His Homeless Heroes

Cordero L.M. Estremera

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I clasped my dog’s face, brushing
the brown fur with cold—bare hands.
His black nose nestled in my breast,
blistered and rotted like moldy McDonald’s.

And I was powerless.

I cradled his bone-thin body
as he cradled my slowing heart.
He curled his right foreleg, the limb
tortured by scabbing.
A limb sacrificed for my tooth-trapped fingers
caught inside an abused mutt’s maw.

I laugh, afraid of the passing people
fashioned in scarlet dresses. They
reek of cheap cigarettes and white wine.
Others don suits as silvery as the moon,
cell phones pressed to their ears.

As they danced,
piano music snipped the strings
of my collared coat. It rattled
my dog’s ears, and he convulsed.
Our tattered, makeshift blanket of filth
veiled the ticks burrowed deep,
the diamond-sized criminals.

A scarlet stream sliced the sky—
stars clustered on each side.
An airplane whirred overhead,
its green dots blinking in and out,
In and out, in out, in
And out,
fading into the night.

My dog heaved his final breath, and I imagined he smiled.

The snow-crusted pavement froze my toes and soaked my faded blue jeans. I wanted to scream.

Police sirens blurred my whimpers. A man had tripped and snapped his arm, an attempt to impress his newly-wed wife. Paramedics lifted the injured fellow onto a wheeled stretcher.

I cried, the tears shining and interrogative. But, the glint on the newlyweds’ rings seemed filled with more importance—than my dead friend.

And I plucked a tick sucking his brow. And prayed, hands pressed together, and the moon glistened, stared. Maybe the moon gained the universe’s 21st space dog or its first tick.

In Iowa City, the earth continued spinning, snow slammed, people hurried, dandelions scattered with the wind, and I inhaled the smoky scent of bacon.

If someone had ever decided to ask me about the stars, I’d say, “They’re our ancestors—we were born out of their snuffed brightness and that’s where we’ll return, embracing lost loved ones.”