

Omega Two

the inversion collection

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Buck's Snow Adventure

THE CALL OF THE WILD

Buck leaves the farm

Buck stretched on his yoga mat and looked peacefully over his master's farm. He stretched up and moved into the warrior. Then, he turned slowly and faced the sun. He decided that he wouldn't do his tai chi and that his asanas today were enough to keep him limber.

It was time for some transcendental meditation and he started his mantra, "yahooyahooyahooyahoo." Buck's mind calmed and then he was prepared to face the day.

Buck's master, WoofWoof, called for Buck. "WoofWoof! Rup! Buck! WoofWoof! Rup! Buck!" Buck was very smart and knew that "Rup! Buck!" meant that Buck should try to find his master and run immediately to his aid or whatever might please him. The most important part of "Rup! Buck!" was to get there as fast as you could run!

Buck tried to smell his master, but his very weak nose was nearly useless and he just stared in various directions. Buck's eyes were his best and, pretty much, only worthwhile sense compared to his master. The rest was pretty pitiful. Buck spun in a bit of a panic and finally spotted WoofWoof. Both of them were relieved when Buck kept his bladder and then Buck ran directly towards WoofWoof.

WoofWoof, a twenty-five foot tall red Labrador, smiled as he saw Buck running towards him. He yelled out to the human, "Ho! Ho! Buck! Ho!" Buck's two legs scampered under him with excitement, but he managed to stop before smashing himself onto the dog. He immediately sat down criss-cross-

apple-sauce, which WoofWoof had firmly but kindly helped him learn. Buck thought ruefully of all those tasty seitan treats he was allowed that day.

Buck allowed WoofWoof to open his mouth and look at his teeth for a few moments before turning his head. He licked his lips as WoofWoof had stuck a rough paw in his mouth and he did not like the taste.

“Het! Het!” said WoofWoof and Buck presented his face back to the dog. “Het” was not a good person word. Buck wanted very much to be a very good person and “Het” is not associated with good. WoofWoof looked over Buck’s teeth carefully and checked inside his pants.

Buck smiled as WoofWoof clipped on a long leather strip to his neck and became excited. Usually, if WoofWoof attached a strip to his neck, it would mean they would spend some time together.

“Yahoo! Yahoo! Yahoo!” yelled Buck. He was very excited to be going somewhere, and the dog led the human by the neck via the strap.

The walk was a bit short for Buck’s taste, but WoofWoof ambled up to a huge panel of steel suspended by torusui of inflated rubber. In wonder, Buck watched the thing his master could command with what seemed to be mystic paw and tail motions. The way of masters was unknowable to Buck.

The speedhouse was like WoofWoof’s home but it could run faster than even WoofWoof. Like super fast. If Buck was a

good human, he would be allowed to stick his head out of the side while this speedhouse ran. Parts of the speedhouse could move up and down and some were transparent and some made absurd noise that just confused Buck but made WoofWoof happy somehow.

When WoofWoof was happy, so was Buck. So, when WoofWoof opened the side of the speedhouse with paws and gestured inside, Buck was, as a very smart and good human, happy to jump inside. It wasn't really shaped for his body but he managed to find a spot to get comfortable. WoofWoof entered and Buck tried to sit on his fuzzy lap, but the dog was not in the mood. Buck instead sat back and just sweated.

The cooling jets directed to the dog's tongue kept WoofWoof cool. Buck waited and then put his hand carefully on a clear portion of the speedhouse. Buck tried "Yahoo? Yahoo?" and WoofWoof made the clear portion descend. Buck placed his head and was grateful for the breeze. He watched in awe as the speedhouse raced and raced past den after den. There were other humans outside. Other losers actually. Buck had never found another human worth a damn; he liked dogs far better.

So many losers walking outside today! He told them how much losing they were doing as the speedhouse raced past, "YAHOO! YAHOO! YAHOO!"

Buck fell back into the speedhouse when it suddenly turned. His face loudly smacked the dash, he blinked from the severe pain, and then he smiled happily at WoofWoof. Things

couldn't be better. He looked around and put his head back outside for a bit.

Buck watched as the speedhouse turned into a strange area. Many other speedhouses and the occasional loser. Buck saw another loser as he got out of the speedhouse. He put that dude in his place with a combo of "YAHOO! YAHOO! YAHOO!" and the loser *dared* to counter with a lame "YAHOO! YAHOO!" (It was clear he wasn't raised well. Obviously, he wasn't a Noel Coward fan). So, Buck launched himself directly at the loser and the two men got into a spitty snarling mess before WoofWoof intervened. It was good that WoofWoof came in because the loser was going to lose some more and Buck told him so, "Yahoo!"

Then, WoofWoof led Buck into a strange house with a strange, very hard-looking dog. Maybe a snow dog of some kind, thought Buck. He stood very close to WoofWoof to avoid being eaten. He never was sure about other dogs, but WoofWoof had proven to not be interested in eating humans. Buck took WoofWoof's lead when dealing with new dogs.

"Tufshet! Tufshet! Tufshet! Tufshet!" said the new dog. Buck decided to name it Tufshet as it sounded close to what the new animal would say.

"Woof Woof! Woof Woof! Woof Woof! Woof Woof!" said WoofWoof. Buck never knew what happened between two or more dogs, but it was clear that WoofWoof and Tufshet were not enemies. Buck's anxiety eased but he needed to defecate. He looked up at WoofWoof and tried to use his "I need to defecate" eyes on him. WoofWoof did not see Buck and as the

urgency of the situation increased, Buck touched WoofWoof's leg and turned in a few circles.

WoofWoof saw Buck this time and took him outside briefly to some nearby grass. Buck dropped his pants and defecated on the grass. The dog picked up the feces in a green bag, tied it up neatly with his paws, and tossed it into a nearby cylinder with an open hole. Buck always wondered why WoofWoof was so very concerned about his feces, but Buck did not judge anyone's strange proclivities and certainly his master was beyond any criticism for sure.

WoofWoof took Buck immediately back inside and the two dogs kept on with their barking duet of "Woof! Woof!" and "Tufshet! Tufshet!" Buck sat criss-cross-apple-sauce, which should show both dogs what a very smart and good human he was. He watched both dogs carefully and wondered when they'd be going back home. Buck was tired and wanted to take a nap. He hated to start one here and then have to get up. That said, Buck was pretty sure everyone saw his excellent sitting. It was always good to make a good first impression. He felt he could relax a bit now and just lay down. He panted a bit and sneezed. He liked sneezing. Was like a wash of the brain from the back to the front.

The dogs finally stopped their bark duet. Then, oddly, WoofWoof handed his strap to Tufshet. The big red dog looked at Buck and said something odd, "Bah! Buck! Ho! Buck! Ho! Buck! Bah. Bah." Water was flowing from WoofWoof's eyes and then he left the store without Buck! Buck was very concerned about where WoofWoof had gone and why he was tied to Tufshet.

He was pretty sure WoofWoof would come back for him very soon, as this was not one of the typical places he greatly feared. This was not where he was thrown into water and had chemicals smeared over him. He hated that place with their strange devices and constant poking and prodding. Always some strange dog that he barely met would doghandle him for like hours and then, he would end up with less hair and some awful smell. There was the dude with needles that totally had no idea what he was doing. That wasn't even worth discussing.

Tufshet then led Buck inside to a cell. Buck hated to be put in a cell but he knew that good humans allow this to happen to them. He walked inside slowly and looked sadly back at Tufshet. The door closed and Buck sat criss-cross-apple-sauce. He was sure WoofWoof would come for him soon. So, he decided that, instead of just worrying, it would be best to just take his nap here. It would be annoying to be woken up, but it would be great to see WoofWoof again sooner rather than later.

Buck's eyes slowly closed as he fell lightly asleep in his cell.

Buck on the road

Buck woke up a bit groggy. His hair was standing up and could use a mango rinse conditioning. He looked around for any hot rock stations or Himalayan pink salt enemas and was confused. He had been sleeping for some time and it seemed to be the morning. There were some non-seitan items in his food bowl. He sniffed at it, but it smelt like losing; therefore, he left it alone.

He saw his suitcase here which was a surprise. It was his large RIMOWA classic and had a few new dents that he did not appreciate. WoofWoof must have left it? He did not remember packing anything, but WoofWoof tended to do that sort of thing. Buck certainly never knew when or why he would need his suitcase, but here it was.

He opened up the bag and found all sorts of very nice new clothing. It was obvious that WoofWoof was concerned about his well-being and thought he might need warm clothing. He did not have a nice furry coat growing out of his skin like a dog. So, his owner would always make sure he had the correct clothing for whatever came next.

Buck put on the multiple pairs of pants after deciding the correct order. The ArrReeEyee logo was very subtle and classy like him. Tight, looser and loose was his best idea on how to apply his own clothing. Sometimes he'd get it wrong and WoofWoof would just undress him and put the clothes on correctly. That always helped Buck, and Buck was always very proud if he managed to get it right on his own.

Buck stared at the tops and saw that it was multiple layers. He put it all on as best as he could manage. Buck started to sweat heavily and fanned his face. He saw some water in a large cylinder with a metal spout that ran through the bars into his cell. He sucked on the spout and cool fresh water filled his mouth. Buck loved to drink some fresh water. Perfect for when you've been sweating and man, he was really hot sitting here in these clothes. He hoped WoofWoof would be taking him to wherever soon as it was very hot.

Buck sat for a few hours and took a nap or two before Tufshet appeared. "Tufshet! Tufshet! Rup! Buck! Rup! Buck!" the large dog said to him from outside the cell.

Tufshet was twenty-five feet tall and had grey and black fur. Unlike WoofWoof, Tufshet's snout was sharper and its eyes were steel blue. Buck was a bit confused as, well, he knew that he should run when he heard "Rup! Buck!" but he'd never heard anyone but WoofWoof say that. Did this mean Buck should run to WoofWoof? Did this mean Buck should run to Tufshet?! Why would he run to Tufshet? How could he run to anyone in a cell? So, he turned his head to the left and right. This had helped WoofWoof understand that Buck did not understand, and to Buck's delight, Tufshet seemed to understand that he was confused.

"Rup! Buck! Rup! Buck!" said Tufshet again as he opened the cell. Buck took a chance and ran up to Tufshet and sat in front of him criss-cross-apple-sauce. He tried to make his eyes look as helpful as possible. Buck liked to be good, smart, and if he could be helpful, he became very happy.

“Ho! Buck! Ho! Buck!” replied Tufshet when Buck sat down. Buck was thrilled as he knew that “Ho! Buck!” was associated with good, smart humans and he was happy that Tufshet was happy with him. He hoped that WoofWoof would invite Tufshet to the farm someday. Tufshet seemed like a good dog and maybe he liked to play? That would be amazing! Buck loved to play. Maybe now would be a good time to try a game?

Buck squatted and did a full bow at the waist. This always got another human ready to play and it worked on almost every dog as well. “Het. Buck. Het.” said Tufshet.

“Het” was not associated with good humans. Buck was disappointed and sat back down. Tufshet did not want to play. So, he sat and waited. He was not overly concerned when Tufshet attached a leather strap to his neck. He smiled as the dog tugged him out of the cell.

He walked out into the hallway and saw multiple losers in cells. He yelled at them to tell them how much losing they were doing just by being there immediately, “YAHOO! YAHOO! YAHOO!”

Some loser tried to point at Buck and then it was on. Buck snarled and spat at the currently caged human and they both fired off “YAHOO!” until Tufshet broke up the disagreement.

“Het! Buck! Het! Rex! Het! Buck! Het! Rex!” said Tufshet to the two fighting humans.

Buck stopped after the second “Het. Buck.” Dogs would get very angry after a few “Het Bucks,” Buck had learned over his

three years of life. He hoped he would remember it until he was an old twenty-year-old with white hair everywhere.

Rex was not as smart as Buck and continued his racket. Tufshet smacked the bars of the cell with some heavy metal tube. The noise was shocking and both Rex and Buck sat and stared at the dog. “Ho. Ho. Ho.” said the dog. Both humans relaxed as the dog seemed calmer now.

Tufshet pulled Buck further down the hallway as Buck spat quickly in Rex’s face before he could get a shot back at him. “YAHOO!” he added with wide eyes and a sneer as they left this strange place.

The dog led the human to a strange speedhouse. Half of the thing was open to the air and there was a portable cell strapped back there. It was colder outside and Buck was now grateful for WoofWoof’s gifts. His sweat was replaced with a foggy breath. Buck loved a foggy breath and so, he made an attempt to breathe as much as possible to take advantage of his good luck.

“Ho! Buck! Ho! Buck!” said Tufshet and he pointed a paw at the opening of the portable cell. There was a ramp for him to use to get up to the cell and, then, he could sit inside. Buck looked around for WoofWoof as he’d never been in a strange speedhouse before; however, he knew what Tufshet wanted, and well, he liked making dogs happy. So, he ambled up the ramp and sat in the cell. He smiled at Tufshet while the dog closed the cell door.

Buck wondered if Tufshet was going to be the one to drive him home to WoofWoof? That suited him just fine. He was

thinking about his first seitan meal as he was getting hungry. He was sure that another meal would be offered soon as, well, it was closing in on midday.

The human was thinking about starting some asanas in the cell when it suddenly jerked forward. Buck was thrown into the cell door and smashed his face into the bars. He fell back and smiled through the pain from his face. He tried to remember how long WoofWoof had traveled to get here. He did not remember it being very long so, he started to circle in his cell as they traveled. He was very excited to get back home and see everyone at the farm again.

The ride went longer than he expected and he sat down. From time to time, he would be thrown off his feet so he decided to lie down to avoid having to stand back up each time. Then, it was a simple matter to close his eyes and just take another nap. As he fell asleep, he was happy as the farm was obviously where he would awaken.

Buck arrives to the party

Buck awoke several times during the long drive. He was unsure where they were going now. It seemed like Tufshet did not know how to get back to WoofWoof's somehow. Perhaps the dog would stop and ask another for help soon? Maybe WoofWoof was someplace far from home?

He was a bit worried and it was getting colder. Buck looked out at endless fields of white, and thought the dogs out here were very poor gardeners. Even the trees had no leaves and most flowers lacked his personal sense of panache.

He regretted not eating what was in his bowl earlier. He remembered he liked a kind of food before, but the memory was fading. He did not like being hungry and called out a bit, "YAHOO? YAHOO? YAHOO?"

He hoped Tufshet would stop and they might eat and he could use some grass. However, the grass was nowhere to be seen.

He did not want to defecate or urinate in his cell. This was a grave, grave dogsin. Dogs had taught humans their ways and dogsin was not something a smart human would *ever do*. Defecating or urinating on any other surface than grass was probably one of the worst things he could possibly imagine doing. So, he was always careful to eat and drink only what he absolutely needed — even when he felt he'd like more. He did not want to commit a dogsin by overeating and just urinating in his pants.

Buck was relieved when the speedhouse stopped and his face was smashed into the door. He spun in several circles waiting as he could hear Tufshet from the front getting out. Buck hopped from foot to foot as he waited. He hoped the dog would move faster but Buck would not sin. He was a very good human.

Buck looked out between the bars and he could not understand what he was seeing. There were so many losers outside. So many humans in shabby clothing who obviously had loser masters. He couldn't wait to tell them all off as soon as he could get out of this cell. Tufshet finally appeared outside his cell and Buck was too excited to keep quiet, "YAHOO! YAHOO! YAHOO! YAHOO!"

Tufshet barked a bit at Buck, "Ho! Buck! Ho! Buck!" The dog opened the door and Buck ran at full tilt towards the other humans. Buck was violently jerked backwards by the leather strap attached to his neck. Tufshet had the other end in his hand and Buck strained as hard as he could to move the big dog. He pulled so hard he started to hack and cough. He just had to tell everyone off as soon as possible.

Some of the humans already there started in on him. "YAHOO! YAHOO! YAHOO!" they all screamed.

Buck knew it was on. His teeth were fully bared and ready to debate fully. "YAHOO! YAHOO! YAHOO!" Buck replied to a huge collection of losers. One loser ran up and lunged when the rope tied to his neck snapped him back like a stupid squirrel. Buck decided that loser's name would be "Squirrel" from that point forward. Losers always had loser names, and

everyone knew that squirrels were the universe's biggest loser of them all.

Tufshet kept him away from the other losers and tied his lead to a stake in the ground. Buck immediately ran towards the nearest loser and put him in his place with several bon mots, "YAHOO! YAHOO! YAHOO!" Buck pitied the response from his nearest neighbor as it was clear he had not been well raised with his sad little, "YAHOO! YAHOO! YAHOO!" So dumb, he thought. He would call this one "Not Oscar Wilde Squirrel."

Buck, after dominating his first two losers, found another one to his left. "YAHOO!" Buck sneered. He loved when he could off a loser with a single, precise phrase with just the right texture to really put someone in their place. He laughed as his third victim was left in tears and holding its spike in fear.

Buck thought to himself, "Man, this is just the best" as he "YAHOO"ed until the sun set over the crowd of yelling tied humans.

Buck joins the team

Buck woke up cold but his nice clothes kept him warm. He wondered why he was dressed so much better than anybody else, but the fact that he was obviously the best around made him very happy. So many losers, “Basic Squirrel”, “Not Oscar Wilde Squirrel” and “Sad Keanu Squirrel” were all afraid to meet his eyes. “YAHOO” Buck thought to himself and he laughed at his own wit.

He was about to make another loser feel worse when Tufshet walked out into the middle of the group and started guiding humans over to a line of bowls. Buck laughed at the losers who yelled their pathetic, “YAHOOOS!” However, he was very jealous watching them chow down whatever was inside those bowls. He was so very hungry and could not remember his last meal. Buck was quite stout and strong so he wasn’t too worried being dominated anytime soon but he felt like eating.

Tufshet came over to Buck and the human greeted the dog. Tufshet said “Ho! Buck! Ho.” as they walked over to the bowls. Buck found a few folks along the way to insult and was placed in front of a large bowl. He relished the pile of buttered noodles and frankfurters with relish. Buck thought this was easily the most delicious food he had ever tasted, but he had a hard time remembering eating anything at all really. This food, he thought, must be what the best human of all gets to eat.

Buck's food-based bliss was interrupted when Tufshet yanked his leather lead. He spat out what he had in his mouth as the dog dragged him slightly over to a strange device. Buck wondered what this might be and he asked Tufshet for any hints with a few well-placed words, "YAHOO? YAHOO? YAHOO?" Tufshet did not understand him and started to tie his lead to the device. Buck saw a complex system of what appeared to be either a very aggressive set of common suspenders or maybe some kind of lederhosen fractal?

Some loser was tied in front of Buck via a set of straps and he just hated that. "YAHOO! YAHOO! YAHOO! YAHOO!" he complained bitterly to the world about this obvious injustice. Buck did not want to look at this loser's ass for any longer than he had to, and like, he was tied *RIGHT IN FRONT OF HIM*. Buck could barely see anything other than this person's butt and well, he did not like that at all.

Buck was thinking of how he might find a way in front of this loser somehow, but Tufshet's ability to control him via leather straps was perfect. Dogs could do almost anything they wanted to, but Buck could never figure out why a dog did anything really. Their ways were just too complex for a simple human to ever really comprehend. Buck knew his place but still wanted to not see this butt anymore.

Suddenly, Tufshet was standing on the strange device and barked out, "Moosh! Moosh!" Buck was surprised when all the humans immediately ran away from Tufshet as hard as they could. Buck had never been given a command to run away so this was very strange. However, he *loved* the

exercise. “YAHOO! YAHOO!” thought Buck as his body strained and pulled the leather straps that connected back to Tufshet.

With the combined effort of all the humans working in a straight line away from Tufshet, the entire *device* started to move behind them. The dog was on some kind of open-air, fully-stocked speedhouse that the humans could spend *ALL DAY PULLING!* Buck was thrilled! A speedhouse powered by humans! An ALL-DAY WALK! This is the best idea ever from a dog! He was ecstatic and pulled as hard as he could.

The loser in front of him was getting tired. Buck thought he was holding them up and bit that loser’s ass hard to motivate the entire team. “YAHOO! YAHOO! YAHOO!” he yelled in joy as the ass in front of him jumped in response.

The team ran for about 50 miles and Buck was feeling amazing. All that air and good solid exercise left him with an incredible endorphin rush, and Buck felt the need to feed on noodles studded with the pink gems of homogenous sausage.

The food was, like, the best. Then, it just seemed like it would be a full day with a dog and the *ALL DAY PULL* was just starting. Buck could not believe his luck. Somebody did love him, he knew this now, but he really couldn’t place who. “YAHOO?” he thought to himself as he tried to remember something red, but it didn’t come. What was coming was that slow guy’s butt again, and Buck knew just what to do next. Could life get any better, the man thought, as he bit a loser’s ass once again.

Buck plays Twister

Buck swaggered around the camp. Tufshet had allowed him the privilege since he worked harder than the other losers on the team. He saw the other teams that seemed to be on this human-powered speedhouse convoy. He vaguely remembered there was a time he wasn't walking all day with Tufshet, but that was yesterday. Today had been another amazing one. Great food, a full day of exercise, and more food at the end of the day! Best part of it all was that a dog was always nearby to tell him what to do.

Tufshet seemed to be happy. He was wagging his tail and howling a bit at the moon with some other dogs at the camp. Dogs had mysterious ways and humans were so very fortunate to have such amazing caretakers. Buck had already plowed through his buttered noodles and sausage, and now he was looking for some losers to dominate or maybe a humanplay game.

Slow Squirrel and Basic Squirrel saw Buck coming and bowed their heads slightly. "Yahoo," whined one under his breath. "YAHOO! YAHOO!" yelled back Buck and the two losers ran off and hid behind Tufshet. Buck hadn't found names for all the other humans on his team as, well, most of them were such losers that they didn't deserve a name. As such, any other person on the team was just called "Miscellaneous Loser" or "MLoser" for short.

Buck ran down an MLoser and bit it hard on the thigh to make sure it knew what a loser it was. He looked over at Slow

Squirrel and was about to bite it as well, when he saw another campfire in the distance. Buck decided to see what kind of losers were over there. He hadn't assigned out "Nimrod Squirrel" or "Stinky Squirrel" yet and was anxious to find where each name belonged.

He trudged through the snow and walked towards the light and could see a bunch of humans tied up on stakes except one. A female human stared back at Buck and she bared her teeth in an unfriendly snarl. An unknown dog said, "Ho! Brandy! Ho! Brandy!" to the female as she tried to look as large as possible. Brandy stood on her tiptoes and yelled "YAHOO!" with her arms over her head.

Buck was trying to think of a good name for the female, when she suddenly walked up, squatted down, and bowed at the waist. Buck's body started to act on its own and he found himself squatting and then bowing. The form had been followed and now the humanplay was on.

The two humans tangled and wrestled. The nearby dog seemed amused. The female managed to get Buck on his back and the dog said, "Ho! Brandy! Huff. Huff. Huff. Ho! Brandy!" as it watched the fire with more interest than the humans.

The female's hair dangled over Buck and he felt something very strange happen inside his body. He inhaled the scent of her body and he felt something different happen to himself.

Then, the wrestling changed and Buck felt amazing. This was the best game *ever* and this other human was *amazing*. They both yelled in unison, "YAHOO! YAHOO! YAHOO!"

Buck wanted to wrestle like this forever, and was totally enjoying himself as he could barely hear, “HET! HET! HET!” The dog threw a bucket of near-freezing water on the two humans. Buck was shocked by the bracing cold and the female ran off into the woods. Buck took a second and then saw the dog running towards him.

“HET! HET!” yelled the dog as it ran towards Buck. Buck took the hint and immediately ran back towards his camp. As he ran, he thought to himself: “Awesome Squirrel” was the name he decided to give the female, and he hoped to find her again someday.

Buck in front

Buck was pulling as hard as he could. Tufshet's sled was far behind. In fact, everyone was behind Buck. Nobody had his/her/their/its ass in his face and he was liberated. Finally, he could just pull and not bite ass to get where he wanted to go. So, now they would all know what buttered-noodle-infused manhood could deliver.

The AlphaMale, as he liked to call himself now, snarled into the weather as he knew going fast was the entire goal of human-powered speedhousing. Tufshet made it very clear that "slow" was the ultimate dogsin: the mortal one. Being "slow" was deadly and humans should fear it as much as they did. As Buck knew, the dogs were mysterious and they both giveth the noodles and taketh the sausage. They giveth the ultimate head massage and taketh the fiddle toys. So, who was he to doubt that being "slow" was so very deadly?

His body was ripped with new muscle and his constant daily exercise had him in peak condition. He shouted in joy as the endorphins of continued effort hit his bloodstream, "YAHOO! YAHOO! YAHOO!"

He looked to his right and could see another speedhouse and they were gaining on Buck's team. His sharp human eyes made out a familiar face and a very welcome sight. Awesome Squirrel was leading her team and her master was barking, "Moosh! Moosh! Ho! Brandy! Ho! Brandy! Moosh! Moosh!"

His eyes lit with fire at the sight of her and her attempt to be more fast. No one would be faster than Buck. She would see

the power of the AlphaMale and maybe later, they could try that wrestling thing. He kinda remembered she was an excellent wrestler and that he wanted to wrestle with her again at maybe the next opportunity, but not this very moment. Like maybe there could be a break in the action for a second? Buck hoped but only heard, “MOOSH! MOOSH!” from behind. He assumed the wrestling must wait.

The snow blew hard in his face; however, Buck found renewed strength and the speedhouse team groaned as he set a brutal pace. “YAHOOOOO! YAHOOOOO!” the AlphaMale roared and he could hear the whimpering losers behind him struggle to keep up. Awesome Squirrel’s eyes widened as her team watched Tufshet and his speedhouse fully pass them.

“HO! BUCK! HOOOO! HOOOO!” barked the dog at his lead. Buck responded to his leader and hollered to the world to put it on notice. The AlphaMale would not be defeated: “YAHOO!”

The device leapt forward at his urging. The speedhouse left Awesome Squirrel’s in the white dust.

“Het. Het. Brandy. Het Het Het,” the other team’s dog said as it slowed to the side.

Buck is offered new food

Buck ate his plate of buttered noodles and Tufshet had added an extra sausage from some other loser's plate as a reward. He grinned as the grease slid down his face. Coward Squirrel flinched when Buck stared at him funny and snarled. "Yahoo" he thought to himself in a moment of self-reflection.

His sense of smell was not great, but even he could tell something was roasting nearby. It smelled amazing. He scraped the rest of his food into his body. Maybe someone had more food that he could have as well? Whatever was cooking could be his, he thought to himself. Lately, whatever human he saw seemed like no match for his AlphaMale physique and butter-powered mental acuity.

Tufshet yelled "Ho. Buck. Ho. Ho." as Buck raced off towards the smell. The man could see a fire and a strange looking thing on a rod over it. The dogs had somehow mastered the fire demon once again and had given it an offering. The offering smelled amazing and it looked amazing. Dogs were impossible fire wizards for sure, and incredible hunters.

He drooled a bit and the nearby dog seemed happy. "Huff. Huff. Huff. Ho. Buck. Ho. Ho." the strange dog offered. Buck walked up and the dog gave him an excellent head massage. Buck sat criss-cross-apple-sauce and just took in the aroma of roasting meat. The fire would sizzle as the fat slowly rendered. Buck's saliva also dripped as the man and dog waited. The roasting took forever, thought the man.

Surely, the meat is ready now, he would think, but the dog was right. The longer they waited, the better the meat looked.

As the food crisped and crackled, the dog showed its teeth oddly to Buck, but the head massage made everything ok. The dog then got up and took off a strip of meat from the roast. Buck licked his lips as he watched the dog blow on the steaming piece it had skewered on a sharp stick of shiny stuff. The dog blew on the meat a bit more and then tasted the food. “Ho. Ho.” the dog mumbled.

Buck sat up a bit straighter and tried to be as good of a human as he could possibly be. He looked at the roast with watering eyes. He looked at the dog and then back at the roast. He hoped the dog understood what he just had to have.

The dog barked, “Huff. Huff. Huff. Ho. Buck. Ho.”

Buck waited anxiously as the dog took another strip off from the roast. He could only hope as the dog’s eyes watched him. The dog blew on the meat carefully until it was cool, and then offered it to the man.

“YAHOO!” said Buck as he chewed. He decided he’d call this food AwesomeMeat as he swallowed it whole and only wanted more.

Buck über alles

Buck pushed towards somewhere as hard as he could. He wasn't sure why he wanted to pull but the fear of dogsin was high. He and his team would not be slow. His noodle-and-sausage-enhanced frame pushed harder than any human might be thought possible. The world, according to Buck, was fading into a sea of MLosers and that brought him to near ecstatic highs. His blood was filled with reward chemicals as the weaklings behind him were almost dragged by his effort alone.

“HOOOOO! HOOOOOO! BUUUUUUUUCK!” howled Tufshet in delight as the speedhouse raced behind the rampaging AlphaMale. “YAHOOOOOO!” howled Buck in return for his master's salute. Other speedhouses were far in the distance. Buck could feel the loserdom from all that were behind him. He surfed their inadequacy and found a tube ride of pride he rode forward to even greater speeds.

His legs pumped into the snow with piston-like precision; then, the speedhouse started a downhill sprint. Buck's burdens disappeared as the weight of the speedhouse was now completely eased by the downhill slant.

Buck roared and his legs pumped towards something, he hoped, and Tufshet urged him on. Buck could now make out, in the distance, a large gathering of dogs. They were all barking at them. All of them were barking “HOOOOOO! HOOOOOO! BUUUUUUUUCK! BUUUUUUUUCK!”

The man pushed downwards towards the crowd of dogs and the entire team slashed over a mark in the ground under a piece of fabric hung overhead. Tufshet barked in delight and ordered the team to stop. The entire group of humans started to yell in non-unison but together, “YAHOO! YAHOO! YAHOO! YAHOO!”

Dogs crowded the team and they seemed very happy. Buck loved when dogs were happy and he spun in a few circles to show them he was also celebrating, if that was appropriate. He hoped so.

Tufshet suddenly had a very shiny urn and was foamily overserved by female dogs wearing less than normal from giant glass bottles. The humans looked in awe as the dogs all jumped up and down. Buck was in awe of his incredible master and he couldn't wait for another hike tomorrow, but then he heard something familiar and new:

“WoofWoof! Ho! Buck! Ho! Buck! WoofWoof!” said the big red dog to his old human.

Buck looked at the big red dog. His head cocked to the left and then the right. Suddenly, something locked in. WOOFWOOF! His master is here! Hooray! He ran towards the big red dog and then stopped. He looked back at Tufshet. Tufshet had tears in his eyes, but he pointed at WoofWoof.

“Ho. Buck. Bah. Ho. Buck. Bah. Bah,” said Tufshet softly. Water dropped from his eyes. Buck was confused, but so very happy that WoofWoof was back. He wasn't sure what to do and looked at both dogs again.

“Rup! Buck! Ho! Buck!” barked WoofWoof and Buck’s body told him what the right call was as he ran towards the big red dog.

He hoped Tufshet would come visit him back at his home! Buck ran in tight circles as WoofWoof put a leather strap on his neck.

Buck looked out back at Tufshet from WoofWoof’s speedhouse through a clear panel. The human’s eyes watered, and then his entire head was slammed into the front as the speedhouse accelerated suddenly. Buck got up with a smile as he was carried away.

Epilog

Buck stretched on his yoga mat and looked peacefully over his master's farm. He always liked to start his day with a full set of asana and some green gunpowder tea. It helped his complexion and his bowel movements.

Buck's master, WoofWoof, called for Buck. "WoofWoof! Rup! Buck! WoofWoof! Rup! Buck!" Buck was very smart and knew that "Rup! Buck!" meant that Buck should try to find his master and run immediately to his aid or whatever might please him. The most important part of "Rup! Buck!" was to get there as fast as you could run!

Buck got up to run and then saw a woman come out from the hedgeline. She waved at Buck. Buck's head turned to the left and to the right. Suddenly, he locked in and thought, AWESOME SQUIRREL! She ran off into the woods. Buck chased after and was never seen again.

Lassie: The Genetic Empire

FOUNDATION

Junior Rises

Weatherwax combed Lassie Junior's long blonde and white hair. The hair was precious and the man whose head was attached became precious due to the hair. The comb ran smoothly through as tangles were simply not acceptable. The hair rippled and shone in appreciation of Weatherwax's continual attention.

Weatherwax was a wise old dog. It was known dogwide as a true "human-whisperer". Weatherwax could get a human to do almost anything and dogs just loved their human pets. The dog looked content and a bit anxious. Its master plan, a human acting in the lead role of a movie, had proven very popular. The movie was called "Lassie Come Home" and featured a female human running home. Now that most families spent their evenings in front of the television set, "Lassie" would follow with her own serialized television drama about a human living with a young puppy near a farm.

Lassie Junior preferred her new title over being called "Lassie." Brother Day was her appropriate title. Brother Day used pronouns that did not match her biological reality, but she was a method actress and tried to remain in character at all times. Her ascension to Day status meant that she would be the first Lassie in her genetic empire to lead a serialized television show. This would be the first time television would star a human. Most shows kept with the typical dog based stories and few doggles kept humans as pets.

Brother Day's father sat nearby. His head was carefully turned and he looked at his son from the corners of his eye. His name was Pal, but his title had become Brother Dusk. Pal was the ur-Lassie. His starring role as the rough human with the golden locks in *Lassie Come Home* (a *film* Pal would emphasize from time-to-time) established Lassie as a household name across the country.

Brother Dusk said, "*She* is not ready for this. I should lead off the television series. Everyone loved my performance in *Lassie Come Home*. There's no reason to replace me now." Brother Dusk used male pronouns and was looking at Weatherwax's brush with obvious envy.

Brother Dawn, a very small younger human with a bright green mohawk, said, "If you are so very ready grandfather, why don't you turn your head to face us all? What happens if the puppy runs to your left? Hahahahaa!"

Brother Dusk spat out, "I can play this role with only half of my face showing. This isn't Lear."

Brother Day interrupted, "It could be Lear, if we actually try, Brothers. Stop the arguing and let's review the upcoming season. I need to prepare myself for my character's arc in her first set of stories. This will lay the foundation on which we all will benefit."

Brother Dusk offered, "I could think better if my hair was in better shape. When does the comb rule my mane, dear Weatherwax?"

Weatherwax barked softly, “When your son is ready for her closeup, dear Brother Dusk.”

“I think I have a split end,” bluffed the older human as he held up a strand of hair.

“Split end! HA! How about the mange on the other side, grandpa,” laughed the youngest.

“I WILL END YOU RIGHT HERE YOU FREAK! YOU CALL THAT A MANE! NOBODY IS GOING TO WATCH A FREAK LIKE YOU!” yelled the oldest.

Weatherwax grabbed a small can from its utility belt, and then smashed the coin grenade onto the ground in one powerful motion. The sudden, monstrous noise made all three humans look at the dog in fear.

“Good boys. No more bickering,” said the dog coolly to its three charges over very bright eyes. “Now, Spock. You will apologize to your grandfather right now.”

Brother Dawn hated to be called Spock, but his actual birth name was far, far worse. He’d asked to have it changed after his hero, Dr. Benjamin Spock, a dog dedicated to the correct treatment of puppies.

He sneered back at the dog and said, without looking at his grandfather, “I am very sorry you have no hair on your left, grandfather. Plea...”

“Fuck you, you fucking punk!” hissed Brother Dusk as he turned and pointed at his own mange-driven bald side. “My

mohawk is earned and not shaved,” the older man nearly shouted across the salon.

Brother Day finally asserted herself and said, “ENOUGH. None of this helps our cause. You, Brother Dusk, are our lead and the ur-Lassie. We all owe you deeply for the chassis from which to build.”

Dusk said, “Build? What would you build from where I left? Lassie traversed the landmass we call home to, and hear me clearly now both of you, COME HOME! So, now that I got here? I’m shown the metaphorical farm and not the fictional one? Lassie, like all of us, ages.”

Brother Day looked hurt and noted, “No. Lassie represents something follically eternal. Please. Think of the puppies watching, Dusk.”

The elderly man continued his rant, “So, tell me fine Day, the brightest of us, where is our home? Why did Lassie come home? Why if the farm is the end? Why run to it? I started her life and now the film demands that we...”

Weatherwax huffed, “This is television and not film, Brother Dusk. Lassie will be on an American farm where she will be a puppy’s very best friend and guardian angel.”

“Those damn puppies,” muttered the old man. “I will be there to help up until they up and flop into the well. Then, my responsibility is to inform the nearest dogs. I mean, I’m only human and I’m still able to do the basics here.”

Brother Day interrupted, “There will be no puppies in wells or any other water on Lassie, the TV program. This will be a

family show to show family values. Weatherwax, what is the first episode about? I am positive it will be an important family lesson.”

Weatherwax barked, “Someone will attempt to steal from Lassie’s current family. Lassie qua guardian angel will directly seek justice as only she knows how.”

Day glowed, “Divine, goldenly hirsute justice will be Lassie’s first fare on television. I assume I might run freely at times? My hair is a glissading, honeyed rainbow that flows well in the wind.”

Weatherwax howled lightly, “That is exactly the intent fair Day and your mane is ready.”

The dog turned to the elder man and said, “Now, I would love to get my comb and brush on your beautiful mane, lovely Dusk. Where is that split end?”

Dusk’s right leg started to shake and the comb was drawn through his very long but thinning mane. The young boy finally said, “Man, this is so dull. My hair is already *perfect*! Do I need to watch you yank out his last few hairs, Weatherwax? Can we do me some other time? I’m not jone-sing for a combs-ing like gramps!”

Dusk nearly spat out, “I have only one addiction and it’s to see you fail in less than a year. I know you. Under fire? You’ll bolt. Watch and see! When your Day is my Midnight, you will be in a nightmare and I will be at peace.”

The young man turned on his heel and left the salon with a loud slam of the door. Day sighed and asked Weatherwax for more good news about the upcoming season.

Weatherwax barked in a fit of joy, “Well, Brother Day, Lassie will be protecting money. This feels venal, but it is her master’s fortune and, well, it’s the last of the man, and Lassie’s love will guard it, with her life if need be. She carefully uncovers where the men are who manage to steal this holy cache. Lassie will embody justice as she physically blasts her body through a window pane in order to find these cretins.”

Day preened and said, “I know exactly the correct head toss when the job is complete and justice is served.”

Weatherwax offered more, “Later, Lassie will bravely defend her family from a typical farm problem. A strange person with a wild mane will invade the farm from an extremely negligent itinerant performing group that still uses human based performances called a circus. Lassie will subdue the crazed man and their hair will be comparable; however, Lassie will reign supreme - both physically and follically.”

Day nodded, “This is obvious, but it should be shown. Lassie is the true king of the jungle. Not some wild maned buffoon with an anger management problem.”

Weatherwax tittered at the joke and then barked, “There’s more dear Day! Lassie will give *birth*. This will test your acting to the extreme. Well, given the gender issues. Not that that is any sort of problem here.”

Dusk snorted and said, “That dude was born to give birth on television, Weatherwax. He’ll be great at it.”

Day looked hurt until Weatherwax soothed the star of the empire, “Brother Day. There will be betrayal, thrilling heroism, and always, always, perfectly flowing hair.”

With that, Brother Day left the salon in peace while Dusk’s leg was syncopated to the beat of his master’s comb.

The Lion

Lassie Junior sat on a folding chair with her name printed on the back with a star. Weatherwax was carefully combing her hair and watching its dog colleagues talk to the doggle actors. Lassie Junior sat with her eyes closed as she worked up her woolly Stanislavski emotional memory. She could hear but never understand the babbling of dogs as they worked out whatever. Weatherwax would give her direction personally.

“O.K. C’est la scène où Jeff se pointe pis y voit le lion. Y s’attendait à un lapin, fait que quand y voit le lion, lui pis Lassie se sauvent au plus sacrant,” barked a dog to other dogs on the set.

Brother Day asked, “What is the next scene, Weatherwax?”

The dog replied, “The scene is simple. The puppy will see the wild human and you both will run away in fear.”

The man sighed, “Well, not much of a scene, but the running should allow for my hair to flow. Who will I be working with? Just the puppy? Who is playing the wild man?”

Weatherwax pointed towards a human actor that was walking up to Lassie Junior with his hand out. “It is such a pleasure to meet you in the flesh, Lassie Junior. I am a huge fan of your movies and this television series has been brilliant. Your hair?! You must tell me your secrets!”

Brother Day grimaced a bit at Leo’s introduction and said, “Well, it’s nice to meet you as well. I’m not sure I caught your name?”

The actor said, "OH! So embarrassing! I totally forgot to introduce myself. I am Leo and play a wild man with a heavy mane. That's why I'm so excited about meeting you. We have the same goals: the advancement of hair based entertainment. You and I could work as a team! Lassie and Wild Man! Think about the opportunities two humans leading a television series!"

Lassie Junior dryly answered, "I think it would be hard to see a family farm with a wild man on it, Leo; however, talk to Weatherwax. It handles my business needs as well as my grooming."

Leo looked earnestly at Weatherwax and started to speak, when the dog interrupted him, "This isn't the place to talk business. Focus on the scene. Should you both rehearse a bit while the crew sets up?"

The actor said, "Of course! Of course! I know how busy you must all be. I'll take my position over here and we can work on this next bit."

Leo walked over to a clearing and lay down. Weatherwax asked Lassie to take her place and she and the dog hid behind a bush.

"I will play the puppy role and I have the first line of the scene. In this scene, Jeff, the puppy, will be hunting and finds a wild man instead of just a normal prey human. I'll start now," said the dog.

Weatherwax said, "C'est-tu un lapin, là-bas, Lassie?"

Both the dog and Lassie Junior rose up from the bush and the dog exclaimed, “Ah non! C’est un lion! Envoye, on se sauve!”

Leo said his line, “YAHOOOOOOO!” from deep within his chest. Weatherwax then said, “At this point, we would run, Brother Day.”

The human then ran a bit in a circle and asked, “How is my hair flowing? I’m thinking this is the correct speed? I want good bounce, and a solid wave without losing volume. I must not look too sweaty, limp or thin?”

Leo offered, “Amazing, Lassie. I mean, I do my best, but my hair is still growing.” The wild man shook his head a couple times to gain a bit of volume.

Brother Day said, “Thank you, Leo. I wish you well on your hair growth, but let’s work on the big conflict scene. I know we haven’t moved to that set yet; however, this is where I think we can grow Lassie’s arc for this season.”

Leo cocked his head. “What is an arc?”

Weatherwax answered, “Never mind, Leo. Let’s try the scene. I will play Jeff the puppy again. Now, in this scene the wild man has broken into Jeff’s home to eat from their kitchen supplies. Lassie Junior will defend her home and her puppy from the incursion.”

Leo picked up his copy of the script and started the scene off.

“So, I’m up here eating the food and my line is
‘YAHOOOOOOOOO!’”

Weatherwax directed Lassie, “Now, Brother Day, you should stand between Leo and the puppy like so. Now, please say your lines.”

“YAHOO! YAHOO! YAHOO! YAHOO!” yelled Brother Day. She then offered, “What should my hair be doing right now, Weatherwax? On end? A double toss? Just to the left with a shoulder flip?”

“May I offer an opinion? I just love the double left right toss with a hard stare whenever you do it, Lassie. Maybe that?” said Leo carefully.

Brother Day nodded and asked, “OK. We can try that. Can we take it from the top then?”

Leo started up again, “OK. I’m eating the food and ‘YAHOOOOOOOO!’”

“YAHOO! YAHOO! YAHOO! YAHOO!” yelled Brother Day again but this time she flipped her hair to the right and then quickly to the left. As her hair was settling around her face in heavy slow waves, she stared hard at Leo.

Leo started to clap and said, “That was amazing, Lassie. Sorry to stop in the middle of the scene, but that toss was legendary. I must learn from you, please?”

Weatherwax said finally, “No, Leo. There simply are no wild men on your average farm. Sure, when the circus is in town, a wild batch of humans might appear. You’ll need to consider something else. Can you lay an egg? Dogs love eggs and that’s always very popular?”

The actor noted, "I've trained on egg laying, but I'm not very experienced. I've only had some very embarrassing accidents so far."

Brother Day was concentrating and then said, "I'm not seeing how this helps Lassie grow to her full potential? Weatherwax, what is my motivation to accost the wild man? Beyond dominating the poor man with my superior hair and natural charisma, this is just another day for Lassie and her assistance to Jeff. What is Jeff learning?"

Weatherwax explained, "Lassie's love for Jeff transcends her concern for her personal safety. Jeff learns what love means from Lassie here. Love is sacrifice. It extends that idea from the pilot, Brother."

"OK. I have my motivation set. Leo? Let's run the scene again," said Lassie Junior.

The wild man offered, "Sure. So, I'm in the kitchen and eating the food. 'YAHOOOOO!'"

"YAHOO! YAHOO! YAHOO! YAHOO!" yelled Brother Day again but this time she flipped her hair to the left twice. As her hair settled, Weatherwax said, "Perfect. Let me get the director. We're ready to shoot!"

The Birth

Brother Dusk and Dawn sat side by side on the set.

Weatherwax stood between them as biting and scratching were possible between grandfather and grandson. The two humans rarely visited the set, but neither wanted to miss Brother Day's performance. Her character would be giving birth.

Dawn had asked to play a role since he was actually Lassie Junior's son, but Weatherwax was firm that he was far too large to be a convincing day-old human baby. The young man had tried wearing diapers and using a pacifier, but the dog just sighed and asked him to change clothes.

Brother Day came out of her method fugue. She was struggling with how to approach this scene and turned to Weatherwax. "So, giving birth. How does one express pain in a follically appropriate way? Women tend to overlook their hair unfortunately during extreme stress. We need to give the world an example of motherhood. Coiffed mothers are good mothers. A blissful birth makes for wise children."

Dusk, the elder, kept his hirsute side towards his son. "When I was a boy, mothers would simply stop plowing, squat, and boom, another person to lend a hand. That's a real mother. There was no stopping yer grandma, son. One moment she was giving milk and the next she was chasing poachers!!"

Dawn argued, "EXACTLY baldie! Kids were fully formed back then. We need to bring that ideal back. Fewer wimps! Mothers! Get back at it, I say. Kids! Why are you standing

around doing nothing and get to work! I could show that! Just leap up and start plowing?”

Dusk countered, “The pot who has never sold a ticket is calling the kettle lazy.”

Weatherwax barked, “Stop it now. I have a can and I will use it here. Right in public, OK?”

The entire Lassie dynasty looked at the dog with fear in their eyes. All human eyes were now locked on the dog’s shining yellow ones.

“Please, Brother Day. Beyond the venom of your kin, the ideas are sound. This is a family show and should show the *ideal* family. This is why you, Lassie, must present the ideal. Birth is difficult but ennobling. That nobility should shine through. Your hair should show the sacrifice all women make to give us life. Display the sheen and body that shows all women: perfection in life can be achieved through solid grooming habits coupled with compliant behaviors,” huffed the dog to its star.

The dog then looked hard at Lassie Junior and said, “We have competition, Lassie Junior. You need to nail this scene for the future of Lassie going forward. Lassie can only give birth the first time once.” Lassie looked solemnly upwards and said, “I am Lassie and Lassie is eternal.” Weatherwax smiled and left its star to get ready for action.

Lassie Junior closed her eyes and became Lassie, Jeff’s Collie. She lay down in a circle of straw, and several dogs fanned out her long hair in a circular halo around her head. A

variety of tropical flowers were then woven carefully to mimic an Erté in human flesh. The dogs carefully misted the hair and the sheen of it dazzled. Several dogs sucked their teeth in appreciation and walked away.

The puppy playing Jeff was walked in and Weatherwax gave the puppy some direction, “Jeff, c’est icitte que Lassie met au monde sept nouveaux bébés. M’as te demander de les compter un par un. Guette mon signal. C’est un show familial, ça fait qu’on doit rester chastes, hein? Fait que tu vas devoir planter le décor pour le monde qui nous regarde, au lieu de montrer de quoi de déplacé.”

Jeff yipped back, “Okidou! J’aime don’ ça, les bébés! Y sont don’ mous!”

Weatherwax stood behind the camera and barked for action.

Lassie Junior beamed and then softly said, “yahoo.” She lifted her head slightly and Jeff daubed her forehead.

The puppy squealed, “Un! Ou, Non! Une!”

Brother Day looked heavenward and smiled softly, “yaaaahooo!” Her eyes shined in ecstasy and contentment.

Jeff barked, “Ça, c’est les bébés deux, trois pis quatre!”

Lassie looked directly at the lens and blinked languidly, “yahhhhoooo!”

Jeff huffed softly, “R’garde, les deux prochains ont les yeux de leur père!”

Finally, Lassie closed her eyes and then smiled. She sighed and simply said, "YAHOO."

Jeff said, "R'garde, çui-là a une crête!"

The puppy pulled up a small puppet that looked remarkably like a small human child with a mohawk. The mohawk was bright green and the puppy laughed a bit at the sight of it.

Weatherwax ended the scene and the actors - human and dog - relaxed.

Brother Dawn's eyes were watering, under his bright green mohawk, when he said, "I did not know that was in the script. Why did you do that, Weatherwax?"

The dog smiled back at Dawn and said, "If you insist on wearing that hair into your Day, we should prepare the world for a different Lassie perhaps?"

Dusk huffed and said, "Just keep him away from any loud noises! At least I am blessed that *I* will not have to watch a maimed Lassie in my lifetime."

Brother Day rose and Weatherwax collected and carefully organized the blonde and white halo into a braid. The human mumbled something to herself, but the take was done in one.

The Death

Brother Midnight stood up a bit slowly on his last evening. Pal was bone tired, but he pulled on his wig over his bald head. He limped over to his vanity and sighed.

“I could still find a puppy in a well. They coddled my son, but my time is done,” said the old man to the mirror. He was going to have a final great meal before the thing that he knew must come, and must come tonight.

He remembered Lassie had proved eternal in both film, her birthplace, and now television. Lassie transcended media and her appeal was not gender-bound. Both girls and boys loved the dog in equal measure.

The man met Weatherwax just outside his cell. The dog led the man to a large hall where his son and grandson were waiting.

His son, the recent Day, was supremely successful. The Miller Farm Era defined Lassie as a recurring, repeatable, and now eternal brand. Brother Midnight’s genetic twins, his son and grandson, would rule human-based media for all foreseeable time: potentially tens of thousands in dog years.

Lassie Junior, now Brother Dusk, hugged his father and asked what he had ordered for his last meal. The old man laughed and said, “Hoping I’ll share, Junior?” His son returned the laugh and they both looked at the new Day.

Spock’s hair was full, blonde and white. She looked stunning in a perfect Lassie coat. She seemed ready, her eyes down at

her feet when Midnight approached. “Thank you, young man. I was wrong about you after all,” said Midnight as he looked at her appearance.

The new Brother Day smiled and thanked her grandfather. She wished him well and left the hall.

Dusk said his goodbye and nodded to Weatherwax before leaving as well.

The dog and Midnight sat at a table. A dog brought a hot dog on a bun with mustard to the table. Midnight chewed and enjoyed his hot dog. After the last bite, he cleaned the corners of his mouth as there was some froth there. He tried to stand but his legs couldn’t bear his weight. He sat down to avoid falling.

Midnight slumped dead from the poisoned meat.

Weatherwax called on others to dispose of Midnight. It would need to decant a Lassie tonight. Brother Dawn was unfilled.

Spock Ascends

Weatherwax combed Spock's long blonde and white hair. The man did not care for her real name and preferred her title, Brother Day. Her hair, throughout her life, was naturally perfect. It was as if Weatherwax's eternal combing had now altered the Lassie genetic code for hirsute perfection.

Brother Day's father, Lassie Junior, was nearby. He had suffered from cancer but recovered. That said, he just did not have the stamina for performances like his first season's classic "birth" episode. He did not want to sully his legacy and left his status as Day a bit earlier than expected. Even so, Lassie Junior's hair was still glorious.

Brother Day asked Weatherwax to move on to her father and the dog obliged immediately. Brother Dusk sighed as the brush moved through his full mane.

Brother Dawn, a savvy little man named Baby, sat to the other side of Day. The three were here for the annual pre-season review as well as first season for Day. Transitions were always tricky but as long as Lassie remained Lassie, people seemed to allow for the rest to change. As expected, if Lassie qua Lassie makes Lassie Lassie, then Lassie must be eternally Lassie.

Day asked Weatherwax how her season would begin. The dog coolly barked, "Lassie will resist change. Her family will purchase an electric refrigerator. Lassie will insist that her meals originate from the icebox of her puppyhood. She will

teach us all about the benefits of keeping things simple. A woman will teach dogs that newer is not always better.”

Day said, “I was worried about this story. I wasn’t sure why Lassie would care, as I certainly do not care if my lunch comes from either an icebox or a refrigerator as long as my lunch comes on time. Thank you for the direction, as always, Weatherwax. The wisdom of Lassie originates in Weatherwaxism.”

Weatherwax offered, “Lassie discovers a lone dog with a gruff manpet falsely accused of kidnapping a nearby family’s puppy. Little does everyone know, but the puppy did what puppies do and it fell off a path. The lone dog is an expert rock climber, which is a very typical skill of loners, and the lone dog climbs down to bring the missing puppy to safety. Lassie stands in judgment of those who would judge others unjustly. Her hairful wisdom will be appreciated by all by the end.”

Brother Day seemed to prefer this to the icebox versus refrigerator story.

Brother Dawn offered meekly, “You know, if you guys need someone to just fill in for Day, just for an episode to, just - you know - give a guy a breather, well, I am ready and have been reading all the scripts.”

Day looked shocked and said, “I haven’t even produced a single episode and you think I want a break? Are you kidding? This is a job I will hold for years and years from now. So, go ahead and practice, but you’re in for a wait, Baby.”

Brother Dawn looked savagely at Day when he said, “Who knows what could happen, Day? Everyone can change. Sometimes just in time, no?” The young man walked out of the meeting.

Weatherwax continued, but Brother Dusk kept his attention on what Dawn might have meant. He wrote something down to pursue later and listened as his master spoke about the future of Lassie.

The Light

Brother Day stood patiently on the set as Weatherwax talked to the puppy that played little Timmy. The two dogs were talking over the upcoming scene before the shooting began.

“Fait que, Lassie va essayer de te dire que l’autre p’tit gars est tombé en bas d’la falaise, juste à côté. A va essayer de te convaincre de la suivre. C’est important que tu dises c’que tu penses pour vrai, pas juste jaser. T’es-tu prêt?” huffed the older dog to the puppy.

Little Timmy replied, “C’est beau! Chu prêt à y aller!”

Weatherwax came over to Spock and said, “So, in this scene, you have just seen that Timmy’s puppy friend has fallen over the edge of a cliff and is trapped. You need to tell Timmy that the boy needs help and lead it to the cliff side. Are you ready?”

Spock, the current Brother Day, answered, “Uh. Yeah. I’m ready. Let’s do a take.”

Weatherwax walked back to the other dogs and let the director know that the actors were set.

Lassie ran into the room and yelled, “YAHOO! YAHOO! YAHOO!”

Timmy responded, “Qu’ossé qu’y a, ma belle? Y’a-tu quelqu’un qui ...”

Suddenly, a stage light landed heavily and exploded in glass and twisting metal. The heavy fixture almost hit Lassie and

she was badly cut by a flying shard of glass. The man screamed and ran for the nearest door. All of the dogs started barking loudly and in panic.

Weatherwax called out to Spock, “STOP! STOP! STOP! SPOCK! STOP!” However, the man would not be soothed and was far gone after it made it to the door.

Weatherwax looked at the fallen lamp and saw a small tag on the ruined body. It read, “Are you spooked yet, Spock! With love from your old pal!” The dog looked at the rope that had held the lamp in the rafters. It was cut cleanly.

The dog asked for the crew to clean up the lamp. It barked out for Spock and asked nearby dogs if the human was anywhere to be seen. They could not lose the day. The dog paced back and forth. Finally, it stopped and called for an understudy.

“Brother Dawn! Are you here?” yelled the dog.

Baby came around the corner quickly and answered, “Yes, Weatherwax? Did you need me?”

Weatherwax offered, “I need you to fill in for Spock. Do you know this scene?”

Baby had a sharp knife behind his back when she said, “Do I ever! I practice all the scenes just in case! I won’t disappoint Weatherwax! I promise!”

Weatherwax smiled and asked the young person to take her father’s place.

The Fall

Lassie Junior, Brother Dusk, looked up the cliff-side and asked his son, “You should have asked for a stunt double, Brother Day.”

“I told you already, dad! Everyone thinks I’m a wimp because I ran away from the falling lamp. I am going to prove I am no wimp! Spock does his *own* stunts!” hissed Brother Day. Weatherwax had told him his skittishness was only natural, which had somehow made it worse.

Two stunt dogs came over to Brother Day and tied several harnesses on the man. Weatherwax came afterwards and said, “You look wonderful today, Brother Day. Thank you for agreeing to do the stunt. The shot will look so much better with your natural hair flowing in the breeze.”

Brother Day smiled at the praise and said, “Of course. I would do anything for Lassie. What is this scene again, Weatherwax?”

Weatherwax explained, “A young puppy has fallen off of a cliff-side. You and a misunderstood loner dog will climb down to the puppy. The dog is actually an excellent rock climber and owns a small human that it milks for food.”

Brother Dusk said, “I have always heard that hermits make excellent free climbers. I assume it gives them something to do given few social engagements.”

Brother Day was a bit confused and asked, “So, given that I am only human, why exactly am I on the ropes and up the

cliff? Shouldn't I be running with my hair flowing towards a dog?"

Weatherwax looked at the star and said, "Lassie grows here by starting to show more agency in her rescues of puppies. She has run for help, she has vocalized threats, but the audience craves to see Lassie's paws *dirty* as it were."

Brother Dusk came up to Day and said, "If I were you, I think this might call for an upward neck tilt with your hair draped down your back. Then, maybe a small side-to-side shimmy as you are lifted upwards to get the puppy; make sure to leave the shot with that image in the viewer's mind. Weatherwax, do we cut the shot when he's at the top? And the next shot on the board would be a studio closeup of Lassie and the puppy?"

Weatherwax confirmed that was the plan and Day agreed to their combined direction. Dusk gave his son a pat on the back and moved out of the shot. The dogs got into position and several riggers grabbed the safety ropes.

The stunt-rig was set to pull Lassie up some thirty feet. The sound dogs rolled sound. The director barked for action. Lassie said her lines, "YAHOO! YAHOO! YAHOO!"

The human started to rise. Her hair draped down her back and she lightly tossed her head side-to-side around a quarter of the way up.

"Too soon," hissed Dusk from behind the cameradogs. "She's still nervous, Weatherwax."

The human whisperer said, "Spock looks fine, old man. Stop your worrying or you'll curse the shoot."

Spock's eyes widened and her head started to violently shake from side-to-side. Her hair scattered in all directions.

The director stood up to stop the scene. There was nothing left to stop. Weatherwax watched Spock fall the full thirty feet and gasped as the body bounced once on the earth and lay still. The rope that had held Lassie drifted down after and settled across the crumpled coat. It was cleanly cut.

The director sat back down.

A Star Is Born

Baby, Brother Day, sat as Weatherwax combed her perfect blonde and white hair. It was not as long as her father's mane, but Baby had to ascend to Day early due to her father's tragic accident.

Spock was still in a coma and it was uncertain if he would ever awaken. Baby was pressed into service and Mire, a new Brother Dawn, had been decanted. Both of the younger men looked up to their grandfather, the aging Brother Dusk, Lassie Junior. Mire and Lassie Junior were on set in solidarity with the Lassie Genetic Empire. No one wanted to just sit and wait to hear how Spock was or was not improving minute-by-minute.

"What is today's scene about, Weatherwax?" asked Brother Day.

The dog looked at the humans and said, "A puppy who suffered from polio in its early life wears a brace but has clearly outgrown the need to use it. The puppy needs Lassie's help to become brave enough to try to walk without it. In this scene, Lassie is wounded. The puppy must use the phone to call for help but its brace is not nearby. Lassie's reciprocating love field that her comeliness generates provides the courage the puppy needs to walk, unaided, for the phone. Yes, Lassie is saved by the puppy, but the puppy's puppyhood will also be saved by its love of Lassie."

Brother Dusk leaned over to his grandson and said, "Pain is universal. One transcends by letting pain have no hold on

your comeliness. So, I believe you are to have a prosthetic wound. Let us make sure the makeup artist knows how to blend and not a weave. We do not have pelts for crying out loud! We have glorious hair. Show the dogs your human spirit during your most trying moment outside of the glory of birth.”

Weatherwax moved its latest star into position. The story called for Lassie to be wounded by an errant pitchfork. She was to be bleeding and in need of help. The puppy actor, named Pinball, with a brace on its rear leg, clomped into the room. Pinball banged around wildly and finally settled down to start the scene.

The director removed Pinball’s brace and gave the puppy a high three. The puppy smiled before getting ready to dramatize.

The prop-master placed the telephone on the other side of the set. Pinball was on the far side.

The director told Pinball that it would walk, with some *dramatic* effort, *without its brace* and call for help to save Lassie’s life. Pinball’s love will overpower its doubt and finally free it from the cage it built around itself.

The puppy took in the direction and nodded that it knew how to approach the problem. Various dogs talked over the camera motion and the crew pulled everyone into first positions. The sound dogs started to roll. The director called for action.

Pinball emoted, <<Mon doux! Je te vois, Lassie, ma belle!
M'as aller t'chercher un docteur au plus sacrant!>>

Pinball looked wildly around and barked, <<OÙ C'EST
QU'EST MON ATTELLE?>>

Brother Day hit her cue and whispered, “yaho”

Pinball gasped and stood shakily up from the floor. Its knees wobbled and its tongue panted wildly. It walked a step forward and fell. Pinball huffed, <<Chu pas capable sans mon attelle.>>

Brother Day hit her second cue and moaned,
“yaaaaaahooyahoyahooooyaho”

Pinball's eyes watered and it stood back up. <<J'te lâche pas, ma belle. Tiens bon, faut qu'on joue encore, OK!>>

Brother Day rolled over and exposed her belly to the sky.

Pinball stumbled over step-by-step and it put its paw on the telephone. It pulled the receiver open and then...

A white-eyed, wild-maned man blasted onto the set yelling
“YAHOO! YAHOO! YAHOO! YAHOO!” He was wearing a hospital robe and his armband simply said Spock.

Daypart Overload

Brother Dawn, or Mire, had the simplest claim of the four: time goes forward, not backward, so the Dawn slot had to be his. Then he looked across at his grandfather Lassie Junior and shifted in his seat.

Lassie Junior qua Brother Dusk sat easy. He had been Day and was the most successful to date. Brother Dusk's *entire job* was the preservation of success and not simply age. He would *not* be moving anytime soon as his hair was only thinning a bit and not really showing unless you looked at him just so. He could easily overcome a poor angle with a dominant *je ne sais quoi*.

Spock, with dreadlocks of uncertain provenance and random jutting jets of blond bristles, subtly signaled his claim to the title of Brother Bad Hair Day with an intensely blind stare at his son, Baby, Brother Good Hair Day. Baby's hair was far more aligned with what the public had become accustomed to seeing. I.e. Baby qua Lassie was closer to Lassie qua Lassie than Spock qua Lassie, obviously.

Weatherwax placed the nickel can grenade on the negotiation table and the five parties began their discussion.

Weatherwax barked first, "It is such a nice surprise to see you again, Brother Bad Hair Day. You are well?"

Spock remained unmoved and still stared blindly at his son. Everyone waited in vain for a response that never would come.

Brother Dusk asked, “These can’t be the titles we’ll be keeping, right? I’m sorry but the argument is clear. Lassie is an ideal that we all maintain together. I am afraid that, unless my son can regain his coat, he cannot be a Day.”

Brother Good Hair Day noted, “That would mean he’d need to be a Dusk, a Dawn, or, well, something else.”

Spock stood perfectly still during this entire exchange.

Dusk replied, “I have been Dusk for a fraction of my fair share of time. I am *invaluable* as my years of successful grooming shows. My son, well, achieved so little. I’d say, we give him his due, he will be Brother Sunday Prime Access and help us in the newly emerging syndication marketplaces for in-store promotions.”

No one wanted that assignment as the constant hotel stays were hard on the hair. Dusk, Good Hair, Dawn, and Weatherwax waited for Bad Hair’s reaction with their heads slightly ducked in case of an explosive reaction.

After a minute of silence, Dawn asked, “Does anyone know if he can hear?”

“yahoo,” said Bad Hair as he turned to face Dawn directly.

“I suspect he does,” said Weatherwax. “Maybe, he cannot speak clearly any longer?”

“Yahoo,” said Bad Hair as he turned to face Weatherwax directly.

“Maybe he’s just an idiot who only jabbers at the last thing he was told,” tested Dusk.

Bad Hair turned to Dusk and stared. No sound was issued.

“Maybe, he has something to tell us and he only reacts verbally when he agrees?” said Weatherwax.

“Yahoo,” said Bad Hair as he spun around quickly to Weatherwax.

“Maybe he says nothing when he does not agree?” said Dawn carefully.

Bad Hair turned and stared at Dawn, then, after a moment, said, “yahoo?”

As Dusk started to ask another question, Good Hair interrupted, “Sorry to interrupt but I just received a message via my phone from poor daddy Spock’s hospital. He’s escaped from their care but if found, he should feel better in the morning. He might be disoriented and non-verbal today. I think we should let him rest as he left the hospital against their advice today.”

Bad Hair turned and stared blindly at his son. The other three looked between father and son. The group sat in uncomfortable silence until Weatherwax offered liver snacks to all. The four humans chewed together. After the food was completed, the dog took Bad Hair away and locked him in his cell for the night. The dog reminded the others that lights out was in twenty minutes.

“I hope poor Spock can tell us what is bothering him in the morning instead of playing charades like today,” said the dog in passing.

Good Hair seemed uneasy as she left for her cell.

Balanced Inventory

Weatherwax walked down the kennel where it kept the hirsute dynasty. It heard the sleeping sounds of its stock.

“Morning, Dusk,” huffed the dog softly into its old star’s cell. The old man rose stiffly and simply offered, “Thanks, I’m up.”

The dog continued down and hit Brother Good Hair’s door. “Good morning, Day. Time to get up, Baby.” Baby walked in from the side of her cell and simply offered, “Good morning.”

Weatherwax continued to the cell where they’d put up Brother Bad Hair. It did not see any movement inside at all.

The dog opened the cell door and walked inside.

Weatherwax barked, “Good morning, Brother? Are you feeling yourself this morning?” It made out Spock’s outline in the dark.

Brother Bad Hair simply stared back without moving.

The dog tried again, “Are you sleeping with your eyes open? I’m sure that’s been disconcerting for others?”

The dog finally noticed the bright red stain under Spock’s neck and the huge pool of blood on the floor. Spock’s neck was cleanly cut.

Epilog

Brother Day was celebrating her sixth year of successful Lassie television episodes. Baby's reign was the longest and most successful. Her father, Spock, had been forgotten, but Baby had even surpassed the old champion, her grandfather, Lassie Junior.

Baby walked across the set, rehearsing what to say at her ascension tomorrow. It would be sad to lose her grandfather, but it was time for him to finally retire. She had pulled in a fortune for the Lassie empire. She was ready to just spend and...

... and a large klieg light smashed into her skull, killing her instantly.

Lassie Junior smiled and murmured, "Long live King Lear."

The Littlest Hobo

THE LITTLEST HOBO, 1979

The Pilot

Mastereye opened himself. He looked into the darkness. Uncountable white shipping containers floated nearby. His kin, floating eyeballs of various colors and sizes, hovered outside or moved between them. He watched, without much interest, as a shipping container overturned. The screaming stream of people and things into the void did not faze him in the slightest.

One wall of each container was transparent. Small plays performed inside each one and the eyes were transfixed on what would happen inside.

Mastereye floated down and found an open space for a new container. He picked this location so that his resources could easily see their immediate competition. The existential threat of tipping kept all the actors in each container fully committed to their performances. No one would “phone it in” when endless falling was the alternative.

Mastereye closed himself and summoned a new shipping container. There was nothing inside but a ceiling, a floor, three solid walls and a clear wall facing the eye itself.

Mastereye summoned a blank character. It was formless and awaited any amount of detail to become real.

Genesis

I find myself in a white room. I am not sure what I am, but the memories are coming in slowly. I am a Canadian man and I have an urge to wander. I feel helpful and kind but I am unsure why that is. Is that just the Canadian default? That seems correct suddenly. My head itches as if pressed by an unseen helmet.

I see a floor for the first time and it is unremarkable. It is remarkable that it is unremarkable as the novelty should be interesting and yet it is not. I can say the same thing about the ceiling and three of the vertical walls. The fourth wall is different. I see it shimmer slightly and sway from a nearby draft.

I walk up to the fourth wall and put my hand out to touch it. It bends away from my hand and seems to be as weightless as a bubble. I keep pushing forward. The fourth wall breaks with a loud pop.

There are eyes staring back at me from an endless void. I can see shipping containers stretching out beyond sight and countless eyes surrounding each. Strange things are happening inside the others, and I watch as the eyeballs drift between them. I am compelled, somehow, to fix on a nearby container. This one, unlike the rest, has only a single eye attending it.

The persons within the nearly abandoned container seem frightened. They increase their antics in desperation, and then it happens: the final eyeball leaves. “Watch carefully,” says something unbidden in my mind.

The unwatched container slowly tips over and the people inside scream into the void below.

I look back at the eyes in fear. One moves forward. It blinks and my mind is filled with the eye’s hypnotic purpose.

“You are London, the unnamed. You will travel between Canadian towns and help the dogs you find in jeopardy. You must follow this itinerary. Failure to make a town on time means the shipping container will be destroyed. I believe you just witnessed a failed container and its end.” I feel rather than hear.

“Judge yourself and your success. Look to the corner of your eye.”

I look. There is a count there now and it was not there a moment ago. My current viewers, and any recent change.

“A container with no eyeballs is a container to be destroyed.”

Before I can respond, the world goes black and I hope it will return soon...

Medicine Hat, Alberta

I smell smoke before I can see. Mastereye and a fair collection of eyeballs are staring back at me unblinking. I say, “Hello?” and see that my words are subtitled in French somehow. The eyeballs blink. I am worried now. Mastereye said that I needed both to keep moving on an itinerary and keep at least some eyeballs on me at all times. I will need to be entertaining somehow or interesting.

“Hello everyone, welcome to ...” I say, but what was the name Mastereye gave me? I am unnamed but he mentioned something else, and it is dragged forward into my mind via Mastereye’s pressure: “... the Littlest Hobo! Travel with me as I help friendly dogs along the way. We seem to be in ...”

I repeat back the inbound, eyebound data, “... Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada. Who wouldn’t want to start off here?”

Ack! Medicine Hat must sound interesting soon and, unless the eye is cruel, I should have a pathway to some interesting something; otherwise, why am I roaming? I spin around and finally I see it.

-17EB

There is a large plume of ash and smoke nearby. This is at least something interesting. I will use it now.

+8EB “There seems to be a nearby brushfire. We should try to help if we can! Come with me and let’s help any dogs in jeopardy!” I say with urgency.

I am running towards the fire and I can feel the eyeballs chasing me as I go. Before I get completely out of breath, I stop with my hands on my knees, panting. Then, I see them. Four puppies! They are trapped inside a locked house and the fire is burning its roof. The puppies are screaming for help!

+20EB “S’il vous plaît! Y’a-tu quelqu’un qui peut nous sauver? Aidez-nous, s’il vous plaît!” the puppies scream and I can see a translation in the subtitles. || Please! Is there anyone who can save us? Help us, please!|| This looks promising and I feel a very strong urge.

I turn to the eyeballs and announce, “The PUPPIES! I must SAVE THEM! We go now to their rescue!” as I run towards the burning building.

+12EB “I am here dear Puppies! Fear not! It is I, The Littlest Hobo! I am here!” I yell.

+4EB ||Please help us, Strange Man! Please!|| the puppies’ translation reads. I gather that the puppies have not studied English yet.

I see the door but it is locked and I try the doorknob. I yank my hand away as the knob is too hot to touch and just avoid a bad burn. I take off my shirt and ...
-11EB ... Damn it. OK. Point taken.

I use the material of the shirt to break a nearby glass window without cutting my hands, open it and quickly put my shirt back on. Lesson learned.

+2EB

The heat is intense on my hands and face as I search for the puppies inside the roaring fire. I cough due to the heavy smoke but manage to call out, “Puppies! Puppies! Are you here!”

||Upstairs! We are upstairs, Strange Man. Come quickly before we perish!!|| the puppies continue their pleas from the upstairs bedroom.

+12EB

I run up the stairs and open the door swiftly. I see the four puppies. One is unconscious but the other three will not leave him behind and none of them are strong enough to lift him.

“I can take you ALL to safety. Follow ME!” I say. I pick up the unconscious puppy and ask the others to hold hands.

+18EB

“Stay together and follow me. We need to get out of here before the smoke kills us all,” I say as I lead the group through the fire. Parts of the roof start to collapse and I finally say, “Run for your lives little dogs!” The puppies manage to bolt out of the building and I can no longer see as the ceiling falls in front of me.

+18EB

“I will get us out of here somehow,” I yell to the unconscious dog. I see a window to the left and fling us both through the glass. The glass splinters and

shards rip through my sides, but we make it clear of
+14EB the fire.

I see an adult dog run up with an EMT badge as
several fire dogs appear with hoses.

The EMT's translation reads, ||GOOD BOY! You
saved all these children. But little Timmy, the sick one
in your arms, needs his medicine. The roads are
blocked, Strange Man? What can we do for Timmy?||

I say to the EMT, "I will get the medicine! Where is
it?!"

The EMT looks at me, confused. Almost as if he didn't
hear me clearly and his translation reads ||What is it,
boy? You say you can get the meds? You? A human?||

I repeat myself, "Yes. Didn't you hear me the first
time? Where are the meds? The puppy needs help!"

The dog still looks confused but he says ||Wow. You
sure are a talkative one. I wish I understood what
those yelps mean. If we could only find a way to the
hospital up the road where Timmy's meds are, we
+12EB save him, but the fire has blocked the road.||

"Oh my," I say, "This is absurd! I will go and get the
meds. For crying out loud, you can't like send a
helicopter? Is medical care in Canada so rationed that
this puppy's meds can only be sourced from one
-9EB place? That's just crazy..."

I start to run towards the hospital by following the obvious signs on the road. I find an area where the road is completely blocked by fire. The heat is intense but I keep my shirt on for everyone's protection.

I walk through the heavy flames with my arms over my head to protect my hair and face from the falling ash. The hospital is in sight and I make a break for it. +16EB

I manage to get into the building. A dog is already waiting for me and it says, ||The EMT told me you might be coming, Strange Man. Here are the meds. Get them back to Timmy, OK? You can do it! You're a very good human. Yes you are!|| The dog scratches me under the chin and it feels amazing. He stops and I wish he would continue; however, Timmy cannot wait and I leave. +8EB

The passage back across the fire is harder than the first time. The fire is raging out of control and I am unsure if I'll make it out alive. My shirt is safe but am I? Finally, I see a break in the wall of flame. The EMT is pushing towards me and together we manage to get out of the blaze. +13EB

I cough and hand over the meds to the EMT. He says with happy eyes, ||You've done it! Timmy is saved!|| Several eyeballs out there seem as if they might be crying? +22EB

The EMT is acting strangely and says, ||Hey Strange Man? You hungry for some ham?|| He's sitting inside of his response vehicle. +4EB

Man, I just love ham. I walk up to the car and the EMT has the pink meat in his hands, ||That's a good boy! You like the ham, no? Come inside. I could use a good human to help me out.|| He won't just hand the ham over. This seems suspicious and well, there's only one way to solve this dilemma.

I quickly snatch the ham and run. The EMT is following in hot pursuit, but I feel energized by the meat and successful rescue. I will not be captured. The urgency pushes inwards and I know: Moose Jaw; you must not be late.

+6EB

The EMT calls out, ||Wait! Wait! Stay here with me in Medicine Hat!|| The ham tastes great as I start the run into darkness.

Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan

I run out of the darkness and find myself outside of an aged casino. The sign reads Moose Jaw Casino. My audience is watching carefully and I greet them.

“Good day everyone! Welcome to the Littlest Hobo. I seem to be in Moose Jaw! I bet something interesting will happen at any moment now,” I say as I spin in a circle in a mild panic.

-18EB

The wind shifts and a horrible smell wafts over me. It smells like death. I look around for something interesting and I hear two men struggling in the distance. “It sounds like some people could use some help! Let’s go see!” I say to the audience.

+11EB

I run towards the sound and finally find two older but very strong-looking men pulling a heavy load of grain from a nearby elevator. They are yelling, “OMG! OMG! This is *sooo* heavy! OMG! OMG!” A dog with a prod is yelling at them, ||Hep. Hep. Get in there Larry! Come on Barry!|| The two men can’t seem to understand what the dog is saying but they understand what he wants when he cracks a whip nearby. Larry and Barry pull even harder and one screams out, “AAAAAH! SO HEAVY! PUSH! PUSH! HELP ME, Castor!”

The other man, either Barry or Larry, then says, “I’M PUSHING AS HARD AS I CAN, Pollux!”

+16EB

I run up and grab a line to help out. The weight of the cart is tremendous. The first man yells, “Castor! Who is the stranger?” and the second answers, “I have no idea, Pollux!”

+14EB The dog barks, ||Ho! What’s this! The smallest hobo I have ever laid eyes on is helping Larry and Barry?!||

I yell to Castor and Pollux, “Please, on the count of three, we all push together and we’ll get this cart moving! One, two and three!”

+12EB The three of us manage to get the cart moving and the dog calls out, ||Thank you, little hobo! These old men have one last job to do and then it’s off to the glue factory! They can’t get anything done without a hand and my new tractor doesn’t ask for oatmeal twice a day.||

-6EB I find the dog’s speech to be shocking and I yell, “Are you INSANE!? You are going to turn these men into GLUE! What needs sticking together so badly that we need to melt people to fix it?”

+9EB The dog cocks his head at me and notes, ||Wow, this human loves to chatter. I wonder what he’s trying to tell me? I think he thinks he’s a dog and can talk! Hahahah!||

The dog doesn’t seem to understand me, but if I didn’t have the subtitles, I would not be able to understand him. I need to help poor Castor and Pollux somehow. Maybe they could show their worth another way.

That's it. If I can prove to the dog that the humans are worth something even without pulling carts, he might not send them away to be turned into Elmer's.

I walk up to Pollux and ask, "Hello. I am the Littlest Hobo. It is good to meet you, but why are you working so hard for this dog?"

Pollux looks over to me and he says, "I am Pollux and my brother over there is Castor. We pull and the dog has heavy things that need to be moved. So, it is a good arrangement. We pull and he feeds. We need and he delivers and we deliver his and others' needs in return."

+11EB

I tell Pollux, "He says he plans on turning you and your brother into glue after you deliver this cart!"

Castor is eavesdropping and says, "WHAT!? I am far too young to be glue!"

+18EB

Pollux says, "Do not listen to him, Castor! No human can talk to dogs! They're inscrutable geniuses whose complex ways cannot be understood by the mere human mind. Who are we to question the wisdom of any dog? It would be insane to trust a person over a dog."

+12EB

I plead with the brothers, "Can either of you do anything other than pull? Anything? The dog wants to replace you with a tractor! What can you do that a tractor cannot?"

The dog is a bit upset as the cart has stopped while Castor, Pollux and I argue. He says, ||Ach! Come along little humies! Hep! Hep! Hep!|| to try to get us going.

I say, “Keep pulling. The dog’s getting antsy.”

Castor and Pollux look worried and then put their shoulders into their work. The cart starts to move and I keep pace. “Anything entertaining at all?” I ask the two.

-5EB Pollux says, “I can dress in drag?”

+4EB “NO DRAG!” I yell as it’s clear my audience is pretty conservative.

Castor says, “Well, I have a ventriloquist routine? I do not have a dummy with me now, but maybe my brother could sit in?”

I look carefully at my audience. Barring any other option, I say, “Maybe? Can you do a bit for me now?”

+1EB I am excited when Pollux sits on Castor’s lap.

Castor’s mouth barely moves and Pollux lip-syncs to his brother’s voice, “Hey Castor! How many Trojans does it take to change a light bulb?”

Castor speaks normally and says, “Hi Pollux! I have no idea!? How many Trojans *DOES* it take to change a light bulb?”

Castor then throws his voice and Pollux lip-syncs to
“None! They wait for the sack and the fires keep the
homes lit! HAHAAHA!”

-7EB

“Nonononono!” I say to Castor, “I don’t think that’s
the right thing. Do you guys do anything else?”

“I can rap,” says Pollux. “My dad, he’s the best rapper
of them all. DJ Boltzar!”

+3EB

I say, “Well, maybe...”

Pollux does not wait and the music is banging:

From the top of Olympus, where the lightning
sparks,
I’m looking down at Sparta, leaving lightning
marks.
I’ve got a million kids, yeah, the family’s wide,
But let me tell you ’bout a boy filled with heavenly
pride. POLLUX!

I shout, “Keep going!” The dog looks oddly at the
three babbling humans but does not interfere as
Castor pulls out a mic.

Castor gesticulates the chorus:

Hear the thunder roll, feel the stadium shake,
That’s my boy POLLUX, every crown he’s gonna
take!
Immortal in his veins, but his heart is gold,
The greatest boxing story that has ever been told!
Yeah, that’s my son, lightning in his fists,
Put him on the top of the Olympian lists!

I plead, “Keep it real, suckas! Spit fire Pollux!”

Pollux steps forward with a practiced move:

Amycus challenged the crew to a fight,
Thought he was a giant with a whole lot of might.
But Pollux stepped up, didn’t even blink,
Dropped him to the canvas before he could think.
A master of the canvas, defense is too tight,
Busting up kings in the middle of the night.

Castor returns for the chorus:

Hear the thunder roll, feel the stadium shake,
That’s my boy POLLUX, every crown he’s gonna
take!
Immortal in his veins, but his heart is gold,
The greatest boxing story that has ever been told!
Yeah, that’s my son, lightning in his fists,
Put him on the top of the Olympian lists!

I am dancing with the twins now!

Both men hit the outro:

So I put ’em in the sky, shining bright up high,
Two brothers in the stars, never gonna die.
From the boxing ring to the cosmic flame,
Pollux and Castor, remember the name! (Thunder
+52EB crack, mic drop)

The two men stop and pant. Their hands are up in the
air and the audience eyeballs dance in approval. The
dog picks up a bucket of water and tosses the contents

over the three, ||Stop messing around and get back to work. The glue factory closes soon!||

+6EB

Before I can try to talk some sense into the dog, I hear two puppies yipping in distress.

||Help us! Help us! We are drowning in the river!|| bark the dogs in the distance.

+12EB

||Zut alors! We must help the children! Oh no! The tractor cannot go into the water and we need to drag the puppies back on shore? What can be done?!|| says Castor and Pollux's dog.

+8EB

I say, "YOU HAVE TWO STRONG MEN RIGHT HERE AND YOU WANT TO USE THE TRACTOR?! Castor! Pollux! Go save the puppies!"

+11EB

The two strong men pull off their yokes and run. The dog barks after, ||Damn it! Barry! Larry! Get back here now!||

+10EB

Castor dives into the water and is quickly followed by his demigod brother. The two quickly find and save the young dogs.

+11EB

Dripping wet, the two men lie down on the side of the raging water and rest. The puppies shiver in the dog's arms and he notes, ||Man, Barry and Larry are still pretty useful. I guess the oatmeal bill is not that bad, and to be honest, that new human would make a great Carry!||

+10EB

I look at the dog with some suspicion as it slowly
walks towards me, ||Come here, boy. Come on. I have
+5EB some nice liver at home for you!||

As he comes closer his paws start to reach out to me,
and I understand his purpose. I dodge the incoming
paws and make a run for it. Mastereye blazes into my
brain, “Excellent work. Keep it up and keep up the
+7EB pace!”

I feel the path ahead and ready myself for the all-night
run to the next town. I cannot be late...

Chaplin, Saskatchewan

I find myself running into a town surrounded by endless white hills. Strangely, the town is not named White Hills, but Chaplin. I have no idea why. Perhaps they enjoyed the City Lights? I see two dog tourists nearby.

-38EB

The two dog tourists stare at the hills and one remarks, ||This is the attraction here in Chaplin? Piles of salt?||

The other dog responds, ||Well, the lake next to it is where thousands of birds stop off during their migrations, and you can stand on a tower.||

The first replies, ||Even the birds aren't staying? Let's move on...||

I feel Mastereye pushing thoughts into my brain, "Find the lost dog. Put him on the right path." I look around and finally see a young dog at the side of the road. It seems confused.

I run up to the young dog and say, "Hello. Can I help you?"

+27EB

The dog replies to me, "Allo? Allo?" I'm looking for the subtitles and then I realize. This dog talks my language? I ask it, "Can you understand me?"

The dog speaks slowly and carefully, "Allo? I am human talk study person. I talk good human?"

-44EB

-19EB I reply, "Yes! You speak very well for a dog. My name is... well, I am a hobo. What is your name?"

The young dog offers, "Obo? I sais pas the obo. I am Rudd. Rudd Weatherwax. I like humans. Want to be boss of humans. Do you know trick?"

"Trick? Like what?"

"Say. YAHOO! Like good boy! I have liver treat?" says Rudd.

-58EB "I have no time for this, Rudd. Aren't you headed someplace? I heard that you were lost?" I ask the dog.

Rudd looks confused and asks, "How do you know Rudd lost?"

-31EB I point to Mastereye and say, "He told me. He told me unless I help you, and unless it's interesting, we all get thrown into a void."

Rudd looks to where I'm pointing and seems confused, "Who is he? Nobody la ... there."

"Never mind. Where are you heading? Maybe I can help?" I offer.

"I want meets Lucille Ball and works with human in television at Los Angeles. I like blondes. Long hair. Long yellow and white hair is my dream," says Rudd.

-22EB "Uh, sounds interesting, Rudd. Let's find a bus stop," I answer, and Mastereye pushes the nearest bus stop location into my brain.

“Rudd? The bus stop is over here. Follow me,” I say to Rudd and he follows after me. Something is on a pole but it’s completely illegible to me. Rudd stares at the pole and notes, “The bus. Here in a few minutes. Merci! Your name is Hobo? People watch Hobo somehow?”

“People? I’ve no idea. Eyeballs definitely,” I say to the dog as he waits for the bus.

“Les yeux? Zut alors! I think my show will be hairy. Hairy, yellow and white. Everyone likes good hair,” says the dog.

-18EB

“If you say so, Rudd. Look, the bus is coming now,” I say and the Greyperson bus drives up. The dog barks out, ||You can board, but no humans outside of a crate.||

+64EB

Rudd notes, “No Hobo on bus. Sorry. Merci. Good boy! Try a YAHOO! and grow your hair maybe?”

I say, “Thanks for the advice, Rudd, but I think I know what will keep people watching. Just tons of variety and surprises!”

-47EB

Rudd looks and tilts his head, “Hm. I am different maybe. Bon voyage, Hobo. Thanks for the directions to the bus.”

I thank Rudd and Mastereye pushes hard into my soul, “Get to Portage la Prairie. You’ll need to do better and find something far more entertaining. This episode feels like filler.”

I run and hope that my filler improves in the next town.

Portage la Prairie, Manitoba

I run out of the darkness to Portage la Prairie, Manitoba. There is nothing here but the World's Largest Coca-Cola can, which is a grain silo with an ad painted on it. Much like large things everywhere, this is a tourist draw and a local eyesore for Portage la Prairie.

Portage la Prairie has the most beautiful name that means "take your canoe over this land to something better," I find myself thinking. I think something rude back and hope that Mastereye blinks. I spin around and try to find something compelling near a grain silo.

"Hi Everybody! Welcome to Portage la Prairie, Manitoba. This is the largest Coca-Cola Can! But this surely can't be why, I, the Littlest Hobo, am here!"

-36EB

Maybe something will happen ... and finally I see a small dog across the street. It looks both ways and walks to the other side. Suddenly, a car slams on its brakes and hits the small dog. Its body flies a few feet.

The car stops and a dog with deep blue eyes looks at the body. He sees me and ignores me when I yell, "Hey! You just hit that puppy! Is it OK! You should get help!"

The dog ignores me as if I'm yapping nonsense. He gets into his car and leaves, but I manage to catch the

license plate number. The puppy's body remains on
+36EB the road.

I run over and see the puppy. It's bleeding from its wounds. I carefully pick up the body and run. There's a nearby building and I burst into the establishment. I see a young puppy's face on the wall with red lettering I don't understand. The puppy on the sign has red hair and pigtails.

Multiple dogs are in here and one barks at me, ||What is this?! A human with a child?! What is wrong with the child?|| as it runs up.

The dogs take care of the puppy and I feel Mastereye's mind invade my own: "Bring the hit and run driver to
+42EB justice."

I yell to the air, "WHAT!? I'm just a human and the only being here to bring this dog to justice is ME?! What is wrong with Canada? Are the Mounties underfunded?!" The air has no answer, and then I see it. The car that hit the boy is parked across the street in front of a bar.

I walk across the street carefully so as not to be creamed by a road hypnotized dog. The bar's entrance reads "Lamplighters" but the interior is almost unlit. A few well-placed neon signs from the nearby brewery provide the only light. The blue-eyed dog is sitting on a stool nursing something brown.

I walk up to the dog and say, “Dude! You need to come with me. That puppy you ran over does *not* look good. I mean, are you at least going to report this?” -12EB

The dog looks at me and says nothing more than ||
This thing again? What is wrong with it?||

“What is wrong with me?! I am not the person who hit a kid and left the scene?!” I yell.

The bartendog comes over and asks, ||Is this your human? We do not allow humans unless it’s a service human?||

“He’s lacking any kind of morality, bartendog. So, I am his morality support person, I guess,” I say to the newer dog. The bartendog looks angry and reaches under the bar. +21EB

The dog smacks me with a rolled-up newspaper and I run over to the corner. The bartendog asks the blue-eyed driving menace again, ||Is that your human? I’ll need to take it outside. The health department will have a fit if they catch him inside.||

Blue-eyes responds, ||Not my human. Do what you want.|| +35EB

I yell back to the talking dogs, “Ask blue eyes if he’s feeling any remorse!” -12EB

The bartendog chases me outside. I wait by the door. I wait. -9EB “Damn it,” I say. I can’t just sit here and be boring. I need to do something dramatic.

I run back across the street and several policedogs are now with the puppy. The dogs start pointing at me as I approach.

+13EB One dog with an apron on notes, ||That's him. That's the human who brought in the injured puppy!||

I point towards the bar across the street and say, "Just in time, policedogs! The idiot who ran the puppy over is in the bar over there!"

The dogs look and one lead policedog says, ||I think he's trying to tell us something?||

I sigh, I stamp my feet and point several times at the bar. The two dogs watch me with curiosity, ||I think he wants to tell us something about the bar?||

I turn in three circles and cross the road. The two policedogs watch me from across the road. "Man, it's a wonder that anything gets done around here!" and I point at the bar from the other side of the road again.

+46EB The partner policedog says, ||I think we should follow him.||

"You DON'T SAY! What tipped you off, Sherlock!" I yell as the two dogs start walking across the road.

||What is it, boy? What's the problem?|| says the lead dog.

"My problem is this language issue for sure, but for now, go in there and arrest that man at the bar." I try without any good effect.

I point at the door and then scratch at the door. The partner dog says ||He wants us to go inside?||

+23EB

“This one is brilliant! Yes, policedog! Follow me inside! For crying out loud...” I say as the two dogs finally open the door.

I see that my gains have left a nearby container without any eyeballs. I see a fairy with a dental appliance pounding on the wall and screaming, “It’s just about to get good!” The shipping container overturns and the countless bodies stream in a rainbow of screams into the unknown.

I stare in horror. The dogs push me into the bar.

-18EB

The blue-eyed dog’s eyes widen at the sight of two policedogs in the doorway. I am having problems speaking and just stare at the perpetrator.

||Good evening. Sorry to bother you all, but there’s been a horrible accident outside. A puppy was hit and the driver has run away without stopping. This is a crime — even in Canada.|| says the lead dog to the bartendog and his criminal client.

The bartendog is relaxed but the blue-eyed dog starts to pant heavily. He says, ||So? We didn’t hear or see it in here.||

||Well, yeah, that sounds right, but this human here seems to think something or maybe, *someone*, in here is responsible.|| says the lead dog and the blue-eyed dog stands up from his stool.

+24EB

The bartendog shies away as the tension in the room increases.

||You know, now that you mention it, I do remember a sound,|| says the perpetrator. ||HEY! WHAT'S THAT OVER THERE!|| yells the dog and he points over the policedogs' shoulders. The two policedogs turn to look at what the other dog is pointing at.

"Oh for crying out loud you two, he's going to run!" I say and start running at the perpetrator.

The perpetrator runs out the backdoor while the two policedogs are looking over their shoulder. The
+38EB bartendog barks ||Guys! He's making a break for it!||

The two dogs follow after me as I chase after the blue-eyed dog. After a bit of a footrace, I manage to tackle it and the two policedogs place pawcuffs on the blue-eyed dog.
+31EB

||If it wasn't for the smallest hobo, we would have never found this man!|| says the partner while picking up the cuffed dog from the ground.

||He's the best officer in the force if you ask me!
+34EB HAHHAHAHA!|| barks the second dog.

||We could use a good Hum9 unit in Portage. There's always someone trying to smuggle a canoe over the province lines without paying their syrup tax.|| says the lead dog. I notice the lead dog and clock his intent immediately.

||I don't want it. Take him.|| says the bartendog. +36EB

The lead dog starts over to me and I can feel
Mastereye's command, "Brilliant job! Our share just
dominated our competition. Keep it up and get to
Kenora."

I wait until the lead dog gets close and duck under its
paw. I race out the front door towards what Mastereye
promises is Kenora. I hope I get some sleep soon... +22EB

Kenora, Ontario

The three hundred kilometer run passes in some seventy hours and I am in Rat Portage, Ontario. “How many places are people canoeing in Canada these days? They need a special path just for the rats to carry their canoes?”

I find the large item in this town. It is a fish statue named “Husky the Muskie.” It does not look like a dog or a mink. There are two dog tourists looking at it, || This is the worst large thing in Canada, I think.||

The other dog notes, || Well, next stop is the largest Coke can? Maybe that one is better.||

-56EB

I see my audience and note, “Welcome to the Littlest Hobo. Today we are in Rat Portage next to Husky the Muskie.” I sigh as this cannot be very entertaining.

“I’m sure Rat Portage has an exciting story to tell us all here! Keep watching the Littlest Hobo!” and I widen my arms. I look around for anything interesting. I see a nearby gentledog’s club and walk over. There are pictures of female dogs with their bellies showing. Four pairs of bikini tops across their bodies keep them modest. The biggest picture shows “Carol Dogda” and she is wearing a white wig.

-20EB

I push open the doors and walk into the hottest nightclub in Rat Portage. The single disco ball spins slowly on a rusted chain. The ball’s spin is halted by a

massive colony of cobwebs, but the lights keep it funky. The music is loud and I watch the dog dancers as they lift their legs against the multiple poles and hydrants on the dance stage. The dog audience is sparse and I see a dog dancer look more despondent than anyone else in this sad room.

+3EB “I’m not ready to dance and I’m sure that is good news...” I say to my audience and then I recognize the saddest dancer as Carol Dogda. Carol dances slowly and with no real energy. She accepts a few milkbones in her g-string as she walks by her regulars. Someone tries to grab a haunch and she barks out, ||Look but don’t touch!||

+11EB I watch Carol leave the stage. There’s nothing happening in this room; therefore, I will follow Carol.

-15EB Maybe people like to watch her?

I sneak past the sleeping guard dog in front of the dancer’s dressing room and enter Carol’s room. She is changing and says, ||Hey little guy! Oh! Aren’t you the cutest!||

She scratches the back of my head and my eyes roll back into my head due to the intense pleasure. I groan something like “Oh. This is just amazing. Please keep going.”

She says, ||I just need a great, handsome man like you to sweep me off my feet, my little Herb! That’s what I’ll call you: Herb Canine.||

I am still in pure bliss as her hands move to my belly. I roll over and place my legs and hands into the air. She carefully rubs my upper torso as she continues to talk, ||I need to get out of here to find a mister, but that'll never happen without some real loonies in my pocket. These cheapskates do not tip well and man, Jerry, the owner, hasn't paid me my salary in at least six months.||

+98EB

"What?! I thought Canada protected their workers?" I say to Carol somehow between groans.

-21EB

||Haha, little hobo, are you my agent? Well, I accept your terms! Hehehe! Do you have a contract for me to sign?|| teases Carol.

"Oh for crying out loud, no, man, this language issue is just *insane*. Let me write out something for her. Then, maybe she can translate it somewhere?" I think to myself.

I pick up a nearby pen in my mouth and start writing out a savings plan for Carol. First, we need to get her expenses and I ask, "So, how much do you spend in rent each month?"

+20EB

Carol looks confused and says ||Haha! What are you writing, boy? Are you an artist human or something? Hahah!||

She looks at my scribble and tosses it into the trash. She rubs me behind my ears and I lose all control of my senses. Man, these head massages are fantastic,

but I'm not sure my audience is interested in any of this.

Carol puts on a robe. She finally says, ||You know, Herb? You're right. I should leave Rat Portage. I am ready for the big time! In fact, I have always wanted to dance in San Francisco! It's my dream!||

I look at Carol without any understanding of how I helped. She kept rubbing my head and nothing else mattered.

My eyes are making a complete census of the back of my skull when I feel a strap around my neck. ||There's my little man! Are you ready to go to San Francisco? It's a good thing I kept my leash from the last little human I owned. He was so cute. White fuzzy hair everywhere and a smashed-up face!||

I panic as Mastereye notes, "You must stay on your itinerary. Next stop, your climax in Thunder Bay. Do not be late."

I make a break for the door and my neck is snapped back when Carol pulls me back with a leather strap attached to my neck.

"Get this off me now! What the heck!" I yell at Carol.

She responds ||Whoa! Settle down, little hobo. Let's get some sleep and we'll head to SF tomorrow!||

I struggle against her pull but she is easily four times my size. She drags me towards the car and, well, I bite her hard on the hand.

+29EB

“Herb! Ouch!” she yells as I run off. I hope Thunder Bay is close by.

+15EB

Thunder Bay, Ontario

I catch my breath and hold my sides. The running has been intense over the past weeks. I stand next to a large statue. Thunder Bay's big thing is a statue of a dog named Terry Fox. The two dog tourists look at Terry and ask, ||Who is this dog?|| to each other. Someone nearby says he liked to run and lost a leg. I feel like that might be a good deal at this point. Would Mastereye pay for a cab if I lost a leg?

-96EB

Mastereye answers my thoughts directly, "No, I would not pay for a cab. You and everyone in there will pay if you do not stay on schedule, however. Please find the magistrate. He should be at his office in city hall."

+14EB

I notice that my audience is endlessly filled with eyes, but I do see a nearby shipping container. There are a handful of eyes around it, but I see the performer inside. It's another human. He has long flowing yellow and white hair. He's looking at me intently and his audience seems to be happy just looking at his hair?

Nevertheless, I need to get going as Mastereye is clear as to what is necessary.

-22EB

I walk over and follow signs from the statue to downtown. The slow pace is a bit of a relief, but after all the running, I cannot go faster. The magistrate has a small courtroom for his work and the dog himself is sitting on the bench. I walk inside to his surprise but he is too busy talking to some nearby policedogs.

The magistrate says, ||Someone took my pup. He's missing and there was a note left.||

One of the policedogs asks, ||Can I see the note, sir? It could help us find your son.||

The august dog hands over a note covered in magazine letters, but since they are not subtitled, I
+58EB have no idea what it says.

I speak up and ask, "What does the note say? I can't
-13EB read it."

The magistrate looks up and says, ||What the hell is this human doing in my courtroom? Can one of you
+71EB kick him out, please?||

One of the larger dogs comes near me. I try to avoid him and say, "I am supposed to be here. You want me to be here, I bet. I mean..." He simply ignores my
+88EB speech and pushes me outside to the curb.

"Crap," I think. "Where the heck would a kidnapper
-19EB hang out in Thunder Bay?"

I look around and I see the sign: "Gateway Casinos."
"This is where a kidnapper would spend their time in Thunder Bay," Mastereye insists inside my brain.
Also, a casino is always interesting and I hope that will
-64EB keep my audience happy.

I look out and see that the other shipping container has a larger crowd around it. I can barely hear, ||
-127EB What's that, girl? Timmy is in quicksand!||

The casino has a revolving door and I can feel the air conditioning making Canada cooler somehow. I look around and see many very old dogs at the slots. The first dog is playing a slot named “Bountiful Bones!” and is watching reels of various bone shapes. He keeps tapping the “next spin” button without seeing what bones show up.

A large group of dogs is around a poker table. Another dog, an artist, has a canvas on an easel and is working up a painting of the dogs playing the card game. I see some shady characters there, unlike the aged slot players, and head over.

The bulldog at the table says, ||Is this my good side? I want the painting to have my stogie off my lip!|| All the dogs look at me as I walk up.

I ask the table, “May I join the game, fellas?”

-8EB

The dogs stare at me and a very long dachshund finally says, ||Who let a human into the casino?||

The bulldog barks and says, ||Haha! He looks like he’s a better player than you, Willie!||

The long dog replies, ||Do not call me Willie. My name is William; thank you.||

The bulldog snaps back, ||I’ll bet you now, *Willie*. That human is a better card player than you. Let’s play!||

He continues, ||Sit, boy! Sit! Sit!||

I sit at the table and the bulldog explodes in laughter,
+96EB ||Hahahaha! If only he could ante!||

I take a chip from a nearby stack and drop it into the
+118EB center of the pot. The dogs go silent and stare at me.

The bulldog speaks slowly now and says, ||It anted.
Deal it in then.||

William huffs a bit and says, ||Come on, dog. Let's
play seriously. You can draw your own Humans Play
Poker at home, Monty. Those pups you kidnapped will
+37EB love the bit.||

Monty, the bulldog, says, ||Shut up, Willie. You want
us to get caught. You know the rules! You cannot play
if you do not ante and you cannot not play if you do
ante. He anted. He plays.||

William sighs and deals five cards to each player. I
look at my cards to the general amusement of
everyone. I cannot make out any of it. None of the
cards make any sense. The dogs keep laughing as my
head turns from side to side trying to understand
what I am looking at.

I put my cards back down and wait. Monty laughs and
says, ||I guess he's standing pat! Must have a great
+52EB hand! Hahahaha!||

Monty asks for two cards and William takes one.
Monty bets four milkbones and a meaty stick. William
calls. I stare and Monty laughs, ||I think he wants to
go ALL-IN! HAHAHA!||

The bulldog continues, ||Read 'em and weep, boys,
three tens!||

William notes, ||Sorry, I have a straight!|| and he
starts to pull in the pot.

Monty says, ||Wait! What about our friend here! What
does he have?||

William argues, ||I am not having a showdown with a
human, Monty. This is dumb.||

The bulldog barks, ||Willie, just shut up and have
some fun for a second. Let's see what he has! LOOK
AT THAT! A flush! HAHAAHAHAHA! I told you he had
you, Willie! HAHAAHAHA! You owe him that pot!
HAHAAHAHA!||

+77EB

Willie stands up and his head hits the chandelier
overhead, ||That's enough! Let's get back. Those
puppies are going to be hungry as it's been hours since
they ate.||

Monty sighs, ||Fine, Willie. Let's go, but my man, the
Poker Human, is coming with us.||

I watch as Monty walks over to me and puts me into
his arms.

+104EB

Mastereye invades my mind, "Enjoy your sleep," and I
exhale when "To Be Continued..." appears in the sky.

Thunder Bay, Ontario — Part Two

I open my eyes and am grateful to be alive and not running. I get up from the cushion Monty left on the floor for me in the kitchen. The jerky jars, milkbone jugs, cheddar cheese wheels, and assorted bags of dried rodents layer a funky, inhuman, and earthy musk into the air that I believe I can use for sustenance instead of eating. Fortunately, my body seems constantly fed by pure adrenaline and panic. Let's see how the audience looks.

-96EB

WHAT? I'm down eyeballs?

I hear, ||What's that, girl? Timmy is down a mine shaft?|| I look out and see the other container. The eyeballs are packed around it.

-71EB

If that's the same Timmy I saved a few days back, I think Timmy is a fucking moron? I have high drama going over here and blondo is scoring with the same damn story as mine?! What is wrong with the world?

I need to find something more compelling than good hair. What is it? What? Ugh. Well, let me try something wild.

"Hi, everyone! It's the Littlest Hobo on my most important mission. I'm here to kill the magistrate's child!" I say to the eyes. They all widen. Several come closer.

+287EB

Mastereye's internal voice overwhelms all my senses and says, "This is a risky improvisation, London. Are you sure?"

No, I'm not sure of anything, but I need something to counter the hair, I think to myself.

I listen carefully. I hear the puppies whimpering downstairs.

+96EB "Are you all ready for some real fun?" I say directly to the eyes.

+341EB Mastereye pulls down the lights as the work is done in darkness. Nobody can see, but as the lights come up, I am carefully cleaning a sharp knife and my hands.

+112EB "Let's clean up after ourselves, but nobody would expect a human, would they? So, I can solve all sorts of problems without any help from a dog. The Hobo is unchained now," I say to the group.

+58EB "Where should we go next, friends? Maybe close to where you live?" I say with a smile. Mastereye shudders into my skull and notes, "Nice recovery. I think you should direct the next episode?"

-24EB As I walk from Monty's house and out towards the main road, I say, "I am heading to Wawa. I wonder if they know what is coming now that I write the stories." The road ahead is dark and I run straight at it.

Wawa, Ontario

I sit in comfort as the dog I found on the highway drives me. The dog whimpers as I have threatened to cut him several times, ||Please do not hurt me!|| I have finally found a way to get dogs to listen: something sharp in your hands. I get out of the car in downtown Wawa and my pressed Dog-ber peels out in panic.

I look at my audience. Good. Almost everyone. That one eyeball on old blondo must be myopic or something. Let me listen and see what might be happening over there. ||What's that, girl? You're going to give birth?!||

-212EB

Heh. I guess they are getting desperate, but I'll need to keep pushing harder now.

"Hello everyone. Welcome to Wawa! I bet I have a problem that only The Littlest Hobo can solve! We sure solved those missing puppies last week!" I say to the ever widening eyes looking back at me.

-147EB

I sit in front of the Wawa Goose Statue. The two dog tourists are here. The first says, ||This one is the best so far. Look at the majesty! The fish named after a dog in that last town should come to visit. This is a real BIG thing and not a pun!||

The statue shows a scene: a man pinching another on the backside. Dogs are just crazy. You never know

what makes them happy; that is for sure. I like the tourists and leave them be. Then, I see it. There's a sign on a post.

-119EB

It shows two pictures of a human toddler wearing orange with scribbling around it I do not understand. I bet he's missing. Hm. Where would a toddler be? I know, I'll check the dumpsters behind the nearest market! Kids love to eat and just love dumpsters!

-84EB

The walk to the market is pretty short and wouldn't you know it, I hear some rustling inside the dumpster out back. I pull open the cover and see three squinting pairs of eyes staring back at me.

"Hey, man! You ever hear of knocking? What's the deal!" says an older man with gray fuzz on his skin and a long, thin, fleshy tail. Before I can answer, an elderly woman that looks very similar to the older man says, "This is our home! Do you have any decency sir!"

I see the toddler as well. He is happily eating some bread that has mold growing on one side. He is eating a white part and not the green.

I address the elderly couple, "Sorry to intrude, but who is the kid?"

The woman is defensive and says, "What is it to you? He's our boy and we love him!"

I ask, "You seem a bit old to have a toddler?"

The older man yells back, “You seem to be rude? Why do we need to answer your questions?”

I laugh and say, “You don’t” and I pick up the toddler as they scream their protestation. Both attempt to get out of the dumpster, but I manage to close and latch the lid.

“Don’t leave us locked in here!” yells the old woman. I shrug and note, “I think you have plenty of food and a dog should be there to refill your supply at any moment. Good day!”

I walk away with the toddler holding two fingers. I ask him, “Hey little fella? What’s your name?”

The young boy looks at me under his orange eared hoodie. “My name is Kat. Meow. Meow. Meow.”

“Do you know where home is, Kat?” I ask.

Kat says, “Yep, but I cannot get there. It is just far away and I do not have a ride.”

I am confused and say, “Kat? How the heck did you get here in the first place then? I think someone is looking for you?”

Kat answers upwards to me, “Well, my parents live next to a KatMover. He saw me and moved me here.”

I am *very* confused, “I’m sorry, Kat, but what is a KatMover?”

Kat seems stunned and says, “A dog that moves Kats, of course? The name is pretty clear?”

“I’m sorry, Kat. You are right. Was the KatMover hired to pick you back up? Is there an app we could use?” I ask plainly.

The toddler shrugs and says, “We did not really discuss much at all. He just said, ‘Hi, I’m your neighbor, KatMover. I understand you are a Kat. Please come with me.’ I’m the agreeable sort, so, I assumed KatMover was official and, off we went. He drove me here and dropped me off. Then he left. Those folks in the dumpster let me live there and they shared their food. The bread is ok but even the white parts make me feel funny.”

-103EB

“Well, Kat. I guess that makes me the KatReMover! Hop on my shoulders and I’ll walk you straight back. I bet your folks didn’t remember which day they ordered KatMover and it’s all a big misunderstanding.” I say.

Kat smiles and makes the classic “uppies” hands in the air. I swing Kat up and he’s a bit uncertain.

“Wow. It’s really high up here. Um, is your name KatReMover or, is that a job title, or maybe a competitive brand to KatMover?” says Kat. He’s found a reasonable grip on my forehead and is now much more comfortable.

“Well, I am un-named and un-jobbed beyond the continual need to supply entertainment to a ghost eyeball audience you can see here?” I say and point to the masses of eyeballs looking in at us.

-137EB

The toddler looks out and says, “I always wondered what that was. I thought the bread was at fault. I’m glad you can see it too.”

“So, Kat? Point me towards home and let’s solve this little mystery!” I say.

The toddler points towards a path into the dark. We walk. The toddler bounces a bit as I walk. There is no one here but the child and I. We continue into the dark and I feel Kat’s hands grip a bit tighter.

-91EB

I offer, “Are we still going the right way? How much further?”

He says, “I’m not sure, but I know we need to go over a bridge first. My mother always told me to never cross it alone. The water is kinda deep and I cannot swim.”

I say, “That’s good to know, Kat. I will be very careful. I think I see the bridge entrance now.”

We walk across the bridge and I can hear the rushing water far below; however, the water cannot be seen in the darkness. We get to the mid point of the span. We stop for a second. We continue on and after a bit there is a very large splash that echoes up from the deep.

At the end of the bridge, I take Kat off my shoulders. I look at the eyeballs and note, “Dread is its own entertainment?” Kat shrugs and says, “Are you ready to take me home yet?”

-68EB “Yep. Just needed a rest. Wonder what that splash was? Anyhow. Are you ready? You should walk around a bit. Get the blood flowing or you’ll have tingling legs by the time we get back to your home,” I say.

-55EB Kat toddles, which is age-appropriate and not related to a lack of blood-flow, and I pick him up. I know where he feels comfortable now and we get into a solid, toddler qua bike helmet of sorts.

The pathway to Kat’s home is simple to follow and he points out a nice home. I put the toddler down and he walks up to the door. He scratches on the screen and the noise summons a dog.

The dog barks, ||LOOK! IT’S KAT! HE’S BACK FROM THE SUPERMARKET!||

I stand sheepishly by and then note to Kat, “They’re glad you’re back, Kat. Not sure about the mix-up? But, you’re back now? The first ReMove is free! So, enjoy!”

Kat smiles back and says, “Thanks, KatReMover! That was a much better experience!”

I look at Kat and say, “Yeah! I’m here to kill the competition! Next time I see you out there! I’ll make

sure to pick you up as a return customer for half-off the other guy!”

-128EB

Kat toddles off and waves before the dog takes him inside.

As I walk into the next door house to find the KatMover, I remove my blade. His home is littered with his merchandise for ‘KatMover.com’. I see pamphlets with pictures of a dog taking a human dressed in a furry costume into his car. There’s a large board with tally marks that appear to be the number of Kats the KatMover has moved so far compared to his multi-level marketing team working under him.

-61EB

I see my audience in tatters and I fall to my knees. What else can I do here? Mastereye pushes, “You need to do something, London. The competition is killing us here.”

-94EB

I mentally hope, “I need a night. I need another night in Wawa.”

Mastereye sighs, “OK. It’ll need to be great.”

I close my eyes as “To Be Continued ...” appears in the air.

-73EB

Wawa, Ontario — Part Two

I see the world fade back into existence here in Wawa, and those who remain here are ready for today's tale of vengeance. KatReMover will do his job. I return to the KatMover's home and see Kat across the street. I am thankful the KatMover has not re-moved Kat again. I wave to Kat and Kat seems happy sitting in the sun in his home.

-88EB

The KatMover's home still seems empty, but perhaps he works at night? I will wait in his home until he returns. His front door is unlocked and I enter silently. I hear nothing as I walk upstairs. The KatMover is nowhere to be seen. I see the KatMover's family photos. He seems like a nice dog. I sigh and wait. Kat is across the street, and that is another option, I guess. Kat is human, however.

-117EB

I look around the KatMover's home. It's time. I must do something with Kat. I exit the KatMover's house and cross the street. Kat sees me and exits his home via a small door embedded in a dog-sized door.

-46EB

"Hi, KatReMover! Are you here to ReMove me?" asks Kat.

I look at Kat and say, "Yes. In fact, that's exactly what I am here to do. Would you like to know how?"

Kat brightens and asks, "Sure!"

-71EB

I smile at Kat, pull my blade from my pants, and slice open my shirt. My chest hair is neatly shaved to read, “Suck it, Blondo!” I then ask if Kat has seen a real man
oEB do drag.

The wind I feel is cool. Kat says, “Great ReMove!” as we fall side by side in the dark.

Epilog

Jeff daubed Brother Day's forehead. The birth scene was her most intense acting to date. She looked out of her fourth wall and down at her competition. She watched the other human show as it flipped over. The "Hobo" and some little thing sailed into the void holding hands. He was shirtless but seemingly very relaxed.

"Long live King Lear," said Lassie Junior to herself with a wan smile as she turned back to Rudd.

Coda: The Wedding

THE WRAP PARTY

Bingo stood at the altar. He was a bit nervous and, well, there was GennedPig to eat after the ceremony. He looked over at his groomsfolks. Bob, of course, was best man. Carlito was looking sharp in his tux collar. It was always really hard to get good formal wear for a polar bear. Stu, Boo, and even the Merle managed to shine up well.

The corgi looked out at the attendees and spotted old friends and new. Buck and his wife Brandy, a strange human couple with a tendency to shout “YAHOO!” at every available moment, were actually sitting criss-cross applesauce and being very good humans.

Bingo saw three very attractive men of increasing age sat together in order. Their blond and white manes were being perfectly brushed by a 25 foot semi-human dog. Bingo didn't know what to make of these dog/people hybrids, but he was happy to have people at the wedding. His momma said she'd make as many GennedPigs as they'd need for the reception.

The small dog then saw a man relaxing. It looked like he'd been running forever. He had two puppies with him and had told people, “I would never hurt a puppy. It's all fiction. Including the fictional deaths, ok?” So, Bingo thought that guy was pretty cool.

Then, the march started and the bride was coming down the aisle.

Salote, Bingo's momma and Bob's wife, led the bride. The two were glorious in white.

Bingo's bride turned to him. The corgi lifted the veil and exposed View's face to him. His breath was taken away.

They both turned to BMO, the robot, who they had asked to officiate. BMO's face panel showed a smile, then she started the ceremony off.

As the robot talked, the multiple fires kept the meal to come slowly roasting. Bingo and View's tails wagged as they watched BMO carefully. The coda fades away.

Epilog — Fetching

THE EPILOG

The puppy sat in his mother's place. She had a restaurant style breakfast "nook" that was perfect for playing all sorts of board games. The young dog loved board games or any kind really. His actual favorites were from Metagaming like GEV, Ogre or Melee; however, only a few folks at school would play those. Here, the pup's newly installed stepdad from England, had a wide variety of board games. Stepdad had spent all sorts of time at sea; therefore, he'd developed a board game habit out of pure need.

We'd played various versions of mah jong and he had strange games with complex rulesets like horse racing or shipping lines. That said, the pup always liked simple abstract games like chess, othello or, in this case, nine-men's-morris.

Stepdad rolled out the board. It was a hexagon versus the normal square. This led to a longer game versus the normal version, but the pup eye balled it for some moments. They played. It was very close. The pup stared hard at the board a bit as the stepdad told stories of the music playing or, in case of the absolutely cryptic *comedians*, some hope of comprehension. To the pup, the sounds of the comedians were no better than pure "YAHOO!" and no real words.

The next game was less close. The stepdad talked about his trips to various ports around the world and what difference he had seen in his world travels. He certainly had been mostly everywhere, but interestingly, mainly at the ports of call versus tourist cities. That said, the pup noticed that his stepfather did take time to travel for pleasure as well. The elder loved a long drive and that meant serious distances. There were hours of tapes where the dog drove across the

United States in a car somewhat non-stop. As in, drive all day until dark, sleep, get up at dawn and repeat.

The pup had completely mastered this variant. They had played enough at this point. The youth was relentless and created cascades that ended the games in complete routs. Both were getting bored as they'd played this one game about thirty or forty times in a row. Perhaps more. It was reasonable to test out various choices, but it was clear that the person who moved first won. This was no longer a game but now, more like, a completely solved jigsaw puzzle.

The stepdad rolled up the game and asked, "Did you enjoy the game?"

The pup was delighted with the game and honestly reported, "It was great!"

The elder laughed as he looked for yet another in his collection. "It sure was," he said.