

FOUR POEMS FROM *DOGS IN TOPANGA! 2000-2018*

TOPANGA

Dogs have saved me here before,
some by finding me on a trail
and making me smile, others by
unexpectedly, mercifully, seemingly
miraculously wandering into my house when
I most needed a friend, like the huge chocolate lab
that showed up the night I learned my last boyfriend
was getting married and even stayed with me 'til morning
as I held onto his big brown body and sobbed.

DOGS

Happy.
They're naturally happy.
They naturally wag their tails
And are happy.

Can't we learn anything
From dogs--
Are we that stupid--
That we can put men into space
Or fly an airplane through one of the
Tallest buildings in the world
And we can't learn to wag our tails
Like a dog?

CAMELLA, 1996-2012

We lived together for a dozen years. Then
six years after her death, I hear her:
“Twelve years and you never knew,
me marching proud through the mall,
everyone staring, so many asking
‘What special breed of dog is that?’
you proud of me, me proud to be
with you, and you never knew.

“You called me ‘Luminous.’ ‘Lunar-lit.’
That light was for you, and with you,
my fifteen-inch tail straight up in the air
long as my body, my dark eyes mysterious planets
you never visited but only looked on in awe as if
I were a work of art and not a breathing being –
not even when I left teeth marks
in the metal sliding doors when home alone,
to get to you. You.

“You gave me ‘Anti-Psychotic Meds –’
for ‘abandonment issues?!’ and I only craved
closeness, like when I sat on your lap at parties,
beautiful and shining, and people cooed
‘I wish I had a dog like that,’ never knowing
how I redecorated the inside of your car,
its ceiling hanging down along the windows
and the dashboard in tatters.

“It was only that last afternoon, my blood
suddenly on your cement floor, and black,
and you, desperate to get me to an Emergency Room,
me on your lap as our neighbor drove us,
me feeling the warmth of your holding me and your
devotion all those years, everybody telling you
‘Get rid of her! She’ll never change!’ Even that dog trainer
saying I was hopeless. Yes, I knew.

“It was only that last moment, my head cushioned
in your elbow, that my eyes looked up at you,
way beyond thanking you for a good life
or for rescuing me, or sticking with me,
the doctor saying I’d never walk again — yes, I knew —
it was only then, your eyes, locked with mine,
that you understood.”

PRINT

If I could read
Dancer's paw print in the dirt –
would it be a poem?
His grumble in his sleep –
another?
His bark, a poem, read out loud?

His paw print is a painting
like a painting is a poem,
and tomorrow's
will be different
the way in Chinese a subtle change
of intonation alters
a word's entire meaning.

I know the way I smooth his brow is a poem,
like my feeding him, the careful spooning out
and churn of dry food and wet.

My dog knows that sunsets are poems
or me eating a piece of chicken,
or then giving him some
(he likes that poem better).

You reading this poem is a poem,
like my age is a poem.
Three Quarters of a Century.
Long poem.
Blink of a dog's eye.