

The ReGender App

Jass Richards

Magenta

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The ReGender App
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Also by Jass Richards

fiction

(the Rev and Dylan series)

License to Do That

The Blasphemy Tour

The Road Trip Dialogues

(the Brett series)

Dogs Just Wanna Have Fun

This Will Not Look Good on My Resume

A Philosopher, a Psychologist, and an Extraterrestrial Walk into a Chocolate Bar

TurboJetslams: Proof #29 of the Non-Existence of God

stageplays

Substitute Teacher from Hell

screenplays

Two Women, Road Trip, Extraterrestrial

performance pieces

Balls

nonfiction

Jane Smith's Translation Dictionary

License to Do That

“I’m very much intrigued by the issues raised in this narrative. I also enjoy the author’s voice, which is unapologetically combative but also funny and engaging.” A.S.

“I love Froot Loup! You make me laugh out loud all the time!” Celeste M.

“A thought-provoking premise and a wonderful cast of characters.” rejection letter from publisher

The Blasphemy Tour

“With plenty of humor and things to think about throughout, *The Blasphemy Tour* is a choice pick ...” *Midwest Book Review*

“Jass Richards has done it again. As I tell anyone who wants to listen, Jass is a comedy genius, she writes the funniest books and always writes the most believable unbelievable characters and scenes ... I knew this book was a winner when ... a K9 unit dog kind of eats their *special* brownies... and dances ‘Thriller’. ... Rev and Dylan are not your ordinary guy and girl protagonists with sexual tension and a romantic interest, at all. They both defy gender roles, and they are so smart and opinionated, it’s both funny and made me think at the same time. ... They tour around the USA, in their lime green bus that says ‘There are no gods. Deal with it.’ Overall, I highly recommend anything by Jass, especially this one book, which is full of comedy gold and food for thought.” May Arend, Brazilian Book Worm

“If I were Siskel and Ebert I would give this book Two Thumbs Way Up. ... Yes, it is blasphemy toward organized religion but it gives you tons of Bible verses to back up its premises. And besides, it’s pure entertainment. There’s a prequel which I recommend you read first. *The Road Trip Dialogues*. ... I only hope there will be a third book.” L.K. Killian

The Road Trip Dialogues

“I am impressed by the range from stoned silliness to philosophical perspicuity, and I love your comic rhythm.” L. S.

“This is engaging, warm, funny work, and I enjoyed what I read. ...” rejection letter from publisher

“Just thought I’d let you know I’m on the Fish ’n Chips scene and laughing my ass off.” Ellie Burmeister

“These two need stable jobs. Oh wait, no. Then we wouldn’t get any more road trips. Fantastic book which expands the mind in a laid back sort of way. Highly recommended.” lindainalabama

Dogs Just Wanna Have Fun

“Funny and entertaining! I looked forward to picking up this book at the end of a long day.”
Mary Baluta

“... terrifically funny and ingeniously acerbic ...” Dr. Patricia Bloom, *My Magic Dog*

“... Jocko won't leave his property, Carson won't come into the house, Rosie is a depressed former race dog. Biscuit refuses to go on walks, and Winner is an over-achieving herder. Amber is a distraught search-and-rescue dog, Toby, a wall-flower unless he has his turtle costume on. Cookie, a puppy-mill casualty, sees the light of day for the first time in her life. ... Brett is funny in a caustic, quirky sort of way, with a heart for dogs in need and a propensity for knowing how to have fun with them.” Mary Trimble, *My Magic Dog*

“I enjoyed this book IMMENSELY!” Deborah Titus, *Smashwords*

This Will Not Look Good on My Resume

“Ya made me snort root beer out my nose!” Moriah Jovan, *The Proviso*

“Darkly humorous.” Jennifer Colt, *The Hellraiser of the Hollywood Hills*

“HYSTERICAL! ... There are really no words to describe how funny this book is. ... Really excellent book.” Alison, *Goodreads*

“This book is like a roller coaster ride on a stream of consciousness. ... Altogether, a funny, quirky read ...” Grace Krispy, *Motherlode: Book Reviews and Original Photography*

“Brett has trouble holding down a job. Mainly because she's an outspoken misanthrope who is prone to turn a dead-end job into a social engineering experiment. Sometimes with comically disastrous results, sometimes with comically successful results. (Like pairing up a compulsive shopper with a kleptomaniac for an outing at the mall.) I don't agree with everything she says, but I will defend her right to say it — because she's hilarious!

“My favorite part was when she taught a high school girls' sex ed class that 70% of boys will lie to get sex, 80% won't use a condom, yet 90% are pro-life. She was reprimanded, of course. I think she should have gotten a medal.

“You will likely be offended at one point or another, but if you are secure enough to laugh at your own sacred cows instead of just everyone else's, this is a must read.” weikelm, *Librarything*

“Wonderful read, funny, sarcastic. Loved it!” Charlie, *Smashwords*

“I just loved this book. It was a quick read, and left me in stitches. ...” Robin McCoy-Ramirez

“First, let me just say I was glad I was not drinking anything while reading this. I refrained from that. My husband said he never heard me laugh so much from reading a book. At one point, I was literally in tears. Jass Richards is brilliant with the snappy comebacks and the unending fountain of information she can spout forth. ... The quick wit, the sharp tongue, the acid words

and sarcasm that literally oozes from her pores... beautiful.” M. Snow, My Chaotic Ramblings

A Philosopher, a Psychologist, and an Extraterrestrial Walk into a Chocolate Bar

“Jass Richards is back with another great book that entertains and informs as she mixes feminism, critical thinking, and current social issues with humour ...” James M. Fisher, *The Miramichi Reader*

“I found myself caught between wanting to sit and read [*A Philosopher, a Psychologist, and an Extraterrestrial Walk into a Chocolate Bar*] all in one go and wanting to spread it out. I haven’t laughed that hard and gotten to spend time with such unflinchingly tough ideas at the same time. ... [And] the brilliance of the Alices! ... I can now pull out your book every time somebody tries to claim that novels can’t have meaningful footnotes and references. [Thanks too] for pointing me to the brilliant essay series ‘Dudes are Doomed.’ I am eagerly watching for *The ReGender App* ...” C. Osborne

TurboJetslams: Proof #29 of the Non-Existence of God

“Extraordinarily well written with wit, wisdom, and laugh-out-loud ironic recognition, *TurboJetslams: Proof #29 of the Non-Existence of God* is a highly entertaining and a riveting read that will linger on in the mind and memory long after the little book itself has been finished and set back upon the shelf (or shoved into the hands of friends with an insistence that they drop everything else and read it!). Highly recommended for community library collections, it should be noted for personal reading lists.” *Midwest Book Review*

“We all very much enjoyed it—it’s funny and angry and heartfelt and told truly...”
McSweeney’s

“If you’re looking for a reading snack that has zero saccharine but is loaded with just the right combination of snark, sarcasm, and humor, you’ve found it.” Ricki Wilson, Amazon
“What Richards has done is brilliant. At first, I began getting irritated as I read about a familiar character, or a familiar scenario from our time living on the lake. Then, as the main character amps up her game, I see the thrill in the planning and the retribution she undertakes for pay back.” Cottage Country Reflections

Substitute Teacher from Hell

“I enjoyed reading “Supply Teacher from Hell” immensely and found myself bursting out laughing many, many times. It is extremely well-written, clever, and very intelligent in its observations.” Iris Turcott, dramaturge

more at jassrichards.com

Sweet Sixteen pitch based on a short story by Peg Tittle. The pitch for *Exile* was actually made at the Great American Pitchfest, it received the described response, Tittle did rewrite it as a novel, and it has since been published (Rock's Mills Press). Go figure. Should she pitch it again, now that it's a published novel? Should she hire a man to pitch it on her behalf?

Thanks to FierceMild and Hekate Jane for Rev's response to cis-privilege, taken almost word for word from their lovely comments on *Feminist Current*.

Thanks to K.A. for the post on *I Blame the Patriarchy*.

All (or almost all) references to past events occur in the previous Rev and Dylan novels. (Enjoy ... !)

And thanks again to Bill for his younger self.

“Whatcha doin?” Dylan said to Rev as he entered the screened-in porch with a cup of coffee and a couple slices of cold pizza.

“Watching the lake ice over.” Rev was on the couch, her hands already wrapped around a cup of coffee, staring out at the lake.

“You can do that? You can actually see the moment the water turns to ice?” He set the pizza on the table between her couch and his chair, then settled in.

“No. Well, in all my years here, no. Which is why I’m watching now.”

“But it’s only November.”

She looked at him.

Right. When she was deciding where to settle, where to look for her dream-come-true cabin-on-a-lake-in-a-forest, she’d narrowed it down to somewhere in B.C. and somewhere in mid-northern Ontario. She’d chosen the latter, thinking that if she lived in B.C., she’d miss the variety offered by the four seasons. She didn’t know that mid-northern Ontario had just two seasons: winter and bug season. Each lasting six months. Though, it had to be admitted, the latter offered a variety of blackflies, deerflies, horseflies, mosquitoes, and no-see-ums.

“And what are *you* two doing?” he said to Froot Loup, the baby wolf who’d followed him out of the forest one day and then adopted him, and Corn Flake, her best bud from down the road, both of whom were sprawled out on their nest of blankets at the end of the porch.

Loup stared at him. Wasn’t it obvious? They were chewing on his shoe. One of the new ones.

They sat in companionable silence, the four of them, for what was left of the morning. Rev and Dylan had fortuitously come upon each other a few years prior, after a twenty-year gap following their graduation from teacher’s college. They’d gone their separate and, apparently, quite different ways. Rev had failed with a boom, Dylan with a fizzle.

They’d each sent a letter or two over the years, but because Dylan had quit his teaching job in Nelson to go on tour with *A Bunch of Drunken Indians* (he played tambourine), and Rev had been fired, more or less, from one teaching job after another and so went from one address to another, they never received each other’s letters.

When they’d reconnected, it was like time had put a bubble around their relationship. It was intact and unchanged.

Dylan had turned his nomadic house-sitting lifestyle and his history not-quite-degree into a freelance sort-of-career as a travel writer. And although he still took off every now and then, he had become content, even happy, to hang out at Rev’s cabin on a lake in a forest.

Rev had become an off-site item-writer for the LSAT, crafting the multiple-choice logical reasoning questions that went onto the test, making good use of her philosophy degree and her inability to get along with people.

At around one o’clock, just as they were finishing their breakfast — the forementioned coffee and cold pizza — it started snowing.

“Let’s go kayaking,” Rev said. She never started working until the evening. Most of her neurons didn’t even come online until noon, and it took until then for them to warm up.

Dylan looked out at the pretty white thick flakes. “Yes, let’s! It’ll be so ... Option (B): delightfully incongruous!”

“Indeed.” She grinned. Despite her hermit nature, Rev enjoyed having Dylan around. Somehow he didn’t destroy or invade her solitude. And he made her life fun.

They changed into their kayaking clothes and headed down to the water, Froot Loup and Corn Flake bounding along with them. Because, hey, SOMETHING WAS GOING TO HAPPEN!!

Rev got into her beloved red kayak, tied to one side of the dockraft — a Rev construction, just an eight-by-eight raft permanently pulled up on shore but buoyed at the far end by two floats. It did the trick. Which was to give her, one, a take-off platform for her kayak, and two, a sit-down platform for her lounge chair, from which she watched the sparkles on the water on sunny days and moonlit nights. And three, because of the floats, it didn't have to be taken out every winter and put back in every spring; it just rose and/or fell with the ice instead of being bent and/or broken by it.

Dylan manoeuvred his recently-purchased lime green kayak from its spot on shore to the other side of the dockraft. They'd considered just tying it to that other side, but quickly realized that on windy days it would keep banging into the dockraft. And annoy the hell out of Rev.

She pushed herself away from the dockraft and — Corn Flake jumped in.

"Okaaaaay," she quickly steadied her rocking kayak. Flaker quickly assessed the situation, but did not change his mind. He sat down, snuggling himself between her knees. *Did* want to go with her. *Did not* want to go overboard.

"Ready?" She turned to see that Loup had, similarly, jumped into Dylan's kayak. Cool. Or not. Dylan didn't have her kayaking skill. And Loup was a good twenty pounds heavier than Flaker. She watched as Dylan struggled not to capsize.

"Down!" she called out to Loup.

Instantly, Loup lay down in the cockpit. Dylan's kayak stabilized considerably.

"See what good teachers we could have been?"

Dylan opened his mouth, then closed it. It was true. They had spent a great deal of time teaching Loup how to ... survive. As a pet wolf in a neighbourhood full of rednecks with rifles. And they had, apparently, succeeded.

Even so, she was quarantined during hunting season. She didn't mind the bright bandanas — usually orange, but sometimes neon pink or neon green or, Dylan's latest purchase, bright turquoise with a bunch of yellow dinosaurs swimming about. She hadn't been so keen about being tied up for two weeks at a time. Now, however, she got to spend much of the two weeks with Flaker. At his place.

After the first hunting season, and after it was clear that Froot Loup and Corn Flake were best buds, he and Rev had offered to pitch in for half the cost of replacing Kit's ten-by-ten pen with something considerably larger. Kit gladly tore down the pen — it had been all she could afford since she'd just bought the house — and fenced in her whole property instead. It wasn't as large as Rev's lot. More importantly, it was level and rectangular. So that was where Loup now spent most of his time during hunting seasons. Safe, and happy, with Flaker.

They slowly made their way out of the cove and into the lake per se, wisely hugging the shoreline. Once they were past the stretch of cottages, Dylan let Loup get up.

"Steady ... " he said as Loup negotiated sitting in the kayak. "Good wolf."

A few minutes later, halfway across the widest part of the lake, a necessary crossing in order to get to the little river Rev was heading toward, Rev risked a glance behind her to see that Loup was sitting between Dylan's legs, following Flaker's lead, and being very still. Dylan was concentrating on paddling, compensating for Loup's weight, which was not quite evenly distributed. All was well.

Until Flaker decided that the view would be better from the prow.

Rev recovered quickly and grinned. Flaker sat there like a not-so-little hood ornament as they moved steadily along the water's surface through the falling snow.

"NO!" She heard Dylan shout a moment later. Just before she heard the splash. "REV!"

Resisting the urge to do otherwise, Rev made a slow, wide turn.

"She tried to jump onto the prow! Like Flaker! And didn't quite —"

"I see."

Loup had surfaced near Dylan, who was paddling haphazardly, in a mad panic, trying to stay close to her in case, in case —

"She's okay," Rev called out. "Look, she's swimming."

"But the water must be ice cold!"

"She's got a thick coat. She's moving. In fact —" Rev pulled ahead of Froot Loup with several strong, even strokes, despite the fact that Flaker was now *standing* on the prow, anxious about — or perhaps just curious. About. Rev intended to lead Loup to the nearest shoreline. Which was, fortunately, at the mouth of the river they'd been heading toward.

"Stay ... " she said to Flaker. Who promptly jumped down off the prow, into the cockpit, and half onto Rev's lap. He shoved his head over her shoulder, trying to keep Loup in sight.

"Or don't," she grinned, counterbalancing with ease. Then barely breaking stroke, she turned the kayak and continued, paddling backwards. Flaker jumped up onto the prow again.

"STAY!" Rev said again, far more sharply. Flaker's coat wasn't nearly as thick. And though he wasn't as heavy as Loup, it would be awkward, possibly impossible, to pull him out of the water and back into the kayak if he decided to jump ship and help — or join — Loup.

No need. Loup swam toward Flaker. Of course she did. Kept swimming toward Flaker, as Rev kept paddling, backwards, toward shore. Dylan paddled behind, calling out calmness and encouragement. And, occasionally, a slight course correction. It was rather like that time in Algonquin Park ...

A minute later — a *long* minute later — the procession touched shore. Loup immediately jumped into Dylan's kayak, and then — *then* — shook herself.

Dylan screamed.

"Ice cold, yeah?" Rev grinned.

Fortunately, Dylan had taken Rev's advice at purchase and his kayak clothes, like hers, were relatively waterproof, as well as windproof. So once Loup was done, and both she and Flaker were back on land — Flaker had flown from Rev's kayak into Dylan's to make sure Loup was okay — Dylan stood up and shook himself. Not as efficiently. But still.

They carried on then, up the pretty river, paddling in the falling snow, Loup and Flaker electing to run along shore. It was so quiet, so beautiful. And so delightfully incongruous.

*

"FUCKING SHIT!" Rev spat out the words. There, where the river became shallow enough for the ATVs to cross — they'd made a trail through the forest where none had been — and it was annoying as hell on humid days because the engine noise could be heard all the way to her cabin — they saw an abandoned fridge, a TV, and a car battery. Just sitting there. Dumped.

"Why go through all the trouble to bring it here, and not to the dump?" Dylan was perplexed.

"Because it's hazardous waste. You need to buy a ticket to take your fridge to the dump, and you need to wait until a hazmat day to take car batteries. The TV is electrical waste ... can't remember if they accept that all year long or if that's a special day too."

“Unbelievable.”

“Actually, it’s not.”

Rev told him then about how she used to take a big garbage bag with her when she walked through the forest — once in the spring when the snow melted and all the garbage tossed by the snowmobilers was exposed, and once in the fall after the summer people had stopped coming and tossing *their* shit. She’d seen entire bags of household garbage dumped, old clothes, soiled diapers, and yes, car batteries and household appliances.

*

On the way back down the river, Loup and Flake elected to get into the kayaks again. And onto the prows again. All was well for a few minutes. Suddenly Flaker leapt off the prow to catch a snowflake, then splashed into the river, giggling. Loup followed suit. They both swam to shore and waited to be picked up. Rev and Dylan obliged. Once back in their respective kayaks, Flaker and Loup shook themselves. They both screamed. Rev and Dylan, that is.

Flaker and Loup positioned themselves back on the prows. A few seconds later, each made another spectacular launch to catch a snowflake. Then swam to shore, and waited for pick-up.

“Shake!” Dylan insisted.

Loup jumped in and shook.

“I meant *before* you got in.” He smiled lovingly at Loup.

“Probably impossible to teach the concept of time to animals who live in the moment. So completely, so easily,” she added with admiration.

“Yeah.” He grinned. With envy.

Then he thought, hell, he was already soaked. So next time, Loup launched himself off the prow, *he* followed suit.

Easier thought than done. He didn’t launch, so much as spill, overboard. Spectacular in its own way.

As evidenced by Rev’s look of disbelief. Because the water *was* ice cold. Maybe not quite as cold here in the shallow river as out on the lake, but still. And their kayak clothes were kayak clothes, not drysuits.

When Dylan surfaced, he grinned. Tried to grin. Found he had little control over his facial muscles.

“Did you catch one?” Rev asked.

“One what?” Apparently also little control over his brain.

Okay, then. She climbed onto the prow, set her sights on a thick flake close to the water’s surface, then dove for it. And looked like a soggy bologna sandwich sliding off a kitchen counter. Never mind. Caught it! Did she rock or what?! Aim low, *that’s* the path to success!

Flaker and Loup stared at them as they struggled to shore, giggling, their clothes dragging. They were bedraggled. The word was meant for them right then, right there.

“Shake.” Dylan said.

“I am.”

“No, I mean — ” He demonstrated.

Flaker and Loup stared at him. Pathetic.

Rev shook herself. Fell over.

Truly pathetic.

Flaker and Loup converged on them and started to lick them dry. They got their heads done, and then — the four of them stared at the kayaks floating down the river, out of reach.

“Oh yeah. Didn’t think of that.”

“If we run, maybe we can catch them before they get out onto the lake,” Dylan said. “You run! You’re fast!” Rev had indeed been a runner. Long-distance, but still.

She took a couple of swish-swashing steps.

“That’s not running!”

“Nor is it fast,” she agreed.

She rolled up her pants, unzipped her jacket, then tried to take off her soaked sweatshirt.

“Hurry!” Dylan urged. “They’re getting away.”

She glared at him. Settled for wringing out her sweatshirt as best she could.

She tried again. To take a couple steps. They still swish-swashed. But not quite as much.

“That’s better. Lift your knees,” Dylan called out as she swish-swashed away.

She turned and glared at him again. Flaker and Loup had, in the meantime, sat down. To wait for the humans to figure it out.

“You just need to catch one. Then you can get in and paddle after the other one.”

“Or we can just walk home from here. Deal with the kayaks tomorrow. It’s not like they’re going to drift out into the ocean.”

“Are you on speaking terms with any of your neighbours? One has a boat we can use?”

She glared at him yet again. Flaker and Loup had lain down.

“Eventually they’ll hit shore *somewhere*,” she said. “We’ll just walk around the lake until we find them.”

“Okay.”

They both stared at the river then.

“We’re on the wrong side, aren’t we.” Dylan asked the obvious.

“Wrong as in morally wrong or — ”

“Wrong as in we’re going to have to swim across.”

“Yeah.”

“Isn’t there a shallow spot where we could just — walk across?” Dylan asked hopefully. His teeth chattering.

“Yeah. Back where the ATVs cross.”

“Oh.” That was at least a mile back.

After weighing the extra wetness, negligible, against the time saved, considerable, they decided to swim across. Then wrung themselves out. Then started walking. Loup and Flaker followed them across the river, shook themselves, then took the lead.

*

“Pity we didn’t bring an extra set of dry clothes,” Dylan said at one point.

“We did. At least I did.”

“And — Oh.”

*

“Do you think our clothes will ice over? You could watch and see. It happen.”

*

“We should call the Coast Guard when we get home. Tell them we’re safe, in case someone

reports — Oh. Right.”

“Besides, there is no Coast Guard.”

*

“So did you catch a snowflake? As you sailed out across the water?”

“Yeah.” She grinned. “You?”

“Yeah.”

*

Two hours later — Loup and Flaker had taken the scenic route home — not that Rev or Dylan would know — both had spent considerable time in the forest, yes, but *on the trails* — they were warm and dry, sitting on the rug leaning against the couch in front of a fire, sipping hot fudge chocolate.

Loup and Flaker were lying a safe distance away.

“Oh, we forgot — ” Dylan pushed away from the couch and crawled toward the pile of kindling, opening a little tin box tucked nearby. He took out a packet of something and tossed it into the fire.

“Oh yeah!” Rev said and smiled. The flames went turquoise and green and orange and red ... The packets were called Funky Fire and contained a mix of chemicals that coloured the flames by oxidizing — something. Dylan had found them at the hardware store, unbelievably enough.

A few moments later, he opened another little box that looked like it contained chess pieces and pulled out a baggie, rolling paper, and matches. He’d found an apparently abandoned marijuana patch in the forest one day, had tended it back to health, and now called it the Marijuana Meadow. M&M, for short.

*

As Rev took again the joint Dylan passed to her, she nodded at Loup and Flaker. “Whoever hypothesized that wolves became domesticated because they sought the Neanderthals’ fires on cold nights ... didn’t know wolves.” Almost lost the thought there for a moment. It had been such a long sentence. “Even most dogs are wary of fire.”

Dylan agreed. “They’d much rather wear little hand-knit coats to stay warm. And booties. Little pink booties with white ribbons.”

“Fifi flashbacks?”

He nodded. Dylan once had a dog, Bob, who left him for life on a farm with kids and — Fifi.

“Did you ever think that maybe Bob left you for the farm? Not for Fifi?” Because, frankly, she couldn’t see *any* dog leaving Dylan for little pink booties with white ribbons. “Maybe he just wanted to run and run and roll around in the muck and run some more ... ”

“I never thought of that!” Dylan glowed. “I should’ve gotten him a farm!”

“Or at least a bunch of muck.”

“Yeah,” he drew in, “I probably couldn’t afford a farm.”

“But you could afford a bunch of muck?”

“I don’t know. How much money does a bunch of muck cost? If a bunch of muck did cost

... money?" He giggled.

"I don't know. Where would one buy a bunch of muck? If a bunch of muck could be bought."

"Oh — Oh — eBay!" She cried out. As soon as her brain had caught up. Because she bought everything on eBay. It was *so* much easier than going to a store.

"Do you think they sell it by the pound or square foot?"

"Which is more important, weight or volume?"

Dylan imagined being Bob. Not for the first time. "Volume."

Rev got up to go get her laptop. Fifteen minutes later, she returned.

"Did you get lost?"

"Oh shut up."

A few minutes later, "Oh, wow ... "

"It's expensive?"

"They're so pretty. Dylan, look at the sea butterflies ... " She turned her laptop toward him.

"They *are* pretty ... Oh, look at that one. With the feathery ... things."

It took another minute or two. "How did you get to sea butterflies? Weren't you going to look for muck on eBay?" He scrolled down to see more images.

Rev thought for a minute. Or two. "Oh yeah. I have no idea. But look at how pretty they are ... "

Next noon, after their coffee and cold pizza, Rev called the township to report what they'd found by the river.

"But it's hazardous waste," Dylan heard her say as he entered the kitchen, Loup and Flaker trailing behind. "Depending on when the fridge was manufactured, Freon could be leaking out. The battery could be leaking too. Battery acid." It sounded like she was trying to convince the guy it was important. Nothing more was said. She hung up a moment later.

"Well?"

"He told me to go online and fill out a complaint form."

"Bureaucracy."

"Don't think so."

He looked at her inquisitively.

"I'll bet that if I were a *man*, the guy would've — *you* call. See what happens."

"I've got a better idea." Dylan went into his room, rummaged in his knapsack, and returned with his smartphone.

She stared at it. Then remembered that they *could* use their cell phones at her cabin now. Without climbing onto the roof. Bell and Rogers had finally improved their service and although her internet access wasn't truly high-speed, it was now light years ahead of the dial-up she'd had to use for far too long.

"Call again," Dylan said, handing the phone to her. "Use the voice modulation app. Choose James Earl Jones."

"Seriously?" She accepted the phone and explored the app.

"I prefer Alvin, myself," Dylan continued, "but ..."

She made the call. The same call. Dylan reached over to put it on speakerphone.

"Yeah, some woman just called about that. Where is it exactly?" the man asked. As if the woman had been unable to tell him.

"Where the ATV trail crosses the river."

"And what exactly has been dumped there?" As if the woman had been unable to tell him.

"A fridge, a car battery, and a TV."

"Oh, well, yes, we definitely want to get that taken care of. It's hazardous waste. Depending on when the fridge was manufactured, Freon could be leaking out. The battery could be leaking too. Battery acid." Rev gave Dylan a look.

"We'll send someone out this afternoon." A murderous look.

"Thank you." Rev handed the phone back to Dylan.

They were both quiet. Rev with anger, Dylan with disbelief.

"You know what we *really* need," Rev started to say, but Dylan had already left the kitchen again.

He returned in a few seconds with his laptop, sat at the small table, and started tapping away ... Rev waited, watching, wondering —

"It's already been invented." He tapped a few more keys, then turned the laptop so she could see as well.

"Holy shit."

It was an app called ReGender. It was Photoshop meets Holoshop.

“No surprise, really,” Dylan said casually. As if the world hadn’t shifted under his feet. “Remember when you started using a male name for your emails? And then went into a few chatrooms as a man? And remember that program we played with, the one that changed all the pronouns?” He started exploring the website.

“Yeah. I called it a Bechdel test for novels,” she said. “If you could change the pronouns and not end up laughing, the work was truly non-sexist. And fantasy,” she added.

“I know you’re not into gaming,” he said, tapping away, “but when women use male avatars ...”

Right. Because what woman *wouldn’t* want to present as a man? To be taken seriously for one goddamned minute. The people in the chatrooms had not dismissed her out of hand. They’d actually engaged with her for what she said. Not for what she was assumed to be because of her sex.

“Smartphones,” he was reading the ‘About It’ page out loud, “have been able to project miniature holograms since 2015.” He looked up. “Did not know that.”

While he thought of all the fun he’d been missing, Rev picked up where he’d left off. “ReGender projects a hologram that completely masks the person holding the projecting smartphone.”

Better pay, better performance reviews, promotions.

“This is going to make someone very, very rich.” She turned to Dylan. “We have to buy stock. Now.”

“But,” he’d scrolled down, “it’s only in the beta — They need people to test it.” He looked over at her. Grinning from ear to ear. Daring her from ear to ear.

“Hell yeah!” She peered closely at the page he’d clicked to. “Oh.”

They had to attend a two-week orientation and training session. Then commit to five months of testing. So five and a half months. She’d have to leave her beloved cabin for five and a half months. Their blasphemy tour had taken eight months. And that had been enough travel to last a very long time, as far as she was concerned. She’d started missing her cabin first week out.

“But it’s in the winter. Mostly.” He nodded outside to the still falling snow. “As soon as the lake freezes over, you won’t be able to kayak anyway ...”

She considered that. In fact, she’d accompanied Dylan on a couple of his housesits during the previous winter. Because, yeah, she wouldn’t’ve been able to kayak anyway. Or sit outside in the porch. But those trips had been for only a few weeks at a time.

“Where is it? Spending the winter in California would be nice. Isn’t that where Google is?”

Dylan turned back to the screen. “It’s not owned by Google.”

“Yet.” Rev got up and headed to the porch. Her laptop was on the little table beside her couch. She settled in, powered on, and found the site. Dylan followed, carrying his laptop, and settled into his chair. Loup and Flaker followed, glanced at the two of them, then at each other, then gently pushed their way out through the hanging strip of grocery-freezer plastic in the bottom half of the door. Early on, Dylan had modified the screen door so Loup could go in and out as she wished. Maintaining its function of keeping the bugs out had been a challenge, but after several failed designs, he’d prevailed. And then had the brilliant idea of changing the screen to heavy plastic once the temperatures dropped.

“It was created by some people in Halifax!” he said with surprise a few moments later.

“The home of *22 Minutes!* That makes so much sense! Dakey Dunn — Was Mary Walsh involved? I’ll bet she was ...” Rev scrolled and clicked ...

“In any case,” Dylan said, scrolling and reading, “It looks like they’re wanting people to be, or go, all over. We choose five locations from a list and spend a month at each. All expenses paid.”

“Really? Including the expense to get *to* those five places?” She explored the site trying to confirm that. “And *from* those five places,” she thought to add.

“Travel, accommodation, *and* an honorarium!” Dylan kept reading. It did seem a little unbelievable.

“Are any of the places in California?” She was looking for the list. “The orientation is in California, right? Isn’t that where Google is? Oh, no, wait, you said the app wasn’t owned by Google ... Okay, that doesn’t make sense.” She leaned back, thinking she’d identified evidence of a hoax.

“What doesn’t make sense?”

“There’s no way a start-up from the Maritimes, or, actually, anywhere in Canada, could afford what this is going to cost ... ”

“Hm.” Dylan agreed. With disappointment.

“No, wait — ” he said, returning to the ‘About’ page and reading. “They went to California to pitch it to Google, but instead ended up getting the beta test funded by a start-up in San Francisco.”

“So they got bought out?”

“No ... they still own it. I think. I don’t really know how these things work ... But they’re still in California ... In San Francisco.”

“Okay, *that* makes sense. No sane person would spend winter in Halifax if they didn’t have to.”

“Which is why the orientation session is in San Francisco,” Dylan grinned at Rev. “In January. Average temperature, 57 degrees. Rain. No snow.” They’d stayed in San Francisco during their blasphemy tour, but only for a couple days. He wouldn’t mind going back.

“But they still want to test it in both Canada and the States? That would make sense.”

“It would, yes, if Canadians own the app and Americans are funding the test.”

“Well, I was thinking it made sense because they intend to market it to both Canadians and Americans.”

“Wouldn’t they also want to reach the Asian market? So Japan and China should be on the list! We could go to Japan and China!” Dylan had already been, to *both* Japan and China, but —

The very thought of being among so many people made Rev sweat. “You can’t speak Japanese, remember? Besides, Asians don’t need the app. They aren’t as sex-differentiated as we are.”

Dylan raised his eyebrows. “You just can’t tell them apart.”

“That doesn’t make me racist,” she said quickly. Because he was right. She couldn’t. She had trouble with black-skinned people too. “It just makes me inept at facial recognition. I can’t tell white fat-assed crew-cut rednecks apart either. In fact, put snowmobile helmets over their heads and they *all* look the same.”

“Still,” Dylan said. “Asian porn,” he added.

“Yeah.” She conceded the proof of sexism in Japan and China.

“It’s sort of a 24/7 thing,” he said a few moments later, having resumed scrolling through the site, “having to test it. But you could probably keep meeting your LSAT quota ... ”

“Okay, that’s good ... ” she was starting to warm up to the idea. Because 57 degrees. Not keen on so much rain, but. No snow.

“No, wait.” She looked up from her laptop and at Dylan. “What about Loup?”

Oh. How could he have forgotten about his beloved Froot Loup?

“We can’t take her with us. Can we? I mean, not only the travel, but a wolf in the city?”

Fraser made it work, but Loup’s not Diefenbaker.”

No, Loup wasn’t Diefenbaker. Dylan set his laptop aside. Oh well, it was a good idea. While it lasted.

But Rev wasn’t going to give so easily. Every year, the winters got colder, longer, and noisier. The guys who had a snowmobile were the same ones who had an ATV. And since all the ads told them they could go anywhere, everywhere, on their manly man-machines, they did. “OWN THE LAKE!” one ad actually commanded.

Which, now that she thought about it, explained their angry “You don’t own the lake!” response when she’d politely requested that they at least turn around before getting to her cabin at the dead-end cove of the lake. She’d thought, naively, that their response had demonstrated an elementary understanding of public property. That, she’d thought, stupidly, she could build upon, with further discussion ...

“We can ask Kit if she’d look after Loup!” she suggested. “That way she and Flaker could be together. Which they are most of the time anyway.”

On cue, the two of them walked through the plastic flap.

“Yeah ...” Dylan was coming back to the possibility.

“She’d take them for a run in the forest every day.”

“Yeah ... No. She couldn’t. When she goes on out-trips, Flaker stays with us.”

“Oh. Right.” Another reason they couldn’t go.

Kit worked at a wilderness camp for so-called troubled adolescents. Once a month, several staff members went on a ten-day trip with several of the kids. The idea was that the kids would develop character. And what have you. Mostly they developed the latter.

“Well, it wouldn’t hurt to ask. Maybe she’ll have an idea ...”

*

Two days later, when Kit was due back from her current out trip, they headed over to her house to return Flaker and ask about Loup. Since she lived just a couple miles away, on dirt roads, they walked. Flaker bounced around, trying unsuccessfully to herd Rev and Dylan, while Loup, as was her habit, moved stealthily through the forest, about twenty feet in. It was an instinct they’d decided not to challenge. On the one hand, it made her more of a target. Should hunters break the rules and cruise close to the road for animals to kill. But on the other hand, it kept her otherwise hidden. In any case, she always had on one of her bright bandanas. Which sort of made both sides of the issue moot.

“NO!” Rev suddenly yelled as Flaker took off. There were half a dozen wild turkeys pecking about on the road some distance ahead. They needed to be herded. Around the wet spots of melted snow.

“NO!” Rev repeated, breaking into a run, Dylan on her heels.. “They can HURT you!”

Indeed they could. Standing three feet tall, with vicious beaks, and even more vicious claws, topped by spurs on their ankles, they’d actually put a man in the hospital some years back. Though god knows what he’d done to trigger their attack.

No need to worry. Froot Loup had also broken into a run. A far more impressive run.

“I didn’t know turkeys could fly,” Dylan said a moment later, coming to a stop beside Rev.

“I don’t think that qualified as flying,” Rev replied. “Looked more like running-for-your-

life-while-hysterically-flapping-your-evolution-isn't-intelligent-design-either-wings.”

They were close enough to see Corn Flake glare at Froot Loup.

Froot Loup looked apologetic.

Corn Flake forgave him. Because ever since he'd gotten caught in that trap — well, it had been a wake-up call for both of them. Injury, perhaps even death, was a possibility.

Five minutes later, they arrived at Kit's place to see her outside waiting. Joyously, Flaker flew into her arms. He was better at it than the wild turkeys, Rev noted. Kit caught him, swung around to absorb the impact, crooning while she turned in a circle. Rev became slightly dizzy. But did not fall over.

Once that part was done, Flaker lay down on the grass, belly up. Kit obliged, getting down on the grass beside him, and beginning an intensive belly-rubbing session. Flaker's tail thumped the ground.

Froot Loup had watched the whole thing. Timidly, she approached, and lay down beside Flaker. Also belly up. Not missing a beat, Kit started belly-rubbing Loup as well. Loup's tail started thumping as well.

Rev nudged Dylan. But didn't need to. Until now, Loup had done that only with him. And it had taken months. Dylan didn't know whether to be happy or sad that he was doing it now with Kit.

“Say yes,” he eventually called out, grinning, but a little teary-eyed.

Kit looked up. “Yes?”

Once the belly-rubbing was, apparently, done — because, hey, first things first — Kit turned her full attention to Rev and Dylan. “Wanna come in for a beer?”

“Sure!”

Rev didn't like beer, but she was socially astute enough, now, to recognize that the question need not be taken literally.

“Loup too?” Dylan said at the door. Then chuckled. They used the French pronunciation of ‘loup’ so it triggered his inordinate fascination with the way words sounded.

“Of course, Loup too!”

As soon as the five of them settled in her screened-in porch — pretty much mandatory in that part of the province — Kit asked what the ‘Say yes’ was about.

“Well, we're thinking of going away. For six months. There's this thing ... ” He completed the explanation.

“Wow.” Kit digested the information.

“And so we were thinking, we were hoping, now that your place is fenced in, that maybe —

”

“What did you do with Flaker while you were on out-trips before?” Before he'd discovered Loup. And Rev and Dylan.

“I took him with me.”

Okay, so they need not feel too bad about leaving Flaker without a second home for six months, but that was probably not a good option for Loup.

“If we had a bit more time to train Loup,” Kit started thinking out loud, “I'd love to use her to scare the shit out of some of these baby-psychopaths I have to deal with ... ”

Dylan was confused. But Rev was not. Given her classroom experience. “I'm not sure that'd be a good idea,” she said to Kit. “Loup might not be able to understand faking it.” Loup was definitely not Diefenbaker. Well, Draco.

“You're right,” Kit easily changed her mind. “It would be confusing. And I wouldn't want

to put Loup through that.” She reached out to stroke her fondly. “Besides, honestly? I wouldn’t put it past some of them to pull a knife on her.”

“Okay, so a definite no to that idea.” Dylan had caught up.

“Once I had to leave Flaker here,” Kit said. “I can’t remember why — oh yeah, we had an interim supervisor who said I couldn’t take her with me. Anyway, I had a friend come over a couple times a day to let her out ... ”

“But even if you left Loup outside ... Ten days is a long time ... ” Rev said what was on Dylan’s mind.

“Do you know anyone who ... ” He trailed off.

“What about Dr. Theresen?” Rev suddenly thought of the vet they’d taken Loup to. Actually they didn’t take Loup to her, she came to Loup. They’d heard about cats in cars, and had thought that wolves in cars might well be worse. Dr. Theresen was wonderful about the whole baby-wolf-adopts-Dylan thing. And the Flaker-caught-in-the-trap thing. When Loup had gone nuts.

“Or,” Kit said, “I’ve been thinking ... ”

They waited.

“I’ve been thinking it might be time to get out.”

“You’re thinking of quitting?” Dylan was appalled. Kit seemed to *love* her job.

“Not completely. Just stepping away from the front line. I’ve been offered a managerial position.”

“You? Behind a desk?”

Rev jabbed Dylan.

Kit laughed. “No worry, I had the same thought. But, you know ... There comes a time ... ”

“You’re burned out. You don’t care anymore. About the kids.”

Kit looked at Rev, surprised to see the empathy in her eyes.

“No, I do, I just — No, I don’t. Not really. Not anymore.” She said it in a progressively smaller voice and looked down at her hands, hanging limply in her lap. She felt ashamed, sad, confused — She reached out and started stroking Flaker, snuggled beside her. “It’s just ... You try and try and put yourself out there again and again, and they call you a SAP. Sad and Pathetic,” she translated. “Not to mention a bitch, a cow, a cunt, a — ”

“It’s a paradox,” Rev interrupted. Because the litany was all too familiar. “Unless you harden, you keep getting hurt and die a death of a thousand cuts. But if you *do* harden, you’re no good to them anymore. Lose-lose.”

Kit nodded. “They shouldn’t really call it being burned out. It’s more like being ... hollowed out.”

Dylan stared at the two of them. After all, he’d been a teacher too, like Rev. He’d worked on the front line with kids too, like Kit. But he had experienced nothing like this. Were students harder on women? In the way they were talking about? Rev had told him about eventually having to brace herself before she entered the classroom because of the hostility. Every day at least one of the students would call her a bitch. He’d never been called a bitch. A wank, maybe, and a faggot, certainly, but not a bitch. And since he wasn’t gay, it didn’t hurt. Not in a real, personal way. But Rev and Kit weren’t bitches either, so — well, yes, they were. Given that ‘bitch’ just meant, really, ‘woman’. Hey, that was something they could test! With the app! Well, if they could get temporary teaching positions ...

“Okay,” Dylan turned back to the purpose of their visit, “so, if you decided to take the desk job, that would be, like, Monday to Friday, nine to five?”

Kit nodded. With some disgust.

“But it’s a promotion, right?” Rev asked. “Better pay?”

Kit nodded. With a smile.

“And when would it start?” There was hope in his voice.

“January.”

“Oh well, then.” Could it be this simple?

“No talking about how it was meant to be,” Rev said, to no one in particular, “or that it’s fate or kismet or, heaven forbid,” she grinned, “a sign from god. Think about it,” she said to Kit. “And don’t let — ”

“But I *have* thought about it,” Kit said. “The promotion, I mean. I’ve been thinking about it for over a week. Actually, I think my heart decided as soon as the offer was made, and my head just needed to catch up. Or vice versa.”

Dylan nodded. His head often needed to catch up.

“Honestly, I think this, your request, is just the nudge I need to say yes.” She turned to Dylan, “So, yes. Yes!”

“Okay, then!” Dylan was delighted. “Thank you!”

“We haven’t actually applied yet,” Rev said, “so let’s not get ahead of ourselves. Fun though that is,” she turned to Dylan, anticipating his comment to that effect.

“And, but, if we do get accepted, we may need to leave a few days before January. To get to wherever we’re going.”

“No problem. I have a couple weeks’ vacation I can use.”

“Okay, then. We’ll apply and let you know. If we get accepted, we’ll figure out the details then.”

“Okay. There is one condition though.”

“We’ll pay for her food, of course,” Dylan quickly said. “We’ll even pay for — how much does wolfsitting cost?”

“And any vet bills,” Rev said, then turned quickly to Dylan, “not that there will be any.”

“You remember Dr. Theresen?” Dylan asked. “She’s Loup’s vet.”

“I remember,” Kit smiled, assuring him. “I know. Are any of her shots due during your absence?”

“Oh. Good question. I’ll check.”

This was going to be okay, Dylan told himself. Kit was clearly responsible, and she clearly cared about Loup.

“Your condition?” Rev came back to that.

“Bring back one of the beta versions you guys will be testing. I wouldn’t have to deal with half the shit I have to deal with if I looked and sounded like Schwarzenegger.”

They stared at her.

“You mean ‘shit’ figuratively, right?” Dylan asked.

Kit stared at him.

“One of these days, when we come back, I should do a story about — that.”