

## Emilio Tanaka's "Man's Best Friend"

1 The water below me looked peaceful.

Peaceful and still, with no waves, reflecting a high moon. The maroon railing I held onto felt like ice in its slip and its cool temperature, Octobers were always cold here. Every breath I took staring at the abyss below felt as if it only emptied my lungs further.

Nothing held me back. my parents had passed a few years ago, my relationships all ended with no-contact, I haven't spent time with friends since highschool. That is not to say I am lonely. I am content with isolation. To err is human and humans are an err. The vast majority of people made me want to take out my own brain because of how stupid they were, the minority I respected were dead or nichely famous academics. Barring the special cases, people weren't worth the effort, not worth the time it would take to explain all their insipid idiosyncrasies. "What's wrong with a lottery? People know they're gonna lose." You sell a scrap of paper and attribute to chance that all but one person will be scammed and say it isn't your fault? that the ignorants who buy into it are at fault? pathetic. "We have to go to war, it's us or them!" Who's us? Who's them? What generalization defines your enemy? What generalization defines your friend? you wretch. I would rather see myself at the bottom of an ocean, resting with the marine life more reasonable than the people above.

"Yap Yap!"

I turned and behind me was a border collie no bigger than a handbag staring at me with helpless starry eyes. Besides its eyes, every inch of the poor thing covered in grime and soot. Case. In. Point. Some bastard left this dog out to crawl the streets scrapping for food until it starved because it couldn't take care of itself. Just a matter of time. And obivously not a single soul in this

city would spare even a moment to help it.

If I jump I'm a hypocrite.

Fuck.

"Yap Yap!"

## 2

It didn't take much convincing to have the dog follow me home, a soft voice and a beckon was enough. My apartment was a 1 bed, 1 bath I rented with a portion of my inheritance and furnished with belongings bequeathed to me. My only roommates were Daniels and Walker, the tenants of my kitchen cupboard, now standing empty on the counter.

"Yap Yap!"

Like a bullet had pierced through my train of thought, my attention was now fixed on the hungry, unwashed and unhousebroken dog in my living room.

I hadn't much food in my house on account of my last night's plans and even then, I was not prone to hosting guests. So I had only a piece of bread and a can of tuna to offer it, to which it unceremoniously but gratefully indulged. I sat down on the tile of my kitchen floor with a piece of bread myself, as it turns out that living works up quite an appetite. "What a feast." I muttered, cracking a small smile, the muscles in my cheeks remembering a tiny fragment of their purpose.

I couldn't feed this dog bread and tuna forever. The nearest place I could find dog food was a liquor store a block down the street, which didn't open until six in the morning. Seeing as there was a lot of time to kill until then, I filled a bath for the dog. After it finished

eating, I brought it to the tub, underneath all the muck was a shockingly flea-free and otherwise healthy coat. The water underfoot it was cloudy and almost pure black.

After a pat-down and dry, it was looking pretty sharp, for a dog. I could see it was yawning, so I hobbled together a mound of my pillows and blankets to make a bed for it. With the now-clean dog resting, I felt comfortable to topple into bed and approach the morning.

### 3

I woke up around eight and left the house quickly to go to the liquor store, leaving the dog at my house. Inside was shelves and shelves of different imports, exports and reserves. The store itself was quite small, but the quantity and variety of different liquors it held gave the feeling it was grander. After a short browse down the whiskey aisle, I found the dog food, sandwiched between some strange european kegs.

As I took the can to the register, I saw a large display for scratch tickets, a bright yellow sign with sharp points clearly made to attract as much attention as possible. I disdain scratch tickets. A product made to maximize the margins on hope itself, every slip of paper equalling another rube with a glimmer in his eye losing more and more every time until he gets a fiver on his 25th ticket and feels euphoric. The thought of such a blatant psychological exploitation of the downtrodden being legal irritated me beyond reason. I pivoted on my foot and walked back to the european kegs, dog food in hand. Should I really support a business that contrasts my values this much? I gazed the label of the can of dog food. There was a dog at my house, who has barely eaten anything as far as I know, and this was the only store I could get to without taking the train. The thought of my money snaking its way from my pocket, to the storekeeper, to the raffle company irked me, But the thought of leaving that dog hungry at my house irked me more.

I folded, dog food in hand, I walked to the counter, glaring at the storeowner. He was an older man who oozed

with sleaze from his greasy black t-shirt, to his 5'o clock shadow. I paid and left, kicking myself on the way back to my apartment.

## 4

My apartment was the same as I left it, except for the faint scent of ammonia. Struck with realization, I muttered curses under my breath, running over to the living room to witness the defilement of my fine furniture. A stream of piss descended onto my grandmother's priceless persian rug, on the other end of it was ofcourse, the dog, one hind paw in the air. "No! No! Nononono-" I said, failing to convey the message to the now relieved canine.

My heirloom, my irreplaceable connection to a family that lays together in an ancestral tomb with only myself exempt, is now a receptacle for dog piss. I felt my nerves tingle, my hand close into a fist. Every primal part of my brain screamed that this act was a lethal level of disrespect, that an animal has traipsed into my territory and soiled my tribe's flag. In the midst of my fury, my eyes wet, a tear rolled down my cheek. What had I done to deserve this? I brought a dog from the street into my house, fed it, and yet I receive this punishment. What cruel god put this fate unto me?

Subsided from my blind rage, It hit me. No god orchestrated this misfortune, it was a dog. A cold, hungry, small-bladdered dog. A dog that couldn't fathom familial grief, a dog that couldn't understand a persian rug beyond shapes and maybe some colors. My reaction was a misplaced sorrow, I saw it clearly now.

I felt ashamed. I felt stupid. I was everything I hated about people. Emotional, Acting on Instinct, without reason, without forethought. I sat on the wood floor beneath me, holding my knees to my chest and staring at the ground. "I hate this. I hate this so much." I said to myself, holding back stupid tears. The dam had burst, and I was sobbing on the floor of my

apartment.

The dog, having sat quietly on the rug, walked to my side and sat, resting its head on the side of my hip. I felt compassion, and somehow, understanding. I sat there with the dog for twenty-something minutes, It--He, was cognizant of how I felt, and compassionate enough to sit alongside and try to comfort me. I wiped my face clear of tears. I didn't think a dog could be this smart.

I got up and carried away the rug, sticking it in the trash, afterall these things cost a fortune to get cleaned, and I figure I have enough keepsakes. I poured a bowl of the canned food for the dog and left it on the floor with some water, then I got a few vegetables from the fridge and made myself a salad and began thinking to myself. I was going to have this dog for at least a while. Dog shelters are terrible places to be, and if I were to put him there, He'd might even be better off on the streets.

If I'm gonna have this dog, I'd better name him. I always liked the idea of naming pets after scientists, given I was always a fan of science. Einstein? No, that's too overplayed. I was stuck between either Bohr or Feynman, but I figured Feynman might be clearer to him because of the extra syllable.

## 5

After I finished my salad, and Feynman finished his bowl, I figured the best course of action was a walk, dog's like that, right? I didn't have a leash, but I tried out calling Feynman by his name, and he quickly learned to come to me. It was just past noon, and so we set out for a nice stroll around the neighborhood. I don't remember the last time I felt this at peace, I don't know if I even had felt this at peace before.

Feynman and I had found a nice park near my house to enjoy and take in some fresh air. I sat down with a nice book and he sat next to me, occasionally chasing his tail or running around until I'd call him back.

Feynman's compassion made me pensive. If a dog can be this smart, this caring and this kind, what is it that stops people from being the same? Is it just that I fed him, and made a bed for him? It feels as if something more was at play. Feynman was there when I was about to jump. Do animals just have a sense for this? distress? Maybe he could smell it. Maybe it's a sense people instead lost, having been cooped up in our caves and our houses so long. Some connection to a field permeating every living thing that would warp and wobble with every tear shed and every bout of laughter. An empathy that transcended language and expression but presented itself in pure silent feeling. Maybe all this metaphysical nonsense was just that, nonsense, but then again, for the longest time I've felt everything around me is nonsense. I started to question a lot of the things I thought about others. Feynman didn't know better than to soil my rug, yet he still came to my side when I was upset about it. He didn't understand, but he cared. Is that then what I didn't see in people? That understanding is a virtue, but equally so is caring. I held my own moral maxims for the sake of being virtuous, so as to hold myself above others, when I practiced them for the sake of practicing them, without heart. Having thought that, I felt my heart, hard as stone, begin to beat softly and steadily.

## 6

"Who's a good boy? whosagoodboy??" I said, ruffling the cheeks of my dog, Feynman. "Did you eat a bug or something man? your breath is awful."  
"Woof Woof!" he replied. I laughed, looking at his big dumb eyes.

"I'll be gone for today, but you need to stay put, alright?" "Woof!" I checked my pockets for my essentials, my wallet, keys and phone, all accounted for, But as I almost left the door I felt a paw on the back of my calf. Behind me was Feynman holding my green 6-month poker chip in his mouth. "Good god, what a smart dog."

