

C.O.A.S.T.

or; Creatures of a Shared Taste

We woke up from a nap that evening, the kind of nap where you have plummeted into your deepest abandoning of consciousness, not a gallop over to sleeping and back without stopping, but sauntering over and staying, sniffing prolongedly at the clovers of dissociation, the saplings of demented all intense dream, and only pulled out back to the waking world as though we were a heavy tree being dragged by chains. In our case, being pulled back by the ringing of the phone. We woke up from a nap that evening muzzle drooling on bare stomach flesh, arm limply resting around hairy nape and hand resting twitchily on hairy side, pawpads resting against flesh and claws resting against ribs, dog breath and human breath in the air all smelling about the same, as for our lunch before napping, dog food and spaghetti had found its way rather freely into either mouth, and as we were settling in for the nap, the mouths had shared licks more directly, hard specks from the dog food incidentally passed, aftertastes of tomato evened out across each tongue and lip. We woke up from a nap that evening, stretched against one another, came back from the deepest abandoning of consciousness concretely by pressing the warm fronts of our lips together, no puckering and no licking, just pressing warm and wet lip against warm and wet lip for the sake of having them be together, and then an arm reached up and grabbed the phone

off of the cardboard box that stood beside our floor-bound, legless mattress.

Simultaneously, a sluggish word and a piercingly-high yawn greeted the caller.

A call to check in, and make sure plans were still on. Yes, today, we know. We'll get going. Limbs now stretch as the call goes on, slow licks made against salty skin, strokes of the hand deep against coat, getting the good spots, pressing to pet not just the surface of fur, but massaging the coat down and down and down again, making the ribs feel known and cared of.

The phone clunks down on its spot again, and we stand up, and go around, getting ourselves ready. Journeys back and forth through doorways with frames in disrepair over a carpet adorned in sticky wrappers and empty cans, crinkled papers, chewed sticks and crusty bowls. A change to an outfit washed of bodily scents, a gathering of car keys and loose money and little hard biscuits, and then leaving into the air outside florid with trees in bloom and grass lush, heavy air like walking out of the house and directly into a sauna that has no ceiling, only a middlingly blue expanse far away above, and a bright street light across the road that stings our eyes as we walk out. Front door locked behind us as we go forth. Looking up and down the street as we walk to the car in our driveway with the windows all down, and clean inside, we worked on it this morning, all of the clutter moved into the trash bin, surfaces wiped of crud and stick, freshly washed blankets thrown into the back. Up and down the street, some neighbors standing around in their front yards, doing work or just standing. Car doors opened, we lunge into the sweltering car, all windows down the seats are still baked hot from the apparently recently daytime sun.

The engine goes on, and we drive, the wind patting and swiping at our faces, at our hair, and cooling the car off once we've gone just down the street. We make turns and halts and speed-ups, a nose sniffs out of the window, a hand grips on the wheel and makes jerky movements, and an inverse hand rests steadying and calm on scruff, now and then petting a little, now and then when the car has briefly halted and the wind has briefly halted a warm set of words goes across the car, and a tail wags, now and then a muzzle comes back in and turns the other

way and licks at a mouth or an eye or an ear, and then goes and hangs back out of the window again.

The car enters a parking lot and parks. We exit through the same door and cross the parking lot and enter through the same door into a room abuzz with people chatting and shifting around at different tables, and others walking around in between the tables, and the clinking of utensils on plates and the smells of spicy peppers and chicken. At a big booth in the corner someone stands up and waves to us and shouts for us, and we cross the room, and people scooch over until we have enough room to sit at one end of this corner booth's wrap-around bench. Plates are handed to us and we begin, looking around at the communal bowls of foods at the center and around at the eyes, friendly eyes, of our friends sitting here. A muzzle, the only muzzle at the table, takes up shredded chicken as fast as it is placed before it, a fork now and then goes out to something and takes it into a flat mouth to be polite, though the flat mouth's stomach would rather be left alone at present, already full from earlier, and so the portions are tiny, performative. All the more goes to the muzzle, and the flat mouth is free to speak when the others want it to speak. Eventually, the deliveries of shredded chicken to the muzzle cease. A scruff is pet. The eyes of the muzzle and the eyes of the performative eater meet, and then our tongues lap at lips and teeth, sharing the tastes we've had. Others at the table see it looks fun, and begin following example among their own pairs.

One at the table announces it's time to get going if they don't want to miss it. Person by person we make our exit of the booth, money is left on the table, we all go out of the same door into the night which has cooled a little though is still warm and rich, and four cars depart in a line, and follow one another out of the busy and short roads of town, into the long roads among hills of trees and grasses.

The four cars pull off to a gravel road, our car rumbles as we go over the rocks. One by one we stop at a booth and hand money to someone inside, and then drive into a wide open parking lot, where, looming on one side of it, a screen is showing the projection of a still image, standing by for a film to play. The four cars spread out, finding their solitary spots, keeping

distance from the other cars that are already parked here and there.

When we stop, and our engine is shut off, we get out, and walk back and forth along one edge of the lot, stretching our legs, exploring the space. The noise of crickets fills the air, occasionally accompanied by the wind.

The still image on the big screen goes away, and soon, a motion picture is on display. We get back to the car, and we climb into the clean back seat, with the soft blankets and just enough space for us. We close the door behind us, and begin kissing, tilting our heads to get better access to the tasty depths of the back of a mouth, grabbing and pulling closer with hands and with claws. We see in flashes, as a bright moment in the movie briefly illuminates hair or eyes or a nose. Now and then we pause to nuzzle at one another, or to lick an eye or a forehead. When we are sated, we nestle in with one another, clothed chest breathing while pressed against breathing furred chest, limbs entangled, a hand a pillow for a furry temple that is heavy from utter relaxation, utter abandon of keeping itself up, utter non-objection to resting furry head in hand of flesh.

When the movie ends, many drive off. We who came from the booth get out of our cars, all still parked in the lot where the screen is now on standby again, and we all find a spot together in the center of the lot to stand, and converse with one another again before we leave. We are all breathless, hair all a mess and clothes all fitting oddly on ourselves.

We will do it again.

We get into our cars, and depart again for now.