

## IGRA PRC

My name is Lyn. I like to go on walks. I'm working on learning how to do art, but, to say my doodles are uh, childish, would still be pretty generous, they're still bad, I'm still learning. I chew on sticks. And, I am literally undead, although I don't mention it to most people.

I originally lived from 1952 to 1961, and died getting hit by a car in my old age. I was a Great Dane. My life partner (my human) was named Fiona, we grew up together, started as young ones and grew into ourselves, through all of the fun and all of the hopeless-feeling work that that entails. I remember long hours sniffing around our back yard while she did laundry; I remember lying pressed up against her side in the sunlight as she did the washing in the bucket, and I remember playing around bothering her to throw a rock for me to go get while she was pegging up the clothes to dry; I remember how at first she really wanted to throw a stick, but I liked the rock more, lifting it up and the taste of it as I carried it, it was important to me it was a rock, and eventually she went along with it. I think fondly of the smells that filled the house when she cooked. Roasts, bacon, I drool just at the memory sometimes. I remember some days were crying days, she would be in a foul mood, and it would never go away until at least the next day, but she would calm down a little if I was there, she would cling to my hair, she would pet me, she would tell me things that I don't think were about me, but I tried my hardest to be listening, and I learned who some of the people were who made her sad. I remember her

scolding me regularly for going up onto the table to eat food when she wasn't around, but the food she made always smelled so good, nothing she could say would stop me the next time I was left alone, it was always worth it. I remember a time when my ears were sore and itchy, and she would be mad when I scratched at them, I didn't understand; eventually they stopped being itchy, anyways. I remember sharing her bed, I would never fall asleep better than to the smell of her breath, and the warm comfort of her there with me, my packmate. I remember I always licked her, on the hands and arms and legs, and then one day while we were on the couch, she looked around to see if we were alone, and then we kissed mouth to mouth, and that became a thing that we did a lot. I remember one time our bedroom door was closed with her inside and me outside, and I bonked my paw into it to push it open, and to my surprise the door wasn't fully closed and did come open, and I saw her on the bed naked, doing something with her nakedness; she looked around like she had looked around before the kissing, and then she invited me into the bed; she showed me what she was doing, sliding some toy in and out of her vagina; I licked at it carefully, and she liked that a lot, and it became another new game we played; I even got her to use the toy on me, showing her my puss, showing every interest in getting played with too; when she finally did, it was so immediately fulfilling, pleasurable, enjoyable, like I had found out about a new sense entirely, similar to the disobedient gluttonous joy of filling my belly by eating good food off of the table; I remember the first time she did it, we looked into each other's eyes like hey, we just found something new to share together, didn't we; it was a fun personal moment. We went on for years, playing around on the bed, waiting around in the house, romping around in the sunshine in the back yard as the wind blew by and carried all of the neighborhood's smells right past my nose, for my inspection and appreciation. And then, yeah. Car. Smack. I barely lived long enough to even know that was what happened. It's not like it was all that traumatic, at the end of the day, from my perspective anyways. It was pretty quick and then it was over.

I don't even want to get into why I was brought back, because that isn't really my story. It's like if I was raped by a stranger.

Why *he* decided to do what *he* did doesn't define *me* or what *my* story ever was before that. But, since it did become a defining moment anyways, sure, I'll give the brief version.

The car that ran me over ran over a human later too, same driver in fact, and this time the driver actually did do time for murder. But, more to the point here, after being in evidence and then in an auction, the murder car mostly spent the next few decades forgotten about in some dude's barn under a sheet.

And then in 2018, my reviver—I won't say his name, fuck him—came along looking for a murdered soul, knowing about the story of the car. Well. He knew about the human who was killed by it. She was the one he was looking for. He didn't know I was on there too. Inadvertently, he got the more inert pieces of her, and the actual soul of me. He had designs of creating a zombie to assassinate President Trump. I didn't know what a president was prior to being brought back, because, yeah, dog. Not my ballgame. I did get some factual knowledge off of the human's soul, so, when it came time that I was resurrected for this purpose, I at least knew the job description of a president, even if the exact politics of this specific president were a few decades ahead of the other soul's time too.

My reviver died, anyways. As he was trying to imbue me with the desire to assassinate and the skills to actually make the attempt, something went wrong with the ritual. A demon appeared he hadn't even been attempting to commune with—I think she overheard, bless her. A giant she-wolf made of fire and smoke. She bit his entire head off, freed me from the chains he had kept me in, and then... the world was mine again. Just like when I was a dog, before, I was alive again, I was a creature in the world that could do... whatever it behooved me to do.

I tried to find Fiona. That took a very long time. It was difficult enough finding the town that we had lived in, but I did, in the end I walked there through huge fields of corn that cut up my bare and sensitive human feet. I walked to our house. Someone else lived there who I didn't know, and he threatened me as he told me to leave. I learned more about what year it was, and, what that meant. I found out it was 2019, and she had died in 1968, seven years after I had. Everything was over.

I tried to die. I went out into the woods and tried to starve. I tried to shoot myself. All I felt (after the initial pain and confusion) was a breeze. I reached into the wound and started scooping my brain out, handful after handful, until I could run my hand smoothly around the entire inside surface of my cranial cavity. It didn't matter. I regenerated. I never even passed out. My soul (my perspective of existence in the universe) is not predicated on having a physical body, like it is for most people.

So I decided, if I am unable to die, then I will give myself over wholeheartedly to living. I eat well and I eat healthy—I'm actually vegan, mostly, which is not very dog-like, but with these human taste buds I cannot get enough of onions and peppers, seriously. I have a job. I have a girlfriend who I uh, have not told the undead thing to. And I have a truck that I am driving in right now, on my way home from picking up some groceries from the organic store that's down the highway. I didn't really need to go there, but, I'm mixing it up today. It's a free spirit sort of day right now.

My exit isn't for another couple miles, but on a whim I take this other exit I'm coming up on anyways. I have a drink of my bottled lemonade on the way up, tilting it up beside by face, my eyes never leaving the road. At the top of the off ramp, I take a right turn onto whatever the hell street this is, and start cruising.

I don't really have anywhere to be. Not in a hurry. The groceries in the back are mostly produce, nothing that's going to go bad even if I take all afternoon getting home. And I'm on a two week staycation, because incidentally I have not used any of my vacation time this year, and that time resets on the anniversary of when you were hired. So, being that I was hired nearing three years ago, here I am with time off that I either use or throw away.

So I am taking the scenic route home.

Shortly after the off ramp and the stop light are some gas stations, fast food places, nothing surprising. I think one of these bigger buildings is a hotel, and the next one down is probably an apartment complex, and then I'm into a bunch of

housing, my truck ambling along by people's yards, taking it casual in the slow lane.

I see a sign for a yard sale. Yeah, why not. I throw on my turn signal, ease down the break, and make the turn.

A little ways farther down a bendy residential road, and I see the garage sale ahead. A few fold-out tables set up in the driveway, a few people poking around. I park the truck on the side of the road, hop out, and go to see what's good.

The other humans shuffle around between the tables, looking things over. Seems to be middle aged people, one of them has a kid with them who is goofing around in the front yard—I smile at her. She's making a better use of this day than any of the rest of them here, definitely, doing somersaults and running around.

I do turn my attention back to the tables. It's mostly clothes, from all kinds of ages, baby to adult. I wish it wasn't considered weird to smell things. Like, screw all these other people, I'm interested, you know? I'd love to spend a long, long time here, going item by item, holding the clothes right up close, cupping them around my nose whether they're a shirt or socks or pants or underwear, and just sniff them, inch by inch. Who knows. Maybe they'd all just smell like cigarette smoke anyways. But, maybe some body odor, maybe fragrant detergent, maybe dirt, maybe mildew. Guess it'll be a mystery. Guess I'll be left not really caring about these clothes, since, that was going to be what was interesting about them. Oh well.

On one table, there are some tools on one end, wrenches and uh, stuff. And on the other end of that table is some computer stuff too. A couple of screens, a couple of keyboards and mice. I certainly don't have an interest, and I think my girlfriend, June, is already good on screens and keyboards and mice. What catches my eye though is something that she might have an interest in: there's a cardboard box with game cartridges stacked inside.

I take some out and look them over. They're definitely used, a lot of the labels are scuffed or discolored. I sniff one, it doesn't really smell of much at all, which is good of electronics I have come to understand—I catch myself and do not sniff any more. Most of the cartridges are light grey, and have labels with different cartoon characters on the front, and names I am sure

I've heard before, Mario, Banjo, Zelda. Down at the bottom of the box are ten black cartridges that don't have any graphics on the labels, just a narrow white laminated strip with plain black text on it. I don't know what those are. They all say IGRA PRC and then a number, like, the lowest I see in here is IGRA PRC 2, and the highest is IGRA PRC 30, so there would appear to be numbers missing, I don't know if that matters.

But, details aside, June *loves* computer games. Each of the cartridges is labeled with a little sticker that has \$10 written on it in pen. I turn to the woman who's seated in a fold-out chair in the mouth of the garage.

I say to her, "Nice day out." It's the way humans say hi to each other, I guess. Start by talking about nothing. It is nice out, anyways: it is autumn, and it smells like it and it feels like it.

She says back, "It could stay like this all year long, you wouldn't hear me complaining."

Just estimating, buying all of these would be three hundred bucks. And I mean, I have it, and I'd do that, why not. But I do think June will appreciate this more the less I say I spent. She is smart like that.

I make an offer. "One forty for the box?"

"Deal," she says, no hesitation. As I'm getting out my wallet, she goes on, "I was on the phone with my grandson, he said I should charge more for those, found them going for more online. I said, well do you want to come get them? They're free to you, if they're staying in the family that's worth as much to me as selling them. And he said no, and I said well there you go, I'm not charging more if you won't drive an hour to get them."

I hand her one forty in twenties.

She counts it out briefly, and then says, "Thank you very much, miss."

"Good luck with the rest of the garage sale!" I say.

She grabs a sturdy plastic cane and starts to stand up, probably to go put the money inside. I have such a desire to help her stand up, offer her a hand, but I have learned that personal space with humans is... Touching a stranger is not something you do, even if you're being nice.

I leave her to stand up on her own, happily pick up the cardboard box that is so totally mine now, and carry my new

thing to my truck. I set it in the passenger side on the floor, rather than in the back, to keep the open box safe from unexpected showers or any dust on the road. I kind of hate computer stuff. Always have to be so careful with it. No fun. But, I'm happy to have gotten the box all the same, I think it's a good present. We'll see.

I continue driving in the direction of home. Driver's side window rolled down, arm hanging out, wind on my face.

Getting closer to home, now on streets that I do usually go down, I make a stop that I usually make. I pull into a small graveyard by the road, park the truck, and get out.

Reaching into the bed of my truck, I take a can out of a six pack back there, and open it as I walk to one of the graves.

Fiona Warren. My life partner.

I sit down in front of the grave cross-legged, and start sipping. There is a lot of space between my thoughts, as I speak them to her.

"Not much new to say since yesterday, Fi. Picked up a box of old games. I don't even know what system they're for. They look like Nintendo 64? I don't even know if all of them are games, some of them are labeled like they might be someone's tax files or something, so, maybe they aren't even for a game system necessarily. June will know. I basically got them for her. I think she'll either be stoked or she'll call me a dork and be a little bit annoyed at how much money I wasted on this. It wasn't much honestly, but, I guess it would be a dumb amount to spend on something she can't do anything with, if she can't. We'll see. I'll let you know if anything in the box was any good."

I set the can down and lean back for a moment, hands pressed down onto the grass, head tilted back to look up at the clear blue sky. I breathe it in, and sigh. I pick up the can again, which is half empty now, and I keep talking.

"I don't know what else to tell you. So much of the human experience seems to be about... thinking about things that you aren't sensing right now. And that's not to say I never thought about things that weren't in front of my face as your dog. Believe me, when you were at work, I looked forward to you coming home, even beyond the fact it would mean you would let me out into the back yard to play around. I just looked forward to

seeing you. So it's not new, thinking about things that aren't true yet. But it's... more. So much of the human experience seems to be thinking about things you aren't sensing right now, even when the things that you are sensing right now are good enough. I don't know. That's just how I feel about it in this moment. But I'll let you know how the games go over with June."

I take the last drink from the can, crush it in my hand, and huck it into the bed of my truck as I'm walking back to it. I get in, and drive the next couple of blocks back to home.

I live with June, my girlfriend. It's her house. It's *really* her house. A human's house. I would never think to put so many of the touches on it that she has, but she has really made it her own space, on top of all the things that the previous owners left here. She's done an unnecessarily cool job of decorating the walls: in the living room the walls are mostly painted black with a bunch of neon colored triangles here and there; in her office the walls are papered with desert imagery, sand and cactuses and skulls, that kind of thing. There are book shelves in so many rooms, many do actually have books, others have ceramic vases and figures, pieces of taxidermy, sewing projects, puzzle toys, tiny masks carved from wood and painted in detail. If this were my house I probably would have smashed all the windows to let the air in and dragged all of the blankets into the kitchen to make a food and shelter den. So, she has thought of more than a couple decorating ideas that I would not have.

Her car is in the driveway, I didn't really expect she would be going anywhere while I went out to get groceries. I bring everything inside, two bags of groceries in one trip (I bury my nose down into the bags as I walk in and sniff the onions and greeny earthy veggie smells), and the box of games in the second trip (I bury my nose into the box and sniff that too, and basically just smell the cardboard box itself).

I set everything on the kitchen table for now, and start going around to find where my girlfriend is. She isn't down here on the first floor, in the living room or kitchen or in her office or in the bathroom. I climb up the stairs—unashamedly I go up the stairs using my feet and my hands. At the top of the stairs I walk lightly over the carpet down the hall, and poke my head in to our bedroom. There on the bed is June, all cozy with blankets



strewn all over her. Sunlight falls on her in little golden beads and lines, through the gaps in the binds. I feel a phantom tail wagging behind myself—the fact that I don't actually have one isn't even super a bother right now, it would be smacking so hard against the wall behind me. I tiptoe forward, take off my shirt and pants, and slink onto the bed with her, snaking my way under the blankets, into the warmth that she has packed in there.

June, half asleep, grabs me in her arms. Under the blankets, we hug front to front, finding a way to settling in that is comfy: she ends up using my arm as a pillow, I have a scrunched up blanket for my pillow. We nuzzle in, my face and hers touching, skin tingling skin, my nose mashed into her forehead, her cheek mashed into my lips, and we are so cozy this way. I love her. It's perfect.

I take a deep breath. A slow breath, letting go, wholeheartedly, of any sense of needing to be anywhere else. I do not need to do anything at all right now. I can just relax. I can snuggle.

I love coming home to this. I love June. She is warm. She is here. And she wouldn't make it anything more complicated than that. She gets me.

And the smells. The sheets smell like us. Sweat, cooch, ass, detergent, breath. This is our den. This is our special together place. This is ours.

Before too long at all, I fall asleep with her there, face on face.

I wake up to the feeling of her planting a big kiss on my lips. I wag, or at least, I feel the fact that my tail is not thumping against the bedsheets when it should be. I kiss her back. Then I stretch, grab all of the blankets, and fling them all onto the floor in one throw, leaving me and her bare on the bed.

"How do you *do* that?" she asks, amused, but also really asking.

"I wanted them off the bed and now they are. Duh."

I pet her tummy. She stretches, and lays back relaxed and lets it happen.

She says, "It's like that trick where you pull the table cloth off and still leave everything on the table, but with the blankets and leaving us on the bed."

I have no idea what she's talking about, but I just keep petting her tummy.

"I got you video games," I tell her.

"Did you?" she asks—she sounds like she might be happy about this but is sooo skeptical of what I mean by that, which, to be fair, is totally fair.

"Whole box of old ones, down on the kitchen table."

She floppily rolls away from my petting and off of the bed, onto the floor, and starts pulling her clothes on down there on the floor without getting up. I do get up, get back into my pants and shirt too, and follow her out of the bedroom door, towards the stairs.

"I need to see these immediately," she says on the way. "What kind did you get?"

"It's a surprise because I have no idea."

"Oh my god."

We get to the bottom of the stairs, and she runs to the box on the kitchen table, and immediately starts grabbing the cartridges out and looking them over and setting them out.

"Yeah, these are Nintendo 64 carts," she says. "Holy shit. Okay..." She is setting all of them out in some kind of organized way, it seems. "Where did you get these?" she asks.

"Garage sale," I answer. "I know the labels all say ten dollars, I just bought the whole box for a hundred and forty."

She continues digging and sorting while I'm talking. When she gets to the ones at the bottom, the black cartridges with the text labels, she says, "I don't know what *these* are," and she leaves them in the box. "But the ones I do know... yeah, honestly you did not get ripped off whatsoever, some of these are pretty worthless but some of these are good gets."

That is good to hear and all, but I wasn't in it for the resale value: I'm just pleased that her tone of voice at seeing this is all excited, happy, interested. I am very pleased that I seem to have not fucked up here. Some could even say that I have been a good girl.

June asks me, "Wanna play these?"

Holy shit. "You have the console??" I ask.

"Yeah, it should be up in the attic."

Holy shit! "You have an attic?????" I ask.

June lets out a shrill little laugh, as I continue to stare, wide-eyed, awaiting her elaboration as to this “she has an attic” news.

“We have an attic,” she tells me, resting a hand on my arm.

That is firstly very exciting, and I must know right freaking now where this entire freaking attic is hidden at. And, to the point of her emphasis on ‘we,’ it is nice that she thinks of this house in that way. Because, according to my understanding of how human ownership works, this house is all hers and she could kick me out for no reason if she ever felt like it. So it’s nice to hear that she doesn’t feel like it. The house had previously belonged to her parents, and then there was a sickness that killed a lot of people including them, and now it belongs to her.

She promises that yes, she will show me where the attic is. When I see she’s going for the stairs I run around her and climb up the stairs ahead of her on all fours, and wait for her at the top.

“There,” she says, pointing to some kind of square recess in the ceiling of the upstairs hallway.

“*That’s an attic?*” I ask.

“It’s the stairs leading to an attic. Come on.”

We go to stand under the square. I see there is indeed a little handle, painted the same white as the ceiling, I never noticed it at all before.

June carries out a stool from our bedroom, and uses it to step up, and pull a fold-down door stairs thing magically out of the ceiling.

“Woahhhh,” I say.

“It’s very cool,” she says, teasing me, but she loves me. “You going up first?”

“Absolutely not.”

“Really? You always seem to insist. Like, literally just now when we went up the stairs.”

“Yeah I already know what’s up the stairs, I dunno what’s in that fuckin place.”

“Alright, I’ll go make sure there’s no ghosts or anything,” she says, and starts up the stairs slash ladder thing, up into the attic.

I hold my tongue as far as commenting on how the ghost is kinda down here, sort of. Me. Her girlfriend. Whomp whomp.

I follow her up, once she's made it to the top. Looking around, I see that there is indeed an entire attic in this house.

I ask her, "Why aren't we doing anything with this! This could be like an awesome scary hangout that we turn into a cozy hangout!"

"Um," she says, and then looks around, and shrugs. "I guess I'm not against that, actually. I have to go through all these boxes at some point."

"Do you know where the video game thing is?"

"Yeah! My old gaming stuff is in a plastic crate, I should be able to spot it." She takes out her phone, turns on the flashlight, and barely shines it around for two seconds before the light lands on a blue plastic box that stands out from all the cardboard ones.

She moves towards it, doing a sort of crawling walk to not bang her head on the low ceiling here. I crawl after her, and take her phone to hold the light while she opens the box.

"This one!" she says, and takes out a game system. I can see right on the top of it, it has a slot the right size for the game cartridges I got. "One sec, let me find the right cords."

The box has all kinds of old electronics and game cases in it. Neatly packed in among them are power cords that are all bundled together and kept from being all loosey-goosey by the same kinds of twist ties that come on bread. She takes out two cords, and a pair of controllers, and then closes the box and takes her phone back, and turns off the light.

We split up the load, making easy work of carrying it all down to the living room. As she gets it all hooked up to the TV, I go and put away the groceries. I put the paper grocery bags beside the collection of paper grocery bags June keeps below the sink—sometimes I see them re-emerge as overflow recycling bags. I don't know if she uses them for anything more other than that, but, I put the bags under the sink, anyways.

When I come back to the living room, June is on her stomach, reaching under the TV stand into all of the wires back there. I sit down on the couch, and hold a pillow as I watch her work.

Eventually she is triumphant in setting up the system, and raises her hands over her head and does a little dance. I clap along to her rhythm—dancing still *looks* very strange to me, but,

some human instinct for keeping time has rubbed off on me, and so going along with things like music is... still weird-feeling, but it kind of tingles too. It's sort of like the first time June gave me a foot massage, when the feeling of music is strong. When the feeling is weaker, it's more like seeing an optical illusion.

June continues her little dance all the way over to the table, and there she stops. I turn around and flump over the back of the couch, facing her.

"Were there any of these in particular you wanted to play?" she asks, looking over all the games she's laid out.

"Nah," I tell her.

"Would youuuu like to try a racing one or a fighting one?"

"None," I say.

"What!"

"I just want to watch," I tell her.

"That sounds a little boring."

"It sounds a little *not* boring," I counter, and I wag at her—well, I would wag at her, etc etc. "I get seasick playing."

"Yeah, I know."

"But I wanna snuggle and see you play and you tell me what you're doing and I ask dumb questions and you tell me more."

"I love you so much, Lyn."

I blow her a kiss. She makes an air kiss back at me too.

She grabs one of the games, and says, "Let's try Ocarina, make sure my N64 still works. After that though, I'm really curious about these other ones with the weird labels."

"What do you think they are?" I ask.

She peers down into the box, moves a couple of the black cartridges around. "The labels say I G R A, P R C. That doesn't mean anything to me, off the top of my head. But I mean, it could be a few things? My guess is that these are just bootlegs, and they'll just turn out to be some other normal games, maybe in a different region or something. It could also be that these are loaded with in-development game snapshots? Doesn't seem likely, but, it's weird anyways, so who knows."

"Do they still make games for this?"

June laughs a little, as she comes over to put her chosen game into the system. "No," she answers. "This is like, later 90s, up into 2000, baaarely anything O1 or O2. Well, but that's the thing:

just because commercial development stopped, doesn't mean that any random person who wanted to couldn't develop on their own in the twenty years since too. Modding is definitely a thing."

I have no idea what she's saying, but I wag at the sound of her voice going on. It's very relaxing. As she's been talking she has put a cartridge into the slot at the top, and slid the power switch on.

Onto the screen comes a logo, and then the title screen, with a horse going across a dark field in the background.

"It works!" June says.

"Yay!" I yay.

June sits down on the couch next to me, presses stuff on the controller, and then we are looking at a menu. I don't know this game at all, but I get the gist of it, that these are two different save files. The second file is empty. The first one has some stuff on it.

June flips the selection back and forth between the two files, and says, "Huh. The guy named his Link Pick."

"Is that important?"

"No, not at all, but I guess that's what we can call him? I am assuming all of these games came from a guy, I have no reason whatsoever but it's what I'm going with."

"Sure, they can all be from a guy," I say, and then I melt over against her side, nuzzling her, getting comfy. "We can call the guy Pick. Can we look at where he got to in the game?"

"Yeah," June says, and just as soon selects the first save file.

The screen cuts to a view as though we are looking down into a room from the ceiling, and I am very glad I have opted out of playing: just looking at the screen I can deal with, but if I was the one who had to drive the character around right now I might hurl. June makes the guy, Pick, leave the room, hop off of a balcony, and then start wandering around in a village with a bunch of trees and hills.

June mentions, "From the file select, I know he's still on the first dungeon."

"Show me around," I request.

June takes me on a walk all around the town, doing all of the fun little things to do, running around in tall grass, throwing

rocks, talking to all of the people—she does the voices on all of them, as I snuggle in and wag and listen. I do enjoy it, seeing this whole place. It'd be neat to be there.

As June is about to go into some other part of the game, I interrupt, saying, "Let's try the weird games."

"Fuck yes, let's," she agrees.

We both scramble off of each other, and she goes to get the box while I stand and stretch—my side that was all mushed into her is all sore, but, no regrets.

She brings the box over and sets it beside the system, and kneels there as she switches out the game we just played for one of the black cartridges. "IGRA PRC Two," she says, and then slides the power switch on, and doesn't even get up as she looks at the TV, waiting to see if it works.

The game does come on, I think. It looks like a pale blue sky in the distance, a completely flat dark green field, and a yellow rectangle standing on the field. And that's it.

"Hm," June says.

"Any idea what this is?" I ask her.

"Nnnnnot a finished game, is all I can tell you," June answers. She hits the reset button, and same image quickly appears on the screen.

Sensing that this whole process might involve a lot of fiddling around with switching out games and doing stuff on the console itself, I start taking cushions off of the couch and blankets and pillows and stuff, and begin forming a cushion nest around June that I will join her in when I am finished.

June tries something with the controller, and right away says, "Oh wowwww, this is terrible. Look at this."

I look, as I am draping a blanket over her shoulders. She is moving the rectangle around, but the point of view on the screen isn't changing, so the rectangle easily goes away off to the sides or becomes really small in the distance.

She makes a noise like she's going to throw up (I think she's like half pretending) as the rectangle starts drifting slowly into the distance.

"What?" I ask.

“I pressed the... oh Jesus, the D pad starts the camera moving but then doesn’t stop it, I can still control the block with the joystick, this is... wow.”

“Bad?”

“Yeah, very bad.”

“You like it?”

“This game is talking dirty to me in the *best* way.”

I lick the side of her face, and then continue working on the pillow fort.

She tries the second controller. It doesn’t seem to do anything at first, none of the buttons effect anything, but then all of a sudden she says, “That’s a crash.” She laughs to herself, kind of rolls over onto her side (onto many of the comfy cushions I have placed) and then rolls back up, sighing after the laughter. “Wowwwwww this is shoddy. Initializing controller two crashed the game.”

She turns it off and on, and the game is back to normal. I sit down beside her, and get in on the blanket I put over her, stealing half of it so it’s now draped over both of our shoulders.

June tells me, “If the rest of these are as exciting as this one, we are in for a treat.”

I lick the side of her face again, she kisses me back this time, and then she turns off the game.

She reaches into the box, and says, “Up next, IGRA PRC Five.”

Swapping out the games, she turns it on with the new one in, and we get a totally different screen. We actually have a person to move around instead of a rectangle: he has a cape and green skin and a bald head. And there’s actually stuff here, too. A bridge is right ahead of us, leading towards an expansive obstacle course that climbs high above our heads in a field in the woods.

“Damn,” June says. She moves the guy around, and he actually walks. “Well this is a huge step up.”

She starts walking for the bridge, and our view actually follows the guy now, instead of staying behind.

As she goes, she tries out all of the things her guy can do. He has a bunch of different kinds of jumps, some of them are flips and others are really far jumps or tall jumps. She manages to do



double jumps too, finding weird ways to dance the character around.

“This handles insanely well,” June lets me know.

“Is it a copy of a game, like you were talking about?”

“No. This isn’t anything that was ever released on the N64. It’s taking some design cues from SM64, but this really is wholecloth its own thing.”

“Maybe it’s one you haven’t heard of?”

“I am a freaking historian with this stuff,” June says. “I promise, I am familiar with the entire N64 library, this isn’t anything in it.”

“Name every game.”

“Super Mario 64, Pilot Wings 64, Saikyō Habu Shōgi—”

“FUCK STOP, I believe you.”

June giggles to herself. She is doing a lap around the forest clearing area, staying on the ground rather than going up onto anything.

“Getting a lay of the land?”

“Yeah. This area alone is extensive. Can I...”

She tries a few things on her controller, making her guy do random stuff. Then, with an “ah ha!” she makes the view look upwards.

“Damn,” she says.

It goes up very, very, very far. Kind of far enough that the highest stuff up is basically too small to see, so it might go even farther.

Once she’s done a whole lap around, she stands in the middle of the clearing, and points the view around to a few different places. She explains, “So, we can start climbing up there... there... or there. I think all of them are a viable path up, but I wanna try this one, I see tight ropes and I’d like to see how those work.”

“Sounds good to me.”

June heads for that way, which starts with a series of platforms spiraling up the trunk of a very tall tree.

The way that June plays is mesmerizing to watch. I don’t just mean that of this game, either, I have sat and watched her play games before. It’s like performance art. She glides around the platforms up this tree like a ninja. She gets to the tight ropes,

and with laughing and experimenting, she has figured out how they work so fast, and starts jumping across them like she is hot on the trail of someone ahead.

This area of the game really is freaking huge. We spend way longer just climbing up all of these things than we spent in the village in Ocarina, and it just keeps going up and up and up.

At some point I grab us snacks. Snacks from June's food, not mine, so, chips and sodas.

By the time we can see the top of the area, it's gotten dark outside in real life. There is one last thing to get over, a bunch of platforms that are all spinning around a weird giant glowing green orb. June just goes for it, no hesitation at all, we both scream and reel at the idea of falling down at this point, but she powers forward, makes it across the platforms, and leaps into the orb.

Instantly, her character is teleported to a completely different level: a blue-tinted town, instead of a green-tinted forest. June scream laughs at the jarring change in scenery, and rolls over onto her side, into my lap. I pet her as she is laugh crying and trying to breathe.

She says to me, "We are going to be up all night, aren't we?"

"That sounds fun to me," I say. I. love. doing weird random shit with her.

"I need to know how much more of this game there is," she says.

"I'd like to know too," I tell her. And then I admit openly, "I mean, I don't actually care, but, I want you to be able to find out, and I like spending time with you."

June kisses me. She tastes like terrible cheesy corn chips. I love her. She then sits up again, takes the controller once more, and goes forward into the new area.

As we go around the town, she says a lot of things like "interesting" and "huh" and "ohhh." I usually have absolutely no idea what is so interesting or huh or ohhh-worthy, but she explains to me that basically this area is a huge puzzle, riddle, secrets kind of thing, unlike the last area which was purely jumping around.

She walks around to the same areas many times, sometimes spends a bit of time standing in place, staring at an area,

thinking, before she says “ah ha!” and then goes and jumps on something or moves something somewhere else, and then seems pleased about it, and explains how this thing she did here will have effected some other thing somewhere else. Mmmmost of this is lost on me, but mostly I don’t care. At a certain point I’m not even looking at the screen, I just have my head in my girlfriend’s lap, facing her, taking in deep sniffs of her shirt, and feeling her gut moving forward and back against my face as she breathes. She smells so human. Bad cheesy snacks, body odor. We are both incredibly sweaty for two people who are just sitting here. It’s probably a mix of all of the excitement from jumping around in the game and also just the fact that we are very toasty, both of our body heat pooled together and contained within blankets.

It really is seeming like we’re going to be up all night. She is still sitting there, I am lying beside her on my back, looking at the TV screen upside down, and she and I are just talking about stuff as she works on the puzzle thing in the town.

June says to me, “This reminds me of growing up. Being tired, and eating garbage, and hanging out with friends, and playing a game without knowing at all what I should expect next. An actual sense of mystery in a game.”

I treasure her sharing that. I haven’t told her much about my life from before I knew her, because, there’s not a lot to share if I don’t want to get into the whole ‘undead dog’ thing. And, in a sort of mirrored way, I don’t know much about her life from before I knew her either. In some ways I don’t need to? I never know if this is just a normal human thing or if I should try harder to ask. There is isolated trivia. She knows I dated someone named Fi who died. I know she had a girlfriend growing up too, but I don’t know what her name was, or what happened, and that’s fine that I don’t know. I feel like it is my dog side that is utterly nonjudgemental as to how she got to be here, and is only invested in the fact that yes, now she is here. But, this right here, this night, is the best of both worlds: her sharing some insight that stuff like this is how she grew up, I love to know that, and I love to get to be here doing it again with her.

She asks me, “Did you do a lot of stuff like this growing up?”

What a question. I tell her bluntly, “No. Doing stuff like this with you is a lot of firsts.”

“I had like, two best friends when I was a little kid,” she says. “One was a neighbor, and the other was a friend from school...”

She goes on, telling me stories from when she was little. Playing around in the woods pretending to be wolves—hehe, oh that is so great, I love that. I wag a ton at those stories, and ask to hear a lot more about their pack, their territory, their hunts. She tells me things about going to school. I hear so freaking much about school, from TV shows and from people talking. It sounds traumatic, so much of the time. Fiona cried about school a lot. It sounds like June had mixed experiences. Some of it was bad, and hurtful, and unfair. But she and her friends also got up to fun, writing things on the whiteboards that would disrupt class, passing notes and trying not to laugh but failing, and also sometimes just leaving school early with her friends to go hang out and, well, do stuff like what we’re doing, this night. I snuggle against her listening to all of it, wagging. It’s incredible I get through the entire conversation without it coming up that I never went to school.

It’s late enough into the night that June and I are both nodding off a little bit. We have busted out June’s energy drinks, and have been sipping those. June has been circling around and around a graveyard in the game. There has been a little lull in the conversation, and I find myself snapping my head upright, catching myself from almost falling asleep. I turn and lick the side of June’s face.

“You’re weird,” she says.

“Licking is a sign of closeness in wolves,” I tell her.

She is weirdly quiet at that. I expected her to explain we are humans. But instead, there is a real heavy silence, as she makes the character on the screen walk around the graveyard more.

And then she says really quietly, “Hey Lyn?”

I get the sense that we’re not in teasing joking mode anymore, and I try to affect a certain amount of... approachable gravity. “I’m here,” I answer her.

“I told you once that I could relate to you and Fi, but I didn’t want to get into it.”

I nod, and don't interrupt her. I can feel her voice on the verge of cracking, and I might cry just hearing how worked up she is, but I remain right at her side. I rest my temple on her shoulder, listening completely.

"Well. My partner growing up, my girlfriend who I had my first kiss with, and my first sexy times, and who I really wanted to marry and run away with... was my family's dog, Shiloh."

Tears flood into my eyes, because of how much I know now, how much I understand about her pain. The dog "was" Shiloh, not "is" Shiloh. I might be the first person she has ever told about this hidden pearl of love. I tell her, "Oh sweetie," and I grab her in a strong hug. She grabs me back, and we cry together.

"I understand," I tell her, as I pet her, and we hug each other. "You're okay. You're beautiful. You're perfect."

She lets it all out. I stay here with her, here to have it all let out onto. I'm good at that. I wouldn't have it any other way. I want all of her pain she will give me. I squeeze her again. She squeezes me back. We are real. We are two breathing crying things that are here together right now, breathing and crying on each other.

As some time passes, we are eventually just two beings breathing together, not crying. I lick the side of her face. She licks me back. I wag. She smiles.

"Do you wanna tell me more?" I ask.

"Not right now," she says.

"Will you later?" I ask.

"Sure," she says.

"I love you."

"I love you too."

"I really do get it, and I hope you and her had all of the best years that you could."

She nods, and says, "We did. I wish it could have... no offense to you, but I wish it could have lasted forever."

"You don't have to explain that one to me, I understand."

"Right. Sorry."

"We have so many notes to compare, some other time," I tell her. I hope I used the turn of phrase right. 'Compare notes.' Seems like a school thing.

She seems to know what I mean, anyways. She nods, and comes in and hugs me again. We make it a quick one this time.

June looks over at the TV screen, and says, "I give up on this graveyard, unless you have any ideas."

"I have had no ideas the entire time you have been in this area, I promise."

She snickers, and says, "If these are all 'in progress' versions of the same game, maybe this is as far as this version goes. Should we try the next one?"

"Let's snuggle a little first," I offer.

"Sure," she says, and then in one motion she leans forward and switches off the power on the N64 and falls onto me to snuggle. I catch her, and gently lay both of us down in this nest of cushions and blankets. Both of us there, both of us having the taste of chips and soda on our mouths, both of us up way past our bedtimes and so tired, both of us so cozy, I nuzzle her. I kiss her forehead once, and then we just lay there, and I hold her, and I pet her.

Pretty soon, she is snoring as I am petting her.

I relax, good to fall asleep too. I fall asleep thinking about how beautiful my girlfriend is, this human completely asleep on me who knows what the love is like between a human and a dog. I fall asleep thinking about how much we really, really have in common. I fall asleep in love with someone who kisses dogs, more times than she knows she has, but I think, when I tell her, that it will all be good news to her, as much as something like that can be. I fall asleep truly, fully pleased with my new human, as she has fallen asleep with her new dog.