

TREAT, JACK, HALCATEON

J

That week we stayed at a hotel, all paid for by the apartment while they were doing some ridiculous fumigating, stands out in my mind. I don't know why. But at least once every day, when I am picturing her, that's where I still see her. They didn't mind her swimming in the pool, and I remember her leaping in after all of the different sorts of pool toys we'd gone out and gotten to play with for the week. I remember, on a lot of occasions, being utterly stricken by how beautiful her coat was in the sunlight that came in through our room's window, whether she was asleep peacefully, whether she was asleep and her paws were twitching as she ran after something in her dreams, or whether she was awake and staring at me for staring. I remember an electric sensation at us getting it on on a bed that wasn't our own, and that others had definitely fucked on before, and that others definitely would fuck on again, or just sleep on, after it had been a bed that we did bestiality on. I pondered if it was a bed bestiality had been done on before. I think our connection was the strongest love that bed had ever been charged with. I remember getting onto the roof, the guy behind the counter I was chatting with one day turned out to be the owner and we hit it off and he gave me an access key, asked me to return it along with my room's card when we left... I remember hanging out up there with you now and then, keeping you on a leash and just, now and then we

would walk around above the city rooftops, on a perimeter around this hotel roof, looking out together, all of everything lower than us.

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T

Love bites. Love scratches. Love licks and love slobber. It's a language that I know not everyone knows. I knew it again tonight with Abram behind the garages. I brought a little plastic purple flashlight with me this time, to look, and when I did grab and hold his collar afterwards, and looked, that's what it said in the light of the flashlight: Abram.

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T

Hiking these vast hills at night, Valkyrie so often finds me. I miss her on the nights we don't meet. Tonight she had me pinned down on my back against the ground beside a tree, pushing me down into the earth with the weight of her jabby elbows and with the force of her sheppy kisses against my face, my head and hair falling back into the soil even as I leaned forward to meet her kisses, each and every one.

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T

I got mated by a literal wolf. My heart is still racing to the point I think I might die, not from white hot wolf cock or claws or teeth, but, this is legendary. His packmates were passing by in the nearby trees, glimmers in the night. I will never forget him in me, on me, with me.

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T

Damian made fun noises. I learned the name of his ex.

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T

Damian made fun noises. This time, an admittance afterwards: I wasn't the first one in him like that. He's been knotted, if I know what that means. Ha.

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T

Why does no one say it out loud on the news? Directly? It's in lyrics of bands that are household names. It's in TV shows everyone would recognize on sight. Bestiality. Sex between humans and animals. I don't invent the idea of bestiality when I bring up bestiality in conversation, and yet, when I bring up bestiality in conversation, so many act like I have just invented it.

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Treat had had his swivel chair wheeled over to be beside Jack's. They had been the only two staff who were present on the row of desks in that room at that moment, everyone else was out on the main floor or in their offices or at meetings. Treat, all of his accessories jingling every time he moved his arm, had been pointing at Jack's screen, and saying, "So yeah, basically what we do is—wait, just to be sure, you do know Python, or not, or?"

Jack smiled and let out a little laugh under his breath, and said, "Yes, I am fluent in Python."

"Did you learn it in school, or?"

Jack had run a hand across his stubbly cheek in thought, still with a playful smile, and said, "I'm not suuuure where I actually first-first learned about it from. I started playing with it when I

was eight or nine, me and a friend would make these little games with it, and show them off to everyone else.”

“That’s what’s UP!” Treat had said, and then he had offered out his hand. Treat and Jack had done a high-key 10/10 high five, and then Treat went on explaining, “Okay, so basically, what we’re doing is reviewing other people’s homework, so to speak. We look over the code—sometimes it’s fresh submissions and those are usually prioritized, other times it’s auditing older submissions or reviewing something that’s raised concerns for some reason—and anyways, we look over it, give it a rank here, give our notes here, and then send it off. The people who review it from there will also know Python and also like every other programming language ever made, so they really encourage getting technical with it, and highlighting everything that comes to mind.”

Jack had nodded, and said, “Sweet, I think I can do that. Thank you.”

“Yeah of course,” Treat had said. “If you want me to look over anything before you send it off, please ask, I’m happy to review it and make sure it gels with what we do here. And if it’s good you can just say it’s good, a lot of times what we get doesn’t have any real problems in it.”

Jack had then visibly glanced Treat up and down, and said, “I really like the collar and all the pins and bracelets and stuff, by the way.”

Treat always loaded up his outfit head to toe with all of his vibes: gay pride beads bracelets, bi pride beads bracelets, lots of random metal spikes and studs and chains, tees with internet memes on them, pins stuck into his dark-green sweatshirt with little “TRANS RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS”-style quips on them, dark-blue chinos and brown fingerless gloves to match the dark-green sweatshirt and make the outfit overall an approximation of the zoo pride flag, he/him pin on the lanyard that held his work badge, different beanies with different assortments of patches sewn into them, and the light-brown dog collar in particular was something that he wore nearly 24/7. He always enjoyed making a collage of himself in the mirror in the morning.

So when Jack had complimented Treat's outfit—Treat got compliments on it a lot, but he had said, with no insincerity, "Thank you! I like your pin too."

Jack had also been wearing a he/him pin on his lanyard.

Jack had leaned back in his chair, and said, "I actually felt so reserved and hesitant about wearing it on my first day here."

Treat had said, "Yeah all that is cool here, encouraged I would even say."

Jack had said, "Yeah. That's good, I really prefer that. And I mean, like, I *am* a cis male, I'm not trying to claim I'm trans and just really pass now or anything. Some work cultures I've been in are just bizarrely averse to pronouns."

Treat had said, "I love pronouns, he/him is my preference, I'm also assigned male at birth, but if people wanna use me as pronoun target practice I am so happy to get she, it, they, neos, say it in my direction and I'll think you're talking to me."

Jack had laughed, and said, "I actually, had this to wear too, and I wasn't sure if I should, so I kept it in my pocket." He had then pulled out a little bi pride flag pin, and showed it to Treat.

"Heyyyy nice! Yeah I mean up to you of course, you're definitely allowed to wear that here, but, it's up to your comfort level, y'know?"

Jack had nodded, and said, "Yeah I was really glad to see your bi stuff, just, like, phew, I'm not alone. I also like the poly one there, with the pi on it, right?"

Treat had wiggled playfully in his swivel chair, and mentioned, "So, I will say, unrelated to anything, workplace romance and all of that is allowed here as part of our rights, as long as it's not a boss/underling kind of thing, or any other obvious conflict of interest."

Jack did another little laugh, and, looking right into Treat's eyes, said, "That's good to know."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah."

Treat had said, "Sooooo, asking about normal, get to know you stuff, are you married?"

Jack had paused, and then said, "No."

Treat had mentioned, "Took you a second."

Jack had said, “No I’m... I’m alone. Oh *god* that was the saddest way to phrase that.”

“I actually felt sadness shrapnels hit my body when you said that, like, physically I felt them hit me.”

Jack had gone on, “So like, is this just jokes, or, I kinda get the impression you’re flirting a little.”

Treat had said, “I. Would never dream of doing anything that wasn’t within company policy.”

“Uh huh.”

“I am. interested in asking. if you would like to hang out outside of work at all, with the open-ended possibility of forming an outside-of-work-stuff kind of relationship.”

“Oh?” Jack had prompted.

“Like. I dunno, the next time I’m free is during our lunch break in my car.”

Jack had snort-laughed, and turned away from Treat on his swivel chair. Then he had turned back, and said, “Like, actually?”

Leaned way back in his own chair, Treat had said, “Hey if you wanna, I’m down.”

“Will it be kinda obvious? Like, we go out, both get into your car, and then, I don’t know, we kinda smell, right? like, I assume you don’t have a shower in your car.”

Treat had mentioned, “I do have tinted windows and mouthwash.”

“Pff, oh my god.”

Treat had also mentioned, “Okay so, also, we would be highly encouraged to disclose it to the boss or HR or whoever you feel comfortable with, just for ensuring there’s nothing unfair happening because of it and all that. Theyyyy know me, they won’t be surprised.”

“Yeahhhh you know somehow that doesn’t entirely surprise me either.”

“I also have Subway for lunch that we can share if you wanna. Like. That is not a bribe, you can have some in my car or alternatively in the break room, I always order a full sub in case I’m hungry, but then usually I really only need half of it at lunch and the rest is leftovers, so, I’m glad to share.”

Jack had said, “I think I’m leaning car.”

Treat had said, “Sweeeeeeeeet. So, I am looking forward to *that*, but anyways we should get to work. Again, interrupt me in the middle of whatever if you have questions.”

And so, at lunch, Treat and Jack had gone out to Treat’s car and both climbed in the back. The two of them had made out, pet each other, and ultimately Treat went down on Jack, and swallowed.

Afterwards the two of them had made out and pet each other a little bit more, and then, they had sat side by side in the back seat, each having half of Treat’s sub.

Jack had mentioned that it had been a long time since anything like that for him, and he had really needed it, and was really grateful to have met Treat. Treat had been flattered.

And so, after lunch, Treat went up to Mindy’s cube, and said, with a very breathy ‘H’ sound, “Hhhhhhhhheeyyy.”

Mindy said back, while still in the middle of finishing typing something, “What can I help with, Treat?”

Treat hung out where he was, elbow leaning on her cube wall.

Mindy stopped typing, smelled the smell of Treat’s mouthwash in the air, and said, “Oh come on, you couldn’t even wait until after work to hook up with the new guy?”

“No it was urgent.”

Mindy huffed, opened one of her desk drawers, and pulled out a sheet of paper. She clicked a pen, and asked, “Your name is Treat Beck, correct?”

“Born and raised.”

“Has your phone number changed since the last time we filled this out?”

“Nope.”

“Do you know the name of the other person this concerns?”

“Jack Cent, C-E-N-T.”

“Do you know his phone number?”

Treat held out his phone with his contacts up.

Mindy sighed, and quickly jotted down the digits.

She then asked, “Did this concern a sexual interaction?”

“Yup.”

“Are you twenty six years old?”

“Yuuup.”

“Do you know how old the other person was?”

“We don’t hire minors regardless but yeah he said twenty eight.”

“Was this interaction consensual?”

“I would say exceptionally consensual,” Treat said.

“I AM—I am going to ignore the other implications of what you just said.”

“Oh yeah that was bad phrasing, I didn’t mean it like that at all, like, honestly.”

Mindy sighed, and asked, “Was this interaction something that has the potential to result in a pregnancy?”

Treat did a huge snort laugh, and ducked away down behind Mindy’s cube wall.

She shouted over the wall, “YOU KNOW I HAVE TO ASK!”

Treat, rolling on the floor, weakly called to Mindy, “Noooo!”

“THANK YOU, YOU CAN GO AWAY IF YOU DIDN’T HAVE ANYTHING ELSE.”

Treat continued to writhe and giggle for a little while longer, but then got up and scampered back to one of the tucked away peripheral rooms, where he and Jack were working.

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J

I always figured—hoped, even—that I would end up with a human, someday. I didn’t know how, or who. I don’t know what I expected at all. But Treat was forward, cute, well-spoken, and I knew that I was in good hands with him.

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T

Jack’s dick was tasty and his balls smelled awesome I love taking care of guys who need it.

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As Treat and Jack got back to working, still with the room to themselves, Treat slid his monitor closer to Jack and rolled his chair over as well, and pet Jack's back while he was reading over the code that he needed to review, using his mouse with the other hand to click and scroll. He stopped petting now and then to type, or if he needed to type something short he just used the one hand.

Jack asked coyly at one point, "Hey Treat, why are you so good at typing with one hand?"

Treat started frantically keyboard mashing with the one hand and making a jerk-off motion in the air with the other.

Jack laughed really hard, and as he was wiping the tears from one eye, Treat reached over and wiped away the tears from Jack's other eye.

Treat fixed all of the random letters he had typed into his dashboard, and then went back to petting Jack as they worked.

Jack said, "That feels really good."

Treat leaned over and nuzzled Jack's cheek quick, keeping the petting going.

Jack took a deep, relaxed breath, and said, "I was *really* touch-starved for a loooong time."

Treat offered, "If you wanna spend the night together, I know I'd be happy to have someone to fall asleep cuddling."

"Oh. Um. Yeah, that sounds really nice, but, there's something I'd have to um, disclose."

"What's up?"

"So, you wouldn't know it just from looking at me, but, I'm haunted."

Treat continued petting, and said, "Oh, like PTSD?"

"No, more like, possessed, except the ghost isn't inside of me, she doesn't make me do anything. She appears now and then nearby me, usually at night. Others can see her too."

"Can you say her name?" Treat asked.

Jack nodded, and said, "Halcateon. She was the best dog ever. Black Lab mix. She loved to snuggle and watch movies together, I cooked for her all the time, um. Kinda part of the reason I like your dog collar so much, is because, she was the last person I was with before today, and, I was just like, wow, I keep falling for dogs, what's up with that, right?"

Treat rested some fingers against Jack's chin, turned Jack to face him, and then tilted his head sideways and went in for a very deep kiss. Immediately, Treat started pushing his tongue as far into Jack's mouth as he could, and began doing that again and again, lapping at the inside of Jack's mouth. Jack moaned, and held his mouth open for Treat, occasionally using his tongue to play against Treat's tongue a little bit.

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J

Finding out that he could kiss like a dog, and that he hadn't rejected me for telling him openly about being with a dog myself, and that he might have been with dogs too, was a thrill. The "might have" of him being with dogs, he cleared up right afterwards, pointing out to me that his clothes were zoo pride flag colors, and that, yeah, he'd done that. I took a risk, and I won. I won a lot.

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T

My love language is touch. I didn't know what Jack wanted me to say, but I knew what he deserved to feel again.

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Jack woke up before sunrise, feeling very out of place. Before even thinking about opening his eyes, he could already feel that the mattress under him was unfamiliar, that there was a warm other body nearby him, that he was wearing a dog collar around his neck and it kinda felt like it was choking him, and that he was wearing a tank top but was otherwise unclothed, his balls were out, as was his morning wood.

He and the other body in the bed, Treat, kinda seemed to rise up a little bit from the bed at the same time. The room was lit by a cinnamon-scented candle on the dresser that had three wicks,

the flames flaring and receding erratically above a small lake of liquid wax.

Treat gasped, and said, "Nakey boy dick in my bed! Hooray!" and then started giving Jack head.

Jack gave a series of viscerally pleased sounds, incapable of words, but very, very into it.

Treat, not even stopping, blindly reached over and unclipped the collar around Jack's neck, and put it on himself, and all the while continued to give Jack head.

Jack had woken up with a really dry mouth and throat, and had no idea how Treat was so slobbery and ready to go without even getting any water or anything in him first.

As if summoned by the thought of slobber, a Black Lab with long, Golden Retriever-like black hair hopped up onto the bed. When she landed, she didn't rock the mattress in the slightest. She began sniffing blankets, and then quickly found a spot on the corner of the bed to walk in tight circles a few times, and then laid down. She looked at Jack and Treat.

Treat, noticing that something had started distracting Jack big time, stopped blowing him and looked up at him to see what was up.

Jack nodded to where Halcateon laid.

Treat gasped, gently crawled around to face the Black Lab mix, and held out a hand for her to sniff. The twitching nose, as it sniffed him, passed into his skin, and there was no sensation to it, no weight, no coldness, and yet her nose was inside of his hand, sniffing his bones and blood.

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J

We hadn't seen her at all the night before. I imagine that she was on the bed with us at points when we were asleep, for her to be so nonplussed by seeing Treat taking care of me in the morning. She had probably already smelled out all of what we had gotten up to the night before. She had probably followed our scent trails all around the townhouse. It was definitely a relief to see that she thought Treat was alright in her book.

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T

I had already believed him about Halcateon's ghost. The universe is enormous and strange, it would be more weird if there weren't ghosts, weren't aliens, weren't a lot of phenomena that break our preconceptions about how things should work. And then presto, this dog I had never seen before shows up on the corner of my bed, and she is delightful.

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A few weeks later, Treat, eyes barely staying open and steaming coffee cup in hand, pushed open the door to one of the smaller secluded computer bays at work. Kyle, wearing a black sweatshirt, was already working at one of the monitors. Treat shuffled past them, slid his monitor to be closer to Kyle's, sat down, and wheeled over and gave Kyle a hug, then started petting Kyle's back as he got logged in on his computer.

"Hey bud," came a voice that was much higher than expected.

Treat looked over at the person's face. Not Kyle. Lidia.

Treat threw his hands in the air and wheeled back, and stammered, "I didn't—I—oh fuck, I..."

"Tired?"

"Barely functioning, apparently."

Lidia held out both arms, and flicked her fingers in a 'come here for a hug' gesture.

Treat wheeled back in.

The two of them hugged, and then Treat slid his monitor back away from Lidia.

Lidia asked, "Did you see the new suite that the Germany team added?"

"Yeah, out of nowhere? Was this something you saw any discussion about?"

"Preston is looking into it, he also had no idea this was coming. He wants us to prioritize looking at those snippets

before anything else, so that we have a better idea of what this is.”

“Wilco. And, sorry, thanks.”

Lidia gave Treat a couple light pats on the back. “It’s okay.”

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L

I think it's normal to hug. And Treatster is a lot of fun to have around. There are only kind bones in his body. I only have eyes for my fiancé, Treatster isn't so cute that he's surmounting God's plan for me anytime soon, but he is pretty dang cute.

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T

Fuck me that was the second time now. I need to get better at sleeping instead of staying up all night with hot people. I don't want to get a reputation as someone who's taking this hookup thing way too far, into sicko territory. I don't want anyone to have to feel uncomfortable at work, or ever.

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On a hot night, sweat trickled down Jack as he made his way down and down the sloping path of the big valley in the graveyard. Halcateon tagged along, circling and sweeping out around in a perimeter where Jack walked, practically invisible in the dark, only visible now and then as a wisp of black passing over the sections of grass that reflected the light of the waning crescent moon especially well. In his hand, Jack held the skull and pelt of a raccoon that he had found dead on the road the night before.

Jack had said early on, to Treat, that Halcateon didn't actually possess him, didn't actually tell him to do anything. That was true in ways, and also not true in ways. How could someone have a wife, his soulmate, his reason for waking, and

then lose that half of himself, and not be consumed by that loss in at least some way? When we get a cut, we grab the wound: we are pulled to these things that have hurt.

At the bottom of the valley, by light of the waning moon, Jack proceeded towards a mausoleum with tall white pillars. Whatever writing may have once said whose mausoleum this was, was all worn away by ages of harsh weather. The structure looked as much like a creation of man as it did a natural feature of stone.

Halcateon walked through the heavy stone door at the mausoleum's face, passing straight through, having no need for the door to be opened.

Jack followed after her, passing through the stone as well.

The room inside of the mausoleum was void of light, and the only sound was the breathing of Jack and Halcateon. Utterly blind, Jack carefully got down to his knees, and placed the raccoon pelt and skull into the collection with all of the others that were strewn across the floor: deer, possum, squirrel, a goat, a sheep, turtles, mice.

Jack laid down on his back among all of the pelts and skulls, and breathed deeply as he stared, blindly, up at the fathomless black void above him. Halcateon laid down nearby Jack's head. Jack listened to her calm, serene breathing, and then he listened to her snoring, as he pet at the pelts that were by his hands. Halcateon had a dream that she was running and barking. Jack started to cry, but tried to keep himself quiet, so he wouldn't wake her up and ruin it.

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J

I am devastated that I can no longer touch her. I am blessed to still hear her, and see her. I might be very different from other widowers in that sense, but, also maybe I am not. I have read of memories alone being analogous to ghosts. I don't know. In the moments when she is here, I can tell her that it's good to see her, and she can lay down against me. But I cannot feel her rising and falling chest as she dreams. I cannot feel her

jawbone weighing on my hand, and the drool that she places on it, so comfortable to trust her head to my hand. Am I unlike other people who miss their loved ones and hope that they are waiting for us in the next life, but that my vision across the rainbow bridge is literal? I miss her when she makes herself seen. I would never want her to go away, but she hurts me.

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Treat walked into the secluded computer bay, and saw Kyle and Jack both at work, with an empty spot between them.

Treat, nodding off yet another morning in a row, said, “Hey, if it isn’t my favorite boys.”

Jack turned and gave a fatigued wave. There were bags under his eyes, and he looked like he hadn’t slept a minute the night before. Kyle looked chipper, so at least there was one of them doing alright that morning.

Treat sat down, and said, “If I fall asleep poke me.”

That night on Jack’s bed, Jack panted desperately as he fucked Treat, both of them moaning and saying little *oh fucks* and *do it, good boy, almost*. Halcateon bounded around the bed wagging, leaping through the humans, making herself part of playing the game with them.

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J

Is Treat my boyfriend now?

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T

Sometimes I randomly remember Adam and I want to fucking puke. That was one of those mornings.

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February, 2020

Treat sat in the corner of the McDonald's lobby, his cup of coffee nearly untouched. It was 10:55 PM. Treat sat looking at his phone, staring at the weather. Already negative seven degrees Fahrenheit, and predicted to get down to minus twenty. Windy, which the howling against the lobby's windows already confirmed. An 80% chance of snow in the morning.

He was wearing all of his clothes. Two ratty t-shirts he had gotten from Evan that had some kind of RPG stuff on them, layered over top of his own plain grey long-sleeve shirt with huge holes in the elbows. Two pairs of boxers, one originally his, one he had also gotten from Evan. His own pair of blue jeans with holes in the knees. A fairly new pair of knit black gloves from Evan, apparently made by Evan's aunt and given to him for Christmas. Two layers of Evan's white socks, and his own shoes that had holes around the top on the sides. His own black winter hat. His own bright blue winter jacket.

Treat stared at his phone. 10:56 PM. Negative seven outside right now, negative twenty later in the night. Snow.

The manager leaned over the front counter, and called to Treat, "We're closing up the lobby pretty soon here."

Treat looked up to the manager, and mouthed *Okay* and nodded his head.

The manager disappeared back into the kitchen.

Treat stared at his recent messages. Evan was the most recent; Treat stared at Evan's name, his eyes not wavering down to the next name for even a glance, until the manager appeared again, and said, "Gotta kick you out, sir." Treat glanced at the time. 11:59. He looked down at the next name in his most-recents; Adam.

Treat got up, chugged the rest of his now-cold coffee, and threw the cup in the trash on the way out.

Outside, before his fingers would get too cold to type on the touch screen, Treat took off one of his gloves, and texted Adam, *Can I come spend the night?*

A minute passed in the howling wind, and then a reply from Adam came: *Sure.*

Treat put the glove back on, and then started walking in the direction of Adam's house. Or, Adam's dad's house, but his dad was almost always out of town. As Treat went, he cupped his hands around his nose and mouth, so his breath would keep his face from freezing.

Two miles later, Treat stepped up onto Adam's porch. He knocked. He shivered.

No answer came.

He tried the doorknob, and it was locked. He glanced around.

He took out his phone, but it wouldn't turn on, the cold had already killed the battery.

He waited a while longer, and then banged on the door again, louder, and then kept up a steady BANG, BANG, BANG, BANG, BANG.

He got through twenty of those before he heard the lock slide open, and then Adam pushed open the door.

Adam was wearing his Hawkeyes jersey and a yellow pair of gym shorts, and held a PlayStation controller. "I was finishing a match," Adam said.

With chattering teeth, Treat asked, "Do you feel how cold it is out here?"

"Well it's not getting any warmer in here with the door open, come on."

Treat stepped inside and shut the door behind himself, and flicked off his shoes.

"Take your jacket?" Adam asked.

"I gotta warm up for a bit," Treat said.

"Pussy."

Treat went into the living room, took off his wet socks, and huddled up on the couch in a blanket that was crusty and covered in chip flavoring. He watched Adam play some video game.

Later that night, Treat fell asleep on the couch. Adam poked him awake, and said, "Hey, it's comfier to sleep on the bed." Treat said that he could sleep anywhere, and he was already settled in on the couch. Adam said, "Come on, up," and grabbed Treat's arm and foisted him up, out of his spot on the couch, out of the blanket he was wrapped in.

“I’ll make sure the bed’s ready,” Adam said, and then went off into his room. As soon as Adam entered his room, Eddie, Adam’s Border Collie, left the bedroom, and laid down in the corner, and looked up at Treat and licked his lips.

Treat shed his jacket, and laid it over the back of the couch, but kept on the shirts and jeans, and he went into Adam’s bedroom.

Adam was under the covers, nude. He said, “Shut off the light while you’re there.”

Treat shut off the light, and then trudged to Adam’s bed, and laid down far to the edge, nearly falling off, above the covers, his back to Adam.

Treat said, “Night.”

Treat took some deep breaths, kept his eyes closed.

The mattress bounced a little as Adam moved, and then there was a quick fumbling past Treat’s waistband, and a cold hand touched Treat’s balls.

Treat’s stomach tensed, and he grabbed Adam’s wrist, yanked it out of his clothes, and moved the hand away and said, “I’m really tired, okay?”

Adam, the sound of a smile on his voice, said, “You don’t have to do much.”

Adam’s other hand then stroked the back of Treat’s jeans.

Treat moved farther away and started to fall out of the bed, but Adam grabbed him and rolled him onto the center of the bed. “What happened to you being so proud of being a slut?” Adam asked. He held both of Treat’s wrists tightly.

“You already know,” Treat said.

The air was silent for a moment, other than the wind blowing outside.

Adam continued to hold Treat’s wrists.

Treat went on, “I *did* like to hook up with everyone, and then I got this super nasty, painful, embarrassing infection, and ever since then I’m just grossed out by people’s bodies, they feel like they’re made of germs, I don’t want anything to do with touching anyone. I’m sure it’ll grow on me again eventually.”

Adam smelled like puke. Like actual vomit. He smelled that way pretty much all the time.

“Is it eventually yet?”

“No.”

“Where did you get your infection?”

Treat, rolling his eyes in the dark, said, “In my urethra, Adam.”

“Where’s that?”

Again eye rolling, Treat said, “It’s in my penis.”

Smiling, Adam asked, “What did you used to call your penis back then?”

“I called it the lovewand.”

“Pfffffft.”

“Look, I’d rather go sleep on the couch tonight.”

“Why, so you can fuck Eddie instead of me?”

“So I can sleep.”

“You told me you like getting dogs to fuck you.”

“Yeah, and right now I bet Eddie isn’t in the mood, so don’t worry about it,” Treat said.

One time Adam had threatened to tell everyone about Treat being a zoophile if Treat didn’t buy him Arby’s.

Treat went on, “The only time I’ve even kind of been with Eddie was that time me and him were both giving *you* head.”

Adam stroked the side of Treat’s face, and said, “Look, now that you mention it: either you can dig deep and remember you like being a slut and thank me for letting you stay over again, or you can stay here and get your precious sleep, and I’ll go force Eddie to give me throat instead, like I do on nights you’re not here.”

The next morning, Treat walked into the library. He asked if the conference room was being used, and the librarian said that it wasn’t booked at all for that day, and Treat could use it if he tidied up after himself. There with the door closed, seated at one corner of the long table, Treat called Evan.

Evan answered, “Hey, what’s up?”

“Adam raped me again.”

“I’m gonna beat the fucking shit out of him on Monday.”

“Don’t.”

“He needs to learn that you don’t do that to people,” Evan said.

“Don’t get yourself in trouble because I’m stupid. I was the one who asked him if I could stay over.”

“Duuude.”

“It was going to be negative twenty last night, but I should have just, I don’t know, tried to find a warm... electrical box? somewhere? or anything but Adam’s house.”

“What happened to that snow fort you made in the woods, you said it was good for retaining heat, like an igloo. Was it just not good enough for this amount of cold?”

Treat told Evan about how he came back to find it destroyed one night, and then, using slurs, he told Evan about how when he was working on rebuilding it, three Mexicans came up and started threatening him until he went away.

“Eeeeasy on the racism, Treat,” Evan said.

“Fuck off, I might be Mexican,” Treat mentioned.

Whatever he was on his dad’s side was a mystery.

“It’s not constructive, dog.”

“Ugh, don’t use the word dog right now.”

“Oh wow, what—scratch that, forget I started to ask anything, I’m sorry,” Evan said.

Treat sighed.

Evan asked, “How much money does Adam have in cash?”

“What?”

“I know you. I know by now you’ve snooped all over his house and would know wherever he keeps his cash.”

“Thousand two hundred and forty in twenties in his silverware drawer under the silverware holder thing.”

Evan began, “A THOUSAND—” and then wasn’t on the phone for a few seconds, and then he said, “Steal it, skip town.”

“I’m not gonna steal a *thousand* dollars from Adam.”

“He raped you. He is no longer entitled to you acting on your best behavior regarding him. He has you trapped, you are empowered to break out of your trap. Think of this as his asshole tax, and the You-R-S is going to *fuck* him up for this.”

With a smile, Treat said, “Bro he’s gonna learn toDAY.”

“Don’t steal his car or his phone. Just the money, no proof it was even his. And I know he’s a moron but I don’t even think he would be dumb enough to call the police and make them start looking into this whole situation.”

Treat mentioned, “A lot of nights I think about when I used to be able to stay at your place.”

“Bro I love you, but you know how close I came to getting kicked out by my parents too when they walked in on us kissing.”

“I know. I was just saying that I think about it because it was nice.”

Treat began asking around among his contacts whether anyone knew anyone who was struggling on rent and wouldn't mind taking on a roommate, for at least a couple months. There in the conference room, after six hours and change, he got a message from Natasha, saying, *Jeremy says he knows a guy who said he would take four hundred a month for his spare room for two months. He's like an anarchist and builds computers or something. He's like a four hour drive away though.*

Treat texted back, *That sounds perfect. What town? Can I have his contact info?*

-

T

I stole his life savings and his dog, and I felt like that wasn't even enough, I felt like he deserved to be hurt physically. I felt like I wanted to take his head and hold it underwater until the bubbles stopped. I felt like I wanted to burn his cock off with a blowtorch, and let Eddie chew on the open wound. I don't like stealing, usually. I hate hurting anyone even on accident, usually. But that asshole would have deserved it. I didn't hurt him though. I didn't say a confrontational word to him. That night he raped me again, and then the next day when he was at school, Eddie and I just made a clean break. Eddie really grew to like the new place. He and I would play fetch in the long snowy street, when there weren't any cars; I would get him treats, actually make sure that he always had water, actually make sure that he could go outside to pee and poop when he needed to. He wagged, he laid on the furniture, he wanted to come be involved with whatever humans were doing. In time, he was almost like a whole new dog.

-

Durand hit Enter, bringing up the next report, this one from J Cent.

Snippet could be cost-optimized via caching. As written, the snippet does return correct values based on valid input and raises appropriate exceptions if provided with invalid input. A-

Durand's eyes scanned over the code snippet, character by character, and then he nodded very slightly to himself, clicked and held on the report until it shrunk down to a little icon held by his pointer, and then dragged the report icon onto the appropriate place in a detailed flowchart that occupied his screen. The report icon disappeared into the flowchart with a noise as though it had been consumed by flames.

Durand hit Enter, bringing up the next report, this one from T Beck.

Does not follow Naming Policy, note the use of tall man lettering. Does not follow Spacing Policy. Big O is optimized. Functions correctly. B+.

Durand's eyes scanned over the code snippet, character by character.

-

C

Why does this core system, that has worked for years, now begin to fail? I am not asking a question of philosophy, where I seek an answer that is abstract. I want to know which lines of code are causing the failure so that I can delete or edit them.

-

August, 2025

Jack laid on his chest in bed with Halcateon at his side, feeling her breathing, in, and out, occasionally interrupting the rhythm to wiggle her nose and sniff the air when a gentle summer

breeze came by their open bedroom window, in through the wire mesh that let in beautiful weather, and kept out the mosquitoes and flies that tended to come with it.

The colored pencil in Jack's hand scratched against the page of his sketchbook, adding a little touch of yellow to the rainbowy glow that he was giving to this long-haired, beautiful canine.

He glanced to his side, to see Halcateon's face, and then smiled, and looked back to his work. In his wireless earbuds, he was listening to one of the community's podcasts. The episode in his ears was new that day.

He was about two thirds through filling the sketchbook up. He'd filled up a lot—a lot—of sketchbooks in his life. This one...

Jack ran a thumb over a blank bottom region of one of the pages.

This one was the first one that had a certain theme in it. Bandannas around dogs' necks that had green, brown, blue, and a white four-pointed star. Zetas all over the place. Slogans in bubble letters adorning the pieces, claiming LOVE IS LOVE and ZOO PRIDE SAVES LIVES, and other things like that.

As Jack zoned out staring at the rainbowy dog on the page, he felt Halcateon's tongue lick his lips. He smiled, and slid the notebook away, and adjusted to face her on the bed. Halcateon adjusted too and put a paw over his neck, and the two of them made out in front of the open screen of their bedroom window. Jack closed his eyes, and tilted his head to meet her kisses, let her get her tongue as deep into the back of his throat as she could. Their chests pressed together as they kissed, fur on tee, warmth on warmth, breathing on breathing.

Eventually, Halcateon backed away, and looked at Jack.

There was no Socratic dialogue needed, no guessing, to know what she was asking.

"Yeah," he said.

He got up, and went to the front door to grab his tennis shoes to go walk.

Halcateon, wagging, followed after him, doing a big stiff stretch when she got down off the bed.

He threw poop bags in his pocket, his sketchbook and pencils into a backpack, and then helped Halcateon into her harness, clipped on her leash, and the two of them headed out. The sky

overhead was brightly sunny in some places, and had big dark grey clouds here and there.

Two hours later, Jack and Halcateon, making their way through pelting rain, were coming upon a public park by the lakeside. They marched ahead. Once under the shelter of the park's large pavilion, Jack threw his backpack onto one of the picnic tables. Halcateon panted. Her fur and his clothes were soaked. He opened his backpack, and took out the sketchbook. Ruined. From cover to cover, every single page, every work he had been doing.

Jack left the shelter of the pavilion, going back out into the rain, towards the lake, with the was-sketchbook in one hand and Halcateon's leash in the other. He walked out onto a dock, threw the sketchbook into the lake's animated waters, and then he and Halcateon turned around and went into the building that housed restrooms and showers nearby to the lake.

-

J

I can barely see Halcateon on the other end of the leash, the rain is coming down so hard, a stream of wet pouring down my face, over my eyes. I am trying to bring us to suitable shelter. I think I know where it is, but I may as well be walking there with my eyes closed. We arrive at a brick wall. I don't recognize it, but as we circumnavigate it, we eventually come to a door, and, going inside, I realize that we have indeed gotten to the bathrooms that are in this park, nearby the lake, for people to, well, use the bathroom in, but also there are shower stalls further down in this long, hall-like men's room. There is shelving here that is usually empty, but on certain holidays they put out towels, as a service for lake-goers. There are towels, even though I don't know what holiday it might be. I go through three towels rubbing Halcateon from soaking to just damp. I strip down to my underwear and dry myself off with a fourth towel. I realize that there is heating inside, here. I see that there is a space heater plugged in and standing nearby

the sinks. Baffling. Halcateon and I huddle against it. My jaw chatters.

-

Treat sat on his couch, on the center of the three cushions. To his left was a box of cassette tapes, each in their own little slot, with one slot empty. On his lap was a notepad and a Walkman, with the line snaking up to the headphones that rested cupped over his ears. To his right were a few loose papers—transcripts of the things that had started him on this.

The host in the tape Treat was listening to started on the usual wrapping-up.

“Alright, thank you for listening to Pericolidea, Ideas Meet Voice. Dream it: Say it. Ian Electron will be with you up next.”

A moment of dead air, and then the usual Replacements-wannabe outro song began to play.

Treat continued listening. As a rule he listened to these things one hundred percent, from zero to end.

The song faded out, and Ian began to speak. Half a sentence in, the tape ended.

Treat sighed, and in his notebook, crossed out PeriIMV 6/18/2004. He opened the door on his Walkman, took out the tape, put the tape back into the empty slot in the box set, and pulled out the next one down.

He felt a smooch on his shoulder, through his shirt.

“Mm,” he said, and then said, “Good morning Kyle.”

“Jack is over this time,” said Jack.

“Oh, yeah.”

Jack asked, “Are you still on this goose chase?”

Treat had been listening to AM radio on a drive a few months ago, and had heard a caller speak, at length, about a college radio program he remembered from the early 2000s, that interviewed a lot of musicians, and the topic of bestiality came up at least two dozen times, it was a frequent question on the show, asking up-and-coming musical acts what animals they could see themselves with if they had to choose, and then often going on in discussion for quite a while off of that, candid thoughts, often even actual experiences.

Treat had called in himself next time the AM show was on to ascertain more details. The host didn't remember the name of the other show in question, but one other caller later in the day said she knew she had heard some kind of show like that too, maybe around 2004, but she couldn't remember for sure the name of the show. She threw out some guesses. Said she was back and forth between Fort Worth and Scottsdale a lot at that point in time, might have heard it in either of those or on the drive. She threw out some of the same names of people she remembered being on: people who would go on to be really big, and she would always think, *that* person is famous-famous now?

Jack went on, "I get it, but, does it matter *this* much, *to you*, that so-and-so spoke about bestiality once?"

Halcateon hopped up onto the couch, and laid down on top of the loose papers to Treat's right. They did not flutter or crinkle.

Treat answered, "It does matter to me. No one says this stuff out loud. It's like a global effort to gaslight me, and... I think I can prove *something* if I can find this out-loud, recorded evidence, that it's not just me, it's not just you, it's not this rare, secret, nearly impossible thing. It's a lot of the people in the world whose names we know. And I don't know why it *wasn't* a big secret then and it is *now*, but, this would at least be proof that something *was* here *at all*, and then it changed. This would just help me to know that I'm not losing my mind, I'm not crazy, zoophilia isn't fucking weird, and it's something in the fucking water or the Illuminati or puritanical propaganda that's *made* everyone act weird about it these days. Just for my own sanity."

"Mm," Jack said, and rested a hand on Treat's shoulder, and rubbed at the shoulder bones with his thumb, massaging the dude a bit. "You sound very sane when you talk about global conspiracies to cover up dog sex."

T – "Well! What else could it be!"

J – "And putting things in the water to change the sheeple's thoughts, also very sane."

T – "Your ghost dog is laying on my papers."

J – "Touché."

T – "These would be *big* names."

J – "Like who?"

T – “As a rule I won’t spread libel unless I hear it from their mouths. *Big names.*”

Jack gave Treat’s shoulder a squeeze, and said, “I’m interested too. I do want to know if you get anywhere with this. I just wanted to know your thoughts. The ‘why’ of it for you. Thank you.”

Treat got up from the couch and went into the kitchen, and started making breakfast for both of them.

-

J

It’s interesting, realizing how much I have to learn about human intimacy. That first time with Treat, I had no idea in which ways it was okay to touch him. I didn’t know if I could make noises, what to say, if I could take off my clothes even as we had very explicit plans to hook up. Even now, I still don’t always know. Treat and I are friends; I’ve never had a human friend who I can touch. Treat and I are driving out of town to pick up another box set of old radio show recordings. We are both shouting along at the top of our lungs to Cheap Trick: Surrender, MOMMY’S ALRIGHT! DADDY’S ALRIGHT! as we barrel up the highway at night. Treat knows all of the words in the verses too, and does a car dance in the driver’s seat as he shouts those lines as well, pointing forward out to an imaginary audience in front of his windshield, or turning to me to give a line as his eyes are scrunched up in an undefeatable expression of joy and he is really, really feeling it.

-

June, 2006

A studio out in the fields and hills.

The door to the station wasn’t even locked.

Using a paperback novel that was sitting out on someone’s desk, and also a wicker chair that sat in one corner, they got a fire going. Nothing that was going to set the whole place on fire,

but a blaze in just the center of the office, that they fed with chairs, desks, shelving, whatever worked as the night went on. It was station policy to record and keep an archive of all of the broadcasts; throughout the night they took these archival tapes off of the shelves and threw them into the fire. Even with the windows and doors open, the air was thick with acrid smoke. But that part of the job was done in a couple of hours' time.

Using a mic stand and a remaining leg of a chair and whatever else was at hand, they poked at the smoldering remains of all the tapes in the embers, making sure they were all well and thoroughly useless.

Around 4:30 AM, they went around and closed the windows and door, and waited.

A little before 5, the front door opened. Lincoln Slime, the DJ, entered, the morning light on his back. After two steps in, he froze in place, seeing the charred husk of his studio before him. "Aw. What."

From a shadowy corner they shot him, and they made sure on the way out that an extra bullet went into his head just to make utterly sure.

Now, they lit the station as a whole on fire, and then they drove off away back into the fields and hills.

-

Durand, hearing a knock on his open office door, said, "Enter."

He finished the last sentence of the email he was composing, glanced over it again, and then sent it off. He then looked up to see Treat Beck standing in his doorway.

Treat gave a little wave, and said, "With the office being closed this next week for construction, would it be alright if I sign out some of the camera equipment for a personal project?"

Durand frowned in thought, and then said, "We hardly ever need it even during normal operations. Let me double check with Rebecca." He began typing.

Treat shrugged, and said, "It's this thing related to zoosexuality that I think will make for a really cool documentary-style thing, I think pro equipment on it instead of just filming on my phone would be—"

Durand interrupted, “Rebecca says it’s fine.”

“Oh! Awesome!”

“The equipment is insured, we got a really solid policy on it,” Durand mentioned, scrolling down a document with his mouse wheel. His eyes flicked around the screen. “Don’t break anything on purpose, but if you do break anything even by an accident that was avoidable, please just let us know within 24 hours and we can get it filed and taken care of. They don’t care what the use on the cameras is, your own personal project is as covered as our rare filming needs.”

“That’s really good to hear.”

The office was going to be closed starting tomorrow to get a lot of construction done, basically ripping out all the wires and replacing the entire IT system from first principles. Same monitors, new nervous system.

Durand looked at Treat, and saw that Treat had written a zeta on the back of his hand in marker.

-

T

The world is going to know, goddammit.

-

C

I didn’t mention to him that my best friend is a zoophile serving 11 years on endangerment charges.

-

March, 2007

They kicked in his back door and shot him as he looked up at the startling noise. They burned his house to the ground, once a private museum of TV and radio broadcast recordings, in hours only ash.

Beside the telephone, there was a ledger of names, phone numbers, addresses, and what records had been sent to whom. The Lincoln Slime set had been sent to one person, in a neighboring state. They tore that page out of the ledger and threw the rest of the ledger into the ongoing fire.

-

Treat looked at his breath, the way that, in the new-Winter cold, his breath fogged the air under the street light that he walked past. He didn't know why there was a streetlight there. It was a long road through the woods, and all along it, there was a single street light. Not near anything in particular, not at an intersection or a bend in the road, but it did serve as useful to him, when he wandered out into the woods. While out, he could stand at the top of a hill and see the streetlight that would tell him his way back.

He stepped off of the road, and into the woods.

-

Treat started his engine as Jack was getting situated in the passenger seat. Treat asked, "Do you have a fursona?"

Jack answered, "Heh. Yeah."

As they drove out to pick up another set of tapes, Jack spent a lot of time drawing, looking down at a notebook in his lap and making art of his two-headed bat sona—left head Reach they/them, right head Stedl he/him, and Treat's coyote sona, Treats. Art of the them hugging, art of Treats blowing Reach+Stedl, art of Reach licking Treats's ass and Stedl giving Treats's ass an evil bite, art of the them checking the mail.

"Dude," Treat said, after being shown the mail piece, "you are a real furry artist, what the fuck, why did I never know this?"

"Heh. I kinda wanted to get involved in the whole, online zoo thing, as a furry artist, and just, yeah I don't know, stuff happened and I never really ended up actually getting involved."

"You gotta, this is amazing."

"Sure. I will."

The ad listing for the tapes had said that they would meet on the side of a frozen lake. The guy's back yard touched one of the local lakes that people liked to go boating in in the summer. During the winter, it was the easiest way to give people directions to his house: just go to the boat landing that's on that road through the woods, and I'll come across and drop off the package for you.

Jack grabbed the camera from the back seat, and got it rolling.

Jack said, while filming, "Alright Treat, what are we doing here today?"

"Well, Jack Cent, first of all I am learning *for the first time* that you can draw. Look at this. Is this in focus?"

Jack got the camera to focus on the open notebook that Treat was holding up. Once it was in focus, he reported, "Yes, here we have some furies depicted who are very good friends with each other, doing what good furry friends do. But what are we doing here in the woods?" With that, Jack turned the camera up to look out of the windows of the car, showing the snowy, gravel parking lot that they were in, surrounded by woods on three sides, and an open frozen lake on one.

Treat said, "Bestiality is real and I'm going to prove it."

"There are already videos proving that."

"*True.* Okay, so here's the thesis statement, right: We all know that humans and animals can have sex; Every man and woman walking this Earth knows that humans have had sex with sheep, cows, you name it; Why do we never talk about it?; What happened that makes us think it's this thing from the past, or this thing that only faraway people in different countries do?; For the last five months, I've been tracking down archives of this barely-remembered radio show where people, who would go on to be big celebrities, *big names*, talked candidly about getting their genitals licked by dogs, eating out horses, hunting and fucking does they had just killed."

"Woah."

"Yeah," Treat said.

Jack asked, "So what's the thesis statement?"

Treat went on, "Right. The point is that bestiality is not far away, in place or in time; It's been done by people we all know,

it's a part of humanity's presence on this planet, that some of us have had sex with animals; I'm a zoosexual, I love animal dicks in my ass, and I am willing to say that with my own two lips to a camera; Come out of the car with me, I'll explain more."

Treat and Jack both got out of the car.

As they walked towards the frozen lake, Treat went on, "Of all the things in the world, how is it that professing zoosexuality is the ultimate taboo?; Why—"

Two gunshots sounded across the lake.

-

J

I hit the ground. As I try to stand up again, I feel a wisp of fur brush against me. I get up to my hands and knees, and Halcateon is at my face. She licks me: it feels like a dentist has stuck my face with a needle to take away all sensation, but the drug was not quite strong enough, and barely, a little bit, I can feel that her licks are touching my cheeks, my eyes, my lips. I reach out a hand, and rest it on her shoulder, and feel her coat under my palm, and then my hand passes through her and hits the ground. She licks the back of my neck. Lick by lick, the feeling of her tongue on my skin becomes less of something distant and numb, and more of something warm and forceful. I feel that she breathes on my wet neck. I feel her pawpads and her claws as she grabs my back. She noses at my face and she is able to push my face with her muzzle, able to force me to face her. I hug her, and this time my arms do not pass through her shoulders. I keep my arms wrapped around her, and she presses herself against me. We squeeze. We breathe. We hold.

-

T

Ha. Well. I am going to survive.