

Fido's Fair

a narrative meditation

by Kem Regik

All Rights Reversed



MMXXVI

Kindly Redistribute

FOREWORD

It is of the utmost importance that the reader understand that this is a work of fiction. As a work of fiction, this text is constructed in a specific manner to tell a specific story with specific meaning. This meaning should not be understood, under any circumstances, to include open advocacy for the real abuse of real animals in the real world.

Reader discretion is strongly advised.

"A fairground to rival the World's, and all dedicated to dogs," said the gateman as he stamped my ticket. It had been an interesting concept when I read it in the paper, but seen with eyes another image emerged. Crowds, dense enough to be a city unto themselves, shuffled and orbited shows and stands. Just past the entrance, dogs of every breed competed for everything but attention.

The gateman would look to me, worried, before finishing his procedure, "Does she bite?"

My gaze returned to him, snapped out of my admiration. "Who?"

A moment of silence, a reverent gesture downwards. "Your dog. I must attach a tag to her collar, in case she is separated from you.

I shook my head softly, confused. "No, friend. Not ever without command, nor does she separate from me."

The gateman insisted nervously, "All the same, sir, all dogs must be tagged to enter."

I thought nothing of it. "Be my guest, she means you no harm I have not spoken."

Without further word, he knelt before my ward, and affixed a bright green ribbon to her yellow collar. A moment passed as he read her name. "Hofeshme'el. What a beautiful name. What does it mean?"

My eyes followed as he rose back to his feet. "It is the name of an angel, she who cut Adam from the womb." With this, the gate was opened, and I stepped into the crowd.

To date, there had never been such a number convened in one place, and it was a nightmare to traverse. Schedules, posted about, were filled to the brim with exhibitions. Among the dozen or so beginning within the hour was a show of tracking dogs put on by a troupe of mountaineers and rescuers. I decided this would be good to see.

In a field on the west end of the grounds had gathered a crowd, surrounding some people presenting expeditionary equipment. As I arrived, the presenter in the center was holding up a bag and talking about the items attached to it. "...which is the bulk of its practical utility, not that she would be much the wiser." At this the crowd laughed, the sign of an in-joke. "But really, our dogs are the core assets of our mission effectiveness. Without them to track and guide us to our objectives, we would be forced to venture blind and disorganized, which endangers every part of the process." By the time I made my way through to the front row of spectators, the presenter had put down the bag and picked up their beagle to show off. "Dogs like Congress here and her siblings are able to process far more information through their noses than we ever could, meaning they can track anything or anyone no matter where they go."

From the tree line, at some distance behind the presenter, emerged another presenter with another beagle. At this the crowd excited, the sign of a demo. The presenter before us turned and waved to their partner, "Aha! And to show you what I mean, look who's returned! Parliament! Come and show us what you've found!" As the dog approached and its quarry came into view, the crowd cheered. The presenter before us kneeled to retrieve the item from its mouth. "Mr. Knox will be very happy to know Parliament has found his wallet!" Leather in hand, they turned back to the crowd, finding the item's owner and flashing a theatrical face. "And it feels a wee bit heavier than when you gave it up, no?" A chuckle from the tall man who reached out to receive it, sharp suit signaling it wouldn't've made a difference. "Now, who else might want to see for themselves? I'm sure we can get Congress her own run before our time is up!" The presenter began to scan the crowd.

Their eyes finally fell upon mine and they stopped. "You, my friend! I didn't see you come on by! Would you like for Congress here to show you what she can do?"

I considered the offer. "You said she will track a scent anywhere?"

"Yes, of course," came the reply, "All you have to do is take an item off your person and leave it somewhere past that tree line. Congress will follow whatever path is drawn by the scent, guaranteed!"

"Very well," I said, and knelt to remove one of my socks. "I'll make the journey easy and the destination hard." With my right sock in hand, I looked to the presenter before us. "May I leave my dog here with you?"

"Of course."

I turned down to look at my ward, and summoned a voice of hatred. "Sit. Stay." She obeyed immediately, and I set off into the trees.

The woods beyond the field were not very thick but quite vast and irregular. Terrain shifted with little warning, scars left by the excavators that once lived nearby. Where fairgrounds now stood there had once been a granite mine, and despite arboreal reclamation the land had not forgotten. After many minutes of walking I arrived at the edge of a cliff that overlooked a massive open pit. The drop was easily forty or so feet, with no clear way down for a mile in either direction. I decided this would be my test, and threw my sock over the edge, watching it fall to the bottom.

The crowd had thinned some as I returned, and the presenter had moved on to a discussion about long-distance tracking. When the other spectators noticed me, the presenter caught on and turned. "My friend! Have you hidden your sock well? Congress is strapped in and ready to track!" They gestured to the beagle, who was now with the presenter that had accompanied Parliament previously. She was sporting a bright red harness, secured by a very long leash.

I nodded to the presenter before me. "Yes."

They smiled. "Wonderful! Would you be so kind as to remove your left sock for Congress to smell?"

As I knelt to oblige them, the beagle became excited and bounded over to me without being called by either of the presenters. Perturbed, I reached out to shove her away. "Where is my dog?"

The presenter's face shifted some, towards a look of slight unease. "Oh, yes, your dog is right here behind me..." they said, stepping aside to reveal Hofeshme'el, who had not moved from where I'd left her. As soon as she saw me attempting to hold Congress away, she sprang from her spot and barked loudly. Scared, Congress backed away. "Say," started the presenter, "Your dog, she didn't move a single muscle the entire time you were gone. She barely blinked. You must be an experienced owner, what training did you employ with her?"

Once I had removed my left sock, I called to my ward. "Hofeshme'el, enough. Sit." She obeyed immediately, and I offered the sock to the beagle, who approached nervously to smell. Once she had gathered enough of the scent, she took off into the woods with the other presenter in tow. I stood and looked back to the presenter before me, "The Damoclean method."

At this, the presenter cocked their head. "Damoclean? What does this entail?"

"If she fails to follow a command, I beat her."

The presenter recoiled. "You *beat* her?!"

I nodded. "Yes. Hard. Usually with a rod, sometimes with my bare hands."

They and the remainder of the audience were stunned. "But... how could you do such a horrible thing?"

"The same way your dog does. Can you recall times where Congress wanted to do something you had dispermited?"

The presenter thought for a moment. "...yes, of course. Many."

"And of those moments where your ownership of Congress conflicted with her will as an animal, how did she react?"

They thought for another moment, one hand reaching slowly to rub the other. To rub in one place. A particular place. "She bit me."

"And how did you resolve those conflicts of dominance?"

"Well..." they trailed off, looking a bit nervous.

"You didn't, did you? You just hoped the sight of your pain and positive reinforcement elsewhere would save you in the long run."

Resigned, the presenter sighed. "It's the best one can do, isn't it?"

I shook my head. "Not at all. Hofeshme'el bit me once in the middle of a corrective instruction. She was retaliating against my pulling on her leash. In response, I struck her with a rod and dislocated her jaw, rendering her unable to eat solid foods for a month. Only after she completed a hundred of the intended instruction was it relocated. This happened a decade ago, and she hasn't bitten me since."

Looking rather sick to his stomach, the presenter took a small step backwards. "And you are... comfortable with this violence?"

"Everything involved in the ownership of a dog is violence. It is violence to keep them in kennels, it is violence to give them commands, it is violence to decide when they eat. Distributed, across many small actions and attitudes, but violence nonetheless." I knelt down to manipulate the head of my ward, turning her so the presenter could see the scar. "Sometimes it is necessary to diffuse, sometimes it is necessary to distill. I make this evaluation just as Congress does when she wishes to defy you, the difference is I hit harder."

Before the presenter could respond, they noticed their partner reemerging from the woods. The relief on their face turned quickly to confusion as they noticed their partner was alone and looked a bit rattled. "Where is Congress?"

"Congress is dead," answered the partner.

"Dead?! How?!"

"She followed the scent of the sock to a cliff and then... jumped off."

The presenter turned to me immediately, anger beginning to swell in their cheeks. "Did you do this?!"

I nodded. "Yes, I walked right to that cliff and threw my sock down to the bottom in hopes of confirming what you said to me."

They blinked with barely glowing rage before the tension suddenly released. "I did say 'anywhere', didn't I?"

"You did," I replied, "For as good a nose as she had, what Congress needed was the ability to solve problems. Concern for the outcome prioritized the jump, while concern for the mechanism would have minded the impact."

The presenter, now cognizant of their mistake, shrugged. "I suppose the blame is ours, then. I apologize for the loss of your sock."

I shook my head, offering my left sock to my ward. "Don't, I haven't lost it." My ward sniffed the sock with diligence, then looked at me for instruction. I returned a stern but calm gaze. "Hofeshme'el. Retrieve." With the command spoken, she rose to her paws and set off into the woods, following the trail left by the scent.

The presenter watched Hofeshme'el disappear into the trees and turned back to me. "My friend," they started, diplomatically, "I understand that you may have found effectiveness in this method of... *discipline*..." They turned to scan what remained of the crowd. "But I think I speak for everyone here when I say that there is a great discomfort in treating our dogs this way. We love our dogs, they're creatures just like us. They're a part of our families."

Raising my hand to dismiss the sentiment, I shook my head. "You have made a great mistake in confusing your ownership of these creatures for their equality with you. They very well may be creatures like us who live, breathe, and feel, but their subservient status must be maintained by any means necessary. When you treat a dog as family, they convince themselves of entitlements."

"But aren't they entitled to certain things? Is our empathy towards them not proof of this? I feel bad when my dog starves and shivers."

I shook my head again. "We persons are capable of empathizing with many things, but you would not let your empathy towards your car prevent you from performing repairs." I gestured to Parliament, now held in the arms of the other presenter, who was sobbing softly into her. "Our dogs are not persons, they are assets we employ to perform tasks we cannot do. To treat them as any different from any other asset is to violate the natural order of things, which invites biting."

The presenter's shoulders slumped a bit under the weight of their understanding. "So what are we meant to do with dogs that do not listen when they are beaten?"

I smiled softly. "You beat them harder."

A look of emotional incredulity came over the presenter. "And what if the beating kills the dog?"

I nodded. "So be it."

"But what is the point of having dogs if I might beat half of them to death for disobeying me?!"

I chuckled, placing a comforting left hand on the presenter's right shoulder. "My friend, a disobedient dog is worth infinitely less than a dead one. A dog that cannot or will not obey commands is a dog too dangerous to be kept alive, and if your training is not up to the task it would be better not to have a dog at all."

Before the presenter could respond, I noticed my ward reemerge from the woods in a different location than where she had entered.

"Ah, and to prove my point." I said, meeting my ward and extending my right hand to receive the sock she had in her maw.

The presenter watched in awe as she gently laid it in my hand and returned to sit by my side as if nothing had happened. "But... how?"

I laughed, putting both of my socks back on and patting my ward's head lightly. "It would seem that when faced with the cliff, the knowledge of what coming back empty-mawed would reap forced her to find another way down."