

Lisa Beatman

Barking for Obama

Tucker sat up, like he always did, nose into the wind. Sophie half-dozed, one bead-blue eye blinking open to catch the gleaming car grills appear, then recede into the narrowing asphalt. Tucker usually loved his spot on the truck-bed, the fresh air like a mailman laden with distant messages, the freedom to howl at nothing, the absence of cigarette smoke that deadened the other smells in the cab. But today, he would have given anything to be in that cab, exchanged his fine long legs and trim coat for the pom-poms and diminutive paws of his neighbor Winston, riding shotgun with Mike and Tom. Winston, propping his front paws on the windshield of Tom's old Ford 150, propelled his little tail, now to the left, now to the right. He yapped each time an Obama/Biden bumper sticker came into view, and emitted a menacing growl whenever a McCain/Palin sticker flashed by –that is, as menacing as a ten-pound poodle could approximate. "Well, at least he's keeping us in the know", Tucker grumbled under his breath. "Or not", Sophie raised her muzzle from under her lustrous tail, "Winston would say anything to keep his high and mighty spot on the bed, and that special chow in his bowl. Special, my paw!", still seething about the chalk-dry kibble that suddenly appeared in her bowl after her last visit to the vet. "Winston would vote for a *veterinarian*, if he thought it would allow him to keep his privileged status". Tucker leaned down to touch Sophie's nose with his. "Well, at least he's not a cat – all cats are Republicans, you know". "Oh, that must be why Mike left Gino at home, that and the fact that he peed all over the dashboard on that camping trip to Maine".

Sophie was playing it cool, but not Tucker, never Tucker, and especially not during this particular election season. Anything that ran into his field of vision, a chipmunk, a dead fish, a tummy-rub, real or imagined, resulted in paroxysms of delight. Just the presence of his daily bowl and bed filled Tucker with so much joy that his tail was in constant motion, even while sleeping. Anything that made Tom happy made Tucker happy – that's why Tucker had to restrain himself from the urge to bite Deborah now and then. And now that it looked like Barack Obama really had a chance to be president, Tom was seriously ecstatic, and he and his best buddy Mike had made a plan to canvas undecided voters in New

Hampshire, the nearest swing state.

“C’mon boy, get in the truck – we’re going barking for Obama!” Tom tossed a blanket and a couple pig’s ears into the back, letting down the back gate. “Leave that squirrel be! There’ll be plenty of squirrels for everyone after Obama’s elected. C’mon, jump up – good boy.” Tucker stood with his tongue hanging out as the truck rumbled over towards Mike’s house. Squirrels for everyone! And plenty of acorns for the squirrels, too! Tucker hadn’t seen Tom this excited since, well, since Deborah had moved in and the long-suffering Red Sox had won its first World series in 86 years. Tucker had suffered along with Tom, and danced along with his private dances, for seven years now, putting his paws over his eyes and whimpering when Tom did, and snatching up stray peanuts and hot dogs when Tom was riveted to the TV during a victory game.

But the thing that had most gotten Tom down during these seven years (Tucker’s whole lifetime!) was the Bush administration. Too many times when reading the newspaper or watching CNN, Tom had either started yelling or had slumped down into the old sofa, face grim. Tucker did what he could to comfort Tom, padding over to lay his muzzle in his lap, and staring into his face with soft, sympathetic eyes. Tom had tried to explain to Tucker about the looting and pillaging that had taken place during Bush’s two terms: the stolen elections, the tax cuts for the rich, the pre-emptive strikes that had reduced the world’s opinion of the U.S. into resentment and scorn. Deborah had pointed out that they hadn’t been able to replace the old furniture or buy a bigger house, but Tucker didn’t quite get it – he was content with the spot on the couch worn down to just his shape, and he knew all the squirrel paths in the neighborhood by heart – why move? Besides, the law of the jungle stated that the big animals would always eat the small ones. Why piss against the wind when there were plenty of sheltered trees right in their very own back yard to water? Plus, there were more and more “for sale” signs littering the neighborhood – a bounty of wooden posts to mark and scratch against. Come to think of it, he hadn’t seen some of the dogs he used to run with – Franz and Pebbles and that crazy Jack Russell – for a long time. The landscape was changing underfoot and Tucker, head in bowl as usual, hadn’t smelled it coming.

Tom tried to explain to Tucker about social justice, and growing inequality, and unregulated markets, and international arms traffic. "You just have to believe me, we need a change after eight years of failed policy" – quoting the fresh new presidential candidate who appeared nightly on the news and seemed to Tucker like someone who would play a fair game of fetch. Well, Tucker loved Tom (and even Deborah when pushed), and he was game to defend and protect those he loved. He had gotten almost straight 'A's in obedience school – (in sitting and heeling, not so much).

"Who should I bite, who should I bite?" Tucker bared his yellow teeth and placed both front paws on Tom's thighs in anticipation. "Should I chase after McCain or Palin? I could probably take McCain down quicker, but Palin would be more fun." His border collie instincts kicked in – he would herd her in like an errant spring lamb gone AWOL. "Down, Tucker, and no biting – let's just all raise our voices for Obama. The more of us there are, the louder we are, and the more convincingly we talk, we can make this happen. No biting, Tucker, just lead with your doggy charm the way you did when I started seeing Deborah." Well, Tucker had different memories about that time, and there were yellow-stained spots on the carpet to prove it, but his debating abilities were limited and he was always up for a road trip.

After picking Mike, Sophie and Winston up, and giving Gino a good run for his money, they were on their way, the Obama bumper stickers giving way to McCain ones as they idled at the New Hampshire toll booths, at least according to Winston's yappability index. As they picked up speed, nearing Concord, and the campaign headquarters, and the end of eight years of an administration that even Winston could see had affected the

smallest of dogs in the worst possible of ways, someone, no one was sure if it was dog or man, in SUV, minivan or Prius, someone started chanting "Oh-ba-ma! Oh-ba-ma! Oh-ba-ma! The sound rose, the syllables elongating:" Ohh-ba-a-ma-ah! Ohh-ba-a-ma-ah! Ohh-ba-a-ma-ah!" spreading over the highways and into the hillsides, men, women, black, white, dogs, sheep, and yes, even some cats, raising their voices in unison

Wilderness House Literary Review 3/4

into one long, never-ending heartfelt howl for change.