

Wilderness House Literary Review 6/1

Bobbi Lurie

Coming Back to Earth as a Dog

Even after he shot me, I still loved him and even after I was dead I wanted to be with him. So I forgave him once more and made the crucial decision to come back to earth as a dog.

I say "earth" instead of "life" because life really is eternal; earth is just a dull and rather frightening universal halfway house for the immature and uncertain. Yet I always enjoyed life on earth. I liked the way the weather changed from sun to rain and back again. I liked the way the hedge along our front walkway got overgrown and how the abundant weeds threatened the life of my roses.

And I loved my life with Martin, in spite of our violent arguments. He never beat me, understand, but we had a gun in the house and often threatened to use it on each other. Unfortunately, on March the second, 1989 at 2:18 p.m., Martin went so far as to pull that trigger. My last sensations were of the sharp heat of the bullet and then the warm ooze of blood which swiftly carried me away from earthly consciousness. I felt as though I were waking from a dream and I found myself sinking deep into long-forgotten yet familiar territory.

Death was a magnificent release for me. There was no need for me to control anything anymore and I felt completely safe. I wanted to laugh at all the things that seemed so urgent and important to me on earth. Things like auditions and acting jobs and wrinkles forming at the corners of my eyes and hair turning gray and the rent which needed paying and my beloved collection of silver teaspoons I had collected from my travels around the world. I really made a fuss over this collection. In fact, it was over this very collection that I lost my life. I was furious at Martin for breaking the wooden shoe off the top of my delicately engraved windmill spoon from Holland. He had been using the spoon to repot his *cereus peruvianus* plant. My blinding rage led me to impulsively pick up a butcher knife, which led Martin to reach for the gun. I was still angry with him when my body hit the floor. He knew how much those little teaspoons meant to me and he knew they were only to be used for stirring milk and sugar into tea.

Martin and I made tea drinking into a type of ceremony. I'd lay my powder-blue tablecloth on the kitchen table and set out my special china cups, the sugar and the milk. My spoon collection would go in the center of the table and we'd both carefully select our spoon for the day. Martin's favorite spoon had the word INDIA engraved on the top of the spoon, which was carved in the shape of the Indian subcontinent. I was particularly fond of the spoons I collected in Eastern Europe but my favorite had always been that wooden shoe spoon from Holland.

We enjoyed our tea time when one of us was working and even better if we both had parts in a play or even a television commercial, but the long stretches of mutual unemployment had a negative effect on our relationship. We tended to blame each other for our bad luck. Martin's violent outbursts towards me were balanced by his heartfelt apologies. He'd often leave me for hours or even days on end, but then return with a bouquet of

Wilderness House Literary Review 6/1

flowers or bottle of brandy. Sometimes he'd stay in the house with me after breaking a vase or throwing a pot against the wall; he'd kneel at my feet with his head in my lap crying, begging my forgiveness and telling me those eternally famous lies lovers tell, things like he loved me and couldn't live without me. He was an excellent actor so I'd enjoy these performances and never failed to forgive him in the 15 years we were together.

But on the afternoon of March 2, 1989 there wasn't much I could do. The blood was oozing out of my gut as I looked on helplessly at my lifeless complexion and grotesquely open mouth. The mess that death makes of a person is really embarrassing but Martin was kind enough to clean me up and once he realized I was truly dead he dug a deep hole beneath the plum tree in back of our house and buried me there.

To be honest, I hardly thought of Martin the first few years after my death. I was living in a sort of liquid consciousness, alone yet with the sense of being completely supported, held and loved. But time flies when you're in a state of bliss and I realized my life on this particular plane was about to end. No one told me this, of course, but I was certain of these facts since I existed in a realm where everything was understood. I knew I was free to either pass into eternity, enter another universe or return to earth for another expedition. Well, I've always loved to travel, even to the most godforsaken places, and it was hard for me to resist another expedition to earth.

It was clear to me that I didn't want to return to earth as a woman nor did I want to come back as a man. I did not miss all the ups and downs of human existence. But I wanted to be with Martin again and that's how I decided to come back as a dog. He always loved animals and especially dogs and I knew I could enter his life that way.

The plan was executed without a plan being made. I was born from the body of a dog who lived a few miles down the road from Martin. Her "owner" (humans somehow feel they "own" other creatures) was a little boy who delivered the Sunday paper. It seemed I was back into a body, this time a puppy's body, almost as soon as I decided to be. Until then I had forgotten what it was like to feel the crushing claustrophobia of physical pain. I regretted my decision to return to earth as soon as I felt myself being squeezed out of the tiny birth canal. It wasn't just the pain; it was also being surrounded by four other puppies and suddenly feeling myself to be separate from all of them.

I was in a terrified daze after the birth but my mother, who I once thought of as a mangy bitch, lured me to her with the sweetness of her breasts. After a communal meal with my brothers and sisters I would doze off to sleep with the comforting scent of my mother's fur entering my nostrils. I quickly realized that this earth was different than the one I knew as a human. As my eyes began to focus, I saw a world which was colored in a rather blurry haze. I was bombarded with sounds more three-dimensional than my vision. My delight came mostly through my incredible sense of smell, which made my body feel almost transparent.

The time with my canine mother ended one day when the boy, with a scent of dry blandness, lifted me and my brothers and sisters away from our mother's breast and tossed us into a putrid-smelling basket. We all

Wilderness House Literary Review 6/1

cried out but he took no notice. He took us from house to house and one by one my brothers and sisters were picked out of the basket screaming their hearts out until I was left in the basket alone.

There was a shock of recognition when we arrived at Martin's house. It was completely altered as I saw it in its faded blurriness, looking bigger, foggier and darker. The strong aroma of flowers and mud and birds and rotting wood turned this into a new universe, one which frightened me.

I saw a changed Martin, one large and colorless with blurred features and bent head, come to the large front door. He and the boy were saying something I could not understand. Martin smelled of sickness and sadness and his voice was deep and muddy. The closeness of his soft checkered shirt put me into a panic. Then I felt his hands reach around my trembling body. His fingers' long boniness brought me back to an old familiarity. It was like the times after a big fight when he would put his head on my lap and tell me he loved me and could not live without me.