

The Dog



Stacey Levine

This story tries to refuse the tedious curve of rising action-spasm-falling action for a few reasons, but mostly because it is about a dog.

It takes place near the end of the late Anthropocene, so much death all around.

He loathed moving. All the neighbors called him “Dogalog,” for, still as a log, he lay in a trench almost all the time because he’d always been there.

The dog’s face seemed eager with the apparent sweetness of passivity; the neighbors sometimes called him Rufus; pity, since all names mask, box, or smash a life a little.

Dogalog’s ever-present trench in the earth lay somewhere beyond the home of his owner, originally named Carl Driggs, in later years becoming Carl Diggs, for, with age as with teeth, men lose letters from their names.

Carl Diggs mentioned his dog to the neighbors leaning

from their windows, and summed up, “That hound used to obey me” while a homeowner down the block called out to the dog kindly, respectfully, as if the pet existed without any tissue of absurdity; meanwhile, the dog licked himself tenderly, as most do.

Carl Diggs checked his watch, antsy about time, for in his experience, time flows around us, passing so we cannot keep up, though time does not do this. And in Carl Diggs’ view, the story lagged; it had no beats; he felt a powerful injunction bearing down, insisting that action and conflict, masculine-style, must play in its pages. To engender this and move the story forward in time, Diggs cried to the dog, “Get out of here!”

So Dogalog ran to a tree. Had the story already failed for its structural lack? The dog stood, his paws on the tree’s skin; another neighbor hollered across the street, “A tree is *like* a story! It springs up with fruits! And funguses too which are parasites that fasten to their hosts!”

Trapped in the story, seeking another one in which to run, Dogalog scabbled at the tree’s skin, then ran to the grasses. Did he seek a story with a placid denouement? Yet no story can fully express or contain our living; the parts that don’t fit into methodologies always spill from its sides like an aggressive blue mold now advancing from the confines of the story’s structure and moving toward toward hapless Dogalog, who was born innocent.

So the dog ran away. He went to Pasadena. He found a house. Soon he decided: “I’m not doing anything else, I might as well get married.” So Dogalog met Debbie Hansen. He married himself out of the story, away from Carl Diggs.

Was it real?

There are certain people in history: Others become better for knowing them. Debbie Hansen was one of those. Prepossessing,

she could elevate others. They all went high.

The story succeeded intrinsically by spreading forward, and also to the side, indeterminately.