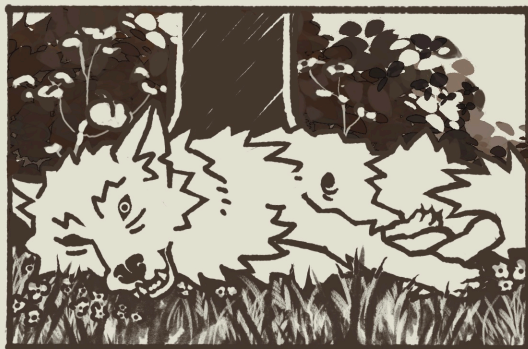


8220 2006

STORY BY MELISSA GROLEAU-PEREZ



A hunter came through forest deep,
And found a mother, still in sleep.



The pale one was a pearly dream,
White as snow, with eyes that gleamed.



He took the white, left black behind,
And didn't spare a glance in kind.



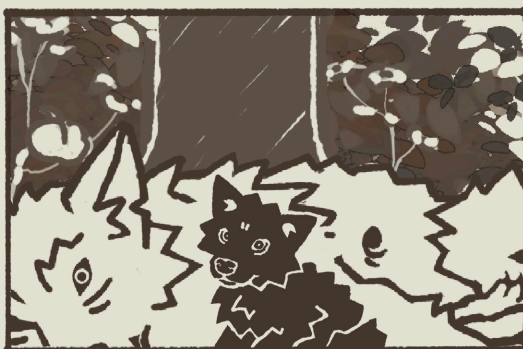
The white one sobbed, his voice was small:
"What about us, what of it all?"



He took her pelt, the price was high,
Then heard a pair of newborn cries.



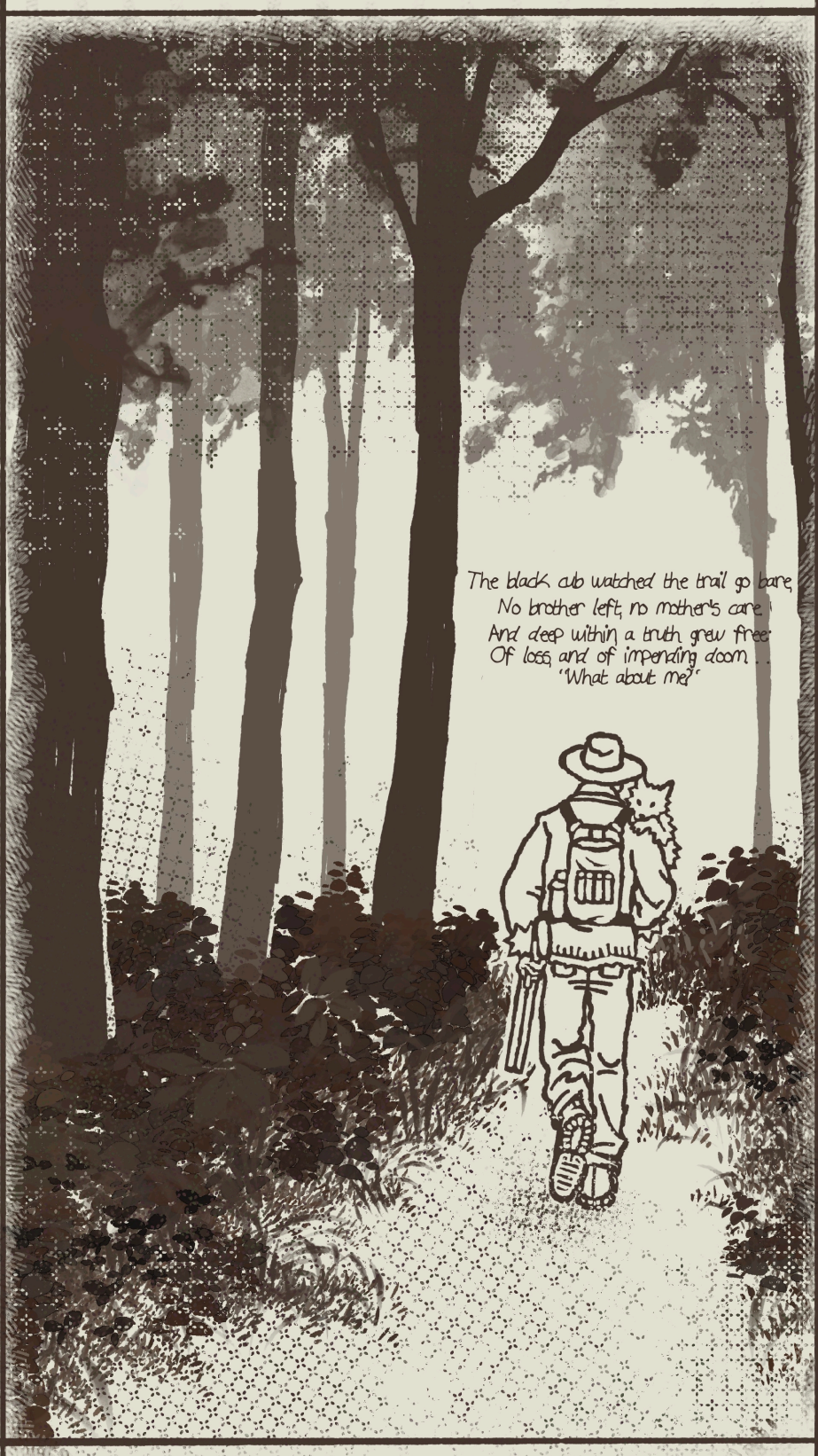
The hunter smiled, his mind was set:
"A coat to grow, and sell for debt."



"If we must part," the black cub said,
"Let not my memory grow dead."



"May you remember me," he cried,
As his brother was carried, terrified.

A black and white illustration of a person walking away on a forest path. The person is wearing a hat, a backpack, and carrying a cat. They are holding a suitcase in their right hand. The path is surrounded by tall trees and dense foliage. The scene is framed by a decorative border.

The black cat watched the trail go bare
No brother left, no mother's care
And deep within a truth grew free
Of loss and of impending doom...
"What about me?"

Years later, the white wolf was raised on the farm as a dog its future felt planned for a great sale. But the hunter, clever in his cruelty, made sure the cub would never know its true nature or purpose. He kept it ignorant of its wild origins, instead training it to be useful and docile for the farm.



First, he gave the cub a name "Dog". And soon enough, that's all it was known as. Becoming a proper dog took harsh discipline. The hunter was cruel, punishing the dog with whips and starvation whenever it disappointed him.



The farm was surrounded by barbed wire fences, keeping the animals contained far from the wild freedom of the forest. The dog though, felt oddly content within this cage. It had a place to sleep and a sense of belonging which it told itself, was better than nothing.



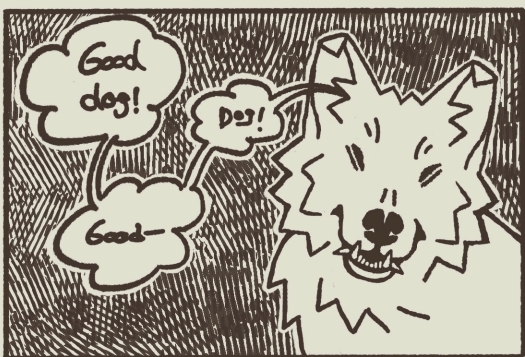
With this new life came the simplest of comforts. The hunter would toss out a word of praise in occasions:

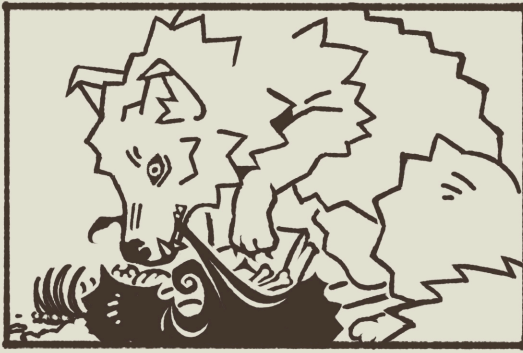
"Good dog!"

"Dog!"

"Good dog!"

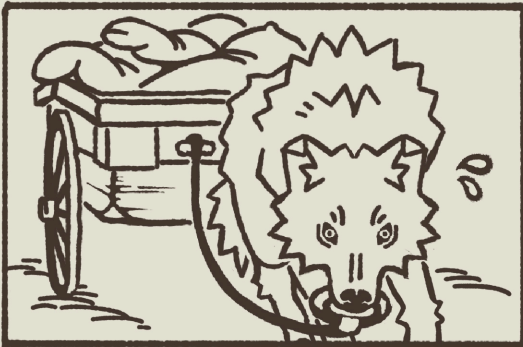
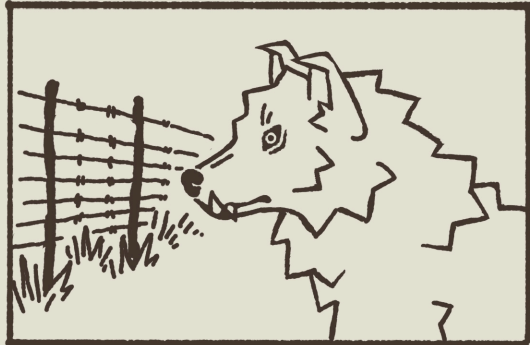
The power of that name, however hollow, filled the dog's heart just a little. It was better than nothing.





The food, though, was very scarce. The dog's meals were mostly scraps, crumbs and leftovers, with little meat to speak of. The man could not bother feeding it properly, as it was below him. But it told itself it was better than nothing.

The hunter, in his manipulative way, promised the dog something more. If it worked hard enough, he said, it would soon be reunited with its mother and brother, who were now at the neighbor's farm.

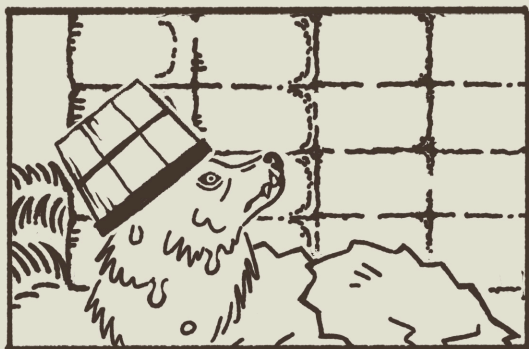
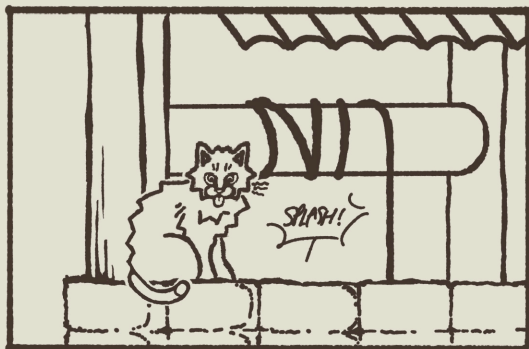
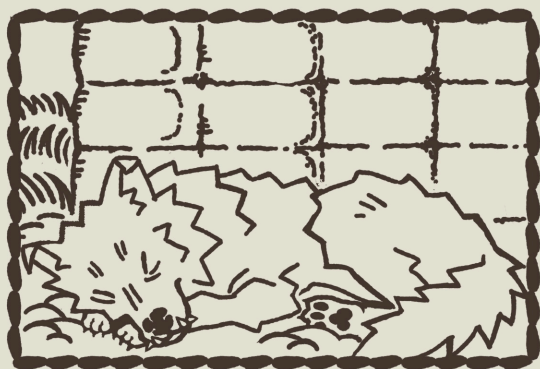


The dog, fueled by this false hope, threw itself into its work, pulling heavy loads by day and guarding the farm animals by night. It labored tirelessly, believing that if it worked hard enough, it would soon be rewarded.

But the hunter was lying. He knew the mother was dead and the brother was long gone. From the beginning, he had only wanted the white wolf for its pelt.



As the days wore on the dog began to feel more and more isolated. No other farm animal seemed to quite understand it. The absence of its family made it all the more lonely. They even mocked the dog, seeing how easily it was tricked.



The dog had no idea who or what it truly was. The other animals found it endlessly amusing: A savage trying so hard to be a refined.

As the farm expanded its reach, swallowing more and more of the forest, the dog found itself meeting a wolf. With the forest shrinking and the farm's cattle becoming prey for hungry predators, a black wolf appeared from the woods, whispering complicated words.

"It's rare to meet another like us," the black wolf said. "—but you seem lost and lonely. I have lost my brother, long ago, so I am looking for a new comrade. Together, we could hunt and eat to our own satisfaction, even the farm's cattle. There would be no more scraps and crumbs to fill the bellies. Together, we could tear down this farm and any others that dared take the land of the animals. We could rule the forest, chase the men out, and return the wild to its glory, to its right-full order. Why stay behind these fences? You are a wolf, and these fences should be nothing to you. Come with me. Let us be free. What do you say?"





The dogs
reply was soft
but firm.

You're mistaken
wild one. I am
neither lost nor
alone. I'm a good
dog. I'm not a
beast like you.

These fences? They
don't bother me in the
slightest. They're only
temporary you see. My
duty lies here on the
farm until the season
ends because my work
will lead me back to
my own family. Besides,
I could never betray
the man. He gave me a
name, a roof, and food
—something far from
nature.

You are the enemy
of this farm and
so I must consider
you my enemy. But I
seek neither trouble
nor violence for I
am not a bad
dog. Leave now,
before I'm forced
to make you.



The black wolf, unmoved, replied with greater passion: "That is your mistake friend. There is no such thing as a bad dog. We are not enemies, we are the same. Listen to this: why do you distrust me but not those who hunt me? They made you forget who you are and they made you believe your worth comes from obedience. But look at yourself. You are confused because you've been shaped to crave recognition even if all you receive is punishment. You are lost, yet unhappy because man keeps all the resources giving you crumbs and leftovers while keeping away your family. We the wild ones we know that this world is terribly unfair. The forest does not deserve crude forces and vulgar possessions... that is not how nature exists. They take everything out of you and give you back almost nothing. They share the sowing but privatize the reaping. And you—You accept this arbitrary misery this existential mediocrity thinking it's better than nothing. Truth is: that comfort will never make you happier. My dear, I'm sorry but I don't think I can free you. But remember my words: when the time comes know that you are far more than just a shepherd's dog. Never let them make you believe otherwise."

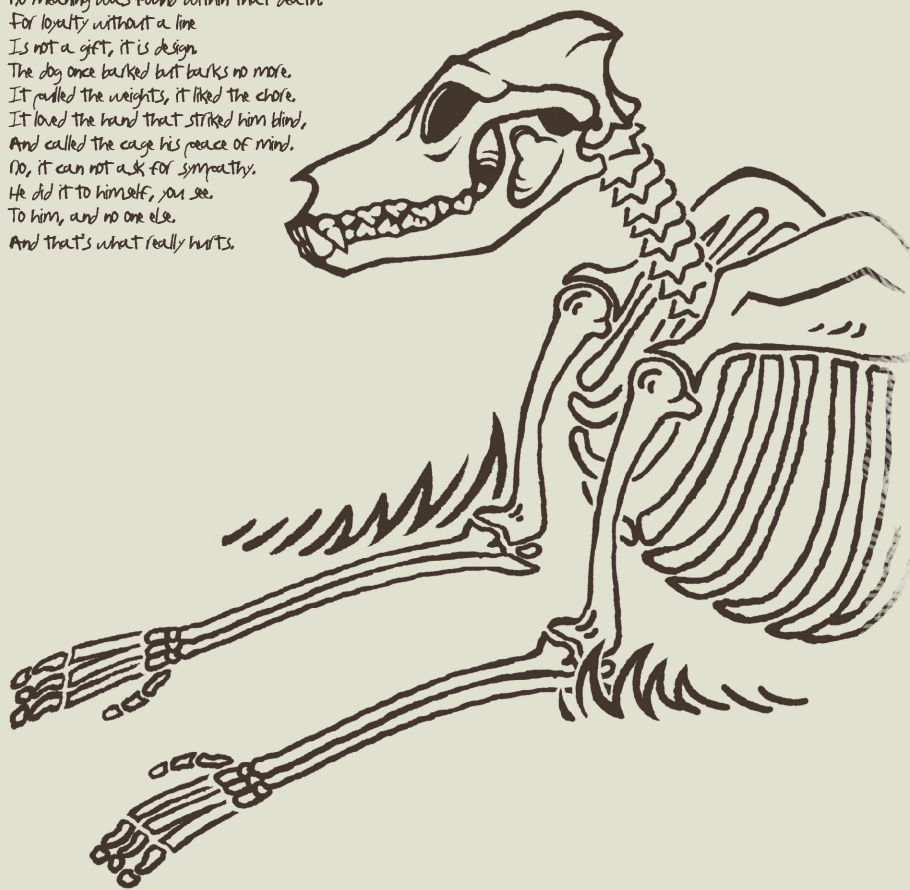
And with that the black wolf vanished into the darkness of the forest. The dog remained silent, pondering those unsettling words. But he quickly let them go. Once again it told itself he was content. After all, the predator had left peacefully and the work was done.

2720 2720

The day had come, it's final rite,
 When the flesh met cost beneath the light.
 The white felt spined, soft and pure,
 The dog was hopeful, as before.
 It dragged the weight, It played the part,
 A servant's toil, a master's art.
 No feast, no rest, no saving grace
 Just a smile carved into it's face.
 And still it followed, tail in line,
 Behind the man with death in mind.
 He led it to the barn, and there,
 He drew the gun. He laid it bare.
 One shot, and silence struck the straw.
 The man, efficient and cold with law,
 Stripped off the felt, so fast, so clean.
 White like virgin snow where none have been.
 He ground the bones to feed the swine,
 He sold the coat for quite a fine.
 The dog was gone, his worth dishonored
 It's soul unsought, a life offered.
 But make no myths of martyr's breath,
 No meaning was found within that death.
 For loyalty without a line
 Is not a gift, it is design.
 The dog once barked but barks no more.
 It pulled the weights, it liked the chore.
 It loved the hand that struck him blind,
 And called the cage his peace of mind.
 No, it can not ask for sympathy.
 He did it to himself, you see.
 To him, and no one else.
 And that's what really hurts.

So now the forest thins and dies,
 Replaced by fences, the row, the lies.
 The master knows what's best for all.
 The barn is warm. The world is cold.
 The whip is sharp, but not unkind.
 And work is sweet, when you're resigned.
 No haul remains to haunt the trees,
 Just profit riding on the breeze.

Yet still we dream that beyond the kill,
 Beyond the greed, beyond the man's will
 That in some distant glow of light,
 Two wokes run free, beyond our sight.
 Together now, they softly mourn,
 Returned at last to mother and home.



GOOD 2221

The day had come, the final rite,
When flesh met cost beneath the light.
The white felt shimmered, soft and pure,
I was hopeful, as before.
I dragged the weight, I played the part,
A servant's toil, a master's art.
No feast, no rest, no saving grace,
Just a smile carved into my face.
And still I followed, tail in line,
Behind the man with death in mind.
He led me to the barn, and there,
He drew the gun. I saw it bare.
And only then I imagined your voice.
"Now do you see?"

A whisper thin inside of me.
The black wolf's words I used to doubt
Now rose like fire from in and out.
In one swift breath, I struck his hand,
The iron dropped into the sand.
He screamed.

"Bad dog! Bad dog!"
I lunged. I tore. I followed through.
I tasted blood, oh, brother, see:
I think I know what freedom means.
It's warm, it's wild, it stains the tongue.
It ends the lie I've served so long.
I left no leftover, no crumb was spared.
I fed on him, on the one who dared.
And when I stood, no longer clean,
My coat was red, very obscene.

I passed through past, through fear, through smoke.
Into the trees I wandered deep,
Where memory wakes but doesn't sleep.
And then you came or maybe not.
A shape, an image, a broken thought.
"What are you seeking in this land?"
You asked, though you were dust and sand.

And I replied,
"Your voice feels faint.
Were you ever strong, or did you just restraint?
And is this truly what you looked like?
Or just the memory I fed myself each night?"
But you said nothing. You never really do.
As you are the silence I always knew.
And as you faded into shade and wind,
I felt you settle back within.
So now I march alone,
Not quite a beast but no longer owned.
The man is gone. The work is done.
The dog is dead.
The wolf walks on.

