

Dog Horse Man

by Amanda Nazario

It was five years later, in a new, fancier place. Wearing a button-up shirt buttoned all the way up, he gave some tourists a bashful smile over the martini shaker as he emptied it. She almost laughed, thinking of how he had acted the first night they were in bed together, the way he spat on her back imitating the noise his balls made slapping against her. That had also been the night they first met, in his old bar.

Every time after that, he'd given her sex like he was doing her a favor—tugged his shorts down sighing, his gaze turned toward the wall. He would bark at her when she hesitated: *Come on, fuck!* Eventually she had walked in on him in the bar's bathroom getting blown by a girl in a purple dress.

Between drink orders he leaned against the cash register and stared at the floor. She remembered reading a self-help book once, a book of Toltec wisdom for dummies, which she'd found at the apartment of a lady whose dog she walked. The book had urged her to treat her relationships with people the way you'd treat a relationship with a dog. You wouldn't expect a dog to be a man, it said. You wouldn't expect a dog to be a horse. It only knows how to be a dog.

She thought of the two tattoos of skulls he was hiding under the button-down shirt, one on each arm. While she was remembering that part of him, he noticed her.

They hugged mechanically with the bar between them. He seemed amused to see her wearing an office outfit, a change from her former jeans and band T-shirts. While they talked he wrapped his hand around her wrist. She had never forgotten how he smelled: sweet and rotten, like compost, like he had just finished fucking some other dirty person.

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He looked bad—there were deep shadows in the pits of his face. His appearance had never suggested health, but his body had once been fleshy, his skin pale and soft because he never went outside in the daytime. He'd also been showy, with a stallion-like swagger, and now this was gone. She understood that he could be sick. After she stopped seeing him, she had gone to the clinic so scared she vomited in the waiting room, into a wastebasket, while they analyzed her blood on the other side of the door. When the lab technician said she was clean, she'd asked, "Are you sure?"

In his life, had he loved anyone? There had been moments when she almost said it: in desperate times, drunk and high, she had thought she might hold his head and whisper *My sweetheart, baby, I love you, you're perfect the way you are*. She laughed out loud now thinking of this, burying her open mouth in her shoulder. He asked her why she was laughing, but she wouldn't tell. He shouldn't know that she had ever wanted to pour love over him, to watch him waste away in it like an ice cube.

