

Stuffed Animals

by Kevin Army

The Unreachable View

Mr. Skunk looked disdainfully at the window. "When the fuck do we get out of this place?" It was mostly rhetorical as the Skunks were all stuffed and inanimate. He often wondered what rain would be like, would there be a sensation? There was no sensation standing still next to a wall of brick in a mock fireplace.

He pondered the irony of the uselessness of said fireplace and of himself; a skunk that couldn't scent. He looked at the Mrs and their child, who he still hadn't named. He wondered if they ever thought of him, if the wind outside ever called to them too.

A light goes off in the next room. There's a feeling in the air, or at least it could be a feeling if he knew what that could be. Then, complete and utter stillness. A secrecy to the room, a void floating throughout. He wanted to close his eyes. He couldn't, so he just stood very still, stillness and helpless, dry and achingly sweet.

The Undertakers Children

The girls next door grew up in a funeral parlor until their mom decided she hated men and took them away. Their father had been big in the mortuary business, later my grandfather's funeral took place there.

The youngest was a sleep walker, we would often find her in her mother's car, passed out at the wheel early in the morning. Once we took her camping in Yosemite, she tossed and turned and yelled throughout the night.

They told stories of hiding in caskets from their parents. I could never tell if it was in fun, or if the hiding was in fear. Their mother was crazy, and looked just like Carol Channing.

On warm summer nights we would all hang out under the streetlight in our court, laughing and talking about pretty much nothing until someone would tell us to shut up. I ended up with a big crush on our sleepwalking friend. I've always had a soft spot for the more animated and troubled among us.

Of course she ended up breaking my heart, and my best friend's heart too. I hadn't thought about her in years, but just the other day, I heard a bird singing and thought of her, Robin, the undertaker's daughter.

Huckleberry

Huckleberry was a mail order bride. A troublemaker from the start, in other words, a fine companion. So many days altered just by a look in his eyes. How does that look change day to day? He's stood by through breakups, sickness, life changing events.

Boo Boo keeps him company when I'm not here. There. They are the keepers of the assortment, the special overseers, the things that keep a balance in this halfway house of my life.

My blood pressure is up. It might not rain tomorrow, I'll try and jog. Less salt. We'll watch a movie. We're a family, even if it's not real.

Better Living Through Taxidermy

It had been about 10 years since I'd seen Jack, but there he was, walking right past my apartment on a sunny October day. Then he had been young, now he had gray hair and age in his eyes. He'd recently gone viral, ranting about this and that, and something had changed, a sadness had set upon him deeper and harder than in that difficult past he'd made for himself.

He was on his way back from a 12 step meeting, he told me the craziness had been going on for five years. We visited a bit, it was awkward and good to catch up.

Years ago I had worked with Jack and saw a world I had no interest in. He couldn't give it up, and I understood that. It wasn't mine to give up, but it was mine to not want to be a part of.

So there I was, showing my low-end life and stuffed animal collection to someone who could own an island, and who looked miserable.

We make choices, what we do, what we are around, what we fill ourselves with. What kind of animals we will be. They're all good, there's no judgment here.

I hope Jack gets better, I really do. That night, I felt a little ashamed of myself, but then I let go of that, and I slept really good.

Augie Doggie Style

Augie Doggie lives under Santa in between bookcases. Mostly, they seem to get along well, mostly each pretends the other isn't there. Santa is largely hidden out of view, Augie stands guard and watches over the couch, where I entertain lovers and friends.

Last night's boyfriend asked me why I have so many stuffed animals. I told him they're always kind, and they tend to cheer me up. He left shortly. He would have anyway.

Augie sees them come and go. Says I should be more self respecting. I point out that Hanna Barbara would let anyone do anything with their characters.

Somewhere, someone is bombing someone. A lot of people are mad these days. I had bad dreams of cockroaches the other night. I think I'm falling apart.

Augie smiles. He knows things aren't actually that bad.

Numb

Often, he felt nothing. Through on-setting emptiness, with lighted candles in gleaming moods of: lost faith, lost dreams. The things that once were. It's not fair to the species, we are burdened with evolution, with the fucking growth experience.

When it slid inward, weightedness sustained within a painful despair that would vaporize and become: nothing. The heart that does not feel. Is that evolved? Or simply a failure?

He stands on the street. The traces of the lines, each vehicle parked within appropriate limits. The sun rises. A breeze touches all life, all this.

He could never get over losing those many things, so he holds onto what he can. He cries, then he leaves, totally enclosed in the grief, completely numb. There is nothing but a preposterous account of time, space, and its total lack of confidence.

When all is said and done, what did it matter what we were? And did it matter what was inside? And what made some of us less real than others.

