

The Scrawny Dog Gospel

by Kevin John Phillips

This thing has dropped in front of me and it may be a good deal.

"Sounds like it might be a good thing, Kevin. Sounds like a good opportunity."

Well, I hope so. Don't know if I've ever run across a bad opportunity. Trouble maybe, but a bad opportunity? Isn't that an oxymoron?

Opor - two - nidy. What a stupid word. I hate important words that are stupid. Why can't opportunity be called fried chicken or something? Cream gravy maybe, or how about Selma Hayek? Now, if Selma was fixin' to come up to my front door holding a plate of fried chicken smothered with cream gravy, that may just about cover everything. But that's another column.

Opportunity, says Webster, is a, "favorable juncture of circumstances." In my Oxford book of quotations, there are seven famous lines about opportunity. Seven — that's it! There are twenty-seven regarding failure. Seems it's been easier for the great thinkers to ponder about messing up as opposed to giving us direction on the good stuff. There are even forty-eight lines about doors. You know, doors, the partition behind which opportunity lurks and knocks? Or does it knock? Here's what it does for me. Here's what I get.

A few years back I'm sitting in my living room and hear these annoying scratches on the back door. Seven, maybe eight scratches, then a pause, then seven or eight more. "Go in your doghouse!" I yell.

We had this dog and though we loved him, if you saw him for the first time you would wonder, "What happened to him, anyway?"

A cute, fluffy puppy grew into a nice but scrawny looking dog. All the dogs I knew when I grew up were playful, then plump, and then fat. My dog could hide behind a wind gust, he was so scrawny. Wasn't sick or anything, he just looked like a dog you'd find in an alley or something. You wouldn't know him from the rats, either.

Available online at *«<http://fictionaut.com/stories/kevin-john-phillips/the-scrawny-dog-gospel>»*

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On that particular night, I thought he went in the doghouse after I yelled, and then I went to bed. About an hour later I realized he was still scratching on the back door, and from there it went something like this:

I get up, flick the light on, and see him do two things. He wags his tail, happy to see someone, and then he gets up on his hind legs and paws at his snout. Points at it, I tell you. I'm thinking he's possessed. Really.

Well sir, I do what any man would do. A moment later, the missus is rubbing the sleep from her eyes, saying with no small amount of confusion, "He's doing what?"

"He's possessed, I tell you. Come and see."

We go outside; he wags and then does the snout thing. I'm hunting out a rock, intent on being humane and putting him out of his misery. While I'm doing that, she looks him over. Turns out he has a small part of a chop bone caught in the roof of his mouth. My wife - I mean our team, under my supervision - reaches in his mouth, flips it out and we settle down to sleep. The moral here?

I think his scratching was just the sound that opportunity makes. I don't think there's a big booming pound on the door. I think it's an annoying scratch that, sized up against the rest of the day, seems worth ignoring. It doesn't come wrapped with a pretty bow on top, and more times than we care to admit, I'd bet it gets caught in our throat. If we try to listen for an exact sound, an expected sound, we end up shushing that annoying noise to listen and...you get the point.

This thing I spoke of at the beginning? I'm thinking it's too much noise to be anything special. Then again, God knows — because He's God — that along with my aging eyes, the ears are going too. Maybe He's just speaking up. Or maybe He's clearing His throat to get my attention. But that's another column.

I'd listen to those small sounds if I were you. Me? I listen for that scratching all the time. Religiously, if you'll pardon the pun. At worst, it will be another opportunity that doesn't pan out. At best, I'll know not to kill our new dog.

