

February 1975 Lansing, MICHIGAN

by Michael K. White

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Ripper the dog died after eating a Quarter which had lodged in Ripper's throat choking her to death. Steve Latino buried her in the backyard the next morning. He felt nothing for Ripper, or any dog for that matter, but especially Ripper. Steve Latino was not aware that in Ripper's coma, her life replayed itself like a grand dog opera. Ten years is a long time for a dog, and her story was almost biblically epic and it unwound for any interested enough to bother to tune it in.

Ripper was born in 1965 and as a puppy came into the possession of Steve Latino's sister Tammy. Ripper was a rambunctious puppy who liked to tear things with her teeth; but this wasn't why Tammy named her Ripper. Tammy named her Ripper because of a certain gastrointestinal problem that the German Shepard mix was subjected to throughout her life. This enraged Steve Latino's father, Arthur, who hated Ripper, but still liked the dog more than the fucking cats.

This little puppy chewed and farted on everything in sight, especially Arthur's golf shoes. But before Arthur Latino could make good on his grim promise to shoot Ripper in the head, he dropped dead of a heart attack on the second tee, just after hitting a two iron onto the green.

Ripper's life was spared then and from that point the dog seemed to lead a charmed existence. As she grew, Steve too, came to hate her. Not because of any personal animosity, for Ripper was always the friendliest of dogs, but because Ripper had chosen the basement Rec room for her favorite toilet, a Rec room that Steve

Latino had to cross daily like a stinking minefield, to get to his room. Every morning he would open his door and the stench of stale dog shit would hit him with full force. It was the first inclination in his life that he might one day want to kill another living being.

His mother and his sister had long ago abandoned the basement to Ripper and Steve until it got so bad Steve decided to move out and join the army. This was to escape the dog shit more than anything else and he hoped he'd never have to see Ripper again.

Tammy Latino moved out of her mother's house shortly thereafter, when their mother went crazy and began spending all her time in Gay bars trying to save people's souls for Christ. Tammy took Ripper with her to Lansing, where Tammy hoped to get her degree in embalming.

It was in Lansing, that Ripper had the first of her adventures. When Ripper was three, Tammy's friend Cindy Shune was babysitting Ripper while Tammy was at an embalming seminar in Eau Claire. Cindy Shune was not known for her intelligence; the pentagram tattooed to her forehead was evidence of that.

So while she had the use of Tammy's house for a week she decided to use it to her advantage to make a few extra bucks. Since Ripper always barked at strange men, Cindy locked the dog in the bathroom while she took care of business. Also in the bathroom, in the tub, was a cardboard box full of mewling kittens Cindy had found outside Swanks.

When the men had left for that night, Cindy opened the bathroom to let Ripper out and was greeted by the bloody mess of tangled dead kittens and a friendly looking Ripper, tail wagging, gore and fur all over her muzzle.

Tammy was urged by all who knew her to have Ripper put down, but she resisted because she knew Ripper was not responsible for the deaths of the kittens, but she never again allowed Ripper to "kiss" her; the notion of kitten blood and guts on Ripper's jaws was just too much for her to take.

Things went on for the next couple of years, with Ripper having her first litter of puppies and Tammy settling down to a job embalming babies and children at Addams Mortuary in Lansing. It was during this time that Tammy met her husband, Roy, and when they got married they did the smart thing, leaving Ripper in a kennel instead of with Cindy Shune when they went on their honeymoon cruise up the Detroit River.

This was the Dark Time in Ripper's life. The prison was cold and cramped and somewhere in her mind Ripper knew that this was finally the retribution for accidentally killing all those kittens. She was in a cramped cage all day, covered in her own shit, unable even to stand, barking herself hoarse. She broke two teeth on the wire cage, but her practiced jaws told her that with a little work, the impossible could be possible.

After four days of incarceration, Ripper managed to escape from the kennel on the very day Tammy and Roy were due back from their cruise. It was not from chewing through the cage though, that Ripper made her escape. She simply charged the dumb girl who took her out once a day to hose out the cage and give her some food and water. Ripper could see that the back door was open. She could see a clear path to daylight and the only thing in her way was a girl who was afraid of her.

Ripper had never run so fast. As the cinderblock prison receded, Ripper felt like the wind. her ears were back and her body moved in one long stretching graceful rhythm. Ripper's tongue lolled out, bringing to her face a dogsmile, with angry shouts getting fainter and fainter and Ripper ran and ran. Right. Then left. Then right down Burnt Mill Road.

For the next ten months, Ripper ran with a pack of wild dogs around Burnt Mill Road. While Ripper was not the leader, she more than held her own in the pack. The leader was a Doberman named Rusty who jumped his fence one day and never found his way back home. He was dumb but brave and had killed a rattlesnake that Ripper had accidentally shit on. The pack of dogs was legendary around Burnt Mill Road and many sightings were reported. They

were stalked and shot at a time or two. They lost a wiener dog named Maxie when a teenage boy tried his father's .22 for the first time.

Tammy would hear intermittent reports from people she knew that Ripper was running wild on Burnt Mill Road, but she was sure that the dog kennel had sold Ripper to a vet school where she was vivisected. She knew how these things worked. It was only when Roy's oil field buddy Cleat told them he saw Ripper that Tammy actually let herself believe Ripper was running wild. So one Saturday Tammy and Roy went out to Burnt Mill Road with a bag of Snausages and called Ripper's name over and over.

Ripper heard her name being called. She recognized the voice calling her, dimly remembering some other time, some other life. Or not. The pull was strong, but Ripper had grown to like running wild with the rest of the pack. Ripper stood between two worlds, but as Tammy's voice persisted and the other dogs got spooked and began to run away, Ripper was inclined to join them. Then she heard a familiar sound, a sound so pleasurable that her body shivered. It was the sound of a bag of Snausages being shaken.

Thus ended Rippers pack running days.

Tammy settled down with Roy and they had a baby when Ripper was eight. Ripper did not like sharing the spotlight and growled ominously whenever Tammy held the baby. Remembering the fate of the kittens, Tammy packed Ripper off to her mother and brother Steve, just in time for his discharge from the army.

Steve Latino had dug down far enough in the flower bed next to the wooden fence. He hated Ripper even more now that he had to work so hard to bury her. Finished digging, he picked up the carcass and flung it into the hole he had just dug. As Ripper's body hit the ground, a Quarter came flying up out of her open mouth, hitting Steve Latino right in the face. He bent over and picked up the Quarter and put it in his pocket.

Steve felt little nostalgia for Ripper, but then again he was not a sentimental person by nature. He always considered

himself alone, against the world and he had no real true friends. He would have been very surprised indeed to know that Ripper had loved him best of all the people she had ever known and had been content to spend the final year of her life dodging his reckless slaps and feckless snubs.

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