

Dog

by Niya C. Sisk

I'm an old dog—a yellow lab as handsome as the day is long. I know that's a cliché thing to say but I'm not the creative type like my friend Bosely, an Irish Setter. I'm what you'd call a traditionalist. I like to eat exactly at 8:30 a.m. and 6 p.m. I take my bone with me everywhere I go. I will not carry the poop-bag.

I've had three names in my life. Max, Sirius and Jonesy—and this divides my life into three parts. I'm glad I was Max in the first four years of my life. I lived with a family...a pretty good one too! But the woman, Grace, she was a cat person. Six cats. All of them, yes! all of them, female. Max is a good name—a strong, masculine name for the only dog of the family.

Brigadoon, the old brown horse had permanently skinned up knees and bad manners with cats. He could make those cats fly like nobody's business. We talked about the kind of meat we liked to eat, how good it felt to be brushed under the hot sun, how we both hated getting our teeth brushed and how difficult it was to be single. There were so many cats that without that horse I wouldn't have developed the healthy esteem I have today.

After Grace died—a brain tumor (I smelled it on her breath long before she was diagnosed), the family moved from New York City to Minnesota and gave us to the animal prison I'd only heard stories about. The worst part was the confusing smells. From Lysol to Hamster droppings, my nose couldn't settle on one thing to dominate. It was frustrating. I cried so hard in my steel box. A girl who worked there took pity on me and let me put my heavy head and snotty nose in her lap and sleep. She named me, Sirius. She wanted me to be separated from the grief of my former life as Max.

I know this is hard to believe, because of how humbled-hearted and handsome I am, but I lived in the steel room for four years. I never heard from my family again. I thought they might have visited

me there sometimes. I had hoped they would bring me a stack of bones or tell the girl how much I loved and needed them. But I was boneless for four years too. Still, in my own way I became a leader and a comfort to other animals in need. When they came in shaking and terrified, I'd push some of my food their way. When we let out into the yard, the small dogs scuttled up to me, laid near my stomach and groomed me like a king. At least I was needed.

One day, it all changed. I had begun to think I would be in the steel room the rest of my life. But an old man came in. He was in bad need of grooming. He smelled like bubblegum, sour milk and whiskey. His paws, (ahem, feet) weren't covered all the way. Dogs have built-in shoes. I can only imagine what it would feel like if the pads of my feet wore all the through. Ouch!

Anyway, the next thing I knew I was living in Central Park with this smelly dude. He was alright. But words weren't the easiest thing for me and he didn't annunciate, he mumbled. The more he drank from the steel flask the worse it got. I found this frustrating. He fed me different stuff everyday. A burger one day, a bowl of chili the next. I couldn't be picky, I was getting food in my stomach even if much of it came back up. I was no-name for awhile. He tried to say Sirius but it came out, Serious, Thesaurus, Toys-R-Us. Finally, one night he mumbled something about when he had a driver's license, his last name was Jones. From then on he called me Jonesy.

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So that's me walking in Central Park, New York City. I carry a bone I dug up that another dog buried. If I don't get caught, there are plenty of these in Central Park. If I do get caught I'm an old dog, so that could be the end of me. I'm twelve years old. Un-adoptable if I was put back in the dog prison. I've grown familiar with the old man's bad smells. There are good things about my life now: I don't have to beg to go outside. I get walked all day long. At night, the old man pulls the sleeping bag over us on the cold ground—he falls asleep on my stomach.

I am needed.

