

Animal vs. Animal

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We are about to cross a bridge. We've paid to cross this bridge many times by car, the toll a little more expensive each time until we stopped carrying coins with us. Lighter we wait on the palisade, a sheer drop down to the muddy basin. The cables of the bridge are eminently flexible. The path is concrete. This place has figured prominently in my imagination. The city seethes with movement we are not a part of.

All the while, my Virgil, things are not all right between us. Terrors take hold of you as waters; a tempest steals you away in the night. Some nights we go to bed rich and wake up with nothing. Some mornings are threadbare.

On our separate radios we each keep a constant stream of voices going, for comfort and ground. The overlapping sounds make circles around ellipsing thought. Everything we say to each other trails off and echoes.

Do you call someone else speaking your thoughts an echo? Do you call gestures cut together like film a way of thinking? Do you remember the day our internet connection died amid a thin April snowstorm of blankness settling?

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You were the one who told me I could find footage of any two animals fighting by typing in *animal vs. animal*. Early on we looked at stills and moving images of the dead together. As adults we decided to be healthier about it. Mostly we came across them on our own and showed them to each other, like lending a book one truly loves and getting it back ruined by the sharing. We watched interest in watching grow gradually before taking off exponentially, catching the air like a kite.

That day you were driving, swooning from the altitude, you told me not to close my eyes.

We traverse the mental landscapes of suicides, you more eagerly than I. We relay the best stories. Skiers thrown from an out-of-control ski lift. A shirtless man rapping in Russian over homemade dance music, barely clinging to the beat. A compilation of boys made to smash their Xboxes as punishment. A young man testing katana after katana. *Don't believe lies!* a vegan rockstar shouts. *If you buy the humane lie, that means an animal dies!* A man who can unhinge his jaw and one-pull a handle. That band with a tuba on fire. Endless white guys spinning vinyl. Domino chains keeling, one, the next, the others, forming kaleidoscopic patterns in red, black and sea-green to spell out the name MillionDollarBoy. Bold Guy. Petscop. We slip into a soup of letters, a hell-world.

*This movie sucks
my dick, why are we
still watching it?*

We spend time in a forum dedicated to oddball movies. Canadian detective flicks, budget horror, blockbusters— movies we have no reason to see. Between the films we watch slower violences unfold over the course of people's lives. We are transfixed by an American man and his young bride Yumi. We watch him berate her for forgetting to include ketchup. It is clear she has no idea how to cook. We half-joke about killing the tyrant. We have nothing to report and no one to report to.

We walk through a neighborhood where seizure warnings are everywhere.

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REACTOR

cars unable to
through the fields

a line not moving
where tainted grass comes up

eventually we get out and go on foot
and swallows our cars to their roofs

*

We become addicted to a procedural in which serial killers are routed by a team of forensic profilers. The unit includes a young genius, a computer scientist, a troubled silent detective, a gorgeous blonde press liaison, a chiseled and charismatic Chicago cop, a smart and sexy brunette, one to two agents of color, and investigator turned bestselling crime writer. The computer scientist, a bespectacled ingenue softened by a costume of floral prints and themed hair-thingies, has instantaneous access to all private and public records. Mass surveillance as an office lady clicking away on a keyboard, her fingernails polished as bright as garnets. Finding the killer becomes a matter of search parameters.

*No loose ends, no
irrelevancies, no
time wasted.*

One night we are awake until morning, almost catatonic by the brink. People are drunk, they are leaving; some stick around, shoot the shit. A young man interrupts an older man's soliloquy and starts messing with everybody. Spamming racial slurs and linking explicit pictures. Bragging that he just got tossed from another chat. At any moment the older man can I.P. ban him, an abrupt, silencing effect; the younger would be unable to visit from any device on his network. Not his laptop, not his desktop, not his mom's computer.

Why were you banned there? Were you being an asshole?

kinda, the young man says.

well as long as you're polite, you're not banned here

what do you mean polite

it's contextual

Others are looking on, but they wait.

I was banned here once, the young man says, *but under a different name*

I hadn't done anything

I even messaged you guys

what was your name

I hadn't done anything

what was your name

can you say bitch here or is that not polite

A bitch is a female dog, one of the others chips in.

can you say chicks are hot here

you can say anyone's hot here as long as you do it respectfully

what was your name

I don't wanna tell you, you're making this weird

was it scarydance?

The young man flinches. no that's my name now

I told you

it was something else before

whatever point you're trying to make i don't get it

I'm just trying to say, the older man responds patiently, the person named scarydance isn't banned here

what

ok then.

ok then

Most nights the older man drinks and worries about his mother. He gets paid (not much) to be a live-in caretaker. He survives on vacuum-sealed military rations. Menu 6: Beef Taco, Wet Pack Fruits, Cheddar Cheese Spread, Tortillas, Nuts and Raisins w/ Chocolate Discs, Carbohydrate Electrolyte Beverage Powder, Seasoning Blend Spice. It doesn't take much to get him talking. When the sun comes up he posts a photo of his face. By this time he and scarydance have progressed to flirting. We leave them, turn away, fall asleep.

*The mouth of the bridge
lies in such shadow
I can only guess at figures.*

We await a sign, or expulsion from our camp. We pass time studying portents. Some among us get quite good at it. I receive a rolled-up note that reads *do lunges asap*. Physical shape is another thing some of us get into. Me, I merely look at the walls.

Word comes down that we should be ready. We have been ready. In the mornings the other place disappears in fog.

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Some days when I was in the hole
I could hear you rustling in yours
though you tried—I heard you trying—
not to make any noise. No sound
of you taking off your jacket or shoes,
crawling into bed fully-dressed for work,
unable to bring yourself to bring yourself to.

I went by instinct as much as anything.
I bit down waited for a meadow.