

I'M YOUR COCKER SPANIEL

VIRGINIA SOILEAU

Don't pity me;
my mournful eyes
and happy smile
are my disguise.
Wagging my tail
with tortured delight;
bruised pain I keep hidden
behind lonely fright.
Betrayed and beaten,
yet cute I remain;
blissfully happy
to hide all my pain.
The might of your anger
and sting of your hand
bring soft tears to my eyes
because I don't understand.
But worse is the fear
of being alone...
the loss of those moments
of rare kindness you've shown—
I'll keep forever these nights,
at the foot of your bed,
and if I do a good deed
there's a pat on my head.
My lover, my master,
to you I submit,
as I cower in corners
from the lashes I'll get.

A slap to my face,
and a boot to my ribs—
punish this dog
for all of her sins!
Will I know that I'm worthless
if I simply don't hear
your hatred and yells
as I whimper in fear.
The pain you unleash
on this spirit you've claimed,
sits silently muzzled...
head lowered...ashamed.
"Bad dog! Now sit—
disloyal little bitch!
You know not to bark...
you deserve to be hit!"
Each bruise a remembrance
that Master was there;
if I didn't do bad,
he might even care.
But don't pity me,
my mournful eyes;
just let me love him
and believe my own lies.
I'll remain loyal
for a moment without sobs;
but I guess it's my fault
for being a bad dog.

SEARCHING FOR FREEDOM

ERIKA WIGREN

(Alcatraz, 1937)

Ralph stared at the worn pages of *The Count of Monte Cristo*. The once crisp pages from his favorite book were frayed and torn, its spine weak from his habit of bending the pages backward behind its cover.

The collision of Ralph's thoughts with the ruckus of the prison's mess hall made it hard for him to focus.

"Can I join you?"

A tray dropped onto the table in front of Ralph, startling him. Ralph looked up from his book, locking eyes with a pudgy man smiling from ear to ear. Ralph hadn't met him in person yet but he would have had to be stupid to not recognize the famous gangster from the newspapers. He was a short, balding man with a bulging nose and fat lips—Al Capone.

"Mr. Capone..." Ralph began, shifting uncomfortably in his seat.

"Please," he said waving him off and sitting down across from him. "Call me Al."

Ralph nodded and quickly glanced around the mess hall—the Gas Chamber as he and the other inmates liked to call it. The room was filled with the sound of chatter, utensils scraping trays, and regular yells from the guards. Everyone's eyes seemed to be on other things, no one seemed to care about Ralph's table guest.

"It's Roe, right?"

"Just Ralph," he mumbled, surprised Al knew who he was.

"Well Ralph, I've heard stories about you," he said stuffing a spoonful of pudding in his mouth. "About how you got here anyway. Bank robbing, fighting, trying to break out from McAlester. And your old partner, uh, what was his name again? William?"

Ralph locked eyes with Al, unsure of what he was getting at.

"Wilbur."