

### Vignette on Good

Joe was taken aback to hear his cat had been mauled by a horse. Tweetums had survived, but only because Ms. Harisinghani had saved him from the swollen purple gums gnawing on Tweetums through the wrought-iron fence that surrounded her yard.

Standing idly at attention in his doorway, Joe thought of the just-bloomed orchid that Tweetums had savagely incorporated the day before, and maybe he deserved his mastication a little.

Ms. Harisinghani held out a large Star Market paper bag—gently twitching—and Joe looked in upon an orchid colored cat. He looked back up at Ms. Harisinghani who was apologizing profusely:

I will punish Posy; I will spank Posy; I will bury Posy while she sleeps and leave only her nostrils above ground for a week. Her tears matched her dress: delicate, and a little see-through. Joe looked away, his eyes drawn back to the slowly dampening brown paper bag with a brown-blue star.

Why don't you come in, he mumbled apologetically to the bag as he flapped lamely with it toward his kitchen. Ms. Harisinghani's eyes weren't on the bag. They were on Joe.

Okay, she smiled, perhaps we could decide how to punish the pony over a cup of coffee. Feeling out of breath, Joe closed the tight New England air out behind them. The walls were covered in black ink cat-footprint batik art. The windows were crowded with viny flowers. Tweetums was set on the coffee table and left to recover.

Joe watched the little woman rush haphazardly around his kitchen as one does when trying to appear able to cook without knowing that kitchen's layout in the slightest. Cabinets opened and slammed and Ms. Harisinghani tripped across Joe's lumpy linoleum, almost gracefully.

What do you do for fun, Joe?

Slam.

Joe was more interested in how the morning light silhouetted Ms. Harisinghani through her dress as she clumsily danced past his window. Her armpit. Her knee. Her breast.

I like to paint with my cat.

Slam.

How wonderful! I used to have a little dog once.

Slam.

I was so young, I've forgotten his name. But he used to jump up onto my mantelpiece and sit so still until I would draw him. I wasn't very good, of course, but it satisfied him, and he would jump down straight onto my head, wriggling around.

Sounds like a cute dog. As her eyes held his for a moment, Joe hoped she was seeing her beloved pet. He had been told by several girlfriends and one aunt that his eyes were lovely and soft and wet. Tell me about your dog, Ms. Harisinghani. The coffee was ready now, and they moved to the small table. Their knees collided and their eyes met over the top of the still rustling Star Market bag, now leaking through the bottom like a rotisserie had cracked open during a fast dash through the parking lot.

He was a sweet dog, Ms. Harisinghani replied, He would always nuzzle my hand for treats. Ms. Harisinghani's hand free hand left her mug and lighted itself, wrist first, on the edge of the table in order to avoid the red-blue ooze. Joe quickly grabbed her hand—a little less deftly—and the plastic buttons on his cuff scooped a little of the puddle. Ms. Harisinghani was smiling off at dog heaven:

He was a very sweet dog, but such a rascal. He loved us to death, but he terrorized the neighborhood cats. Ms. Harisinghani stopped herself, shock behind her glasses, and snatched her hand away, knocking the bag on its side. A matted tail rolled out onto the table. I'm so sorry, I forgot. I just forgot. Ms. Harisinghani looked distraught. Joe felt foiled. The tail tapped a single beat of morse code on the table. Joe, I just don't understand why Posy would do this, Ms. Harisinghani spoke softly, through the holes between her teeth. Joe—a quiet and thoughtless man—took his time before answering, in an effort to impress her:

People sometimes say that horses are harmless, just big dogs. But what if dogs are just small horses?