

MEMORY DOG

by Kathleen Ann Goonan

Kathleen Goonan is working on *This Shared Dream Called Earth*, a novel that hinges on the latest research about memory, as does “Memory Dog.” Other recent short story appearances include tales in *The Starry Rift*, a YA anthology from Viking, and *Eclipse 1* from Night-Shade. The paperback edition of *In War Times* will be out soon from Tor. Kathy’s web page is www.goonan.com.

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She is always busy and today the temperature is dropping. So she splits wood and I lie next to her, paws outstretched, belly on cold ground, panting breath outflowing, white. Memory huge and bleeding, not keeping to one track, mammalian but skipping, skipping.

She is ferocious with energy. She is mad. The chips fly everywhere and so do the split logs. Splinter, splinter, splinter: kindling. The insides of trees smell sweet; sharp.

Arnold Wentworth watches from his wheelchair at the window. She is not angry at him. We brought him here. It was an arduous journey. But my kind likes journeys. Their imperativeness pulls us, gives us purpose. We know we will find you, eventually. Take us for a ride, throw us out of the car and drive off. We will think you made a big mistake and make it home again.

Split and long crunch of log-fiber. She does not know me, but I know her. She used to be different, and I was too. I am her memory-device, but she has lost the key. This happened before our memories were beamed down to us; among us. Our thoughts, our feelings, re-edited and re-cut events—some true, some false, but all completely manipulative—emanate from the Allover Station in a constant flood. Some of us knew it was coming, or at least suspected, and took steps. The three of us in our strange symbiosis are immune, but we have to live out here, alone. People would notice. And there are those who want to find us.

A pale flare curves against gathering storm clouds. It comes from Evan’s Ridge, which used to be a tourist town but which is now a rebel stronghold. They have a missile launcher hidden in a bread delivery truck—at least that’s what Jake says. I even hear the small pop when the missile hits the floater, but she cannot; her senses are dimmer than mine.

I would not have guessed how many people just wanted, needed, an excuse to use weapons. Everything went to hell fast—overnight, it seemed, and everywhere. Individuals joyously got out their guns, knives, bombs, and missiles. Nations happily suspended diplomatic relations and declared war. We are safe here, at least today. Elizabeth still believes she can change people, that Arthur's smacks can do that.

The worst memories, the deepest, most searing, and most universal, are inside a small, protective bubble. The bubble is inside of me.

She has no idea.

Perhaps I am loving this too much, watching her, being with her. Putting off what needs to be done. But I am in heaven.

I hear it before her, the low sound of the truck engine, the hiccup of the driver shifting gears, and jump up, stiff, growling. Alerted, she lowers her ax and stands waiting, wondering: is this the time? She picks up the pistol she left on the rock next to the chopping block. "Who is it, girl? Get him, Daisy!"

By now, I've recognized the sound of Jake's truck, relax, and run down the steep hidden road wagging my tail. Jake, a local farmer Elizabeth has known since she was a teenager, brings us supplies. Food, gasoline for the generator so we can save the propane in the big buried tank, and local news. Not regularly. The dead-end tree-hidden dirt road below us also goes to property he owns, so it is far more likely that the smoke from our woodstove would give us away than Jake's visits. But this has been a vacation hideaway for years, so we could be anyone. Jake understands the need for not revealing who we are.

I was cast off, taken for a ride, thrown out of the car, but I came back. I will always come back. I am a dog.

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Rain strikes the leaves, making them shiver. Fall is almost over and they are few. By tomorrow, according to the weathernews that is so submerged in my brain that I no longer have to access it deliberately, the trees will be cloaked in ice.

Jake gone, Elizabeth continues to split wood, glancing at the sky nervously. Weather is just about the only kind of uncorrupted television information she can get now. The rest of television, a million stations, with

no exaggeration, is sheer entertainment, even what they call the news. I call it the Allover Station because every station and all of the news is the same, essentially. The weight of Allover draws everyone in, together, the same way a hearth fire would. It is almost impossible to resist. It is so full of death and murder and pain that we take it for granted that this is the way of the world and nothing can be done.

They are wrong.

Truth comes in the form of newspods, released into the air, drawn hither and yon by the magnetic call of those who swallowed the black-market pill that gives them access to a million independent podders. They call these newspods smacks: you get smacked with the truth, every once in a while; the pod, an electromagnetic bundle of information, smacks your face—really, just a light caress—and then true news—if you believe the source—unfolds within you.

Arnold Wentworth was a smacker, one of the most well-known and respected. The smacks were in the air, tangible things, like seeds adrift in the wind, after we all knew that it was truthuseless on the airwaves. He composed and sent smacks, and they were not the right smacks because they too often told the truth. He was Elizabeth's mentor, and her fury and her wit brought him here. Many people believed Arnold Wentworth—so many that he was considered to be a threat to the government and tortured. Millions of people worldwide took the Arnold Wentworth Pill, disseminated on the black market. All based on the deepest trust, and Arnold, over the years, had earned that trust.

Now only Elizabeth has Arnold's smack code. Only she can release his smacks.

I am a forbidden creature—or at least I would be in Allover. My brain is my entire body, every bit of it pressed into many functions at once, for I am a memory dog, the only one of my kind. I am adrift in places and thoughts that are not really here. *Here* is quickly baring branches, lake marsh behind with ice creeping across its surface, low gray sky and gray geese flying, honking, saying simply go, go, go, their amazing brains taken up by getting there, by magnetism. *Here* is the pile of supplies Jake deposited on the porch before driving away. *Here* is the strict chop of her ax, her low muttered "Fuck them all!" which issues as rhythmically as the downblow of the blade and its thunk into the block beneath the split log, fuck them all, thunk, fuck them all, thunk, fuck them all. The pile of split wood grows. The man watches from the window and I am thankful that I do not have his memories too, for they are hideous.

Here is free from feeling my own memories. Mostly.

I still know them, though. Knowing is a form of enormous selfishness.

I revel, for now, in knowing: Wendy. Jolly. Elizabeth.

And me: Mike. Sometimes I remember. My name is Mike.

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Arnold may heal eventually. He cannot talk, not yet, but is beginning to. He had a stroke—a specially administered stroke. Tears well constantly and creep down his face and he cannot or does not bother to wipe them away.

I nudge his resting hands with my long nose from time to time and his hand sometimes stirs and rests on my head. I get little from him, but whatever I get is becoming stronger. Perhaps he is recovering. From her, I get electric anger, stabbing fury, the energy that still cannot be words. She moves quickly, bringing in armfuls of split wood and clonking them onto the pile next to the hot stove. It is too hot in here, but maybe it is good for Arnold. She hauls in the supplies, too, piling them up on the kitchen table, getting them in out of the rain.

She was not always so angry. She was in love with Arnold. She podded lyrically to him, and the pods, I know, unfolded within him, potent flowers of information, sharp and intense as her, and he could not help answering. After a year of this, he left his wife, and his wife reported him, out of jealousy and sadness, and the government came because of the truth of his pods and now we are left with what-once-was-Arnold.

I am memory. And memory is pain. But I was made strong enough to bear it. For I made myself. I—the self that knows myself—cannot get out of the bargain, the deep-being of my cells. Oh, I could be killed; I could die if injured. I cannot, though, knowingly cause injury to myself. I am like a robot in this regard. I did this because I so often contemplated suicide, so often thought of the tree speeding toward me as I drove, or the wrists in the bathtub, or the gun in the drawer. This dance around oblivion tired me tremendously, but with a long-regarded plan, and then in an instant of strength and resolve, I did away with it.

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Rain turns to snow outside. Elizabeth plays jazz on the radio, even as the Allover Station, behind her, fills the screen with silent written opinion-molding headlines and alerts. Right now we hear an Oscar Peterson piece. It is a special talent of mine, one I was pleased to retain: a jazz encyclopedia. I can tell who plays, instantly, who sings. The sounds are horizontal planes that slide across one another. Mostly they stay distinct, but sometimes, precisely, they intersect. With a dog's fine ears, augmented by songbird genes, I find my pleasure. It is not the only reason I stick with her, but it is a plus: jazz. The wood in the stove snaps and pops. We are a joyous popping rhythm laced with the anger that is always there, that makes her movements quick and impatient, that erodes her heart with anger-generated substances.

She wheels Arnold to the shower room and I pad along behind. I hope it's warm enough now, she says, and unbuttons his shirt, unbuckles his belt, slides off his clothes, tests the temperature of the water, and rolls him under it, wheelchair and all. Water draws his gray-black curly hair straight down his face, over his eyes. Her long, blonde, pulled-back hair holds beads of water in the fine tendrils around her face.

"Juh," he says. "Juh."

"Uh, huh," she says. "Good." But her face does not say good. I think he is trying to say the name of his first wife, Jane. He is saying more consonants now. "Guh." And then, his eyes shift and he looks right at me. "Muh."

Elizabeth twists off the taps and grabs a towel from a pile on a nearby chair. She rubs Arnold's hair. She lifts his chin and looks into his eyes, kisses him swiftly, sighs, and gets his shoulders. "Grab hold," she says and he obediently grasps the bar in front of him and pulls himself up, shaking, his pale skin sagging from his ribs, his chest hair white although he is only fifty. They made him old. She briskly dries his back, his buttocks, the backs of his legs, and plops a dry towel onto the wheelchair seat. "Okay." He gasps and falls back into his chair. She's dried his face, so the wet tracks are new tears. She is gentle; her anger abates when she touches him. I am glad for her; I am sad for her; I am simply a wraith of emotion, rising around her. I nudge her elbow; she pats my head absently.

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After she dries and dresses him, he sits on the couch. He can sit up without falling over. Every day she makes him exercise, moves his limbs, tries to make him reach, or grip, or try to repeat sounds or words after her.

“Kuh,” he says, slowly, drawing out the sound. “Kuuuuuh.”

I lie on my side by the stove into which she has shoved her split logs. The television is on, tuned low. She thinks it helps Arnold. All that is on it is stuff, stuff, stuff. Lies that they call news, celebrities, murders, gossip. A low, growling sigh escapes me as I relax into the warmth.

I think of Arnold’s first face, when they were colleagues, not lovers, and I was Elizabeth’s husband. Are these my memories? Hers? Jolly’s? I no longer know.

That is what is so wonderful.

It is getting too hot in the cabin. I scratch the door, she lets me out, and I lie on the porch, on guard.

Mist flows in and obscures some of the details. Everything is still there, behind the mist, like brilliant red and yellow maples on a far ridge. You know they are there, you just can’t see them. Think of the cloud, with its wind-driven fringes, as beautiful. Think of your mind as weather. Think of your brain as a storm. Arnold is stuck in a storm, locked, unable to move.

Being a dog is a joyful thing.

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First, way back when it was new, it was a memory pill. Yes, say it, memory *drug*. I worked on a lot of the original research. Initially for those who were terribly impaired, it was such a boon that its quick spread to the rest of the population could not be stopped. It was to help people with memory deficits, which is to say most people. And it was to help with useful memories: where did I put the car keys, what the hell is his name? However, it of course did not distinguish between users who were terrifically impaired and the rest of us. And, most importantly, it did not sort memories as to importance. It bypassed mechanisms that do such things. It turned up all the signals. So it became the drug of choice for anyone who could lay hands on it. The possible dangers were trumpeted by the press, but if you could enhance your doctoral, legal, or high-school pop-quiz performance, why not? It raised the bar for everyone. Real and counterfeit pills, injections, and patches were for sale in the third world and in the school parking lot.

The world was awash in memories.

They were all imperative. People wrote memoirs, previously the domain of those obsessed with the past, just to take the pressure off. The intense numinosity of memories caused constant reruns of one's life; memory overload became a common plea in traffic accidents. The memory of a grievous wrong sharpened and would not let the wronged one rest until it was avenged. One way or another, when we are stretched out of our previous shape, we jostle the status quo in ways we could not have predicted. So here we all went, our memories stretched and teeming with visual, audible replays, as if we were all schizophrenics, into a well-to-be-remembered future.

For some—writers, painters, musicians, those who dealt in emotions—the memory drug was a boon. It produced a heightening of affect. The present always led to the past; the past was therefore always present, layered and linked and resonant with longing, love, and resolution—or hate, revenge, plots laid and hatched and brought to fruition and the results lived with. And lived with. Inescapably. Christian churches, with their confession and absolution, experienced a resurgence. We were all evil, deeply evil, and could not forget it; we could only hand over the guilt to an almighty being. Or we remembered joyous, pagan interconnectedness with nature, danced in circles, and our minds floated into a golden ether of faeries, dwarves, witches, tree-gods, and druids. Whatever. I'm telling you, the whole thing was a godawful mess.

It was not all bad. Some learned to control their memories. The visual used pictures or objects to set off links of associations.

Meditation, emptying one's mind, became big. Our minds and memories tortured us. Forgetting was a blessing.

Many people had permanent memory-release modules implanted in their bodies, and some, like myself, were genetically engineered to produce the necessary enhancing chemicals.

I will never forget the whole of Elizabeth's being after Wendy, our three-year-old, died.

That, and my own grief, and Jolly's, is the key that I hold.

* * * *

It really was my fault.

Because, Elizabeth screamed, after we came home from the hospital, gently ejected from the E.R. and then the chapel and then the lobby after Wendy was pronounced dead, I had taken too many memory drugs, too much of them, and could no longer pay attention to the simplest thing.

“Mike! You didn’t even know she was out in the street!”

It was true.

I can see the various angles of Elizabeth’s fury-stretched face, her anger-stunned eyes, her chest heaving as she gasps for breath, hear the hoarseness of her voice as it devolves into small shreds of sound. Her face is mottled red, like some pale, mineral-dappled stone, and her straight blonde hair is pasted onto her cheeks by tears. Her smell is of sweat too, sharp, one she has never had before. It tastes sour and unpleasant.

This grief is memory, and it is Jolly’s memory, for our collie rushed out the front door after Wendy, tried to keep her from the road, the neighbor who was also running toward her at the time told us. When we got back from the hospital, Jolly ran to Elizabeth, emitting hoarse barks, licking the back of her hand, pawing at her leg, and then jumping up, planting her paws square on Elizabeth’s chest, barking like fury right in her face until Elizabeth drew Jolly tightly to her and they both collapsed backwards onto a chair, Elizabeth crying, Jolly licking her face as she was never, never allowed to do, while I stood dumb and stunned and empty.

The next day, Jolly disappeared. We knew she was looking for Wendy, trying to find her and bring her back. As Elizabeth made funeral arrangements I walked the neighborhood, and later that night while Elizabeth sobbed I called “Jolly!” out the car window, driving slowly down nearby roads. I put up signs. The next morning, while I was walking into the dog pound, Elizabeth called my cell phone. “A man just found Jolly in a ditch next to Bartello Street. Down where it curves.” Her voice was flat. She thought Jolly’s death was my fault too. She was probably right. I was supposed to fix the fence. I hadn’t.

I went and lifted Jolly from the ditch. He was stiff. I took him down the road to our vet’s and asked that he be flash-frozen. They do this all the time at the vet’s; people don’t always have time to deal with their dead pets immediately. “Step back,” he said, as he lifted Jolly’s shrink-wrapped body into the open freezer, but I didn’t and tears froze on my face.

I was not fit to be a person. I wasn’t fit to be alive at all. Not any more.

I shared Elizabeth's opinion in this matter.

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After everything was done with, after we buried Wendy, after I realized that Elizabeth would never speak to me again and with good reason, I watched her take up with Arnold who was a good man, an exemplary man, a man dedicated to the good of humankind and not addicted to memory pills. You would never find him standing in a daze in his kitchen being perhaps his grandmother cutting carrots in a another high-ceilinged marble-tabled kitchen while his toddler wandered out the door. He was definitely not me.

I decided to become a dog.

I would doggedly survive. Perhaps at some point I could be of use to Elizabeth.

Oh, of course, the form and deep being of many creatures were inviting to me, as I contemplated. The long life and intelligence of elephants, of parrots. The interior brilliance of panthers, snow leopards, tigers. Yet I could have them all, in this form: the dog.

No mammal save the human kills itself. But there was no room for big cats, or elephants, where I was going to live: in this world of humans. Was it penance, of a sort? I cannot say I do not remember, for that is about all I do. But there are rooms I do not go into. I do not go into the room of Wendy. There is no understanding that room.

I admire Elizabeth. She lives in the room of Wendy. Still. That is her anger. I cannot get in the door, because I am Dog. Wendy, the true real room of Wendy, is in the smack I so carefully composed, encased in its protective bubble. I have locked myself out. If I went in the door I would kill myself. And that is something I cannot do. Understanding is in the hands of God and God does not exist. There are many logical conundrums on the threshold of Wendy's door, and, as a dog, I am free to not examine them.

It was not really much of a decision. I remember those days as great swaths of scent, of grief-smelling spring wind that Wendy would never again smell, the green rich sea-smell, fresh and mineral-damp when I lifted a handful of wet sand to my eyes to see what she had seen, translucent prisms of obsidian green, pure true brown, golden sharp-planed bits that dried and blew away before I could move, so perhaps I was already inclined to dog, thinking in dog-memories of overwhelming smell. I guess

that somewhat distantly I was considering my options and I can see so much more clearly now what I was thinking, as I have said: the elephant; the cat. Animal seemed the only option: to change shape; to give misery a different vessel, a different shape in which to bounce its energy about, as if emotion were the straight geometry of billiards. On this day, I saw a dog running down the beach between a man and a woman. Their child ran with the dog and grabbed his long black tail. The dog twisted free, frolicked and leapt, and he seemed happy.

I craved the relief of what looked like simple happiness.

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That afternoon I drove back from the beach, went to the big-mart, and loaded up on dog food. Ellie Wills was in the next line; we all shop at the big-mart now, even for a gallon of milk.

“I thought your dog died.” Then she looked aghast and embarrassed for an instant, remembering my greater loss.

I pretended not to see the look. “I’m thinking about getting another one.”

“What kind?”

Huh. What kind. A dog-like dog. Wag, bark, happy.

“Another collie.”

“Collies are stupid.”

I’d never much liked Ellie Wills, but for an instant I purely loathed her. “No they’re not,” I said, bristling in advance for my future self, and for dear Jolly.

It was the right choice for various reasons. I wouldn’t want to be a menace; collies are kind, not inclined to viciousness, and filled with love like me, bursting with love, with infinite flavors of regret.

I wiped my eyes. “I’ve got a cold.”

“I know,” she said. “I’m so sorry about Wendy. It’s not your fault.”

I reeled with memories not just of Wendy but of everything,

everything, echoing into forever, and reached for the seventy-five-pound bag and hauled it onto the belt.

“Any coupons?” asked the check-out clerk.

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Love has no pride.

I needed Elizabeth. She did not need me. She despised and hated me. She wished me dead. So when I left the note saying that I was leaving and that she should not try to find me I am sure she did not grieve. She was probably relieved.

There was penance, too, in my decision to become a dog. I had enough reason to feel guilty, certainly; enough for several men for several lifetimes, even without the weight of Wendy. Because of what we did to the snails, the mice. We transferred memories from one mouse to the other. Memories of how to run the maze. Then we killed them, casually, by the thousands. It was the job of a grad student, his or her choice about how to do it. But that was long before the drug, long before my addictive hypermnesia, the opposite of amnesia: remembering everything; having, even, mental events that you think are memories but which are not.

Dr. Lorenzo, at first horrified, finally agreed after hearing my whole story, after knowing who I was and what I had done and why it was so necessary to me. I had read of her work for years in journals; we had spoken at the same international meetings. I offered myself as an experiment. There was no paper trail, none at all—so both of us knew that actually it was too subjective to be any kind of an experiment. It was a favor to me. For all she knew, she was murdering me, but I easily convinced her that otherwise I would kill myself anyway, because it was true.

It took me several months in the lab to distill the essence I was after. Almost all of us are able to feel grief and loss. But it is so painful and overwhelming that we soon become numb, in various degrees. Some of us can kill others without feeling any remorse. We can justify it. Others of us are capable of causing pain on a large scale. We command armies and call it necessary and civilized.

What might change this?

Arnold Wentworth had his ideas.

I had mine.

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Becoming a dog: I cohabited gently, slowly. The initial work took weeks. It was a matter of the cells remembering; deep memories, cross-species, the work of a brilliant memory-master, experimental and forbidden. And: remember: we could do specific. So from Jolly, frozen since her death, I got Jolly's Wendy, and Jolly's extreme grief. We could also do long-term change. We could fix an emotion, a vision, a scene, in long-term memory by precisely implanting specific molecules of one brain into the other.

In the early days of memory work, we learned how to change the neurostructure of mice in various ways. We took out genes or inserted them. We traced protein encoding; we traced the precise mechanisms by which long-term memories survive in the brain. By then, we were able to transfer exact memories—how to run the maze; what color symbolized an exit; what sound meant food—from one mouse to another. Behavior was then replicated without the experience needed by the first mouse to form the memory.

That was the dawn, years ago. There were many more steps to go, much more to learn, before we reached the final, complex product: me. The puppy had preparatory genetic work done; the infusion of identity structures—mine—distilled from a myriad of information Dr. Lorenzo retrieved from my human body. I am, perhaps, a precursor. Perhaps not. My reasons for becoming a dog are unique, and neither the process, as it stands now, nor the product, would be approved by any government.

The puppy, so new, welcomed me, not surprised, and our neurons intertwined quickly, for she was growing like all new things, swiftly, her brain branching and branching. I thought I could keep out of her way; I had no real wish to use her body in any way other than to be near Elizabeth. But it was inevitable that we become one.

It was just my way of driving into a tree.

I am happy with the results. I am always happy, now. I am a dog.

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I had to learn to be a dog. At first it was awkward to have four legs, but then it was liberating. I surprisingly remembered what it was like to be

human and a toddler, like Wendy, so low to the ground. As I tumbled along on four short legs, I remembered my own two short ones, the sense of growth and maturity I'd felt when finally I could balance on one leg, take the next step, then balance on that leg, and take the next step, instead of putting both feet on each step at the same time. In six months I had grown to be an almost-full-sized female collie, tricolored.

I was cast off, taken for a ride, thrown out of the car, for the wrong I did, for my deep negligence as a human, but I came back. But it was my own ride, and I will always come back, now. I am a dog.

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One of Dr. Lorenzo's grad students released me near my old house, as agreed, though she hadn't a clue about anything. The student loved me. She'd walked and fed me for weeks. She scratched behind my ears, patted my side heartily, called Dr. Lorenzo three times to make sure. "I can't just leave her here." Doglike, I loved the student so much that I wouldn't have minded staying with her, but she obeyed my previous instructions, sternly relayed by Dr. Lorenzo, and put me out eventually.

As you see, this was no remedy for my problem, as I had hoped. Already the minutiae of memory crowded round. But it was intimate memory, the memory of learning how to control one's own body, the second sensory explosion my own consciousness, my own identity, had experienced. My love of the world returned, and my guilt receded. For a time.

First, I walked doubtfully down the sidewalk. Next, I trotted, and then galloped, liquid memory, a mere outline of a dog, through which flowed images, smells, imperative, striking me fully in the brain, loudly, immediately, like a live symphony orchestra. The spring earth was thawing, rich and damp. I scrambled beneath the fence, using the same hole Jolly used to escape, which I ought to have boarded up but, assailed with too much memory, paradoxically forgot to do. I ran to the basement crawl space door, pushed away its rotted door, and bellied inside. I ripped through the industrial-strength plastic bag I'd wrapped the dog food in and crunched down on the brown, intensely delicious nuggets. Upstairs I heard Lester Young on the stereo, and Arnold. "What's for dinner?" he said.

What's for dinner? The bastard didn't even cook for her. I barked.

"What's that?" she said, and her voice thrilled me. A million instants like stars shot through me in the underhouse darkness: her.

I barked again, and ran around to the front door, squealing and jumping up onto the door. She opened it and laughed. “Look, Arnold. A collie!”

“I see.”

She opened the door and let me in.

I ran to every corner, sniffing joyfully, whining and emitting small barks, smelling her and smelling Elizabeth and Wendy and Jolly and our whole lives. I smelled this that and the other thing. I was bursting with the joy and sadness of the past. I ran into every room—her office; mine; the kitchen, faster than fast, at four-legged dog-speed, scrabbling and twisting as if bringing a gazelle to ground. Elizabeth laughed hard, with great joy. I shook myself into a frenzy, wheeling and barking until Elizabeth grabbed me and said Hey, HEY. She looked into my eyes and for an instant I thought she knew.

But how could she?

“Someone’s lost him,” said Arnold. “We need to call the dog pound.”

“Her. She doesn’t have a collar.”

“Someone will be looking for her. Dogs like this don’t grow on trees.”

No, we grow in labs.

I licked her face. I swallowed her memories.

A rumble arose in my chest and I transmuted it into a sharp bark. Elizabeth reached down, ruffled my head-fur, and I happily danced, all dog, threw in a few leaps. Elizabeth said, “She stays.”

Arnold’s scent was slightly sour. He smiled. “Whatever you want, honey.” His eyes, when he looked at me, were irritated. I didn’t care. He was not the boss.

She was.

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Memory is anatomical change. Period. Neuronal change. Synaptic

change.

Aplysia, a giant marine snail, has few brain cells, compared to mammals, and they are comparatively large. It was a good subject for early memory studies. It is a beautiful marine animal, its head arching up and around, topped by what looks like fronds of a stubby palm. However, it is usually ensconced in its shell, so you can't see all of that. It is a hermaphrodite.

Training creates actual anatomical changes.

Memory is physical.

I wanted to remember love. I wanted to remember Elizabeth and Wendy. I wanted to remember the extraordinary web of being in which I had lived, and because I did not know whether or not the experiences that you or I might call "bad"—the disappointments, the setbacks—might have contributed to the overall flavor of that being, like a wash of one pigment over another gives a watercolor depth or a pinch of spice gives a dish an indefinable flavor and because, let's face it, I was a memory addict, I wanted it all. All of it in the skull of a dog.

The heads of true collies are not pinched, and they are herding dogs, so their memories have to do with the big picture, and being bossy, and with speed, direction, and following complex signals. Their long, flowing coats are beautiful. I chose to be a female because I did not want to be reflexively aggressive.

Because I wanted to be like Jolly.

Lying at Elizabeth's feet, I knew I had made the right choice.

* * * *

After they were in bed, that first night, I padded to the door of Wendy's room.

This was not the room of Wendy that is inside me, the room I made, the room I can't go into, the room full of pain. This was her real, lovely, physical room, frilly purple and green like she wanted. Moonlight stretched across the bed, washed the pillows. Rumble, her beloved teddy bear, lay there, stub arms outstretched, his black bead eyes facing the window.

I whined. I stretched out on my belly, put my chin on the floor.

I howled, and was surprised. I did not know I could howl. It was a truly mournful sound, a soul-releasing “Owooooo!”

“Goddammit!” Arnold’s voice.

“Shhh. It’s okay. Get back in bed.”

I still had teeth; I could bite if I decided to do so. My growl was low, but sufficiently ferocious. When I heard Elizabeth’s moans through the doorway (they did not bother to close the door) I could have shot through that doorway, leapt onto the bed, and torn out Arnold’s throat. Rapid pictures filled my mind. Elizabeth’s naked legs, parted for me.

I padded to the kitchen, tipped over the garbage can. “What’s that?” I heard Elizabeth say, and then whatever Arnold did made her shriek with delight. I teased a trail of chicken bones and rotted vegetables across the kitchen floor and cracked the delicious bones between my teeth. Bacon grease drooled onto the rug beneath the dining room table.

Deeply satisfied, I trotted back to Wendy’s room. Without pausing, I leapt onto her bed, curled up, took Rumble in my mouth, and fell asleep, my mind a train wreck, a bonfire, an amusement park, of memories. A slide show. I saw it all going one way, each snapshot: Elizabeth’s slow joy at realizing our love, a lazy morning in a sunstruck St. Paul hotel room, her smile across the table at the diner the day she found out she was pregnant. Fast, flash, flash, flash.

Now I was going away. Seeing it all from the other side.

* * * *

“We have to take her to the pound!” Arnold’s voice was reedy when it rose. “She’s ruined the rug. It’s a very good rug, isn’t it?” He sounded hopeful.

I was sitting rather far away, in the living room, half-behind a chair, trying to be small. Elizabeth was on her knees with some cleaner and paper towels. It was her grandmother’s Oriental rug. “It’s all right.”

“I don’t think so.”

She looked up at him and said sharply, “It’s my rug, Arnold, and it’s all right.”

A thrill shot through me.

* * * *

I have two brains. My human brain is evenly distributed throughout my dog body, intertwined with everything else. It makes what we call thinking slow, since distances to be traveled are greater. This was a decision I made. I wanted to be able to control my body easily, and therefore the dog brain needed to be where it has been for hundreds of thousands of years. The dog brain is on tap. It is ready.

But where was *I*? *What* was I?

I was a religious experience. I was, and am, Awe of Elizabeth. I was able to lie next to her on the bed, feel her hand absently play with my fur as she read, which is something that my human self would never have felt again. I was, I *am*, the future I never would have had, I am life beyond death.

After a weak, "I don't want that dog in the bed," Arnold succumbed. "You don't want the dog in the bed, but I do," she replied, calmly, firmly, and leaving him with no doubt about his choices.

* * * *

We are in that heaven that all the saints so longed for and predicted, pens scritch across rough vellum in damp towers, heads bent beneath sputtering candles. Heat, ample light, plenty, near-infinite knowing. But man is still enemy to himself, and man still must find god within himself to go beyond the oppression; the killing. And first, he must find killing wrong. That seems to be a sticking point in some parts. What if, suddenly, we all simply could not kill. If it was impossible. Memory drugs might do this.

I left my grad students with a particular prototype. If everyone had it, if it became active all at once, all wars, all firing, all missiles, would stop. Men in bars, poised to cut during the Saturday Night Knife and Gun Club boys' night out would drop their knives. Women in the Air Force with a load of cluster bombs would overfly without pressing the button. Any death would be accidental, not intentional. No revenge.

How would we pass our time? How would we spend our money?

Oh, there were a million problems with this drug, no probability that it

would be brought to production in my lifetime. It was just a dream, and there was just one dose, one infinitely expandable dose, which had never been tested. I distilled it into pure smack-quality intensity and kept it, then handed the information over to Juanita, the brightest and best, the most committed, the most feisty, the one who could muster the most money. The most likely to succeed.

I *did* have a plan ... what was it?

The memory key. Yes. That's it. My dog self sometimes forgets.

When I remember Juanita, I feel hopeful. Glad.

But I am a dog. Gladness is my nature.

* * * *

I found that I could read.

At first, it was slow going. Elizabeth had left the newspaper on the floor, open to the Sunday funnies. I tried lying down on top of the paper and looking at it between my paws, but I had to back up, and finally I stood and looked down at it. This was especially painful. I imagine that stroke patients might feel this way—the loss of an especially treasured skill.

But then, it came together! A sharp bark! I danced! It was just the brain-slowness, the long journey of the information—

“Look,” said Arnold. “You’d think that silly dog could read.”

Elizabeth glanced over and looked at me very thoughtfully. I reached down with my head, grasped the edge of the dry newspaper in my teeth, held the page down with my paw, and tore it in half. I am just a silly dog. What is printed on the paper means nothing to me.

“No!” she said, jumping up and grabbing the newspaper.

But she continued to look at me thoughtfully just the same.

Well, I no longer had to worry about such things. I was a dog.

* * * *

Wendy, still, was everywhere in the house. I ran through it every

morning as if a spell struck me; I sniffed frantically, disconsolate, while Arnold worked, composing his dangerous, seditious smacks, which said that the government had been subverted by evil men and that we must all take action. His smacks were, and are, full of specificity; his research was superb. I know; I was quite aware of him before Wendy died; he was Elizabeth's colleague. Her smacks were quieter, but smoothly ferocious, with sharp, sudden legal barbs, like those of sea creatures, emerging to puncture arguments and positions. They really were two of a kind.

Occasionally he said lie down and be quiet, but didn't move from his chair, or even move his eyes from his screen.

That particular morning, Elizabeth was out, teaching. The house, with pale winter sunlight striping the dark wood floor, seemed empty; Arnold was invisible to me. I sensed that things were no longer all that good between Arnold and Elizabeth, but I didn't care. I was deeply happy just to be near her.

In the afternoon, I jumped up on Wendy's bed, took Rumble gently in my jaws, and stretched out, aching. Arnold came to the doorway and looked at me.

"You shit," he said. "You think I don't know what's possible? I'm working on it." As he walked away, shaking his head, he muttered, "But sometimes a dog is just a dog. Right? Right? Of course."

I'm a dog, I barked. I'm a dog, dog, dog.

"Shut up," he yelled, and went back into his office.

* * * *

A few hours later, I heard him shout "God damn it!" He staggered from his office and leaned against the doorframe of Wendy's room. I rolled my eyes to look at him. He let loose with a sob, dropped his head into his hands, reeled, and walked away.

I ran to his side, curious, a dog, overwhelmed by his scent. His pure, political goodness engulfed me. How did this smell? Oddly, like the ocean. Several kinds of sea. An openness. This apparently did not translate into personal openness—he was jealous of a dog, and that stunk—but he was famous for this sea-goodness, and for the sheer efficaciousness of his sea-wrath, a pounding ceaseless wave of good sense he released daily from relayed locations, helping to keep people open-minded. In a world

where we could choose to become dogs, we could quite easily be made into dogs without choosing. Right?

Right. And that was just a small taste of the nasty possibilities. So he was quite necessary.

He also emanated the scent of something-bad-has-happened: worry, defeat, fear.

I returned to the bed, jumped onto it, and bit down tightly on Rumble.

* * * *

Elizabeth came home flushed and angry. “You wouldn’t believe what they’ve done!” She slammed the door behind her.

I dashed to her, danced around—carefully, so carefully, not jumping up. She crouched down, hugged me. She was crying. “They let me go! Fired me! I have tenure, but ... Oh, hell!”

Then Arnold was there pulling her away, up, giving her a long, tall hug, saying, “I know, honey, I know. Look, we have to get out of here. I’ve been packing. It’s my fault. It’s me.”

After I crawled onto Wendy’s bed, I rested my head on Rumble, who was very damp.

It was not Elizabeth’s fault. It was not Arnold’s fault. Every bad thing in the world was my fault. My memory fault. My memory addiction fault.

But I would fix it.

* * * *

Outside, the sky was raining hate. Small pictures of Arnold descended and popped, and neighborhood kids led the police to our house and they dragged him away. I realized that he had been in hiding. There would have been better places.

Elizabeth was magnificent, promising many specific forms of legal action, even when they threatened her too.

They did not take Elizabeth, which, I think, made her more angry. They only took Arnold, said that he was a traitor and that they did not need

any further legal justification for taking him. They shoved him in a truck that had a government insignia on it and that was that.

We stood on the wintry stoop. The gray sky backgrounded darker gray trees, and the mundane houses of the neighborhoods, their yards yellow and brown, seemed the saddest place in the world.

My dogness kept back the surging memory of seeing Wendy lying on the street on a similar day. I was that strong, that much dog, my humanness, my Mikeness, firmly tamped into my paws, the tip of my tail, my entrails. And I knew what she was thinking: Loss. Nothing but loss.

She collapsed onto the stoop, put her head in her hands, and cried. I pressed next to her, licked her salty tears. She put her arm around me.

I was sad for her. I was glad of the moment; deeply satisfied, and some yearning was settled, for just that tipping instant. Finally, I could be of some use to her, if only as a furry animal into which she could press her face, and sob, and hug me so tightly that my entire being rejoiced.

* * * *

They were watching Elizabeth, of course, her information paths, with their computers, but she knew the triggers as she had defended clients against their prying. Besides, they have so many people to watch. She knew the back alleys to the back alleys, all the ways to make her searches innocuous, all the ways to subvert their attempts. And she found out where they took Arnold.

She talked to me, of course, all the time, told me everything she did and everything she planned to do. She forgot to eat, and became very thin, and ran twice a day, with me at her side, and got strong.

By that time, I knew that Arnold would never die, not for her. "He left an entire library of smacks," she said. "These people are so predictable. He said that tyrants always are. I'll only have to modify each one a bit to make it perfectly up-to-date when I release it."

They will know you are doing it, I barked. I barked straight at her, standing up, as if I were talking to her. I heard each word in my head as I barked. I thought of plans. I could tear out tiny newspaper words and assemble them for her. I could talk to her if I really wanted to.

No. *Mike* could talk to her. I knew quite well that she would throw Mike

out of the house, onto the street. She would never let Mike back in. She really could not suspect who I was. She was already puzzled at times.

She leaned back in her computer chair, tired and anxious. "They'll know it's me, of course. If they take me, I'll be of no use. But if I do nothing, I'm of goddamn little use either. Hell."

For three days, then, she packed. She went into the garage and got out all of our old camping and backpacking gear, our emergency flee-the-government food about which we laughed, but nervously, when we assembled it years ago. The smells of it all threw me into ecstasies of a million hikes. One year, we hiked the entire Appalachian Trail. When we started in Georgia, in the spring, red trilliums dotted the slopes of the mountains. Our tent smelled of Gore-Tex, a few steps removed from plastic, and as she unrolled it and set it up in the garage to see if it was still good I went inside, breathed deeply, and, if I could have, I would have cried. I curled up there on the sleeping bags she tossed into the door, enveloped in a deeply scented panacea of the past. The good times. Us.

"I know where he is," she said. "And the government is going down. It will be chaos. He won't be at all useful; he'll be killed. Here's the plan. Listening? Good dog. I've got an aunt with a cabin in the north Georgia mountains. Her name is Cecile. She's very old, hasn't gone there for years. But first, we have to get him."

Why? I thought. We don't need him. My traitor tail, though, thumped in agreement, ringing against a Coleman stove she'd shoved inside.

I wanted all of her, everything, just like I had when we'd met. I wanted that still, her first wagon ride, the day she'd fallen from the monkey bars and broken her arm, the feeling she'd had when she launched from Cove Mountain, into the wind, her arms in the hang gliding loops, moving the bar. When we met, we'd talked and talked, trying to get to that place where we would be one, the same person.

* * * *

Where does memory reside? We do not know. It is a system, a process, a constant recreation. What accounts, then, for its specificity? I'd transfused blood from one white mouse to another, after giving them the memory drug. I watched the new mouse run the maze, which it had never before run, perfectly. Strange but true. All that information, so compact, just needing the medium into which to expand.

I was that medium, now. I was like water. Elizabeth and Jolly and Wendy were the folded Japanese paper flower that would unfold inside me.

* * * *

She packed the truck, tied down everything beneath a tarp. The back seat of the truck was full of electrical equipment which might soon be useless. Cecile had a generator, and a huge buried propane tank, and when that was gone, that would be it.

Elizabeth took all the money she had in the bank, all the jewelry, odd things she thought might be useful for barter. One night she went next door and traded Mr. Monroe's license plates for ours. "He'll never notice," she said, bolting them onto the truck. She was ready to go get Arnold and head for the hills.

Inside the hollow garage, sounds were magnified. I heard the car come up the street and jumped to my feet. It was three in the morning.

"What is it, girl?" and then she froze too. "Shhhh." She held me tightly, and then held my mouth shut, too.

Footsteps, coming up the walk. A thump.

The car sounds receded down the street.

She hurried through the dark house, opened the front door.

It was Arnold, tossed like a package onto the doorstep. He was naked, bloody, bruised, curled up, moaning.

"Oh, no!" She tried to pick him up, but he was too heavy. She pulled him onto the hall rug, slammed the door. "Arnold! Arnold!"

He opened his eyes. They were empty. Except for the tears.

* * * *

She had her mother's wheelchair and walker and all kinds of old folk equipment in the attic. She worked quickly, fury in every motion. From taking care of her mother, she knew how to position him, how to hoist him into the truck. When she was finished, his clothes were packed, he was wearing a diaper, wheelchair and walker were in the back of the truck. He

stared straight ahead.

The last thing she put in the truck was Rumble. Slowly; sadly, almost as if she wanted to leave Rumble, leave Wendy, behind. She sighed and locked the house door. She said, “Come on, girl.” I jumped into the truck, between her and Arnold, and sat up so I could see where we were going.

Everything seemed in order outside. The fast food chains were doing a brisk business; the parking lots at grocery stores were crowded, like before a blizzard, but there was no hysteria. Perhaps no one really understood how long this might last. It was a government coup—them against us. It was spreading, as if a virus had engulfed the entire world. Maybe it had, spread by Allover.

After we had driven for most of the day, she pulled off a narrow country road and lifted a portable podcaster from the back seat, tucked it beneath her arm. She thrashed through the woods for a few minutes, found a flat rock, set it up, and turned it on.

It is a magnetic thing, the podding; the smacks. It is a precise frequency, except that it is constantly changing in order to elude the government, and you swallow it, and it disseminates into your cells and stays there for a while. That’s all. You are an antenna, constantly conducting a blisteringly fast search, and you get Arnold’s new smack. Or whoever’s. Arnold’s, as I said, was by far the pill most swallowed. Internationally. He was the most true, most courageous. Most energetic.

The most dangerous.

This setup would just help disguise the source.

She stood up straight and dusted off her hands. “There. They’ll find it pretty soon—maybe. If they have time. It’s kind of like a chain of bubbles, though. One will release several, and those will release several. Time-delayed. Some for years. Mike and I went to Czechoslovakia right after it was returned to independence, in 1989. There was a museum exhibit there of all of the lost years, the years during which they’d been allowed no news. It was called Lest We Forget. Well, this is my Lest We Forget.”

My laugh, and my tears, were just a bark.

* * * *

A slight snow spits outside the cabin. Elizabeth has made it cozy and warm for Arnold. It is too hot for me, but I would rather stay in here with people than go outside and be comfortable. I am a dog.

I lie on the couch so I can look over Elizabeth's shoulder while she works. She is in touch with a hacker.

"I think he's in the Netherlands," she says to Arnold. "His name is The Great and Powerful U. You, get it? All of us; one of us. But maybe U is a woman." She takes a sip of coffee and resumes her work.

All the hackers want to figure out a universal hack that will leave us bare to one strong message, one big smack. But what will that message be? Most hackers don't really care. They just want to open everything up. For them, it's a game, a challenge. For most people, it's the ultimate fear: mind control.

But U seems to be addicted to Arnold's smacks. She believes in him, in his messages of the importance of truth and transparency. Every day, U posts, somewhere, about the latest smack that Elizabeth has brought up-to-date and released.

What is the truth? I know what the truth is. Truth is loss, death, grief, and pain, and knowing the preciousness of each individual. Truth is living always on that edge. Truth is trying to prevent all that from happening. Humans have a special way of forgetting truth, of not thinking about what others might feel. Have I said it? Memory is physical.

Knowing can be changed.

I slowly lick the white top of my paw, straighten the curly fur into smooth lines, feel with my tongue the smack-bump inside. It is just a tiny bump, but it is powerful. It contains the essence of what I distilled in the lab.

My brain is storm.

* * * *

Much later, when it is dark and Elizabeth is making dinner, I lie on the floor, still licking the smack-bump. It itches. In front of me is the local newspaper which Jake brought and which Elizabeth tossed onto the floor. There is news of local militias, an ad for hen-fresh eggs on Angle Ridge Road, obituaries. I move my head so I can see the next page.

“Mi,” says Arnold. “Kuh.”

I start, as if I’ve had an electric shock. My tongue pauses. My ears swivel. I turn my head to look at him. I can’t help it.

I know that the weird expression on his face is a smile.

* * * *

How would he have known? I told you, his research network was astounding. He could find out anything he wanted to. He worked on many edges. Maybe he had a pod about what I’d done waiting in his library. He might even have tracked down Dr. Lorenzo, held her feet to the coals, forced her to talk.

It doesn’t matter now.

* * * *

I am asleep on the couch, but her sudden snort wakes me around one in the morning.

“Ha,” she breathes. Her computer screen glows, the little keys are lit from within. The only other light is from the stove, where the fire flickers with soothing snaps. Arnold snores on the bed.

“U did it,” she breathes. “She made the hack.” Elizabeth starts the download. “Now, we’ve got them. Every fucking person in the world, no matter what kind of smack they usually get, no matter whose pill they’ve swallowed. And we’ve got to get to them first.” She watches the screen, sighs. “Damn, this computer is slow.”

* * * *

It is dawn. I am on the porch. Elizabeth is inside, frantically modifying pods, as she does this time of day. Usually, we go for a long hike and put them in the relay in the woods. It is stupid and dangerous but she says that if she doesn’t do this she might as well not be alive anyway.

Today is different, though. Today she has the hack.

Something—*something*—has me on my feet and drives my memories down to the tips of my paws, crushes them flat with the pure and absolute present.

My barks thunder and I am like an arrow running to the approaching vehicle. I meet it as it rounds the sharp bend at the top of the hill that keeps us hidden and leap to one side.

The soldier is alone in the jeep and surprised by me. There is no door on his jeep and I leap onto him, going for his throat.

He is yelling and I smell the cold metal of his pistol. I am a whirlwind but his other hand reaches the gun and draws. I bite his hand as the pistol goes off.

Elizabeth is on the porch, her shotgun raised. "Get away!" she yells and I know she means me but I cannot, I am a pure and total dog, with only a wisp of human somewhere.

She fires the rifle. He puts the jeep in reverse and flees.

And I know it's time.

"Are you all right?" She runs to me, hugs me. I ignore her. I am chewing, licking, gnawing. "Is it a bullet?"

No; the bullet went somewhere else, and it does not matter. It only makes a small sting, an ache.

She reaches into the bloody hole I gnawed and pulls out the blood-smeared bubble, a standard smack-storing bubble.

"A ... *smack*?" She is stunned.

YES, I bark.

She stares at me, hard. "What are you?" She kicks me. "Some kind of spy?"

I run to the cabin, up the stairs; she follows. "They'll be coming soon. Arnold! Arnold! We have to leave! And Daisy..."

At the door, she whirls on me, still holding the rifle.

Arnold makes a grunting sound. Moves his arms. Makes a horrified face. I *bark! Bark! Bark!*

She looks back and forth between us. Arnold begins keening “hmmm hmmm hmmm hmmm...”

He can still kind of carry a tune. This is easy. The alphabet tune.

“All right then,” she snaps. “Just one try. A? B? C? D? Oh, this is ridiculous!”

“HmMMM,” hums Arnold. As always, tears creep down his face. I smell his ocean-openness, coming back. And then, with great difficulty, he roars, “Mi. Mi. MIKE.”

I bark, I dance.

Yes, I say yes with all my dog-tools. I grab Rumble, toss him in the air. It takes a surprising amount of energy.

“MIKE?”

I brace for another kick, but she hugs me and begins to sob. “Mike? Mike! Oh my God.” She steps back, looks at Arnold. “How is this possible? How do you know?” I can see her thinking then, thinking about all the things I’d done as a memory scientist.

I nudge her pocket. The smack.

She pulls out the bloody, protective bubble. Then she grabs a knife, sets the bubble on the table, and carefully slits it open.

Out it falls, the smack that I so carefully, lovingly made.

I cringe back, whine.

“What is it?”

It is something I cannot do, because I am a dog.

But I must. Again, I pick up Rumble, and this time just hold him in my jaws. Then I put him down and lick his face.

“Okay,” she says heavily. “Okay. Something to do with Wendy.” Her shoulders sag. “I’ll do it.” Her smile is wan and she is crying. “First. Wendy goes first.”

She puts the smack I made into the sequence that she has prepared. The sequence is prefaced by U's hack. After a minute, the smack is ready. All she has to do is press a key to send it.

On the Allover Station, firing seems to have gotten heavier this morning. I am not sure why the local soldiers haven't come back. Perhaps there is too much disarray. The television says so. The long, grinding, universal violence is creeping upward, always upward.

A deep, low growl shakes the ground. I hear loud cracking sounds. Out the window, I see the tips of trees topple.

"Must be a tank," says Elizabeth. "The bastards."

"Tuh," says Arnold. "Tuh. Gu. Nnnn." He gestures toward the rifle. He is healing. The smack, I think, might hurry things along. I bark, loudly. Go! Go! Go!

She does it. She makes the smack, biological information now converted into electrical signals, rush down the wires at the speed of light and just as quickly is in the air, relaying, disseminating, *smacking*.

The tank slowly comes round the bend, ponderously slow, and stops fifty yards from the cabin. A gun on top rotates, adjusts straight at us.

"Fu!" yells Arnold.

And then—

The top opens and three men climb out. They hug each other, they are crying.

The same thing is happening on the Allover Station. A reporter is in some war-torn downtown where suddenly everyone looks around, bewildered. Two men fling down their rifles. The same look, of awful grief, comes over their faces. Tears flow. They grab one another, reel around.

The television reporter is weeping too. "What is going on?" she cries out in a parody of the reporter's false concern. "What is going *on*? Sir?" She shoves her microphone in someone's face. "Sir? How do you feel?"

"I," he gasps. "I—oh, my god." He falls to his knees.

Elizabeth grabs me, hard. "Wendy," she whispers. "It's Wendy. Oh,

God, I remember, oh, my sweet baby.”

All that grief and longing. Now everyone feels it. Everyone feels the loss of just one child.

Just one precious person.

But there is no revenge. No anger. Because this is not just our grief, not just Elizabeth’s and mine distilled and refined and full of blame. It is Jolly’s: pure, whole love and longing.

That smack, and its heavy burden, and the chemicals it was secreting, are gone. Gone from my blood. Mike is leaving too, ebbing away. It is good. It is as I planned.

I did not plan the bullet. But it doesn’t matter. I am, of course, happy.

“My god!” Elizabeth gasps. She just stares at me, then falls and hugs me, hugs me, hugs me. “You GENIUS!” I glimpse for a brief instant a look of horror on her face as she draws back her hand, sticky with blood, before I close my eyes, deeply satisfied.

This exquisite grief, this unwillingness to kill, this respect for all others, may last for years, universally, making loss impossible, removing the numbness that most people live with and leaving them raw and open and kind, unable to hurt another human. Or someone like The Wonderful Wizard of U might hack it quickly, just for fun, and make everything as it was.

I no longer care.

I am a brilliance, like when the sun is on the water and you can’t see into it. I am the brilliance of Elizabeth and of Wendy, and then I am golden grains of glad, glad sand, blowing in the wind, free of almost all memory.

All that is left is one little girl, who stands there on the beach.

“Jolly!” she calls, and claps her hands. “Jolly!”

I run to her.