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# Dogs

By Justin Heckert  
Photos by, Masataka Namazu

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You could ruin the carpet, easily. It is white, the carpet. Clean and white, like unmarked territory. Through the glass of the deck door, through the half-open blinds, you stare silently at the inside of the house, eyes perfect and brown and small as beads, stalactites of drool growing down your chin.

In a recurring dream, you have broken through that door, triumphantly. You have stood up on hind legs and pushed forward, shattering the glass into glimmering shards. In this dream, during the apex of it, with the door wide open, you travel the length of the kitchen in one leap and then into the living room and onto the carpet, a comet’s trail of fur and dirt and spittle, free and unhindered with the soft sewn fabric brushing the insides of your paws and you raking through it and mud flying off in clumps with the wondrous good natural feeling of being so free and running in circles inside the clean and silent house while rubbing your matted back against the cushioned chair and jumping and snorting and shaking on the couch and dripping filthy outside-bowl water onto its fabric, picking up the cushions and crushing through them with your jaws, shaking them, shaking the foamy insides out of them all over the floor, running around, tired and exasperated and alive, tongue flapping behind you, a pink, droopy flag, and you sniffing around for a good two or three spots to pee.

You are mighty, Natalie. You are chaos. You are a 2-year-old Irish setter with crayon-red fur and an arched back and four long, powerful legs. And if you could, if you had any sliver of opportunity, you would take Gizmo the cat by the neck and toss him off the side of the deck. You would also rip off one of his ears while batting his head about with your paw. You would leap the tall wooden fence in the yard and chase people and mangle plastic swing sets. If you weren’t spayed, you would mate at least four times a day. If somehow set free, if the fence were

torn away, you and Winston, the fat English bulldog with a wriggling stump for a tail, would run so fast out over the streets of the neighborhood and bark and yelp and let the wind take hold of your lips to push them back from your teeth while you just run and run and run and run, the kids just getting home from school, perhaps on a Tuesday, and screaming at the mere sight of two creatures so large and fast and carefree coming towards them, kids dropping their backpacks, running for their parents, crying.

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Now, fully grown, your paws are thick and powerful, with claws jutting out of them. You drink your water from a round chasm of

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a dog bowl. Your fur is long and uncut, and your ears are giant drapes attached to the sides of your head, bouncing when you run, flying forward when you stop, drooping when you’re completely still, which in turn is almost never.

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Oh, you galoot. Do you see what you’ve done? Bad girl. Bad, bad girl. You have overturned the green plastic patio furniture, and you have chewed the leg of one chair into a gooey, misshapen tentacle.

You should be punished. Yes, that would be fitting. Spanked, scolded, nose rubbed into the ground, something. But instead, you mock Sarah by clomping quickly down the stairs of the deck, away from her reach, spinning around through the back yard, clutching a tennis ball in your mouth, fur fanned by the air, dropping the ball and then kicking it and then running to pick it back up. She storms into the house, unamused.

Freedom! You roll around on the grass, smelling things. There is a cricket, and you chase it; there is a bone, and you chew it; there is a stinking mound of something, and you pounce on it, rubbing your back and stomach and face on whatever it is; there is a gnarled piece of firewood, which you inspect and smell and carry over to the edge of the yard.

Then you are lapping water out of your bowl, making greedy slurping sounds that the neighbors can hear, more water spilling out than you’re taking in, using only a few precious seconds to breathe, shoving your paws into the bowl, digging out water, emptying the bowl and tossing it into the air with your nose.

Now you have decided the day is so beautiful that you must run as fast as you can for as long as you can inside the rectangular perimeters of the fence, creating a massive pulsating feeling that almost shoots from your stomach through your paws and out into the earth, carrying you with it, air gushing down through your nostrils, oh you are so freaking alive, ooooh it can never get any better than this unless of course you were lost in a space of unending land speckled with fire hydrants and grass and old bones and fat swollen low-flying birds. But for now, this will do.

There is Sarah again, calling for you. She could never hate you. You are her greatest friend, the best thing she has here in Columbia, far from her home in Arkansas. She is back on the deck, snapping her fingers, smiling. You run to her, and she massages her hands down through your hair to the dirty furrows of your invisible skin.

Snorting, sniffing, drooling, barking, chest puffing up and down, storming onto the deck, stomach caked with mud and drool, knobby tail jerking back and forth, torso too large for his legs, here he is, slamming into you: Winston! The result of wanton human tampering with nature, the tawny product of two unbreedable animals. An English bulldog: a fat, square, bulk of energy. A soul buried behind spectacular



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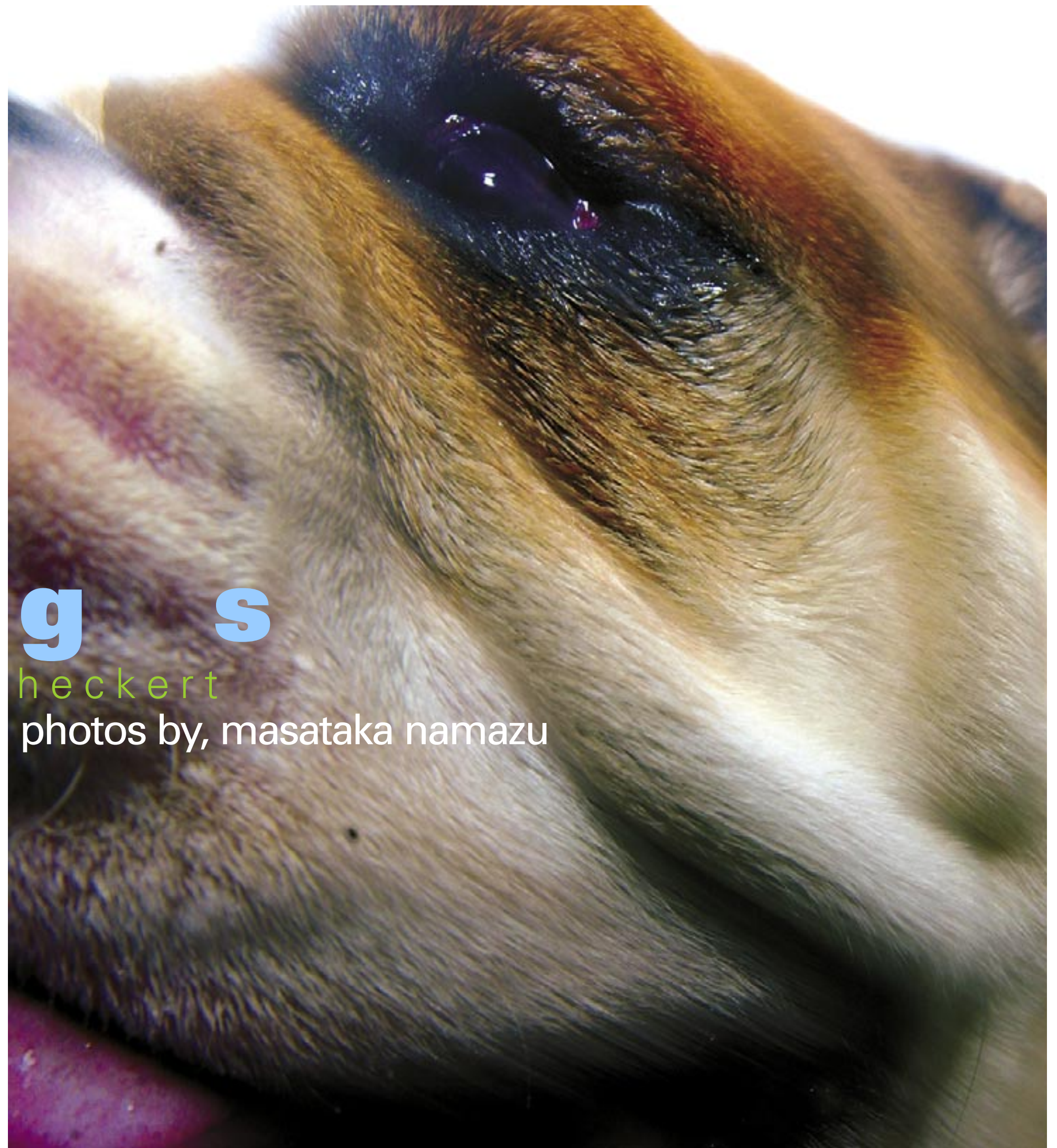
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# DOGS



Photos by, Masataka Namazu

You could ruin the carpet, easily. It is white, the carpet. Clean and white, like unmarked territory. Through the glass of the deck door, through the half-open blinds, you stare silently at the inside of the house, eyes perfect and brown and small as beads, stalactites of drool growing down your chin.

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The deck door is the only thing that stands between Natalie and the forbidden freedom of the house.

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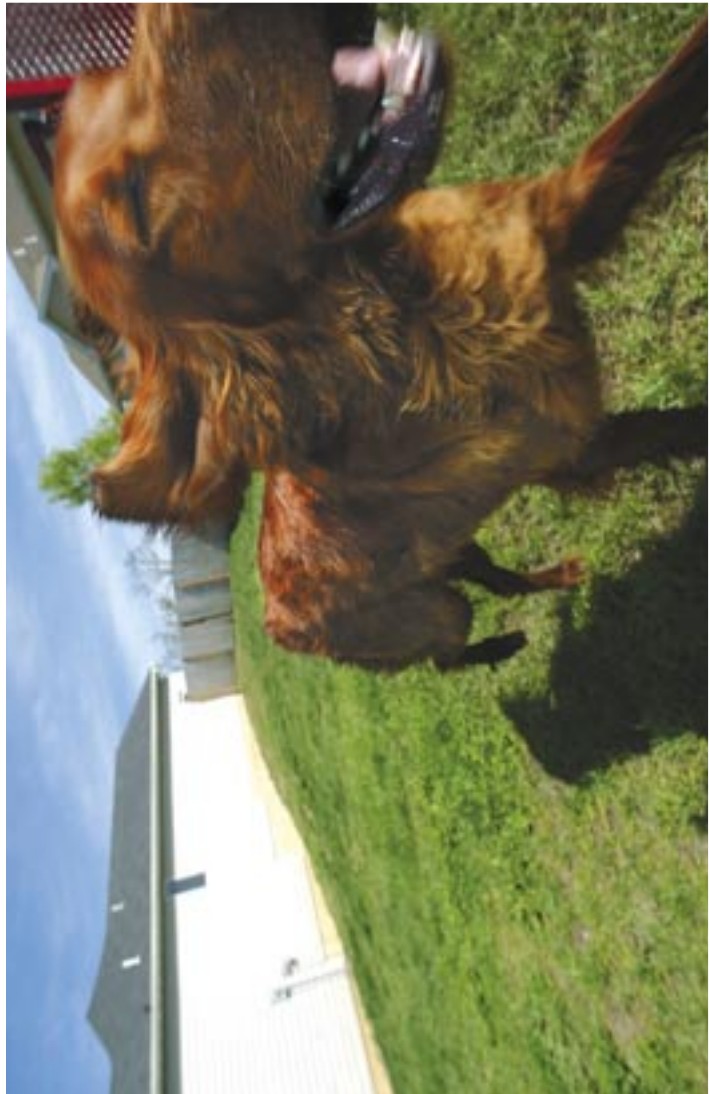
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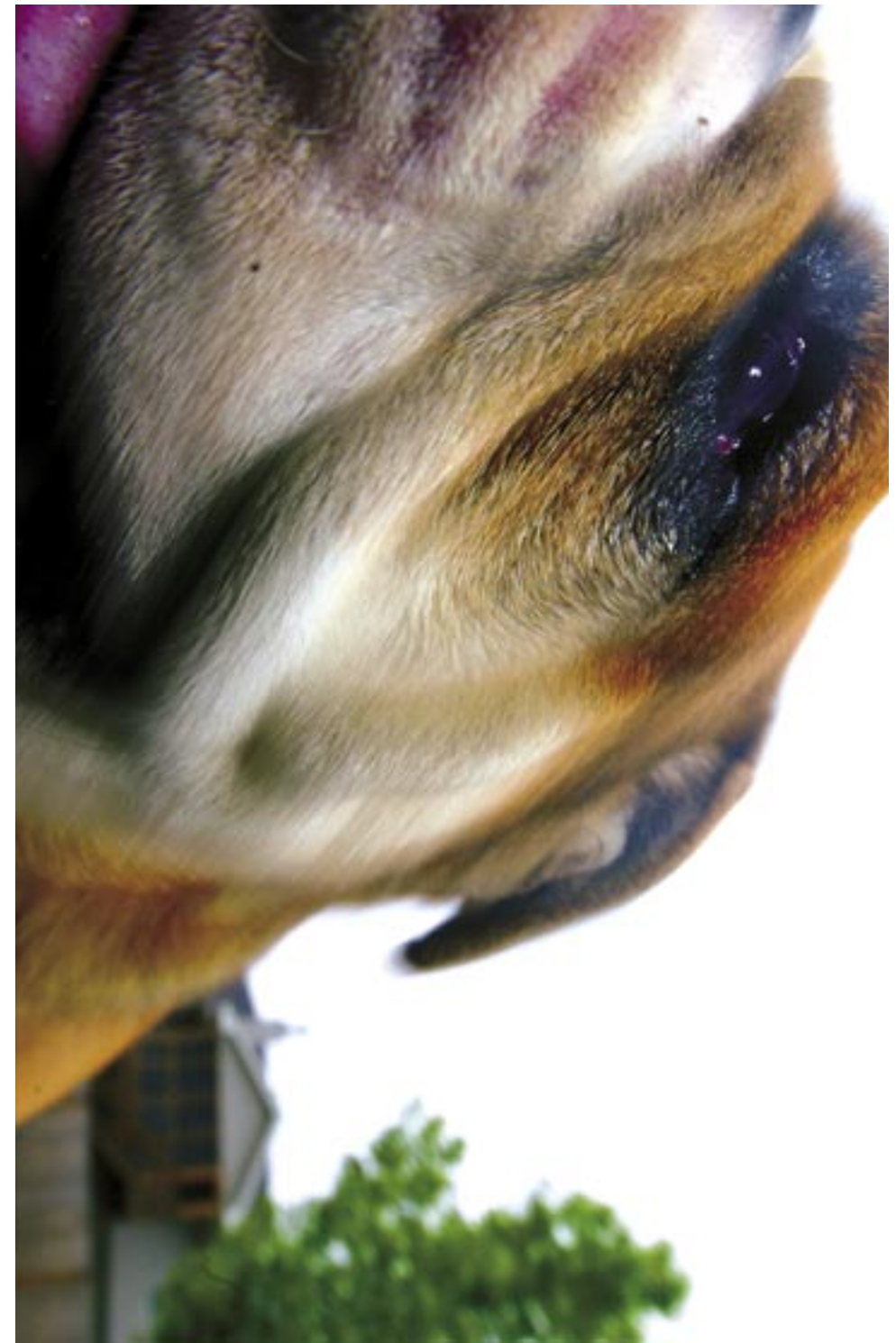
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The yard is wide and green. There is a semi-freedom to it. The yard is big enough so you can poop and race and fight with Winston and splash through dirty puddles and carry wood from the big woodpile under the deck to various spots about the yard and run through them like a maze, amusing yourself, licking yourself, eating grass, throwing it back up, running forward with your tongue played behind you like a wet, sloppy, flapping tendrill.

You stand on the grass, under the deck, dog treats bouncing off your nose and then some going directly into your mouth, vaporized. Sarah is up there, tossing them to you. Sarah is up there, chanting "Good dog, good dog," and you are on hind legs, perfectly still, panting.

Oh, you galoot. Do you see what you've done? Bad girl. Bad, bad girl. You have overturned the green plastic patio furniture, and you have chewed the leg of one chair into a gooey, misshapen tentacle.

You should be punished. Yes, that would be fitting. Spanked, scolded, nose rubbed into the ground, something. But instead, you mock Sarah by clomping quickly down the stairs of the deck, away from her reach, spinning around through the back yard, clutching a tennis ball in your mouth, fur fanned by the air, dropping the ball and then kicking it and then running to pick it back up. She storms into the house, unamused.

Freedom! You roll around on the grass, smelling things. There is a cricket, and you chase it;