

Dogs and All

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THE HUSBAND HAD GOTTEN INTO THE HABIT of finding things on the side of the road. Kitchen set made out of plastic, rusted frame of a bike, four-foot cardboard cutout of Elvis. They were strange items that didn't belong in anyone's home anymore, especially not his. At first, he kept them in a pile in the cleaning closet attached to the kitchen, but it began spilling out whenever the wife retrieved the broom. So he moved them to his office, a small room with one window and a large, generic portrait of the Milky Way. The wife spent more time with her friend "Donna," who was really, the husband knew, the man she was fucking. He did not ask her questions about this man or how she met him, but he could smell the difference in the way her sweat stank, how she stopped picking fights with him about the little things. Bulk pickup was twice a year and he scoured the streets in a rented trunk. Ripped up La-Z-Boy, bulbous glass desk, living room-sized golf putting mat. His office, already full of maps and encyclopedias from the twentieth century, could not hold it all. And so three-legged furniture and monitors the size of blackberry bushes started spilling out into the hallway, into the living room, daring the wife to say anything at all. She spent more time with Donna, who the husband knew was not really her friend Donna, and yet she didn't say anything. The wife was fucking someone else and still she didn't say anything! One day the husband was driving on the side of 95 and passed a pack of dogs hurling their bodies in the leggy grass next to the shoulder. And so the husband pulled over and found

them tick-covered and thirsty enough to lap at the sweat on the backs of his knees. He brought home the dogs, wiry with an untamable spirit, and let them loose. He already had a box full of toys with the squeakers mostly punctured. Sure, he got the animals medical care, and, obviously, the wife was no longer involved. He slept in the bed with them that first night and every night thereafter, flea dirt collecting on top of the pillow that was once on her side, until he died of an aneurysm one morning, where the wife found him, having returned home to retrieve winter clothes, at the base of the shower. She had found him and the dogs wouldn't stop licking him, not even when she said "Hey dogs!" and cracked open a can of spam that was on top of the plant stand in the hallway, her voice high-pitched and ridiculous. She found him, and, for a minute thought she might have really ruined everything. Then she sold the house and dumped the stuff, his stuff, dogs and all, on the side of the road in a wealthy neighboring town, where they would all have good lives, and flew to Florida where she lived out her years in an adult community next to a canal that, in the winter, grew engorged with manatees. She spent afternoons with a glass of rosé watching them float aimlessly. She saw sadness in their cow eyes, the way they pleaded with her. Could they sense it, she wondered, the boats with propellers that would scar and maim them? This temporary being? The end of it all?