

Doggie Consternation

By Gary Beck

Summer had come again to New York City. Global warming, climate change, or whatever is politically correct to describe the extremely erratic weather pattern with few hot days, but some a scorcher, limited rain, respiratory challenged air particles. No assault of nature prevented my silent clown show performances, followed by balloon animals for the youngsters and the mentally underdeveloped adults, three shows each Saturday and Sunday mornings, at the entrance to Central Park at West 72nd Street. Again the weather gods favored me and I hadn't been rained out once, through July.

I earned almost as much money doing the clown shows as I did as an adjunct instructor teaching drama at Gotham University's School of Fine Arts. I was only teaching two courses this summer for Continuing Education, on Tuesday and Thursday nights, courtesy of my department charmer, Ernest 'the emoter', a florid nickname I gave him when I first started at Gotham U. for his emotional displays at my caustic, cynical attitude. However, our relationship had changed dramatically, no pun intended, with the unexpected success last semester of my advanced drama class's presentation of Hamlet, script in hand.

The class worked hard all semester and Ernest was so delighted with our efforts that he let us use one of the university's many 99 seat, state of the art theaters, the 'Hickenlooper'. Many wealthy parents attended, including one student's father, a Broadway theater producer, who had made generous donations to the department in the past. Ernest was so impressed with our results that he let me use the 'Hickenlooper' for a short run of my play, 'Unravelings', at the same theater. The show played to full houses, theater and art world notables attended, including the Broadway producer. Ernest became very benevolent and I had to seriously consider changing his nickname.

I had been loyally supported throughout this exhilarating period by my live-in girlfriend, MJ, nee Marguerite Janice Van Doerner Kowalski, daughter of a wealthy old line Philadelphia

mother and a Polish invader father, whose only virtue to the Van Doerner clan was nouveau money. MJ, a bright, fair-skinned, feisty red head, was an aspiring artist, preparing for a one person show in October at a respectable Chelsea gallery. It was arranged with the help of my ex-girlfriend, Anitra Blaralsky, linear descendant of a famous spiritualist. Anitra was a bony, chilly artist who worked for a world famous artist, who I had nicknamed 'Sophisto', the master of plastic, for his depredation of the natural wonders of the earth by wrapping them in plastic. Anitra brought 'Sophisto' to MJ's studio and the visit kick-started her career. Then Anitra brought him to a reading of my play that he praised, then to the production at the 'Hickenlooper', that he raved about. I had to seriously consider changing his nickname.

Anitra's frigid manner began to thaw in direct proportion to my and MJ's success. She had been so spoiled by moving in important international circles that only fame penetrated her crustacean exterior. This détente didn't extend to my dog, Pard, an exceptionally clever mutt who I loved, MJ adored, and Anitra detested for his rampant horniness. Of course Pard didn't try to mount her leg and hump her, one of the few humans who intimidated him. But he constantly tried to investigate Anitra's teacup Maltese, Buckminster Fuller, who she carried in a tote bag tucked against her bony chest. Pard was still trying to figure out if that strange creature was really a dog. Truth be known, so was I.

Anitra's major topic of conversation, after her own artwork, which currently consisted of cutting holes in unprimed canvas then filling them with women's personal hygiene items that she called 'a proud flaunting of gender differences', was her master, 'Sophisto'. His latest project was to cover the Ural Mountains in red plastic, supposedly still being considered by President Putin, despite concerns with prolonging memories of old hard-line communists, and threats from Chechen separatists. Criticism of me had drastically receded since my recent theater triumph, but unfavorable comparison of Pard to 'normal dogs', continued unabated. Anitra boasted that since 'Old Bucky's balls were cut off, my phrase, and replaced with neuticles, artificial testicles, as well as liberal doses of pharmaceuticals, 'Old Bucky' was a wonderfully behaved animal. Her urging those treatments for Pard set him growling at her,

then leaving the room stiff-legged, tail up. I know she once wanted the same treatment for me, but I didn't growl. She had been instrumental in my and MJ's good fortunes, so I had to be nice, but I could still imagine certain degrading torments for her.

I had to admit she was right about Pard. He was the horniest mutt in the western hemisphere, perhaps the world. But he was smart, loving, protective and my best friend. It would be a crime to cut off his balls. Only rapists and pedophiles deserved that. It was obvious why women were the more vocal advocates for removing offending male parts. I idly wondered if sexually abused gays felt the same way. In any event, Pard was keeping his privates, despite how he offended some dainty souls. But his intense sexual needs were a problem. I still thought my idea of a pneumatic doggie sex doll was pretty good, but MJ had vetoed that with extreme exclamations of disgust that couldn't be overridden.

Anitra had dropped by one day and after the usual subject of her art, she told us about 'Sophisto's' missive to President Putin, asserting that covering the Urals was high art and would reflect the spirit of the Russian people. Then she started describing 'Old Bucky's' latest menu. Her pampered pet was getting pan-seared duck with brown rice and blueberry compote, roasted turkey with butternut squash and russet potatoes, salmon with black and white quinoa. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. This pathetic beast was eating better than 99% of the world. Besides, he was so stoned on tranquilizers that if she gave him sand patties with dung gravy the wretched creature wouldn't taste the difference. But I suppressed my sarcastic comments, repeated my mantra; 'Be nice. Be nice,' and tried to endure the attack of lockjaw caused by my forced smile. Somehow, whenever Anitra was near, I appreciated Pard even more.

However, I was preoccupied with a bigger problem at the moment. I had recently met with the Broadway producer, Hugh Garner, who saw the production of my play at the 'Hickenlooper' theater, at Gotham U's School of Fine Arts, at the end of May. At that time he

told me the play had Off-Broadway potential. I salivated for the next few weeks while we played phone tag, and was still enthusiastic when we finally got together at the end of June. After a lengthy discourse on the cost, risks, and vicissitudes of producing Off-Broadway, especially in union theaters, he told me the play needed more development and exposure. I didn't quip: 'Do you want me to walk around naked holding the script?' and nodded encouragingly. He said a few shows with invited audiences didn't test the drawing power of the play.

"It needs an Off-Off Broadway production to determine if the play has upward mobility."

As my dreams of fame, fortune, the great leap forward, crashed around my feet, I tried to maintain a cool front and merely said:

"What do you suggest?"

"Do the play at a decent theater, with publicity and promotion. Then we'll see how it goes."

"That could cost between six and eight thousand dollars, without counting publicity and promotion. I'd have to hire a press agent to get a good response. That could be... I don't know. Another two to four thousand?"

"Are you crazy? We're talking about Off-Off Broadway. Why are your production costs so high?"

"I pay everybody."

"You paid them for a show at Gotham U?"

"Yes. If you expect theater people to work well, they should be paid."

"Do you have any idea what it would cost to stage your play at a union Off-Broadway theater?"

"Not exactly."

"Guess."

"Two hundred to three hundred thousand? It's only four characters and not a musical."

“We’d have to have some name actors and a known director. They cost money.”

So much for my career as a director and the fine efforts of my actors who did so well. But again I retained my outward calm.

“You saw the play. If you believe it has potential, you should back it.”

He laughed. “You’ve got nerve, kid. I like your style... I tell you what. You raise the production money and I’ll take care of publicity and promotion. If the show does well, we’ll discuss a future production Off-Broadway.”

I concealed my despair at not being rushed to the Tonys.

“That’s very generous, Mr. Garner. It’s a deal. Do we get a contract?”

He laughed again... “I’ll give you a letter of intent. When you raise the money we’ll draw up a contract.”

I couldn’t think of any way to get a better deal, so I stood up and held out my hand.

“Thanks, Mr. Garner.”

“Call me Hugh, kid.”

“Call me Ken.”

I told MJ about the meeting, omitting my disappointment at not leaping to the stars in one exciting jump. She immediately offered to finance the production, which I knew she could easily afford. She had a substantial trust fund, but I was reluctant to use her money, fearing it might change the nature of what had become a very special relationship. When we first met I lusted for her body. Then as I got to know her, I began to like her. Her kindness, wit, talent, loyalty and inner beauty reached me so deeply that it turned to love. Up until now I had been pretty much locked away emotionally, a bequest from my stuffy, frigid, tradition-bound family, The Boston Kensingtons. I hadn’t told MJ yet. I was trying to get used to the alien feeling. But I think she sensed it.

MJ was painting away like an artist possessed for her one person show in October, at the Felicitous Gallery, in Chelsea. Somehow she still found time to not only be the best lover I

ever had, but to actively concern herself with my theater career. I often found myself thinking about her when I wasn't with her, a new experience. She was so much a part of my good fortune that I didn't want anything to go wrong.

MJ's appreciation for Pard still amazed me, considering she grew up in a family that raised pedigree yellow Labrador Retrievers for a hobby. When we visited them, a frequent occurrence, since MJ was mediating between the Van Doerner clan and the Polish invader in a dispute about putting up a new opera house in Philadelphia. Mums came up with the idea, instantly supported by the clan, who expected the Polish treasury to pay for the new fantasy palace. Dads thought it was ridiculous in a decaying city, with a diminishing culture base. So the battle lines were drawn. Although badly outnumbered, the Polish resistance held fast and, only MJ's intervention prevented a messy divorce.

I was gladly welcomed at chez Kowalski, since Mums went to an exclusive boarding school with my mother, of whom she had fond memories of their friendship, even though they hadn't seen each other since then. Pard was barely tolerated and certainly not allowed in the family mansion. He was left on his own on the grounds, with the labs they kept there, while the bulk of them resided at the farm, a rural plantation that I had never seen.

Pard was urgent to slake his lust on the delectable females, whose glistening, soft yellow fur, delicious body aromas and provocative posturing tantalized him. After all, dogs don't demand pedigree papers before mating. That's a human requirement. There were two females who were not unreceptive, but every time he got close to possessing the desired treasure, the three dumb males showed up, thwarting him. He was clever enough not to attack the slow country yokels, since that would result in instant banishment, but he just couldn't figure out how to outsmart them, an unusual experience for the cunning mutt.

Much as I sympathized with Pard's frustration, I had bigger concerns about the future of my play. I phoned my actors, hopefully they were still mine, and asked them if they wanted to do a paid three week run of the play, probably opening in mid November, figuring I could raise

the money. They were very enthusiastic and made commitments over the phone. So I had a cast. I didn't tell them there might be an Off-Broadway production down the road, since it probably wouldn't include them. I had about \$1,400 left in the bank after my last production. I could earn another thousand by the end of August, weather permitting, I could earn another thousand by the end of September, when I would start rehearsals. I quickly did a preliminary budget for a showcase run and came up with a rough figure of about \$8,000, my high estimate to Mr. Garner.

In order to do the production, I would have to borrow \$5,000 from MJ, since I couldn't count on any income at the box office. It would take me two years to pay her back. I couldn't live with the pressure of owing her that much for so long, so I phoned the actors and told them we couldn't do a paid production until February or March. They assured me they were still committed, but six months is an eternity for an actor. Who knows what configuration of the stars can lead to bartenders school and a well paid job. Hope may have been flickering, but it wasn't completely diminished. I was still determined to have my play produced.

I took Pard for his late night walk at Tompkins Square Park, where only the dedicated dog walkers ventured at this hour. The pretentious princes and princesses with their pampered pooches apparently didn't have to take them out at night, since they probably had personalized doggie toilets. I was anathema to them ever since Pard mounted one of the Pomeranians and ejaculated on her lustrous coat, to the horror of her doting ortho-mother. We had barely escaped a rabid lynch mob, intent on punishing the malefactor and his abettor. Pard played with a doggie friend, while I chatted with his owner, who I had nicknamed 'Prince Hal', for his dissolute, but noble bearing. A while back he had told me about a bordello for dogs in Venezuela. It hadn't worked out, impossible complications to overcome, even if it really existed, which I could never verify, but he asked about it every time we met.

Later that night I was browsing my google search engine and casually looked for Perro Shangri-la, the fabled doggie paradise in Venezuela, with no results. I kept browsing and found

a New York Times article about a new business venture in Brazil. I read with growing excitement and called Pard, who wagged appreciatively as I read to him.

“Listen to this, pal. ‘Finally, a place in Brazil where dogs can go for discreet sex’.” His ears perked up at his favorite word after walk, biscuit, and MJ. “Heart shaped ceiling mirror: Check. Curtains drawn against the bright day: Check. Red mattress: Check. The establishment has features that demanding clients naturally expect from a love motel. Brazil, after all, is a world leader in short stay pleasure palaces, with names like Swing, Absinthe and Alibi, and motifs like medieval castles or the American Wild West. Animalle Mundo Pet, an eight story enterprise in an upscale district of Belo Horizonte, a city of 2.4 million people, has a dog spa with a Japanese ofuro soaking tub, canine apparel and beef flavored, non-alcoholic, Dog Beer.”

MJ’s sleepy voice startled us.

“What are you boys up to?”

“You’ve got to hear this, sweetie. Pard’s troubles are over. There’s a place...”

“Not tonight. Please. I didn’t even clean this paint off cause I’m so tired.”

“How would you like a nice vacation in Brazil?”

“Where?”

“Brazil. Land of exotic dining, romantic sunsets and a doggie love motel with a dog café that sells beef-flavored muffins, a specialty shop that sells Chic Animale, a perfume for dogs for \$40 a bottle...”

“Are you nuts? Perfume for dogs? I’m going back to bed.”

“Give us one more minute. This place charges only \$50 a session. It’s the answer to Pard’s dreams.”

Pard emphasized the opportunity by wagging enthusiastically.

“This sounds like that Venezuelan fantasy again.”

“No. This place is real. It’s in the New York Times.”

“As if I’d believe that rag.”

“I’ll prove it to you. I’ll go to their website and get all the information.”

Writing Raw

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“You do that. If you’d like some of what Pard can’t get, come to bed now.”

She turned and walked to the bed and even in her silly bunny pajamas she was the sexiest woman I ever saw. I looked at Pard, and whispered: “I think we found the place at last. Be patient, pal.”

He gave me a skeptical look as if this was one more false hope, then dejectedly went to his mat. I felt for him and I tried my best to ... I had to find a phrase that wouldn’t offend people... slake his needs? but MJ was waiting.

The End

Gary Beck bio: Gary Beck has spent most of his adult life as a theater director, and as an art dealer when he couldn’t make a living in theater. He has 11 published chapbooks and 1 other accepted for publication. His poetry collections include: Days of Destruction (Skive Press), Expectations (Rogue Scholars Press). Dawn in Cities, Assault on Nature, Songs of a Clerk, Civilized Ways (Winter Goose Publishing). Perceptions and Displays will be published by Winter Goose Publishing. His novels include: Extreme Change (Cogwheel Press) Acts of Defiance (Artema Press). Flawed Connections has been accepted for publication (Black Rose Writing). His short story collection, A Glimpse of Youth (Sweatshoppe Publications). His original plays and translations of Moliere, Aristophanes and Sophocles have been produced Off Broadway. His poetry, fiction and essays have appeared in hundreds of literary magazines. He currently lives in New York City.