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## *Who Names the Rez Dog Rez?*

I AM READING Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous* and I let the words find me because the body always knows better than the mind does, muscles remember, they witness, like trees, riddles etch disease, and I am weeping willow, crying seeds and dripping saline from my hair, this is how I got my name, y'know? Or how their cambium will warp a bullet civilly, make room for the wound in the structure of their being, crown themselves with flora and I am singing starling. Ocean asks me, "Who will be lost in the story we tell ourselves? Who will be lost in ourselves? A story, after all, is a kind of swallowing." Feel the roots of me, an ecosystem of pain—I am anthropic in the desert of my being. Do you feel how much the winds have dried my tendrils? Feed me, water me, nurture me, I would be lying if I didn't say I too want to swallow you in this story I call essay, essay I call livelihood, life I pretend to call my own. I dog-ear Ocean's page and make an animal of story, I am looking for a wilderness in the act of being wild; I, here, a rez dog, I haven't seen you in a dog's age, by which I mean I haven't seen myself in years.

I am sitting on the hills of Dover, a space I rely too heavily on these days, the afternoon sun licking my shoulders, masseuse to the marks that stretch from the child-me who still fits inside, and I have only just begun to find him again—that wild ancestral dream. People walk by me, staring: there I sit alone, barefoot, feet stroking the prairie grass and thistles, pricks not knowing the width of my soles. I cannot be harmed in this moment, by which I mean, I cannot afford to be. I puff a cigarette, curtail the smoke around the width of my neck, which remembers the lace of fingers around it—a finger trap, a gag toy—I

let the smoke burn away the oils of your pads which seed deep into me. I listen to Maggie Rogers' "Back in My Body" on repeat, tilting my cheeks to the sun, let pîsim kiss them into roses and I am blooming flower, you, a shrike to my stamens. I hold myself as if I were a babe, bare legs with thin hairs wrapped up into my chest, I, a papoose. In regard to those who stop and gawk at a lone NDN sitting in the long grass, the other you of this story texts me, "They're just stunned by your beauty in the sun." I tell him that if they are, it's entirely for me today—I am majesty and my body is a living cornucopia, I eat my own seeds, which isn't to say I consume myself, for once, but rather that I will my pain into nutrient and I am ouroboric. My hair, which I model off of Steve Harrington, flails in the wind much to the point I look Medusan in this Mohkinstsis light. I look at the you's that have harmed me in ways, big or small, and will you all to stone, carry them like petrified wood, or a gallstone, in the bladder of my being and expunge them in the beautiful delight of a well-deserved urination. I am a body not needing to be owned, I am owed, and no man can consume, let alone hold, my plurality in this zipper I call a body. Or maybe I mean to say, here, in this field, hair a zephyr of raze, I become âtim, dog, relinquished from the prison-house of the now, and I bark horror back into that doghouse while I rest among the multitudes.

I am a rez dog in this moment, a vicious sight.

I read reports about rez dogs, of how moniyâw come to steal them, beef jerky in hand, lure them into a car and drive off to transplant them into suburbia. I think of my three sisters who have been thrown into a pot of soup, I am looking for them, have you eaten? I imagine those rez dogs strapped in the back seat of a Volvo watching the horizon recede and their found family howling into the night screaming, "Heck, where are you?" In this vignette, I am the rez dog and you are the driver, it's a hot July evening during the Calgary Stampede, the window panes sweat and my tongue is panting for moisture. My skin aches to be touched, but, like a frog's, it weeps when you lay a hand upon my back. You grab me by the leash you have locked around my neck, force me close, my whiskers receding from your rank breath, your tongue the scent of fermentation, and I, my own muzzle. You promise me companionship and I bow to your feigned generosity, if only because the skyline is a dark ring and tipîskâw pîsim cannot see me here. Already, I am strategizing survivability amongst the looming abandoned buildings like spectres in the peripheries of my vision because I am trained to stare at you. Hand tightened around my collar, you bring yourself into me with the force of a bookbinder—even this assemblage of sound drips with violence and I am wet with ink. When you are done, you promise me a home, in its largest connotations, and

I reassemble done as doom, home being a torture chamber, a cage, kennel, the terrible weight of pounds. Your body expunged, you smile a gluttonous grin, and I paw the door of your vehicle, escape into the night. I am feral in this delight, having returned from the throes of entrapment and survived, fleeing into the safety of a transformed me. I enter the vomitorium of who I am and hack up severance, lick the salty rue clean to chew the bone of you. I howl for my kin, who rush to my side, here, don't underestimate me, wendigo, I have chewed larger men than you into dust, blew through monuments, pissed on flagships, and you are only six inches of a man pretending he is ten. Together, a pack, we crush bone into fracture, crunch calcium into slop, will you the smiling death, a sudden syndrome, that slow necrosis.

"Just deadly," we will say, and I will stop in my routine pathway, sit, and ask: why do we use "deadly" as an adjective of achievement or self-esteem, why must we encapsulate NDN success through the verbosity of death? I don't tell them that, though, for I don't want to question those who continually save me, even if they can sometimes damn me. My kin bring me back to the rez, we settle into the long prairie grass, cuddle in a ball of fur and dust, mouths salivating a river of froth. They lick my ducts with tongues sanded into soft leather, nuzzle noses into one another, sleep side by side: this is how a rez dog survives.

The circularity of a second-person address chokes me, who is the you I am addressing? And I would be lying if I didn't say: I have missed you forever. My, you're a shapeshifter, m'boy, or am I the one who shifts? Here, in my bed, beneath fairy lights and vinework, I am beside a you whose chest blazes in a similar glory, patch of spirit, bed of dandelion, and I am grazing softly, regurgitant, is this you, "you," in my bed sheets when I pool between his thighs?

I am only making love to myself in relation, aren't I?

What means loneliness to a rez dog whose foot is wounded from a trapper's coils? Look around you, my ancestors will say, at the vastness of what you call living, watch where your skin flakes off in the wind and thins into nutrient, where a hair follicle stems into a dandelion, sweat a sweet drink. Loneliness, they'll say, is a mode of being dejected, not from relations, for those are plenty and you are hungry, but from the act of rejecting that which is honest. Honesty, they'll say, is all around you, these are relations that detect rejection. Look to the purple heads, honesty, *lunaria annua*, those silver coins that rattle in the wind—ecology its own economic. Honesty, that beautiful flower, whose roots look like fingers in the soil, coil yourself into it, stem into cell, finger the wet mud, and reach down into the earth of me. Do you see "you" there? Storage roots a network of hyperlinks and I am out of time: you are perennial and this concept you call temporality is an

orality. I tell you I am looking for the pup of me, the one that knew no shame. And I look to my stomach, my arms, my shoulders, see the clawings of a pup too rough with its mother, I am valiant in my ferality, by which I mean, I am no longer that rez dog, but rather, I am the one removed from the servitude of civility and I return to the hinterland of who I am: child-me, elder-me, present-me all dancing a vigorous round dance in this pit I call pimatisiwin, the act of living. I love the me I become in orality, it's just, why can't I bring that to be beyond this page? I am in retrograde and this essay is an act of all the things I've been mourning to tell you.

Just don't expect too much from me for I am slowly dying and you have paid to witness.

In this escape act of an essay I have enacted and endured, I hear "everyone around me saying you should be so happy now" from my airpods as Maggie Rogers wails in "Light On," and yet I am attracted to the light of you, that second-person address, continually, a daisy of a man. The other you's of this story eat from the palm of me, like a canker, worm, maple, the hardwood of my structuring, I am blown righteous with holes, here, in this moment, see the indents stitching together the orality of such temporariness? I think about how much I have given in this history: I see how much I have soaked into your floorboards and zigzag-stitched clothing that presents your chest hair like a bouquet. And when I go into the tomb of mine, I see nothing of you save for a gallery of nail holes all screaming "fill me, filimme, filiusme."

I pace my home for hours on end, alone, listening to Rufus Wainwright's "Dinner at Eight," and I am waiting to hear the wail of you from across the lot so I can know that I too held some type of signification in the life you are now living. I find a stone I saved from a tender moment we once shared, a memento, one I plucked from Bow sipîy, all ruddy and smoothed from the rocking soliloquy of its mother and all of her aunties. And in my maddened haze, I strike it against my abalone, casket of medicine, hearse of mindfulness, I am trying to spark a fire and become holy in the smoke—I am begging Creator to make me well again because I am weakened in this state and the root of me, the only face that smiles these days, aches to be dead-eyed into a shroud that will rig me into rigour, make me red sky. And yet, I am also striking this flint with instruction from Rufus, to break this nominal form, this "you," down into its roots too, inspect "you" elementally, granite of loss, determine not its ecological but its emotional value to myself. Instead, I break me, because this "you" is a simulation and I am faced with truth.

And ain't that the funniest thing about non-fiction writing? That the "you" I keep invoking is multifarious, shattered glass, and I have

only ever really been talking to myself. Instead, when I go to the old home, I sit amongst the rez dogs, all kibble breath and piss dribble, ask them for companionship, conceptualize rez dog as teacher, rez dog as sacred, rez dog as the greatest promise of futurity through the metaphor of their bodies, their stories, their tattered pelts and crooked teeth in the apocalyptic followings that we are stalking and I am here, looking for the good home, both in their skins and my own, and I echo starling about it now.