

The Fields and the Woods

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The third floor flat was far from the fields and the woods, so after work, they would get a bus to where the breeze ran green through the long wild grass and the birds swung deep in the sky. Pepsi would lift her twitching nose to the air. He'd do the same, struck by the intensity of sensation. Pepsi glanced at him then lifted her nose again. He howled and Pepsi howled too.

It didn't matter much when he lost his job; they said he'd been delivering post to the wrong streets. The doctor gave him a few leaflets and put him on the sick, but he was none the wiser. He went out with Pepsi for longer walks; she was more than happy to go out to the fields and woods all day. And when they returned, he'd open a tin of dog food for Pepsi and then would open a tin for himself. During the long winter nights in the flat, they'd snuggle on the settee in front of the gas fire and comfort one another when they took to yelping in their dreams. Pepsi would sniff his nose telling him it was ok and he'd yawn noisily before laying back resting his head on his arms.

Every day they went to the fields and woods and whatever memories that might have lingered were swept away and he'd throw himself at the crows scattering them into the sky, chase Pepsi over the ditches through the trees rolling down the hills. Then as night drew in they would curl up on the settee and sleep.

It was a neighbour complaining about the smell that brought the police to the door. Not all there, she'd said.

The policeman had to force the door pushing it hard against a heap of mail to gain entry. In the dark he found the light switch. On the settee, he saw a naked and badly decomposed man. Huddled between what was left of his arms were the remains of a dog.

It looked like they were gazing at the painting on the wall: a smudge of man heading towards a wood whilst his dog leaps in the air chasing crows across a green field. A man and his dog, the policeman thought, touched by the scene, and holding his nose called it in, deciding to wait outside until help arrived. He flicked the light off and closed the door as best he could.

Inside, silence fell like snow upon the man and his dog as they lay on the settee gazing up at the fields and the woods. Motes of dust unsettled by the policeman's activity floated in the ray of sun coming in through a gap in the curtains: a beam of light crossing the darkened room. And like a stage spotlight, it illuminated deep scratch marks on the door where on the other side the policeman waited.