

Toke

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When I was a boy on a Colorado farm
I often walked the windblown
fields of winter wheat
beneath the golden sun
and frigid pale blue sky.
Hobbling at my side
on his three good legs,
the neighbor's dog,
I called him Toke,
bobbed happily along as though
an extra leg would do no good.
We two adventurers, set forth,
free at times from hindrance of chores;
he seldom barked, I seldom spoke.
When far enough away from home
to keep from being seen
we'd hunker down alone
amidst the tawny, rustling sheaves,
and have ourselves a smoke.

In a stretch of woods just off the road
there (tall, thick, and green)
a hidden patch of marijuana grows
hearty beneath that precious sun
sheltered from icy prairie breeze
and watered from nearby brook
The pointy leaves are hairy, huge,
and dappled with the dew of dope.
A finger's wipe in that sticky stuff,
a moment's suckle as from breast of earth,
mellowed out my childhood days,
laced my thought with dream and hope.
I ventured often there to tend my crop.
I'd twist off the seedy sticky tops,
dry them gently in the barn
then baggie them for me and Toke.

One gorgeous day in my young teens
when Toke was on in years,

and for weeks I'd done my chores,
Toke skulked in to lure me away to a romp.
I begged my hard-earned break and won,
then packed some water and lunch for two,
snuck a baggie down into my jeans,
and off we went to share the joy of liberty.
We ambled out into the fields
until the house and barn behind us
had smalled into a pair of dots.
Free at last to be with his buddy,
Toke had an air of frisky gladness,
a kind of happy anticipation
of what might come.

We lumbered long through waist-high wheat
topped with fronds of golden,
whiskered grain, bursting ripe,
rightly dry, and harvest-ready.
Then we reached a distant hillock
that God had graced
with a mighty, now ancient oak.
And there beneath protective boughs
we sat, me and Toke,
to enjoy our own private harvest.
Unbeknownst to us,
this would be our last meal together,
our final smoke.

I broke out the sticky weed,
crumbled it to dislodge the seed
that usually pops and spits and sparks,
defly unsheathed a translucent Zig Zag
sprinkled onto it a sumptuous mound
of those dried and earthy shreds,
expertly pinched it in the middle,
and rolled it into a fat cigarette,
grass protruding from each end.
I bit off the mouth end of the grass,
raised it to my lips,

struck a match,
shielded it from the breeze
and sucked in the the mind-bending smoke,
holding my breath
till it had penetrated my blood
and started making its way to my brain.
And then as the dog awaited his share,
I toked the joint twice more.

The dope hit me like a fist.
The open baggie fell to the ground.
I lost track of time and reality,
went reeling into a backward tumble
out of the shade of the oak
By the time I had crawled
back to my spot
Toke had found the baggie
and was devouring its contents.

I sat for long moments,
Toke right beside me,
his single front paw touching my leg
in benign friendship that transcends words.
I visualized fractional instants of our
adventures together.
I saw his comic, pathetic gait
as we ranged the windy prairies.
I conjectured journeys to
far away worlds and distant galaxies.
I glimpsed a future of puppies and kids,
not knowing today was
the only future Toke would have.

Amidst my jumble of thought
I fumbled in the knapsack
for the lunch I'd brought -
one baloney sandwich for me
and the other for Toke.
It would have been hard
for bystanders to tell
which of us was the dog.

We both wolfed our food,
and drank with gusto
from the same bottle.
And then, my head still spinning,
I leaned back against the mighty oak
and closed my eyes.

When hours had passed, I awoke
with buzzing in my ears.
The sun was low in the sky.
Beside me was Toke.
His sole forepaw still touching my leg.
His head lay on the ground before him
where his other leg might have been.
His mouth was slightly open.
His long dry tongue was draped on the earth,
and dotted with fat blow flies of dark green.
His body was still, no longer breathing.
His eyes were closed in his terminal rest.
I had just lost my dearest friend, my best
companion in secret adventures,
my buddy Toke.
I couldn't think of a better way
for him to go.

I did not carry Toke's body home
I did not tarry to bury it.
I left it there to decay atop the hill
in the shade of the mighty oak,
to become part of the wind
and Colorado plains he had loved so.
I knew that if there was a dog heaven,
Toke's spirit would find its way there.

As the crepuscule dimmed
the rich blue sky into the sable of night
and overhead the stars glimmered
hints of my future trek into eternity,
I trod the long path home.
And I wept as I trod it alone.