

A VISIT TO THE GROOMER



a short story by John Scott G

A Visit to the Groomer

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“I like prizes funded by
things that go ‘boom’.”
— *Alfred Nobel*

(Quote unverified.)

A high-definition flat screen TV was mounted high on the wall of the dog groomer's waiting room. While some people regarded it with interest, the content annoyed me. I did not enjoy watching videos of fixed-smile buskers as they demonstrated the dubious merits of "designer" pet toys, all offered for sale, of course.

I was only there to help my girlfriend Kora pick up Bart, her overly friendly, short haired, big-eared pup. I liked Bart except for the fact that he never seemed to appreciate the advantages of clean fur and trimmed claws.

Glancing around the aromatic room, I could see: A harried soccer mom, fussing over the curls on her five-year-old girl's noggin. An ex-football player who had not maintained his athletic figure. An elderly lady who obviously escaped from a Norman Rockwell painting. A harried homemaker in sweatpants and a hoodie. A recent divorcee who had spent far too much time on her hairdo, make-up, and nails.

Kora put her hand on my forearm, and I snapped back to the present.

“Hmmm?” I murmured.

“We should get Bart one of those.” She nodded at the TV screen.

I looked up to see a magnificently coiffed Golden Retriever gnawing on a fake bone while the pitch-ladies promised that a product called “Best Bite for Fido” calmed your dog while cleaning his teeth.

“Couldn’t we just give him a soup bone?” I asked.

Kora smiled and punched me on the upper arm. That was girlfriend-speak for, “Wow, men sure are funny creatures.” I nodded to acknowledge her witty repartee. She smiled and returned to staring at the screen.

I watched the door where the animals were brought out to their humans. When a critter was ready, the receptionist would appear behind a half door that had a metal shelf. She carefully spritzed and wiped down the shelf, lifted the animal onto the shelf, and then announced the name of the animal. “Sparky?” she called. Mr. Former Football stood up and lumbered over to the door to indulge in a ritual

of hugging, petting, and face-licking, the latter mostly by the dog.

I sighed. It seemed to be taking forever for us to get Bart so we could escape this congregation of yokels and their vastly inferior canines.

We had used the name “Bart” on the groomer’s registration forms, but that was not his full name. In case you are fortunate enough to meet him, he is Sir Bartholomew the Valiant Conqueror of Apostasy. I wanted to list him that way with the groomer and the vet, but I was outvoted in the matter.

“You understand, don’t you darling?” Kora had asked at the time.

“Did you just bat your eyelashes at me?” I asked.

“Maybe.”

“Okay,” I admitted, “I think your way is more practical, but you have to admit my way would be more fun.”

“Maybe,” she said again, this time making a point of not batting any lashes.

Back in the present, the sales video ended, so Kora and I picked up a conversation we had begun at breakfast.

“What am I going to do about this job situation?” she asked me.

Like a torturous mantra, she went over the same complaints I had been hearing for months. Upper management was money-mad and indifferent to decency, line managers were without judgment, and clients wanted unicorns without approving necessary budgets.

“Well, if—” I started to reply, but she wasn’t listening.

She launched into the second wave of her ongoing work woes: low pay, poor benefits, cutthroat atmosphere, and employees expected to be available even during off-hours.

“You know—” I tried again.

“Also,” she went on, “you and I have to resolve some issues.”

I waited without comment. After all, what is the point of trying to respond if—? Right on cue, another interruption happened.

“We have to decide if we’re going to be together,” she said firmly.

“Together,” I repeated.

“Married,” she said. “Or not.”

“I see. Well—”

“I want to get pregnant.”

I turned to regard her. “Something about being around puppies bring this out?”

She punched me on the arm again, harder than before. This one meant, “Don’t be such a jerkface.” She was quite the conversationalist.

We wasted a couple of minutes rehashing this old argument. She listed the advantages of marriage, using glowing terms to describe the formal commitment, the tax breaks, and the joys of “family.” I countered with a few facts about inflexibility, in-laws, dependence, psychological imprisonment, entering into a contract with the state, and the overwhelming odds of divorce. Once again, we agreed to disagree, although she was becoming more disagreeable about it. My first hint was when she said, “You’re a moron sometimes.”

“I think ‘fucking moron’ is the phrase you’re looking for,” I told her.

“I take it back,” she replied. “You’re a moron all the time.”

“You don’t—” Yup, another interruption, but this one wasn’t from Kora.

The main door to the groomer’s burst open, slamming into the five-year-old girl with the curls. There was a sickening thud as the

metal-edged door struck the child, and the force sent her tumbling onto her mother's feet. There was an instant in which everyone was concerned for the welfare of the little girl, but this was replaced by shock and fear as a camo-clad male figure entered the room firing a semi-automatic, long-barrel tactical assault weapon.

The aural shock of each shot couldn't be processed because they were coming too fast, each explosion building on the last until the room was a sonic torture chamber. Blood was in the air, its red mist roiling everywhere while pints of it gushed from open wounds.

Kora's torso shook violently as several rounds pounded into her. One bullet struck me in the shoulder and the pain was white-hot and blinding. My body bounced off the back of my chair and then onto Kora. I watched her die and couldn't believe I was still conscious.

Painfully twisting my head, I saw the shooter stop and look down at his weapon. Smoke swirled and eddied around the barrel of the gun. There was now an acrid smell in the room that did not go well with the scent of blood.

In ads and promotional literature from the manufacturers of rapid-fire military-grade weapons, you encounter phrases like “man glory,” “your opposition will bow down,” “male test,” “proving ground,” and “game time.” Some of these machines of death are called “ultimate combat weaponry.”

Basically, everyone associated with this industry can go fuck themselves.

My vision blurred for a second, and the ringing in my ears was intense. I focused my eyes and saw the shooter discard the empty magazine from his weapon and insert another. I braced for the deathblow, but he marched over to the half-door and began firing into the back rooms.

He tried to open the half-door, found it was locked, and blasted off the door handle and locking mechanism. He slipped into the back rooms. At first, there was screaming and barking. Then gunfire, screaming, and barking. Then more gunfire. Then the screaming and barking stopped.

Some motor skills returned to the left side of my body, and I was able to move my hand enough to smear some of Kora’s blood on my

face. I tried to look dead for when the shooter returned to the waiting room.

Okay, not really.

I made up the shooting. Sadly, it seemed completely believable because of the uniquely American stupidity about the reasonable control of weapons. So, yes, this was all a bit of a fake-out. I would apologize to you except that I'm not sorry. While I don't like red herrings in life, they're cool in stories.

I know what Kora would say. "You can't play tricks on the reader like that. Some of us just want some entertainment. Not everything has to also be moral instruction."

"True," I would reply, "but this is what I do—my stories are ethical guidance disguised as entertainment."

I am sure some of you take Kora's side in our disputes, but that's impossible because... there are no disputes. There is no relationship and there is no Kora. I made up the girlfriend, the dog groomer visit, and the killings.

Yeah, I know. Kora would say that's something a cat person would do.

About the Author

With malice toward all and charity for none, John Scott G stumbles through life radiating unrestrained cynicism and unbridled sarcasm. “Don’t forget my misanthropy,” he states. He also wants you to know that he writes to “achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.” He says that sounds good and it’s not at all plagiarized.



Photo: Brian Forest

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