

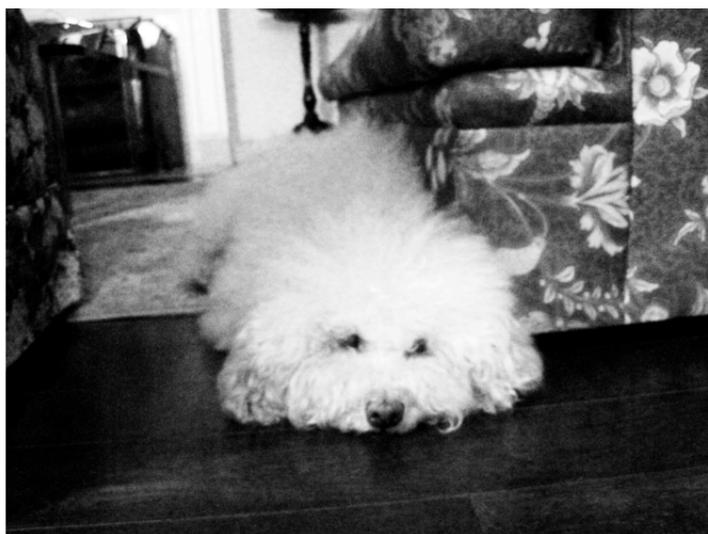
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# **Sheltered Close**

by

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1.

You were Harvard material . . . I graduated from  
the Ivy League,  
but would have written for you,  
a recruiter's obligation when he sees potential:  
curiosity, wit, your chin raised high,  
your chest out, legs steady, your mind made up.

I laughed at your posture and then your bark  
that put big dogs in their place.  
They'd stay on the West Coast where they belong.

You always walked away un-interfered with.  
Anyone could see this.

2.

Before we found you, groomed and ready  
at the shelter, you were lost,  
completed matted, wandering streets.

But when we took you for a walk,  
just down the block, you found us,  
our miniature big guy, sitting at our feet  
as we filled out your passport.

Your original name was lost  
to history. You came to us  
as Stanley, the escape artist.

We had to love you closely  
because we didn't want  
to have you disappear again.

3.

We took you everywhere we could,  
where you sat close  
making sure you were noticed by people  
who loved all things living,  
and when they came to pet you,  
you let them because your love was free.

4.

You didn't play with toys,  
and the ones we bought you  
I made squeak until I, too,  
was sick of the sound: child's play.

You had serious business on your mind.  
I could tell by the way you stared at me,  
a sight I took to heart:  
*Why would I want a toy?*

5.

We loved walking you to the Coffee Bean, just  
down the block.

You had water, standing in the open  
where you'd look at everyone who brought food  
outside.

Only at home did you sit for a cookie,  
and when you finished one, you sat there  
until I understood you wanted a second.

Never a third . . .

You knew there'd be a first later.

You trusted my hand,  
and I felt understood.

6.

If I turned the other way, you'd jumped off the bed.  
You resisted being confined,  
even by hands that wanted to hold you.

I had to learn to let you walk  
at your own pace, back to the foot of the bed.

Then I picked you up  
so you could sleep with us  
completely on your own.

7.

Your solid white shape appeared out of the blue,  
every time I looked around a corner.

You were baby  
proof that everything was young.



You were in fact a miraculous breed  
that kept us full of wonder.

9.

Still, something innate kept you  
waiting at the open door of each room.

You wanted to be invited in from room to room.  
And you were. We ran to your courtesy.  
No barging in like a small oblivious pet,  
barking in a language no one  
could possibly listen to. You kept a fine distance  
that drew us to you.

In the end we both were touched  
and you were home.



11.

When I put you on the bed,  
you'd licked me without end.  
I had to push your affection away  
for a moment to catch my breath.

You must have known I had to  
because afterwards you tucked your head  
under my neck, and during the night,  
when I raised my head to give you breathing  
    room,  
you licked me again.

12.

You hated to be groomed, and passed out twice  
when other dogs gave themselves over  
to licensed handlers.

We had you bathed and cut  
at home where we stayed out of the way.

Only when you dried  
did we see how handsome you were,

and we looked forward to brushing you  
from a clean start.

But you hated  
even a loving hand on your hair,  
which grew back very fast, and so we had to stop  
and wait for another home visit.

In these between times, you were left to yourself  
and liked it, free from social care.

13.

You would fall asleep anywhere: in the middle  
of the living room when people were over,  
in the living room of anyone who invited us over,  
and everyone remarked how trusting you were,  
the kind of guest everyone wanted to invite.

After dinner you took a nap.  
But sprawling comfortably in someone else's  
    living room  
struck me as inappropriately comfortable.

    The host barked, *He's sleeping*  
*in the middle of my house.*

Then I too wanted to join you,  
but I kept my behavior to myself . . .

14.

I kept singing even after I thought you were deaf,  
for I wanted you to remember the music I played  
every Sunday morning, the music that took me back  
centuries where I imagined I lived a royal life.

You must have heard it, too, for your silent posture  
on the floor by the couch meant we both were  
back where we knew, as sure as the music in the room,  
that time was elusive, and perhaps an illusion . . .

15.

Sometimes I think I pulled too hard  
when you wanted to wait and let the scents  
in the grass, like signposts, hold you.

You hugged the wall, and buried your head  
along its stones, better guides than I.

I wanted you to like the lawn and the wind,  
and when we crossed the street to a new block,  
you stood there, raised your head  
as if you knew this was unfamiliar ground  
and you waited to take in open space.

I was happy I pulled you there and thought  
your waiting said you were happy to be  
out of this world. I wanted to think that . . .  
and when you walked slowly,  
one foot in front of the other,  
I knew you thought that, too.

That's what I could give you, even for a short time,  
before you went through the tunnel.

16.

Once I saw the passing horror on your face,  
when I pulled you forward to the elevator door,  
your head hugging the wall.

    `You'd slip on the smooth floor,  
your back legs giving way,  
until I picked you up and carried you  
from the first floor outside.

I wanted you to walk the way  
you loved to walk.

I was your future, I told myself,  
and your past.

Then slowly you began,  
halting so you'd press your nose into the jasmine  
hanging from the planter that kept the garden  
safe.

    You renewed yourself with each breath,  
hid under the vine, where others had passed,  
and you remembered who you were,  
and sometimes as you walked, feet straight ahead,  
you'd stopped.

    Whatever you wanted to find  
you found. You wanted me to know this.  
I did.

Then you walked ahead of me,  
looking back, and at inexplicable intervals  
you leapt over invisible barriers,  
then over curbs at the end of each block.  
I loved the joy we both found unanticipated.

17.

Then suddenly seizures from where I stood.  
Did you know they were coming?

Your repeating pain told me everything  
was late. I could only take you to the hospital  
where we sat in one vacant room  
where the doctor kept walking  
through terrible choices. We had no choice  
and my pain kept repeating.

You were quieted by then, waiting in the room  
at the back, your own emergency room.

18.

The doctor said it was organ failure.  
Which? All of them at different speeds,  
different times, then all at one time.

I was wide-awake, looking for a cause.  
Only one would do. What had I done?  
Walking you when you were reluctant to walk?  
Do you remember how freeing your walks were,  
how you took the lead and I watched you  
leap ahead?

You left me behind.

But this was different . . .

19.

You still felt firm to my hand  
on the gurney that rolled you  
in, and I held you as you breathed,  
often.

Then I knew you knew me,  
and I hoped you wouldn't be abandoned  
to plastic syringes with the fluids for ebbing life,  
the sea brought into the emergency room, again  
and again, as you used it up.  
But there was always more

until you had no need of more.

Then dry land.

20.

I was close enough to see your eyes and thought  
they saw me. You had been euthanized,  
a cold word for a still warm being.

But your eyes didn't close and no one  
closed them. They stared  
as if you were still awake.  
And I was still, too, a witness to something  
moving me.

    I saw ahead,  
but I wanted you to see  
that your spirit never left my sight as I was  
ushered out . . .

21.

When I look out the glass window of my office

now,

I imagine you pushing yourself  
through the patio bushes, where you peed.

I brought the lawn close to you  
when the outside was far away . . .

22.

How crowded the rooms have become.

They are full of traces.

There is barely room to move.

You are everywhere and my memory blocks  
my seeing free space: in the middle of the dining  
room,

under the table where you were caught  
and cried so repeatedly.

I couldn't

get there fast enough

to pull you out. Now I see

silence. I can't have gone deaf.

I hear your voice that reshapes each room  
into a box off of which I pull the lid.

Sadness never opened a heart  
so invisibly.

23.

Where are you, Stanley?

I have run into every corner of each room  
into which you ran, headlong, finding something  
invisible: a secure place?

A blocked direction.

What comfort would have  
lodged there, your head pushing against barriers—  
I didn't think there could be  
so many in each room.

Howling panicked me  
and I run to set you free of panic.  
I want to find you lodged  
in any corner so I know where you are  
and can back you out, pick you up  
where my comfort rests, where your quiet rests, too,  
if only I could find you.

24.

I wish you everything good.  
Your poise carried all your days.

You sensed when I was there,  
even after you were deaf.

But if I called your name  
in an unmistakable voice,  
you raised your head, turned it back.  
You knew me once again.  
You reached where memory lives  
and drew the thread that connected us.  
The heart is carried on this invisible cord.

You gave me life,  
even as your own descended into the silence  
everyone assured me was real.

How shut my comforters are  
to longing never silenced.

25.

How soon your ashes  
rest in my closet,  
a certificate of authentication  
fixed to the front of the box  
should anyone happen on it  
and begin reading.

But rest assured, Stanley,  
I'll remember you.  
I know where you are,  
and before I close the door,  
I'll have mixed one tear  
with what remains  
in the box, now filled,  
now empty, pointing here  
where my thoughts are,  
sheltered close.