

## Cecily Niumeitolu

### buddy system

THE JACARANDA TREE is moated by a knee-high brick wall just outside the kindergarten classroom. Every November the jacaranda flowers fall, casting a purple shade that moves and pulses with bees embalming in the sick sweet. This will be the last November the kindly teacher is bound to hazard the kids to steer clear of the courtyard surrounding the old tree, and thinks her command rather pointless. There's a noticeable decline in the population of bees looming in the rot, while nut bars are on the frontline of an anaphylactic epidemic. Two girls still play their serious games during the purple shadow, jumping behind the off-limit brick moat that guards the jacaranda. They wish to dwell with rock, with wood.

The two girls hid diamonds in the tree, *real diamonds* they would claim. One of the two girls discovered the booty in an old trunk, deep in the backyard of a pirate who just happened to live next door. Hook was the pirate, and the other girl gave credence to this claim. She knew Hook. Hook had red hair and was ginormous and owned a rainbow lorikeet called Hoozle who was blind in both eyes, so would be fed crackers all day long by the dirty seadog. The terrible two would barter their story with

other kids who sported packed lunches. And as the girls grew their jewels in the bark, they would bear their crystals to the sun to bud their clientele's eyes into rainbow. Red and green and shiny bangles would clink and clunk as good as gold and ruby and emerald. They would come, the boys and girls, proffering their noodles, apples, monte carlos, caramello koalas.

One afternoon, a parent confronted one of the mothers belonging to the two serious girls. Her son had come home wearing clip-on diamanté earrings and, after she twisted his ear, and made threats amounting to a ban on Internet access, he claimed it was the girl, her daughter, who had black marketed them (among other contraband) for his Doritos and jam donuts. The boy's mother took out her angst, which stemmed from an identity crisis not rooted in her son but an idea fixed to the role of mother. Now, nightly, she would find her son, his arms folded across his chest, a sheet tight over his head, and her shiny stilettos on his feet, surrounded by a ring of high heels with their toe ends facing in, a profound clock face foreshadowing the future. It was easier to blame the clock on the serious girl. The father of the boy found no shame in his son's behavior, and reminded his partner that the kid was healthy, that he was merely mimicking those in the world closest to him, that she was his role model, and that she should be happy. Their kid had sass.

That night was scalding. The girl ran into the bathroom as if she could hide from a hiding. She grabbed onto the shower curtain, twirling it around her, wrapping herself in the garish plastic to ward off the wind turbine that had usurped the mother. The shower curtain couldn't handle the mother's propelling and broke off the piping. Her breath was knocked out, if only for a moment, when the mother saw the opportunity to use the shower pole to blow her rascalion of a daughter down. How could this child, born of her lie, steal and swindle her mother's and her mother's mother's jewelry under the tall tale of a pirate called

Hook who owned a blind parrot? The girl became a bell rung with each sure scold, her tongue donging as she curled upon herself, trying not to sob an inch or to give that redheaded hook of a mother any sign of remorse.

The terrible two waited an eternity. The morning was so infinity, the day so sadly infinity and frightful never, so boring and endless, the jolt of minutes so slow. And then there would be Christmas holidays and so many weeks, and perhaps trips somewhere, to the beach, with real castles of sand, and real crabs and sea anemones in rock pools, which they would finger, relishing slime. How long must they wait till the recess bell, till they till and upturn the bruise of buzzing, till they are bees buzzing, till they run in figure eights, twirl on the spot, their loose heads drugged with dizziness. They no longer have diamonds to trade, but they have rocks, pet rocks, and pet slaters and stingrays made of jacaranda pods, ready under the arbor.

One of the terrible two used to eat slaters. Was a moist old grot of rock and wood, her mother's place, so different from her father's? The slaters would climb up the walls and drop off the ceiling onto her dinner plate, where she would peck them up before she could be stopped, her brothers and sisters cringing, making ew. She was such a grub—a yucky grub. The girl would crumple her nose, a certain pride. Some wanted to be lawyers or bankers, but when she was a grown up, she'd be a grub, a slater. They were silver and blue, delicious blue and silver and blue, and had slats for backs. They were houses that were alive, carried houses on their backs. She quivers the crunch. She misses the crunch. She has an urge to pop these slaters on her tongue, under the rocks of the jacaranda, but is fearful of judgment from her best. She may not approve of eating their pets, and she is fearful to try, just in case. She wouldn't mind kissing her. She wouldn't mind trying. Her friend has such petal lips, such purple wet petal; she wouldn't mind if she was kissed by her in the bud, or if the

girl put her hand between her legs and went tremble there a while between her lips, trembled their hands to vegemite smell, and she would eat her friend's hands.

They are good friends, after all. Best of friends. A terrible two. They could bathe together, be swim together. They could try dangling, and they could bathe together in the holidays. Dangling their legs off the brick wall, they name the rocks in their own language. Ti is small, Haramboo is the heaviest, Luloom long, Rigadig rough, sandy; Impling is round and the favourite. Impling the Impling, and their children—the children of their very own, the slaters, they lift up the rocks, and check that they are all still there. A happy.

They nudge the slaters, to see which ones curl faster than others (a sign of health), to see which are fatter, too greedy, lecturing them with their pinkies, lifting them with their pinkies, so that they share the mulch, the rocks. The baby ones are smaller; they are fast but easily hurt if fingered, so they better not. Better only to play with the mother slaters, prawns of earth, who make castles of the rocks. At times they pouch the slaters: a slater curls and unfurls, rafting their fingers and hands that rudder, turning tremble till they grin their secret under the classroom table, the classroom dumb to their fun. They like to see them curl into houses, and when the terrible two are sad they disrupt the dirt if only to relish the slaters in their fear, to relish fear curling; and terrible mouths curl smiles, and then they spend the minutes waiting, waiting for their children, talking to their young, curlylike with curly tongues that lull and loom, coaxing them, telling their young they are not to hurt them, that they were just testing, that it is safe to uncurl and go about their business, and the slaters do, unclenching themselves and beginning their march, as if nothing. And the two serious girls feel a sense of right in this, holding the rocks up and marvelling. When the bell sings, they gently place the rocks back over the ground near the roots

of the jacaranda tree and, in their given positions, where the dirt is loose, give shelter under Ti and Haramboo and Luloom and Rigadig and Impling.

The buzzing is all about them. The earth is wet still beneath the jacaranda, and the rocks wet above the roots. The girls don't care they don't have their clients any longer. They could eat the slaters, one suggests, but the other scrunches her nose and is not for it—eating their young, that would be bad.

The girl pops a slater in her mouth and crunches down.

The other casts her mouth in horror, but she pretends her horror. She wants to try too but then presses a slater, watching it curl, and this curls her. She loves her friend's wet petal lips. She's just a little funny, just a little odd, and she has habits no one can see, that not even her best friend could see, for no one can see what she does in the night when she pretends to sleep, away with herself and terrible. If her best eats slaters it's not so bad; she makes the best games and they have their own bells. The bells are bees and no one can touch them; they are the fastest runners, none of the boys come close; and they can kiss and catch each other instead, and they can curl into slaters, just like the slaters, and roll and play marbles with the slaters, who are such wonderful marbles, who let themselves be rolled across the court stained brown by the rotting flowers. They have six legs or ten or a gazillion and they queen the castle; it is their castle, a castle of purple, and the day is too long and it never will end, and it is sweat and stink of boy, and they will always be the best of friends, always the best the very best.

## in its sex

THERE SHE WAS, sitting at the window, below the fabric, below the steel, with the roll of wheels, the tug of pistons. Big wheels—black, big black wheels, round and round—and her sex turning on the shift at the intersection that sent the bus left, thrumming just right. It pleases her the watching that takes over the restlessness, the watching that opens in a somnolence bereft of a goal.

How her arms rile at the joints after the repetitive movement and all-day stoop, those acts that figure her joints tender come the end of day. In moments like this she gets winsome and visualises her work scissors delving, wrist to elbow, gathering warmth in that quarter, and this proffers a bright sight. She looks out the window, is lost in looking out the window.

Her eyes are inordinate devices for a consumption that roams slantwise as her body is palliated into dumb cargo. The bus vies for the curb; some alight, some board, and the homeless men in the tents near Central park's bus stop blow each other in the bushes. Go their blowing: the bush could be repurposed as a humble divider for a quick suck. She had never thought to use a bush in such a way. Her ears discount words as she lets the scrum of the passengers take over.

It was that her man got off on furniture and tapestry. Perhaps that was sex requiring a metamorphosis of sorts. Sure, there was intimacy—but so-called sex was less between them, not that it

really existed to an extent that could be termed “romantic.” Still, they do dote on one another. Was a material love: romance was the appendix of an otherwise healthy body built between them, and they were joined by a similar worldview. They patterned the world with similar patterns; there was respect and small kindness. She did not want for a life without him. When he mounts her, which is rarely, her face would be muffed by the pillow, and he’d rabbit from behind with his hands on her shoulder wings for a few arduous minutes, before patting her behind postcoitally, as if he’d just given her a treat.

There was more carnality between his hands and wood. She can’t remember the last time he touched her the way he handled an antique freshly purchased from an auction down Alexandria way. When she left him to do his dark bidding in the back room of their semi, she would fall asleep watching late-night infomercials on the newest abgadget or on pyjamas that doubled as a sleeping bag, knowing he would not return for hours. No doubt he was surfing eBay for a table so streamline it might float, or a Tasmanian oak frame with seamless joints. He would creep into bed and puck her as a child on her left cheek. She sometimes felt a voodoo anger towards chair legs, the way he would almost touch them, the way his fingers would dance up and down as if he was about to perform a magic trick, widening his eyes. She would leave the room when he got out the beeswax on a Sunday arvo, on his hands and knees, with a white cloth, rubbing their arms and legs. Instead of children, they had a Parker table and Ole Wanscher chair. She dreamt of a bonfire, a bonfire that would smell of cedar and varnish and impeccable taste.

The human contact on the bus was as necessary as cauterising a wart. The girl beside her wore an apricot jumper, cashmere. Only cashmere materialised a nimbus so haptic it could tickle her corneas. All day long she’d work with nylon, cotton, rulers and needles, measuring, cutting fabric to size, seaming. Clothes were

not all they were cut out to be. In fact, as a woman in her mid-fifties, she was lucky she even had a job in garment construction. That morning, she sat through an excruciatingly long-winded monologue with the new general manager, whose voice was so vacant as to seem a tad deranged. She was so obviously skirting around the actual issue. The manager's eyes gaddled ceaselessly over her person, as if they were flies unable to find a shit to land on—a coke habit perhaps. It was only when she herself had said it, for the exasperated girl was well out of her depth, that she politely worded the prospect of her own redundancy.

She let out a grunt, and the girl in the apricot jumper repaired to a seat at the back of the bus that had freed up. Still, how could she not grunt. Maybe it would be for the best: no more intern pattern makers wearing the latest fad of socks with sandals during Autumn, or pants up to their nipples, speaking to her in broken English, bowing low, as if she was from Japan or something, before telling her in monosyllables how to interface a bloody collar.

She looked over the heads to her left, then at the front, the partition at the front, sequestering the view of the driver, apart from the interior rearview mirror. She held his reflection, he couldn't see her, he was a little overweight, balding. She saw him ogling at the next stop an exotic young thing with jeans so tight they were as good as skin, an apple-shaped, taut face so edible. The driver smiled a little smile, as though he would smile at all the passengers with such a smile.

She didn't feel so different, no, she didn't feel so different—or perhaps it was that she just couldn't remember exactly how she felt.

The pistons feel her, the pistons and fuel turning. The throttle feels her, and hands that are wheeling, and the effect below her, above her, across her, going round and round. She could feel the left rear wheel turning her. Round and round she

could feel her whole body moved by the grooves and bumps in the road, the jolt of the break at the light, and the inevitable cross-stitch of cars down Parramatta Road, an ambulance siren always bounding past.

She was back in Blayney, and she remembered her legs would splay beneath the tap in the bath, get right up close to the flow of warm water beneath the tap, get her rear right under it, and the pleasure devoid of idea, hitting a warmth working from the inside out, from the outside in, all at once. All at once the pleasure of the bus, being above the left rear wheel, her tiredness opening up. She gave herself over to the throb of the steel frame above, to the side, below her, the window that she lay her head upon, tingling into her inner ear, shivering hairs along her joints, along her arms. She gave herself to the sore, to the cold, to the town hall with its broken clock tower, the shopfronts turned squat, and others with a glow that made her heart break, always just a little.

She would go home and be kissed on the forehead by her man. She would run her hands along his back, along the woolen sweater that she made him last winter, fix his fringe, and they would play out their day to one another over tea. She would eat a huge sandwich of avocado and swiss cheese and rye, would run a bath, quit her job, would make herself a new dress, and dye her grey pussy a Chinese black, all these desires weaving as she alighted Norton Street, stepping over the amorphous mound, asleep in its blanket, outside the local convenience store, her eyes consumed in a warm glow, tingling.

## every dog and her girl

THE DOG WAS a dance. Yes, and the girl? The girl was a dance. Yes, the dog and her girl were a dance. How did that song go, how did it go—O body swayed by music—it was just that something that sways inextricable. The girl could be called beautiful, they called her beautiful. That she was something that could be called beautiful posed questions at times, this beauty, this raging. And how the rage leapt through her bones, how the brow that creased too early loosened in her shaking fists and cicada legs.

The girl had a sister—if this little girl was called beautiful, the elder sister, the elder sister, how to put it. Skin of magnolia, hair of cobalt, lips of wing. But her eyes: ah, a beat of her lashes could lacerate the heart. Those lashes were slippery dips from which her hazel would disarm. Yet these parts, in themselves cause for remark, were dealt so much grace by an inner warmth that it was as if her mind was a benign head of state, a head that dulled these heady fiefdoms towards fine equipoise.

But we are getting carried away here. We are once again letting the beauty get in the way of . . .

The elder had a child, the child had her mother's laughing eyes, they set up house in the suburbs just nearby. It was all soft, soft mother and soft child; think pastel colours in a milky room, soft kisses and soft words. But there are many stories that could be told, and least of all a mother and child's. Many Helens and many wars fought under the farce of these faces, a fair foil for a prick by any other name. What is beauty but a collective

yearning, to be born a Helen—ah, what nightmare would smell as sweet.

Perhaps, in the end the elder is a minor. She minors the scene of the dance, perhaps. The elder sister's lips may feature here—perhaps these lips and only those lips; they touch our girl's cheek, and then from the deep space a whisper, a whisper that is demand and also instruction, and the girl, only the girl, can hear, and upon her face a smile appears.

Do you hear one magpie begin a song, do you hear how this calls for congregation? If you do not, then listen, the black grips, the branches, and the whole tree teams to music box, volleying a fugue that opines far travels. A spirited epic delimits the bower of the blue gum, and such song of dark and light could not be but birds, and the birds could not be but a song of piercing dispersion, rising many-voiced but one, which forthwith ends as it began, instantly and without ceremony, harboring no future. We meet the dog and her girl under the bower of the blue gum, in the local park under the bower of the blue gum.

The dog is out walking her girl, and the dog is black, as black as the magpies to be exact—which is to say, the dog is black with white highlights. The white highlights how time diffuses her limbs, how an end diffuses from the inside out, from the outside in. Our canine does not need to reconcile with death: she will be right to harry a space to deal with her body's malaise, for she is moved by life as she is moved by death, matter-of-factly.

The dog will make room for death when time is due, as indeed will the girl, through attrition—pain—that great inquisitor. Pain will charge space with contemplation, to reconcile with death per se by clutching the cosmic in a little mortal death of her very own, and this little death will clutch the girl to plot a space in the space that opens her to infinity. Perhaps carrying a thought on the wind, a trespass born into living: yes, the dog

and her girl among the fissures that fire your own little head into death. Surrender will be sudden.

The dog's muzzle is a diffuse light, and her coat's recourse to a different melanin expresses itself in the white that sprouts her jowls and brow, forefeet and hindfeet. How the dog's skin sags across her abdomen and neck, across her increasingly cleaving chest, so much that it seems as though she were performing a sleight of hand, for now she sports a tuxedo coat to court death, a white emblem hearting her black saturate. Yes, there is something Dietrich about this dog, something Dietrich in *Morocco*. Behind the dog's eyes there conspires a reticence that holds the world nonchalantly, a kind of nonchalance that takes life as if it were a dream, as if at times she were asleep with her eyes open.

Perhaps we are reading into the eyes of the dog something that is not there, in an Olympia sort of way. To reference the world around us is a human talent, that of fabling the inexplicable towards resolution. Gods, Yetis, and apocalypses roam the human horizons. It is a colourful way to be, with a cast of invisible friends and nemeses. The dog was not an automaton, but nor was she human. Her eyes were that of a dog, those eyes that perceived clearly, with no talent for fabulation. The future functions differently for the dog, who may dig a hole to stash a carcass, a treat to dig up at a later date, when the flesh has rotted appropriately, and who may then collect talismans of twigs and socks to set up shack. Yet she is not held to ransom by these creative endeavours, and surrenders herself to the momentum of the present, for what is pressing is a tummy rub, performed by her girl at this very moment beneath the bower.

The tummy rub is winning. Very winning. The dog is winning.

Often, the dog regards her girl in such a way that the girl feels guilt. This guilt does not reside in the dog; but in the dog's girl who has abstracted failing her duty of walking her companion.

The dog throws upon the girl what the girl sees as a Dietrich distance; the dog is unimpressed with the waiting game she must play until she is taken out once again to be as she is, a dog. The dog plays her tune. She slinks across the living room after eyeing her girl, and she rubs across the chair, winding a half circle upon her hessian bed, to coil that head into her legs, all a conch.

The girl is under the bower of the blue gum, living in the shadow of her elder sister, unaware of what could be called, by some, a certain charm. She has eyebrows that caterpillar and lips and eyes that looney tune a bug parade. The candour of such insect features, so delicate yet robust, and as muscled as centrifuges, is as transfixing as watching someone with a plate of green jelly about to trip over a bench. The girl has no talent for duplicity and, in lacking this talent, makes good this lack, to be appalled and show no appall, to be impressed and show no impression: it is a bag of tricks she presumes wanting.

At times this frankness is charming. Conversely, it often causes offence. Some such persons in their own duplicity intuit in the girl a purity akin to idiocy. This lack of duplicity feeds into her kithship with animals. The girl is more comfortable with their languages, with her fluency in animal movement, primed as it is by her training as a dancer, with muscles and their locomotive cadences more easily legible for her than for the majority of her kind. She has a talent for bodies. Thus to her, the certain ways a dog may pivot, and certain prehensions in the trapezius, signal a dog's intent. The gestures of the neck, a paw that stretches out, a supplicating snout, a gaze: these acts are never directionless but are vessels of habitation, existing as concrescence and conflict, as question and response, folding further. And now the wind plays on the girl's brow under the bower, in the park, and in response her mouth curls.

A brindle staffie waltzes upon the scene just as the girl's face is curling, the staffie's balls hanging low and loose in their

skin. This is in contrast to the head, with its skin stretched tight over the knotskull, lowered on approach. His ears droop slightly back, his tail limp. He is scouting the availability and backstory of our dog by scavenging her rump. The dog who walks her girl, although desexed, is not averse to a full-blown male, brindle or otherwise. While she is on the whole standoffish in relation to her own species' taking of privileges, she is more willing when the nose belongs to a virile type. After this sniff, the dog—as is custom among dogs—takes her turn, her eagerness translating in her tail, which crescents sky high, and with her black nose, with its now-white whiskers, flaring mildly as the neck delves inward, towards its puckered target. After this short meet and greet, the brindle bounces off, a little prouder, balls dangling left and right, rising its hind leg over a nearby shrub. He disappears, never to be seen again.

Enter a female kelpie, who jetties face forward but moves to the dog's quarters, her tail wagging. The girl notices the hairs stiffening around the neck, alpha that the kelpie is. The growl erupts, the dogs frozen in a close-quarter Mexican stand-off in rapid time. The girl grunts from above, and calls to her dog, "Dog." The girl summons her feet and legs to stiffen into syncopation, so that she may tower over them both. The kelpie ignores the girl and her demand, its face taut and foxy, not looking directly at her target, but by a side glance as she begins to bare her teeth. The dog responds with neck hairs rising beneath tensed muscles, and the girl slides her hand quickly below the collar, pulling the dog to her shin. There is no call from the distance, but there is something else the kelpie wants, and she moves on, moves on farther.

When the girl was young, she thought as most bourgeois white kiddies think—that she was free—and felt her freedom encroached on recklessly by her parents. She was led blindfolded across a tightrope between two cliffs of violence with a gulf of cruelty in between. No, she could not see how precarious freedom

was, nor its dirty cost—not until dissonance could enter the scene. So it happened in the guise of a series of run-of-the-mill maths tutorials when she was cusping. Yes, the maths tutorials happened to her on the cusp.

When the maths tutor happened, she was horrified to find hair sprouting within valleys and dips previously barren, her caterpillar brows arching thusly in appall. She was punching her chest to make the little sore hills disappear, wanted to be the way she used to be. This harvest left her in mourning. Why her body was changing when she didn't want it to, didn't want it to at all—and this was cause for more than discomfort—it was shameful.

She wished she was somewhere other than in maths; anywhere else would do. Perhaps she could be at soccer practice, or following her sister and her sister's friends, somewhere beyond the window. She would wait, all ashiver at the window, at the door. The maths tutor was a bloke the burb used. He'd worked up a solid reputation, and the girl was thenceforward sent to him. "Send her there," her mother would say. "Maybe then her grades will improve."

But the girl would sit on the tutor's lap, and he'd tell her to open her mouth, and it felt funny and a little strange, and that tongue of his so powdery and darty. Of course, she never told anybody. It was her boyish beauty that won him over so. Skin of magnolia, hair of cobalt, lips of wing. And how slippery dip the lashes upon which the hazel reposed, pretty as a picture, pretty as a child blooming. She wondered what happened to the tutor. She did hate him, wondered why she did hate him, knew she should hate him, for life happens instantly and without ceremony. Time had passed, as time did, much time, and there were so many other wonders that crept her out. There were moments when her mouth opened and he crept back, he and the hate, and she felt sore, for however many others, for however many could be counted.

She kept despite a propensity to love. It was her life to love, self-care folded into animals, into people, and in small ways into the landscape that constituted her life. Hurt was part and parcel of forming and maintaining and severing relations, part and parcel of the deal of her life. To love was that love was contingent.

The girl recognised that the preciousness of love came not from its being unconditional but from bonds hard won, that perpetual balancing act between one's own desires and those of others. It was certain that her father never could quite master affection, and her mother was draconian. Yes, these factors may have led her to know how conditional love was. She could sense an economy to affection.

Perhaps this is why she turned to dogs, to these fine examples of the conditions that constitute something akin to her notion of a special sort of trust. Food, exercise, shelter, and boundaries formed a loyalty that could become in a dog unerring, steadfast, and forgiving of occasional slip ups. Respect was something a dog didn't give willingly, but had to be earned. Intimacy was not a celebration of the dog's assimilation of human qualities but of an aberrant animality. Family could be created across species and not merely within her own. To be given this respect opened up a relationship incomparable to those she had shared with her fellow humans: it was a human-dog pact, millennia in the breeding. Here was the dog, scratching a flea on its back, a dog whose heightened awareness of movements, scents, and sounds invisible to the human senses, forwarded to her what could be called the beauty of life outside the stiflingly human.

The dog chose her. She chose to have the dog choose her. Yes, that would be best. There she sat—at the RSPCA with a mongrel litter, and the dog, the black runt, the pup barely able to stand under the weight of its milk-plump belly, foundered upon her foot, where it proceeded to fall asleep. The girl lifted the dog, for the dog had lifted the girl, lifted the dog in between her legs, where

she could see the pup's belly rising and falling in the soundest of sleeps. That is how the dog had her girl, and the girl her dog.

In the park the girl stood under the bower, the dog running across the park in strides that masked its sore stifles. The dog had a propensity to retrieve, it having been written somewhere into its co-evolution with humans, and with a coming of age, the girl noticed that the dog had become increasingly fixated on balls, balls and food, and food very much so. If there was a ball in the vicinity, no matter how hidden, the dog had the power to sniff it out, and back she would come with the ball in her mouth, squeezing the ball, a writhing question. And there the girl would stand, a warm response. The ball was the dance. One must throw; one must catch. The ball was their dance, for it sped across the park, dancing the park, in the dog and her girl's gathering, and the dog would go to no other, for it was for the girl alone that the dog.

The dog could then stop to sniff at a pole, and her pink beak would loosen, and she would crouch above the grass fronds, casting a glance for her girl as she made flag in her evergreen territory. This brought to the girl's face a glow: how once, how once upon the joy. The dog would be trotting off, serpentine, and the girl would call after the dog to wait.

The girl says now, "Dog, Dog, wait for!" And the dog—even before the wait—and merely in the way the name coils the air, knows what her girl requires, and the dog does not turn head, her ears pincer back, ready, for they existed to listen to her girl. And there the dog stands, frozen from snout to tail, their nostrils expanding to distinguish a new set of coordinates, staring forward, gathering in that body the somehow swaying.