Yesterday, Tomorrow, and Always

Each morning opens in a familiar fashion: lap up the sparse remains of last evening's bedtime bowl of water, leaving behind the correct wet change of fluid nickel and dime-sized puddles on the hardwood floor. With a quick head-to-tail shimmy, perfect for loosening knotted muscles, ten-year-old Herbie shuffles from the corner watering cranny toward the open window at the front of the room under which rests a plastic basket of clothing worn, discarded and collected. In the past, he might have hopped up on hind legs, paws on the sill, to peek at the world outside that window. He has, however, grown beyond that undertaking. Favoring his left back leg by carrying it up in a bent position, Herbie gently inserts his graying snout into the disparate collection of laundry rummaging for a specific memory.

Even after nearly three thousand and seven hundred such starts to a day, connecting a warm recollection from the previous day's lived life to the appropriate memento requires careful consideration. Like all dogs, Herbie inhabits fully only the present moment, though he also embraces the happy echoes of the past aware that within this hazy expanse hides tomorrow, and if his luck holds, forever. Selecting a single recently worn item—today a well-used dress sock, on other days a pair of underwear, a sweater, a tee, or a towel—Herbie noses through the basket until he finds the moment he seeks. The faint scent of warmed earth from the previous day's gardening still lingers on the fabric. He encloses the browned, heel-worn sock in his jaws, strong despite the absence of more than a few teeth. Skillfully pulling the sock from the middle of the basket, Herbie is careful to avoid initiating the textile avalanche that could dislodge and drop to the ground a concealed shoe or belt

hidden deep within. Such a miscue would alert the figure lost in thought nearby, too early. Pleasant moments are to be shared—at the correct time.

Slouching upright in bed, Friend is tacitly aware of Herbie's movements around the room. This peek-a-boo dance is just part of his—their—daily ritual of waking. Friend's morning rituals also reflect patterned familiarity. Herbie knows that Friend is either reading from one of their many packets of chewy papers or listening to the sounds emanating from the open window hoping to foretell today's weather. Maybe even both at the same time. Sensing their distraction, and aware of the inviting tap-tap-tap-tap of his own nails on the floor, Herbie slowly, and with great ceremony, moves to exit the room. Stopping at the threshold, he turns in anticipation of eye contact, shaking the sock twice in his jaws to free the loamy scent of this morning's catch. While mindful that small biscuits smell less enticing than they once did, Herbie remains confident enough in his sniffing skills to have chosen that right piece to beckon Friend to follow. Which it does. Friend offers a confirming glance Herbie's way, accompanied by the performative "What are you up to, Silly?" that releases Herbie forward into the hallway. With this question asked only to stir the space between them, Friend pulls themselves up swinging legs until both feet land flat at the bedside.

The hallway's floral-patterned carpet runner muffles Herbie's steps as he proceeds down the center of the corridor. He drags the mid-calf sock along the ground in front of him heading toward the staircase. The spectral scents of day-old fertile earth trail Herbie as he negotiates the four descending steps to the first landing, where he drops to the carpet, an exclamatory "Harrumph!" escaping his clenched jaw. He sinks into his ascribed slightly settled carpet space in the middle of the landing, the sock hanging just below his lolling

head, eyes closed, ears open. The soft sigh of heavy footsteps releases from the wooden floorboard beside the bed, as Herbie supposes Friend has begun to follow the familiar breadcrumbs laid out for him.

Upon reaching the landing, Friend steps over and around Herbie's resting form and sits on the step just below inquiring, "What are you doing with that dirty sock, Pup?" This prompts Herbie to instinctually strengthen his grip, the taste of soil separating from the fabric and recalling past days spent digging holes and burying bones. Friend recalls yesterday's yard work. Resting their right palm on Herbie's head, Friend traces the faint white caterpillar hairs above the clouding eyes with the extended forefinger and thumb before remind Herbie that he is "the best dog in the world." The wagging docked tail confirms this simple truth made real through its release into the air between them. With it, Herbie and Friend's yesterdays and tomorrows together begin again in earnest.