

His ears perk up and in an instant he is awake at the foot of the bed. He takes a second to get his bearings, to gather all relevant information of time and space around him; with a violent shake of his head he rids of sleep and his ears flap in their charming way. It's dark in the room, an early morning deep grey, though he has no real conception of time in the sense of minutes and hours; his first thoughts don't drift quite towards the "Oh, God, what time is it" questions asked by most upon an unscheduled awakening. It's more a feeling honed by habit and instinct. His Master, giant and benevolent — an anvil-heavy sleeper up much too late tapping away at his computer, working, writing something — sleeps still like a log near the head of the bed.

He's not quite sure why he has awoken; he knows only that he is incredibly thirsty, and this being the tail end of his 15th hour of sleep and probably his 10th nap for the day, a little restless. Weighing a little less than a dozen pounds, he stands on his four legs unconcerned with disturbing the sleep of the Master. In the cold air of January, a new year, he takes in the fading night with acute senses. Far off, cars speed away, revving their engines on empty streets. His brethren bark and howl from miles around, behind locked doors and gates and fenced-in side yards, from the alleys and barren streets for those of them less fortunate. This gives him some start. An ancient urge to reply pulls at him, though he knows, somehow, they are far off and his yammerings will be useless. He stretches, front legs extended and rear end pushed up in that yoga pose so aptly named and appropriated by his Master's race. His tongue extends, long and curled at the end as every ounce of him breaks off the rust of sleep.

He jumps off the bed, into the darkness, hoping the floor is there as it has been the last few thousand times he's done this. He turns left and pads to the door ajar and nudges it open with his nose, just enough for his body to fit through but not with so much force that the knob bangs against the wall. He is a courteous dog, and he has been well trained (and yelled at far too much) to let this happen anymore.

He pads a few more steps until the silence of the old carpet in his Master's room recedes and his nails tap-tap-tap on the hardwood of the hallway. Here he freezes, senses engaged once again to take in the night from a new vantage point. There are great foes that lie ahead; he hates them and fears them with similar intensity. He listens for their presence.

The night is cold, but the wind is absent. The blinds do not shake and the thin windows do not boom with the pressure of the air swirling around outside, sounds that induce panting fits and send him running and screeching for the solace of the space under the bed. He listens again. His Masters aren't awake at this hour, no meals to be consumed and no bowls, plates, or cutlery to be washed. This means there's no growling from the great beast beneath the sink, the one that the masters feed their scraps to in some confusing ritual of appeasement. He's seen it before. Their meals finished or half-eaten, the Masters collect their plates and walk them over to the sink and scrape the remains into what he can only imagine is some terrible maw; he's too short to see it properly. A great roaring and grinding commences that terrifies him, and it sends him, like the wind, into further running and screeching. But not right now. It too is deep in slumber, the horrible thing, and he is safe to continue on.

He taps with patience past the bathroom, past the room where the Elder Master snores away; he takes a sharp right and taps into the living room and stops a third time. The moon out tonight is full and its light falls through the open blinds of the living room window, illuminating him like a stubby phantom.

He's a Miniature Schnauzer — bred down to his size along with a ferocious hunting instinct honed over many generations to oust mice and other undesirables plaguing the *bierpalasts* of greater Berlin. He stands perhaps a foot at the very top of his head, where his floppy ears are perched, and he is cut — standard for his breed — with a large beard and rather severe eyebrows. He is five years old, about a third of the way through his lifetime, and the defined black and white coat he had as a pup has faded to a gray — damn near a silver — betraying the age he does have but also deceptively denying his youth. The gray was premature, to be honest, and in the past had brought about questions of, "Why is your dog so old?" when he was barely past three years; his Master answered with a chuckle. Were you to enter any given room with a couch that had ample curling up and napping space, the dog would lie upon it looking like a weathered soccer ball, irregular in shape and strange from too many weeks in direct sunlight. If your steps in said room fell too heavy, he'd glance up with that beard and the intense brows, the eternal look of an ornery old bastard permanent on his face. To look at him and think that his kind was once wolves — savage animals and the scourge of early man — seems ridiculous. In fact, you may look at him in amusement at this thought but also grim realization that humans toyed around with lesser beings and here is the result. Not that he is an embarrassment, far from it, but he is a reminder of the great domain humans possess and the odd things they've done with it.

He stares at the moon without really knowing what it is — he's a dog, of course — but he can see it there and he's aware of its significance, aware of it as something bigger and more meaningful than even himself. He is intelligent in that he knows to put his bones and squeaking toys away and where when he is finished with them, but you wouldn't exactly get drunk with him and muse on about the nature of the universe or the weirdness of being anything. He can listen, though. His Masters, both the Elder and younger, are the closest he has to gods and he admires them as such. To sit in their proximity as they do anything is to him the greatest bliss, the simplest thing he can wish for. This thought fleeting in his mind, he walks over to the fireplace where his food dish and water bowl lay and takes a few laps of water. His beard, taking on a brown color from way too many days without a bath, is dripping slightly on the bricks of the fireplace. It will dry by morning, certainly.

He shakes for a third time, ears flapping about once again and his beard drying as lingering water is flung off. The dog is unsure of what to do now. He's not tired; all he does is sleep, really. He knows the sun will be up soon, signaling the time when he can pounce on his master, assaulting him with licks to the face until the giant rises with much grumble and reluctance to take him out for the combination morning walk/bathroom break. The dog looks forward to this,

more out of habit than out of some spur of imagination, but his future prospects look bright nonetheless.

He taps back down the hall, past the Elder Master's room where the sound of snoring ceases for just a minute. He takes a left, past the bathroom once again, and his steps once more become silent as he returns to his Master's domain. He won't sleep the remaining hours on the bed; he'd rather not risk jumping directly on his Master (it's happened before.) Instead, he pads on to the corner, near the big closet doors where his Master keeps his clothes and, once dirty, discards them in a hurry on the floor nearby. They still smell of him, and it brings the dog comfort.

He will lay here for a while, sleeping or just hanging out. The light will be here soon.