

The NATURE of the **BEAST**

By Tiffany H. White

WHY WE LIKE IT: *Stories narrated by animals usually come with a red flag so we were pleasantly surprised by this unsentimental, left of center 'tail' inspired by a real event. It's a witty fritto misto of pet-parable and four-legged satire written by a 57 year old author who just started writing—and if that isn't inspiration for wannabe scribes we don't know what is. The 'voice' in The Nature of the Beast is doggone perfect and White's sunny use of language is fresh, a little bit kinked and deliciously outsider. And all the Flea-Bitten Dog can say to that is 'Bow Wowzer!*

QUALITY QUOTABLE (for the love of language):

Cat stayed put, kneading Dog's tummy with kind paws, purring tittle tattle tales. "So. Fox. That gamey leg? Trapped in the poultry farm. *Caged.*" Her dramatic pause elicited a drowsy grr from Dog. Could have been a snore not a grr. Cat continued regardless. "So, Fox is caught red-pawed – and I mean blood red - with billions of panic-struck chickens clucking alarm and the Man is coming. He'll hunt Fox down, shoot Fox dead and turn Fox into chickenfeed. Or pies."

The Nature of the Beast

Dog could smell sausages. *Mine* thought Dog.

Tummy growling, he nosed the golden aroma trail as Cat slunk up like a thief in the night.

"Are you stalking me?" Dog asked. He sounded gruff.

"No." Cat lied. "Where you are going?"

"Nowhere." Dog said, trying not to think *My sausages. Not for you. Go away.*

"I'll come with." said Cat as she read his not-thinks.

“Why?”

“Curiosity” said Cat “It’s a thing that I have. So did Pandora.”

“It won’t kill you.” Dog said.

“It’s happened before.” Cat sighed. “So. We’re going nowhere?”

“It’s sausages if you must know.” Dog growled. Dog never lies. He doesn’t know how.

“Not nowhere then.” Cat mused “Shame. Never been there. But sausages seem like a better place.”

Murmuring gossip that might or might not be true Cat followed Dog and Dog followed his nose.

“So. Frog drowned.” Cat nonchalantly inspected her scimitar claws.

Dog was surprised. “Frog drowned? Frog? How is that even possible?”

“Ironic, right?” Cat smirked. “Scorpion drowned too. A real sting in the tale.

Talking of which “Dog wasn’t listening, Dog was tracking “Did you hear about Fox? “

“I here.” Fox slipped out of the redolent dark, all bright eyed bushy-tailed urbane gangsta, too clever for his own good or anyone else. “Throwin’ shade, sis?”

“No.” Cat lied. Lying is the default position for cats. Fox couldn’t be bothered to make it a thing.

“What’s cooking, peep?” Fox never asks a question unless he knows the answer. It perfumes the soft breeze of autumn dusk with siren scent promise of fleshy delight. Fox drooled slightly.

“It’s sausages” Dog sniffed. “Lamb Chops. Things on sticks. Chicken lumps”

“Gucci.” said Fox.

Fox followed Cat and Cat followed Dog and Dog followed his nose.

The trail led to the back garden of number 23 Shalimar Close, recently bought by Mr. and Mrs. Pettigrew.

The tormenting smell of burnt flesh twined with the uncomfortable chat of strangers in ritual sacrifice to the gods of social propriety. Mr. and Mrs. Pettigrew were hosting a neighborhood barbeque to decide their position in the local pecking order. It's a thing that people do.

The sausages were trapped.

"Got this" said Fox. "Clever shit's kind of my thing." Fox has a plan and it might just work.

Fox followed Dog and Dog followed Cat and Cat leaped into the crowded garden of number 23 Shalimar Close.

"Let loose the dogs of war!" Fox screamed and they did and it was havoc. The invaders had a wonderful time, the invaded not so much.

Barking furiously Dog veered after Cat as she screeched and scrambled up obstacle legs. Mr. and Mrs. Pettigrew watched in horror as coleslaw, humus and taramosalata launched an unholy trinity in the sky then fell like the wrath of many gods. Cat and Dog chased in ever decreasing circles, scattering hosts and guests in their wake.

Fox borrowed a handy carrier bag, stuffed it full of meaty goodness, hauled the loot out of the garden and slid under Mr. Pettigrew's Prius. Cat and Dog followed soon after on an adrenaline high and dived in.

“Killed it, peep.” Fox licked his chops clean as Dog wolfed down lamb and pig with a large chunk of raw cow. Cat tried one of the chicken lumps which was tofu and disappointing.

“Here.” Dog nudged over an alternative snack “It’s as good as you get. No shit, just offal and piggy leftovers.”

Cat batted the offering with a sideswipe paw and watched the sausage roll. *It’s alive* thought Cat in delight, delivering the frankenstein monstrosity a left hook *Prepare to meet thy doom!*

“What you do?” Dog lay on his back four paws in the air, very full up and feeling slightly sick.

“Playing with my food” said Cat “It’s a thing.”

Fox let the sleeping dog lie, winked at Cat, and limped after the fragrant allure of Vixen.

The sausage was dead. Cat left the corpse by the front door of number 23 Shalimar Close by way of thanks to the hosts then landed four-square on Dog’s pumpkin stomach.

“Hoof. Squashing. Ger’off.”

Cat stayed put, kneading Dog’s tummy with kind paws, purring tittle tattle tales. “So. Fox. That gamey leg? Trapped in the poultry farm. *Caged.*” Her dramatic pause elicited a drowsy grr from Dog. Could have been a snore not a grr. Cat continued regardless. “So, Fox is caught red-pawed – and I mean blood red - with billions of panic-struck chickens clucking alarm and the Man is coming. He’ll hunt Fox down, shoot Fox dead and turn Fox into chickenfeed. Or pies.”

Dog was snoring, but Cat was too caught up in her own romance to care. “Fox has a plan and it might just work. Fox rolls around a bit, plays possum and – no offence – breaks wind, The Man finds a dead thing: limp, chickenshit green and smelling of rot. Not much good for chicken or pies. The Man chucks the corpse out and Fox hobbles back home.” Dog yawned, slumped to one side, and deposited Cat in an ignominious heap. Cat curled up for a nap of her own.

Mr. and Mrs. Pettigrew stared at the garden. It’s devastated. They stared at each other. They’re devastated. Mr. and Mrs. Pettigrew let the neighborhood down and they are outcast. It’s the nature of the beast.

Party over: not a sausage left. The essence lingered on for a while, a memory ghost slowly diffusing in the soft air of autumn dawn, going nowhere. There are worse places to be. Dog slumbered on, making scents of the world with his nose. It’s a thing that dogs do, and they do it very well.

AUTHOR’S NOTE:

The Nature of the Beast is based on a real event.

*Posh neighbours... elite barbeque...social politics... cat and dog chase...
pandemonium...sausage abduction.*

I watched the fun from my window, giggling while the story wrote itself – I didn’t see Fox, but he was definitely there.

The narrative is a not so subtle dig at social transaction and suggests why I don’t get invited to parties. It’s a matter of con text.

AUTHOR’S BIO: Based in Swansea, Wales, 57-year-old Tiffany White (LGBTQ) is a lifelong reader and first began writing in 2020.

