

Wag's Revue is proud to award 'The Recital' by Lauren Lovett its Inaugural Prize in Short Fiction.

"I very much admire the authorial restraint, the consistency of voice, the slippage of narrative positioning, and the subdued way in which such an unsettling conclusion is dealt with. It's a terrific, haunting story."

-Will Litton, Fiction Editor

THE RECITAL

Lauren Lovett

pigeons have two legs, not four. you scribble out two of the legs before i see. i do not notice your mistake. i am busy colouring my fringe with green hi-lighter. i ask you if you think i should add some pink. you tell me that orange looks better with green. small dashes of orange. i take the orange out of your drawing hand and add it to my fringe. you take the brown. the darkest brown texta from the table and give your pigeon a nest to sit in. a nest to sit in and cover up his two bonus legs. i have finished my hairstyle and have moved onto my eyebrows.

you tell me that i look dumb with orange eyebrows. i tell you that your whole face looks dumb. you are not sure how to respond so you do not. you look at your picture and then you look at my picture to see which one is better. you have drawn a pigeon in a nest. i have drawn a mouse riding a pony while eating a donut. you decide that your picture is better because it is more like real life. my picture isn't like real life. you think it is dumb. dumb like my orange eyebrows.

your mother likes my eyebrows, she thinks they are hilarious. she laughs and hands me milk. she has given me your special cup. the fish cup that has the word 'aquarium' on it. you dip two tiny teddies into your cup of milk. i bite off my teddy's arms and push it under the milk's surface. i tell you that i like to drown the teddies before i eat them. you tell me that the textas are permanent and that my fringe and eyebrows will forever be highlighted. i bite off the head of a teddy and spit it at your face. it hits you in the eye. right in it. your eye hurts but you pretend that it doesn't.

joseph is sucking on a tennis ball. i take the ball from his mouth and throw it across the yard. joseph does not fetch it. you tell me that joseph knows tricks. you tell me that you canmake

him sit and make him fit into your doll pram. i say that putting your dog in a doll pram isn't a type of trick. i tell you about the trick that i can do with my dog. you haven't tried my trick before. i bend down and pat joseph on his face.

'i will show you on your dog.'

joseph just sits, sits on the grass and lets me try the trick. i tell you that it takes a little time to work. i move my fingers like i am playing a piano. i tap my fingers on the inside of joseph's hind leg. nothing happens. i tap my fingers faster.

'it works on your dog too,' i say as joseph's lipstick begins to show. i tap my fingers on your palm.

'you have to do it like this,' i say. you watch my pointer finger as i tap it on your palm. then you hold my fingers still and turn my hand over.

'like this?' you say as you tap your fingers on my palm. i tell you that you have to do it faster but that you are doing pretty well for a beginner.

you need to practice your technique on joseph to see if it works - to see if you're doing it right. you ask me if this is something that you're not supposed to do to pets. like how you're not supposed to pick up dogs by their hind legs and push them around like wheel barrows. you begin your piano recital because i assure you that this is different. it's not like the wheelbarrow thing. you are tapping. tapping just like i did. you are tapping joseph in the same place that i tapped but nothing happens. i say that maybe the trick only works when i do it. perhaps i have the lipstick touch. you stop tapping and ask me if i want you to teach me something. it isn't a trick to do with joseph. it's a dance. a fred schneider dance. i have never heard of the b-52s. you start singing 'rock lobster.' i don't know the song. not even when you add in the jellyfish and narwhal sounds. i think that your piranha impersonation is pathetic. you tuck your t-shirt into your track pants and pull your pants up until the waist band touches your nipples. you show me your best fred schneider dance. i tell you

that you look like an idiot. you tell me that your dad thinks that you are really good at dancing like fred schneider. i want to teach you the macarena but you already know how to do it.

you ask me if i want to try the finger trick on your guinea pigs. i pick up joseph's tennis ball. i would rather play donkey. you do not have a basketball hoop at your house so instead we use the washing basket as the target. only five turns in and i already have d o n k. you only have d o. that is because physical education is your best subject. physical education and japanese. you know how to sing the rainbow song in japanese without any help from your teacher. jared who is in your class can sing it better than you but you do not mind because jared looks like a japanese person.

the game is over because i have missed the washing basket six times. this means i have spelled out donkey. you get down on all fours to pretend that you are a donkey.

‘eh oh’ you say in your best donkey voice.

i show you my finger, my rude finger. you get up and dust off your knees. i want to change the game to elephant or chicken because the word donkey is too short. you tell me that it wouldn't be any different if the game were called chicken because the word donkey and the word chicken each have the same number of letters. you think this because you forget that chicken has the letter ‘c’ in it. i tell you that you are wrong. you have still forgotten about the ‘c’ and start to argue with me. you want to keep arguing until i admit that i am wrong. but i have had enough. i couldn't be bothered arguing with you. once you slapped me in the face during an argument. you did this because i wouldn't agree that the song went ‘this hand is your hand.’ the reason i didn't agree with you was because the words to the song are actually ‘this land is your land.’ your slap made my face pinker than bubble-o bill's face.

i want to play something else. you tell me that you can teach me to dance like fred schneider. i do not want to. you tell me

that you can try and wash the orange off of my eyebrows. i do not want that either. you hold the tennis ball in your hand and think. the tennis ball is warm and moist from being in joseph's mouth.

'we could do a wedding,' you suggest. 'not with us but with my guinea pigs. i've got two girl ones and one boy one so we can even have a bridesmaid.'

i like your idea. i am at the guinea pig hutch turning the guinea pigs over to find the husband. you tell me that the fat one is the boy. herbert. you called him herbert because you think herbert sounds like a fat man's name. i take off my socks. they are black. i put herbert into one of my black socks.

'voila tuxedo!'

you pretend that you are not impressed. you pretend because you are jealous that you did not come up with the sock tuxedo idea. the wedding is a success. herbert looks handsome in his tuxedo pouch and carmen looks very elegant in her flower patterned gown a la scotch paper towel. after the reciting of the vowels i undress the groom and the bride and push their newly married bodies together. carmen is squirming. you tell me to be careful not to squish carmen's insides. i think that carmen likes the squishing. carmen and herbert are loving each other. you take carmen out of the squish love and put her in her hutch. you do this because you think that i am wrong. you think that carmen does not like the marital squishing.

i put my socks on. my right sock is covered in herbert hair. i do not mind. i am not allergic to guinea pigs. i am only allergic to cats. you want to play hide and seek. i think that hide and seek is a baby game but i play with you because i am nice. you want to count first. that is ok with me because i prefer to hide. you say the word 'elephant' between the numbers, the numbers that you count. you do this because it takes exactly one second to say elephant. you do this to ensure that i have enough time to hide. i hide underneath the upturned washing basket. i hide like a turtle in its shell.

'nineteen elephant twenty.'

you turn around. you see me straight away. you see me because the washing basket has gaps in it, gaps that my purple jumper pokes through. i ask for another turn at hiding. i tell you that the first one is always a practice, a practice for the real hide. you let me hide again even though you do not believe in practice hides. you let me hide again because you like being the seeker.

'one elephant two.'

i want to hide in a really good spot, a spot that you will never find me in.

'two elephant three.'

i lay down next to joseph. he gets up and walks away. i am exposed.

'eight elephant nine.'

i am running out of time. everywhere is crap.

'thirteen elephant fourteen.'

i open your shed. the door handle squeaks as i turn it. i quickly shut the door behind me. i hope that you have not heard the squeak.

'seventeen elephant eighteen.'

i stand behind the fridge, the fridge in your shed.

'eighteen elephant nineteen.'

i open the fridge to get a quick drink. there aren't any drinks in your fridge. your fridge is empty and warm. your fridge must be broken.

'nineteen elephant twenty. ready or not here i come. here i come into the shed.'

you must have heard the door handle squeak. you are coming. i panic and crawl inside the fridge. i sit inside and close the fridge door.

you are in the shed. you pull the string. it turns on your shed light. you cannot see me. you look in the cupboard where your mum stores the christmas decorations. i am not in there. you look behind the totem tennis and the lawnmower. i am not there

either. you call out my name. you say that you can see me. you are lying. you want to trick me so i come out of my hiding spot. i do not come out. you look behind the big bag of potting mix that smells like death. i am not there. you pull the string to turn the light off. you shut the shed door behind you. you do this because you give up. you do this because you think that i am not in the shed. you go inside to look for me. you check behind the couch and behind the curtain. you check underneath your bed and in the pantry. i am not there. joseph is next to you. he is licking your leg. you tell him to sit. you reach in between his legs and practice. you tap in the same spot that i tapped. you tap in the same way that i tapped. nothing happens. you give up. you give up on tapping and you give up on looking for me.

your mother wants to know if i would like to stay for tea. you tell her that i do not want to. you tell her that you think i must have gone home. you tell her that i must have gone home because i didn't want to play anymore. your mother says she is cooking chicken - in schnitzel form. she has made enough for you and for me. you help your mum dip the chicken bits in the egg. you like the feeling of raw egg. you imagine that raw egg feels the same as ghost buster slime. you are good at helping your mum. you hold a piece of chicken, eggy chicken. your mum takes it from your hands and dips it into the bowl of bread crumbs. you ask your mum how to spell the word chicken. she spells the word out for you in lower case sounds, little letter sounds. you count the letters on your egg dipped fingers. seven. you count the letters of donkey in your head. six. you were wrong in thinking that the word chicken and the word donkey each had the same number of letters. you feel bad for arguing with me. you plan to say sorry next time you see me. say sorry and tell me that you were wrong.