Hibernate

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Published by The Ohio State University Press

Eslami, Elizabeth.
Hibernate.
The Ohio State University Press, 2014.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/35395.

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Continuity in Filmmaking

Geoffrey has been a good helpmate and lover in our home, as well as a renaissance man at work, but he cannot be in two places simultaneously. For proof of this, I can point to the empty side of our bed, or to the absence of his dun-colored hairs on the pillow, or to the remarkably clear water in the bottom of the toilet bowl. When he arrives home, Geoffrey reclines on the bed to remove his shoes, sending a fine rain of dirt from his soles to the bedspread. Then he takes a leak first thing after and doesn’t flush the mellow yellows.

The specificity of these details proves that I am not lying, or at least that it is unlikely that I am lying. They say that in a court of law, during testimony, a jury should be vigilant about the specificity of details. A vague story with a dearth of details marks the storyteller as a liar. Of course, it is possible that I am confused or mistaken. I was in a car accident six months ago, my head smashed into the windshield. Two men flanked by three women and one additional man operated on me for four hours; little fragments of glass were removed from my brain. When I woke in the hospital, part of my forehead was dented in like a doll’s head. I lost some memories, that’s what Geoffrey says. And sometimes when I’m talking to him, I realize he’s actually one of his sport jackets or a shadow or the shower curtain. So I’m not saying that I’m faultless.

But here, now: no hair, no dirt, no piss. The lack of these things proves that Geoffrey isn’t here.
Geoffrey is training Nimrod, a bull terrier, for a half hour sitcom called *Man’s Best Friend*. He is a dog trainer, though he calls himself a “people trainer.” Training dogs for the world’s entertainment is his life’s purpose.

In the script it says that Nimrod, playing a bull terrier named Louie, is supposed to grab a hot dog from the hand of a three-year-old boy. The boy’s name I don’t know. A laugh track will play like a chorus of lunatics as the child and his mother, an actress who calls herself Patricia Duvae Lovell, chuckle with good humor. The camera will frame Nimrod’s jowls as he chews the hot dog with an impish canine *joie de vivre*.

Things are not going as planned. The dog is frozen on the steps, a decade of arthritis locking his hips.


This is as good a time as any to mention that I don’t give a crap about this show. I watched it in the hospital when nothing else was on, and it actually made me feel sick. It’s a terrible show, the kind that no one watches and is scheduled on Saturday nights when everyone is out drinking, and anyway, none of it matters because Geoffrey is supposed to be here, in our house, and not there, at the studio. He’s supposed to get his car out of my garage and then his things out of my house, or he’s supposed to grab my shoulders and shake me like a snow globe until both of us resemble what we were before. Either way, we need to talk and reconcile and be mature and do the things that adults do, and we can’t do any of those things when one of us is somewhere else.

A treat, moistened with the sweat of his palm, is inches away from Nimrod’s nose. Geoffrey will smell like bacon and bull penis for the rest of the day.

“Take it?”

Nimrod descends the final two steps.

“This is when they look at you like God,” Geoffrey likes to say. With a quick flick of his fingers, he sends the dog, entranced, to the child, and then to the hot dog. Mission accomplished.

It’s remarkable what some people get paid for. Before the accident, I was paid to fetch things for studio heads and ingénues, for anyone who happened to be present on any given day of the shoot. I met Geoffrey on a commercial for canine herbal supplements, with a collie pulling an amputee. We bonded over a box of flea dip. I was the courier of ten varieties of latte. Spec scripts. I drove people whose names I didn’t know to plastic surgeons and, afterwards, I helped them out of the secret back doors of buildings, swathed in hoods and designer bandages. I brought five or six magazines to read while they were under the knife, but I
always timed it perfectly based on the procedure, so they didn’t know how unambitiously I passed the time.

I was so good, I could have done my job and Geoffrey’s combined. I could’ve trained Geoffrey to take treats, to mouth processed meat from the fist of a toddler. Even now, I can remember the entire cast and crew of Man’s Best Friend, down to the craft service guy and his wife and their white kid with a retro afro. How come I can remember these useless things? I lose pens and buttons and Geoffrey’s ex-wife’s name, his kid’s name, even my name sometimes, but I remember everything about Geoffrey’s day-to-day dealings with dogs and Hollywood assholes.

Geoffrey trains six dogs: Marvin the mutt, Waldo the collie, Kibbles the bulldog, Yoda the Boston terrier, Miss Pebbles the Brussels Griffon, and Nimrod. They all belong to other people, but they spend more time with Geoffrey than they do with their owners. In total, Geoffrey works with five studio suits: Mr. Bunton, Mr. Graves, Mr. Khandakhor, Ms. Sterling, and Mr. Lowenstein. Geoffrey belongs to me, but he spends more time with the suits than he does with his owner.

In his absence, the lack of him has come to resemble him more than the actual him. His mother’s in a nursing home and has a photograph of him on her wall above a bedpan. It’s from when he ran track in college. It doesn’t look at all like him now that he’s softened and thickened and thinned out, but how would she know? As far as I can tell, he hasn’t called his mother in months, but luckily she probably doesn’t remember that. We’re all the same, dented heads or not.

Right about now, Geoffrey and Nimrod have finished the scene. It’s a wrap, which means that a girl named Meggie Barclay is on her knees in front of Geoffrey taking photographs of Nimrod. Nimrod’s collar. Close-ups of his paws, the direction his fur’s been brushed. Even the type of hot dog.

They call this “continuity in filmmaking.” Meggie Barclay is the person in charge of maintaining continuity, so that if they have to shoot the scene over again tomorrow, Nimrod will look exactly the same. Everything will be seamless, and the audience won’t know the same scene was shot over the course of many days. I doubt people would care, but this is an important part of filmmaking, or so Meggie Barclay says. For some reason, Geoffrey holds her in high regard, as he does with most of these Hollywood power bitches. When she talks, she moves her nostrils, which I have always considered a sign of a person coming unhinged. Probably because she has to remember so much, so many details, the same day every day, forever.
It is an impossible feat to remember a whole person, the groove under his nose or his vinyl, car-seat smell. Looking at his dusty Hemingway collection helps. I used to read Hemingway, but I can’t remember any of his books now. Weren’t all the men amnesiacs? Hadn’t they all been shot in the head?

I take all of Geoffrey’s shoes out of the closet and arrange them in patterns across the floor. It seems they’re all going somewhere. Once, Geoffrey and I took ballroom dancing lessons with a woman named Maria. She had a thick accent, something like a Spanish villainess. We couldn’t understand a thing she said, just “Deep!” for dip, and “Bank!” for back, but that was okay because she had these little shoes painted on the floor, and really you just had to match your feet up with them to master the steps.

I point Geoffrey’s eighty dollar beach loafers toward the front door. They’re probably going to see Patricia Duvae Lovell or someone similarly fake and whorish. Who was that girl, the one they hired to help him wrangle the dogs and block scenes. A grip? A second assistant boom? He liked her because she did some bullshit cliché thing like raising chickens on her roof. Or roosters.

I’m not jealous, or paranoid. I don’t think Geoffrey would cheat. I just think he’s friendly with everyone, which is a truly horrible character trait.

In the hospital, Geoffrey sat by my bed for a week. Then he went back to work. It wasn’t that he was heartless, exactly. They were shooting a pilot called *Braver Than Brave*, featuring a Puli named Nuba. I was driving Nuba to the Studio to meet Geoffrey when I had my accident. A tour bus blew a tire and slid across six lanes of traffic, like in a bad Bruce Willis movie. I don’t remember anything about it, just a cracking sound, and then waking up in the hospital to Geoffrey’s face, that little constellation of moles down his neck. When I asked him what happened, he said Nuba had gone through the windshield. Nuba was dead. I asked him over and over how it was that my head just smashed the thick glass but didn’t go through, yet Nuba flew into the air like a black mop. “Seatbelt,” Geoffrey said. “Seatbelt.” I don’t think Geoffrey has forgiven me.

They ended up filming *Braver Than Brave* with Marvin the mutt, who really was smarter anyway.

His last message is there somewhere on the phone. He’s talking in his “calm voice,” what he uses to soothe Nimrod when he gets all pissy from the fourteen hours of shooting situation comedies. “Now, Nimrod? Go to your place,” he’s always saying when Nimrod gets that look in his eye and curls his top lip under like an eighty-year-old woman.
He says something about noon. Unable. Hon. He is busy. He is not creative. At least take a rain check from the elevator where you delivered a baby. Let there have been a diabetic stretched out on the floor, weak head in your lap.

I take all his blazers and position them on the bed like victims of a crime. “Guess you didn’t see it coming,” I say, my voice low like a detective’s. “Maybe you should’ve paid better attention to the company you keep.” I link the sleeves of three sport jackets until they look like Hands Across America, or a family.

When the phone rings, I jump and grab at his fallen jackets.

“Listen, it’s a fucking mess,” he says. “I can’t come.” He fades in and out. “You don’t have rags and bandages, do you?”

“What the hell happened?”

“It was an accident.”

“You mean . . . like a bus in a pile-up? My kind of accident?” Perhaps the tour bus was going fast enough to slide through the space-time continuum, cutting down people over the course of a year, still taking them down, a runaway death machine.

“Don’t start,” he grumbles. “Fucking Nimrod bit me.”

“He bit you. Why? He’s ancient.”

“How do I know why? He wanted the goddamn hot dog. Fuck it, I can’t come home. I’m going over to Meggie’s now.”

“I want you to come here.”

“I’m probably going to have to get a rabies shot. I’m bleeding.”

It sounds like a bad talk show, but he really has been distant since the accident. He says it’s my moods, but I think it’s something else entirely. Sometimes I laugh hysterically for no real reason. Last week he came in when I was in the shower and I didn’t recognize his voice so I started screaming and begged him to leave and not kill me. He stopped sleeping in the bed with me when I’d wake up convinced my head was still dented in, or part of it missing, and I’d grab his fingers and make him touch my scalp.

We were supposed to meet after work last night at the Golf Pub down the block. He hates when I call it the “Golf Pub.” It’s the “Pebble Beach Pub,” he says. The bar at the pub is covered in glass, and under the glass there are fifty-three Titleist golf balls, plus autographed photographs of golfers. Last night, I recognized the one with the alcohol problem. He has a red face. Geoffrey didn’t come, so I sat around drinking for a couple of hours. I asked the bartender if I could touch his balls. “You fucking crazy, you know that?” he asked, and we both laughed until he finally stopped.
Nimrod’s getting old. He’s not the cash cow, or cash dog, he used to be. Sometimes he pukes or shits in the car on the way to auditions and Geoffrey has to clean up on the side of the 405. The fucking traffic nearly shears the door off. “I should have him sire pups,” he’s always saying. “Nimrod’s genes are solid.” He’s still got the Brussels Griffon at least. Everyone who wants a cutesy wootsy little girl dog wants the Brussels Griffon. He’s made a lot off her and she’s still young, still has those eyes that glitter and don’t look burnt out from jumping around too many soundstages.

Geoffrey almost never talks about his son, but he gets emotional about his dogs. He still carries a photo of Nuba in his wallet, even though she wasn’t even his dog. “When you train a dog,” he says, “you really get inside its head.” I want him to get inside my head and tell me what it looks like. What’s the damage.

I go out and sit in his car. I’m not allowed to drive yet, so I’ll close my eyes and pretend I’m waiting for Geoffrey to return from a secret facelift. It smells like Nimrod and dog piss. There’s dog fur or pubic hair on the passenger seat, some kinky brindled hairs that float through the air with the windows down. I try re-lighting all his cigarette butts in the ashtray, sucking down what he’s left behind. Sometimes I bring them inside the house with me and hide them in my pillowcase.

Now that I think of it, when we were first dating, sometimes he didn’t show. There was “car in the shop” and twice “paperwork.” What kind of fucking paperwork does a dog trainer have? Sometimes he cancelled after I left the house. I didn’t know he wasn’t coming until I got home and found him among my voicemail. Even now, it is pleasant just to drink a glass of wine and eat part of a chicken while listening to his voice.

Usually by now he’s done for the day and on his way to Nimrod’s owners’ house. They live deep in Topanga Canyon. “It’s lucky,” Geoffrey says, “that coyotes didn’t take Nimrod away.” Once while the owners were jogging with him, Nimrod got grabbed. Nimrod was so heavy, so dense and thick, the coyote just carried him from one place to another, dropping him behind the juniper and picking him up again. It couldn’t really get its mouth around him. Finally the owners came and beat off the coyote with sticks. I laughed when Geoffrey told me that story. “I was just a coyote for the studio heads,” I said. “And for you. From one place to another.”

Over the last two months, as part of my therapy, Geoffrey has to drive me to Neuro-Spinal Rehab. I have to sit in a room while a woman who sometimes looks like Meggie Barclay and sometimes looks like just
another blond woman holds up a series of cards with illustrations on them. I’m supposed to identify each one and say the name out loud. Boat. Bear. Clown. It’s harder than it looks. More often than not, it doesn’t look like anything.

What are the details of his skin and hair? My testimony of what’s happened to us would be thrown out in a court of law. I find myself forgetting him all the time, even when he’s here. Even when he’s inside me. Wait, who are you again? I want to ask, my nails digging into his hips. Writing things down doesn’t help. Maybe it’s because I’m always using the lack of details to prove his absence. Nothing equals nothing.

I remember he once said he hated all the Beatles except for George Harrison. He was proud of himself because he said most people loved John and Paul, and others loved Ringo because he was the quirky choice, but mostly, no one favored George. He liked to play his 45 of “Apple Scruffs” and dance around the room with me. He sometimes knocked over the lamp shaped like Buddha. When I play “Apple Scruffs” now, I just feel embarrassed. I don’t want to knock anything over. I want to carry things around in my mouth, where they’re safe.

I walk into the bathroom and take his electric razor out of my medicine cabinet. I like to jog my memory by flipping it over in my hand, taking its weight. Evidence.

I open it and sprinkle the flecks of hair in the porcelain sink. I remember the words “a soft bear” but I don’t know why I remember them at this moment and not at any other. Fuzzy Wuzzy was a bear, Fuzzy Wuzzy had no hair, Fuzzy Wuzzy wasn’t very fuzzy, was he? I want to call him my bear but he is busy training lions or maybe papers. With my index finger, I arrange the bits of hair into the shape of his face.

The specificity of my details suggests he might come home tonight. He’ll be bleeding or clotting, wrapped in Meggie Barclay’s healing bandages, or in a torn shower curtain. Meggie will stand in the doorway, holding her cards. Boat. Fuzzy bear. Clown.

“How ever do you remember it all?” I’ll ask her. “I need reminders, little strings tied around my finger or stitches in my head. Mnemonic devices.”

She’ll shrug and walk around taking pictures so our dinner can last forever, all the details exactly the same.

He’ll go into the bedroom and take off his shoes on the bed, sending down the dirt of his day. He’ll walk over to his Hemingways and talk about plane crashes over Uganda and the importance of continuity in filmmaking.
“Stop moving around. You’re getting blood all over the place.”
“Goddamn Nimrod,” Geoffrey will say. “Goddamn dog bit me.”
“Why?” I’ll ask, squeezing his bloody hand. “Show me. Where are the teeth marks?”
“How the fuck am I supposed to know why? Why does anything happen?”
“That’s okay,” I’ll tell him. “Never mind. No one should be expected to remember all these things,” I’ll whisper, kissing him. “You’re here, anyway.” I’ll hang up his blazer, take his papers, his jacket, and I will tell him not to worry, to remind me to take him into the bathroom later, by the sink, so I can be sure to show him his face.