

An Hour With My Beagle

It'd been a hard winter succeeded by a dousing spring. The field into which we descended was lush with the warmth, and vigor of a gay April sun, and a thousand aromas sailed on the fluffing breeze. Mountain laurels hued the hillsides lavender, and everywhere life sprang up from soil deep, intent on the stars.

My puppy Darwin, and I plundered this ankle-deep forest, and settled on a grassy knoll in view of a gurgling field stream. Butterflies flitted, coursed, and tumbled to some chemical orchestration below my sensory plane.

Darwin dipped his head in search of an errant chemical eddy; his nose in lockstep with an unseen aliphatic. Divining his purpose, I drew sharply, in clumsy mimicry, and was rewarded with a sensory rush of unaccustomed scale.

Man and beast, so evolutionarily divergent, yet in this companionable silence, we shared a primitive pleasure. Odor molecules swam into my sinus cilia, colliding with dissimilar receptors in random rank and file. Sweet ketones here, and earthy esters there, and upward towards the limbic system, and thence the cortex where childhood memories lie waiting to be triggered.

Wet grass, so rich for most; a running carefree child bounded the nano-distances of memory, and a gulf of thirty years.

Darwin's reveries could only be inferred. A squirrel, just fast enough to give sport, ran ahead, his trail of chemical markers leading through my pup's mind. Turning to his head-up profile, I spied a small smile played at the corners of his mouth even as his hackles rose to some inner pursuit.

Thin wisps knitted slowly overhead, obscuring the sharp edge of Sol. Ninety-three million miles away, two hydrogen atoms fused, and a photon spit out towards Earth's 77th longitude. Traveling at "c," this little packet-waveform shot past the new moon, and collided with a leaf's chlorophyll molecule fluttering before me. Soundlessly, its arrival was announced by a re-emitted green, a prism's sliver of its original color.

Cause and effect, over and over. Chlorophyll grabs a shower of the incident energy, and uses it to combine water, and carbon dioxide to make sugar, and oxygen. A micro-breath for a man, Valentine's Day for my leafy neighbor.

The unused frequencies leapt off, and towards my eye. Through the cornea, lens, and vitreous humor, they burrow into my retina. There each excites a molecule, fires a nerve, and a fraction later, somewhere in the occipital lobe of my brain, a picture gathers from thousands of like spectral bullets.

Myriad interactions, millions upon billions per second. Nature's dance goes on and on.

And Darwin is watching a fly.

8Nov2003