

Confinements

Dale Easley

Winter, 2015-16

Regarding Beauregard

We lived in the country at a time when dogs were not house pets. All through the South, you could see dogs hooked on chains, tied to trees and posts in the yard. Somehow Dixie, our bitch, still decided to have pups. I remember keeping two from the litter, Beauregard and Ulysses, the latter named by a friend who didn't know better. I don't remember what happened to Dixie nor the other pups. I remember letting the dogs off their chains to run free, roaming the hollers and streams. I remember coming home and Dad saying Ulysses had been run over. I don't remember what happened to his body.

Beauregard was a coon dog—black, brown, bits of white. He was powerful, with a deep voice that carried for miles. He was bred for chasing a raccoon in the dark for miles, treeing it, then baying for someone to come shoot it.

What I don't like to remember is the years after I left home—Mom and Beauregard alone in the country, Beauregard always hooked to his chain, day after day, seldom making a sound.

Driving

I told mom I wanted to go riding with you and your brother. Your brother has the car. He's cool. Plays on the basketball team.

He said he would drive us around, maybe get some food. Mom said no. You're my friend. I've known you since Head Start, back before the schools were desegregated. But you're black. It wouldn't look right. Don't act hurt. It's not personal. She's just trying to protect me.

Stray

It was late in the afternoon. Still daylight, I know, because our old barn was open on the uphill side, still didn't have lights. We kept the hay stacked up top and dropped it through trapdoors to the cows below. Beauregard and I used to lie in the hay and listen to the rain on the metal roof. As I watched Dad work, a skinny dog wandered up. Some people in the neighborhood let their dogs run free. Dad said, "Don't pet him. He's a stray. Might have rabies. Watch him till I get back."

The dog had no collar. No tags. His ribs were showing beneath his matted brown hair. He didn't move much. Trembled occasionally. He looked like he'd weigh about 40 pounds if he weren't so skinny. Breed indeterminate.

Dad came back carrying his rifle. It was a 22-caliber, not good for much but squirrels and target practice. He had a couple of shotguns for hunting, though he seldom used them.

We got a rope around the dog's neck and led him to the edge of the woods. He stuck his rifle against the dog's head and pulled the trigger. There wasn't a very loud report, and only a tiny bit of blood. We left him where he fell.

We walked back to the house where Mom was making supper. The kitchen was warm and smelled of pinto beans and sauerkraut with wieners. Dad put his rifle back in the rack he'd built above the fireplace in their bedroom. We sat down and ate supper.