

Winner of the Lynda Hull Memorial Poetry PrizeJEFF WALKER

Itchy Is As Scratchy Does

Begin with the chickens on the soccer field our
dog Babu would not chase and the female dog he
did until she vanished, a ghost, a wraith of a dog,
maybe not a dog at all I said but two chickens
in a dog suit and you did not find that funny.
With my idiosyncrasies, you say, I confuse the nationals,
but I see universality in “two chickens in a dog suit”
and those with vision and the courage to use it will
agree: the chickens buried deep in the stuffy costume,
pulling wires and punching levers to make the dog
lurch about the field. Woman, that brand of humor travels
and I need you to ease up on the dog suit.

Next, why wince when I use the word “honky” in reference
to most white expats? If there were 400 guests
at that wedding reception where they stampeded
goats and chickens through the middle and
we, the only honkies, dragged half a cow 50 feet
across the short grass, what other word can I use?
Or when I snarled “back off, honky,” or wish I had,
to the punk at the expat pub who with his idiotic finger
snapped the strap of your brassiere. I understand your
objection to the geographical context, I’ll cop to the
ambiguity but listen to me when I say honky is gold
and I can’t, I won’t give it up without a fight.

I will never understand your negative reaction to
my standard critique of any female friend’s new, short

haircut, "it looks very French" or "it looks très French."
Despite its formulaicity, I have witnessed the effect again
and again, seen the recipient purr and blush with pleasure.
But you say I'm full of crap and I must respect that.
And I have promised never again to bring up in public
my past success in seducing lesbians, although I still feel
a small part of your impatience is brute envy. Picking up a
"sista on sista" requires a certain reckless abandon which,
to be frank, my love, I'm not sure you still have.
We could try some role-playing exercises next week.

This week you are traveling for work and I'm on the alert
for opportunities to communicate with others in clear,
non-ambiguous tones. I'll joke with the household
staff about the simplest things, holding aloft a piece of
fruit and marveling over its name in our respective tongues,
getting a big laugh from the cook by suggesting in
broken Bahasa she join me at the dinner table.
After you come home we will drive to Jakarta to hit the
duty-free, and maybe we will pass a car wreck on the side of
the road. Maybe I will say one of the motorists is praying
but you will say he is only looking at the ground.
Maybe, to win, I will lie and swear I saw his lips moving.