

A golden retriever dog is shown in profile, barking with its mouth wide open. The dog is positioned in the lower-left foreground. The background is a dense forest of tall, thin trees, with a bright sun low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow and lens flare effects. The overall scene is captured in a cinematic style.

HAVE I BEEN GOOD?

A LARP FOR TWO PLAYERS, ONE OF WHOM IS A DOG

BY JEEYON SHIM

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It is a fearful thing
to love what death can touch.
— excerpt from the Mourner's Kaddish, as attributed to Chaim Stern

It is morning and your dog wants to talk to you. You know of a spell that will enable them to speak to you through your words; it will take all day, and you will labor through many tasks with them in order to enact it, but once you do they will be able to tell you everything that is in their heart.

This LARP is an epistolary game for two players, one of whom is a dog. Within the construct of this game dogs think of humans as ageless, near-immortal, untouched by sickness or death except in rare confluences of time. You know this is not true; but it does not matter. You will spend play time looking at the world and yourself through the eyes of your dog as you spend a day together exploring, playing, and enjoying each other's company. The game will conclude with you writing a letter from their perspective, wherever they are in their life in relation to yours, to you, and then watching your dog as they

dream after they've fallen asleep at the end of the day. Play time lasts one waking day, and the morning after.

What you will need to play:

- a free day with little to no calendared social plans
- a small notebook (spellbook)
- three sheets of loose sheets of paper
- a pen or pencil
- your dog's favorite treats
- your dog's weather-appropriate outside gear (leash, harness or collar, bowl, bags, etc)
- yourself
- your dog

1. Wake up. Say good morning to your dog. Feed them breakfast, give them a treat. Watch them closely. How do they express their gratitude to you? Do they wag their tail? How many times? Do they look up devotedly up at you before they begin eating, or after they've finished? Or do they wolf everything down with focus, abandoning themselves to the pleasure of the sustenance you provide for them every day? Write your observations in your spellbook.
2. What is your dog doing? Note the tone of their body language, what they seem to be saying (especially if they are talkative). You start to see signs, a gentle and joyful augury that tells you your dog has something important they want to tell you.
 - a. There are three signs, all shining through your dog. What are they?
 - b. Write them in your spellbook.

3. You love your dog. Your dog knows this, and loves you for it. But it is easy to let slip, in the way that we people form the habit of letting days or weeks or months slip away like misplaced receipts, that time moves differently for your dog than it does for you. To them, when you leave for work or to run errands without them, the hours that pass stretch into their vigil of fidelity and endurance until the moment they hear your tread approach your home again. A couple years for you, even if they are difficult or trying years, is an entire stage of life for your dog. (And if they are difficult or trying years, your dog knows they are, and dedicates that stage of their life to loving you.) That is why this spell takes the whole day; it is an offering to your dog, and to your love for them; a gift of time.
4. Write a short letter to your dog on one of the loose sheets of paper.
5. Get ready to take them on a long excursion. Do they like parks with other dogs and people, space to themselves, hiking trails? Where do you live? Are you in a city, where even a short stroll around the block contains all kinds of scents and trash and small plants growing tenaciously up from cracks in old concrete? Or are in somewhere more open, with more flora and fauna for your dog to get to know? Wherever you go, will your dog be able to feel grass and soft, stubborn weeds beneath their feet? Will your dog be able to look up to see birds flying overhead? Will there be squirrels or gophers or other small rodents that draw their interest? Whatever there is, indulge them. Let them take their time smelling that bike rack for the 7th

time that day. Let them dig harmlessly in the packed, dusty earth of the dog park, seeking a treasure that only they can scent. Let them roll around in the fallen leaves and watch their legs kick out in every direction. Let them chase that ball and bring it back to you over and over and over again, like the sun wheeling around the earth: devoted, tireless, bearing warmth and light to you every time they return. Take note of what transpires in your spellbook.

6. Admiration and proper adoration are powerful boons to any living creature, and you want to gather as many boons for your dog as you can. Throughout the day, to strengthen your spell, think of ways you can garner appreciation for your dog. Does your dog like being pet and meeting strangers? When people ask to pet them, think of a short, charming fact or story to tell them about your dog. Make sure you tell them that your dog is a good dog, and that they know your dog's name by the time they leave. Is your dog shyer in person? Share that fact or story along with a photo of your dog that you take at some point during your travels today somewhere people will see. Include your dog's name. It is obvious that your dog is good, but make sure to include that as well.
7. Around midday or the afternoon, think about what your dog would like to do most until the evening. Are they the type of dog who could explore and play all day? Would they prefer to return home and curl up against you while you watch a movie? Is there a friend that they love and who you could call up and visit? Manifest this stage of the spell as is appropriate for

your dog, and make note of what transpires in your spellbook.

8. Before you feed your dog dinner, think about what they like to eat very best in the world. Create a potion that is tailor made to their liking, and write the recipe for it in your spellbook so you know you will be able to always refer to it in the future. If you have the ingredients on hand to make it for them now, do so. If you need more time to plan and acquire them, whether it's because their most beloved dish is esoteric or because today just isn't market day, set a day on your calendar to make it for them. Feed them dinner. Spend the rest of your time with them tonight doing what they love to do with you most. Let them paw at you for the eighteenth time to keep scratching behind their ears. Let them sleep in your bed if you only sometimes do so. Stay wholly with them in your attention and presence until they start drifting into slumber.
9. After your dog falls asleep for the day, you feel your mind and body shift. This is an indication that the spell is now at its most critical stage. You transform. You are a conduit for your dog's love, their faith to you, their self as living altar to the bond woven between you the moment you first opened your door and they walked over your threshold. You are ready to honor them and hold their words.
 - a. Write a letter from your dog's perspective to you on the second sheet of loose paper. Start your letter with "Dear [your name], have I been good?"

- b. Include their reminiscences of three memories that span the beginning of their life with you to the present moment.
- c. Include their reflection on a time when they knew you suffered and wanted to help you, and how they helped you.
- d. Include their joy in recounting three of their favorite things about you.
- e. Include their acceptance that you will live on past them, and how they feel about you carrying their spirit with you wherever you go on the path of your ageless, immortal travels.
- f. Conclude the letter with a message of the clarity of their love for you.

10. The spell is almost complete. Watch your dog until they start to dream. What manifestations of the dream take hold of them (twitching paws, little muffled barks, etc)? What do you think they dream of? Write it down in your spellbook.
11. Go to sleep. When you wake up, say good morning to your dog. Feed them breakfast. Tell them they are good. The balance of magic in your house returns to its mundane hum. Reflect on the spell you cast together yesterday, and write a second letter to your dog. Conclude the letter to them with, "I will carry you with me wherever I go. You are loved, and you are good."
12. Once you've finished writing, watch your dog. When they wag their tail next you will know the spell is complete.
13. You are loved, and you are good. So mote it be.