

*for Louis*

We mourn my champ my best friend my itsy vicious pitbull Debris (1984-1991), who pretty much got it all started that day she disrupted Mr. Baldwin's math lesson by lunging on his chest and tearing out his throat. She was only supposed to do the tackle part, that's all I trained her to do I swear. We practiced in my room: I gave her Mr. Baldwin's scent with a jack-o-lantern tie I found in his desk (while he was distracted with some boys snorting baking soda on a dare), and I tied the tie around a swivel chair's pump and trained her to jump it. I guess I wasn't really training her though. The more time I spent around Debris the more I realized she did whatever, she had her nose in her own flame and didn't do orders. She wasn't like most dogs. Ordinary dogs don't murder teachers! A lot of us kids laughed at first at the slaughter, but some of us cried, a few threw up, and some of us frozenly gazed.

Me, I must say I felt like a badass goddess, having so righteously unleashed my hound from my backpack, where she had been patiently hunched during the pledge of allegiance, legs drawn in, her light claws resting against my back. Right at the beginning of this my first and most detested class of the day, I took off my backpack, carefully rested it on the ground, and unzipped it.

"Go Debris!" I shouted.

And boy did she go! The bitch charged--no one else is allowed to call her that--hopped onto Mr. Baldwin's chest, bit into his throat, crunchily yanked it free and tossed that wrinkly sucker across the room into the side of a blue recycling bin, which toppled, sending sheets of pastel green paper everywhere. Debris stood triumphantly over her collapsed kill, barking with lots of teeth.

Thus auspiciously began a body count I sometimes consider impressive, sometimes regrettable, depending on my mood. That was in 1986. I was 13. At this point Debris and I had been together for only two weeks.

Of course I didn't give a shit about Mr. Baldwin. That guy was a creep. Crushed on this cheerleader girl with his godforsaken acoustic guitar. Gave all the girls sketchy looks, even me. And if you asked to use the bathroom he'd say you had to tinkle and like what is that, I hate that, the word tinkle it gives me the creeps. Anyone says that to me now I'd kill him for sure. I'm not ashamed to say after Debris iced him they found me barking, trying to sync up with my dog, and kind of emphatically pumping my fists. All the other kids left us by ourselves because they were fool cowards and got scared. I'm not sure how long Debris and I barked together.

My parents and the pigs came, two sides of the same coin really. They had animal control ready, but the adults were even more scared than any of the kids were. They crept into the room almost like they were bashful. Animal control guy holding out his catch pole, its loose collar like a noose. Pig's twitchy hand hovering over his holster. My tired-eyed parents holding out their arms, offering soulless hugs.

"Get away from that dog." My dad commanded.

Debris bubbly growled.

"It's not safe." My mom urged.

Their faces said the same thing: *stop embarrassing us.*

They cornered us against a window, so I grabbed the nearest chair and wildly swung for glass. The crack blast of it made a cloud of loud shatter that rained sharp bits. Pig aimed his gun at me. Animal control made a move for Debris. She clapped her teeth at his catch pole and almost bit it. My parents basically shrugged out of the room.

Debris and I made it out through my little smash portal without any cuts. Pig and animal control ran after us, chasing us across a soccer field, but we were a lot faster than those panting losers. We easily lost them in the woods that surrounded my school. Those woods will soon be gone. I hear they're fated for subdivision.

I miss her baggy pout, face whitish grey and marked with shadowy pockets, like the moon. We slept in train carts together, heart against heart, our loose hairs getting all over each other. She was the warmest nugget in the world. She was a snorer.

Running away from home is a difficult profession to begin at 13, even though most 13 year-olds think it's a dream job. I'm glad I was smart enough to escape with my backpack. Heavy textbooks reeking of glue got replaced with food stolen from gas stations and corner stores, and it was like even my backpack was happy with this new purpose, like the tent-like fabric of the bag became more relaxed, while its intense neon greens and pinks were dulled into colors more chill by all the outdoor exposure.

But I never would have made it without Debris. Her regular growls were intimidating enough for scumbags or whoever to leave us alone wherever we went. We train-hopped west, whooshing through cities, towns and prairies that were all equally nowhere. Riding on a train like that it feels like you're always falling. Debris often got motion sick. To keep our spirits up, we sang songs made out of howls and barks. My back quickly acclimated to sleeping on hard surfaces.

We made it weeks without any trouble. We'd stop at places for days where I could steal us food and we could bathe in a lake or river. I fished loose clothes from donation bins. Our favorite spots were woody pockets near a major road or freeway, someplace where we could

hear the hypnotic wind sounds of speeding cars, while I lazed and watched the squirrels and Debris chased them in a frolic. Sometimes she just watched them too. I think she liked them: if she wanted to kill them, they'd be dead. Her frantic bounds toward them were play. I've met so many people who don't know squirrels squawk musically. They'd sing at us all the time, flashing their pollen-like bellies in leapy dances, or hunching their little backs like cats on the hunt. Squirrels are great.

But they weren't all squirrel days on our way to the west. I think it was in Idaho where that pig tried to arrest us. Amazing it didn't happen sooner. I imagine I looked like a dirty little freak. Probably smelled awful too.

This pig catches us eating turkey sandwiches in a park not far from the tracks. He's by himself. We're in a small enough town for solo cops. He said there was a concerned phone call about a maybe homeless girl heading for the park.

I said, "I'm not homeless," and he just goes *uh-huh* in this dickish skeptical way I can't stand.

Debris also hated that tone of voice.

She didn't have much patience either. This pig made a move to grab me, maybe cuff me, I don't know. Debris was all over it. She jumped the pig and like bit off his face.

"Holy shit Debris! Yes!" I remember shouting.

I think she ate the face.

We got out of that place real fast.

I would have been happy living like this indefinitely, riding the rails, forever falling into an addictive unknown, killing teachers and cops that got in our way, but we needed to end up somewhere, and we ended up in a punk squat in L.A, where the epic scope of Debris' ambition

began to assert itself. If people were friendly to us, Debris and I would usually also be friendly, although she hated it when people called her small, even if they meant it as a compliment or thought it was cute or whatever. If you called her the smallest pitbull you'd ever seen (and she would be if you saw her), she would snarl. I think she knew that one word, small, and she knew whatever it meant it was an insult to a giant like her.

A lot of punks loved to hear our stories, and we loved to tell them. Debris accentuated all the best parts with barks and hyper, hopping reenactments. Until the end, one of Debris' very favorite activities was storytime by the hacked gas line fireside. That's when her tail would wag the most and I swear her eyes flashed gold. There was a light to her, she was so simply and enthusiastically herself. It was nice to be around. People envied our bond. Honestly I felt like the luckiest girl in the world, because I knew there was a different version of my story without Debris, the reality most punks live, where they have little protection against the cops, shitty thieves, and pervy jerks. Debris saved me from the bullshit world. She saved me from constant self-defense. Every day we were together I felt so lucky.

It didn't take long for her to get noticed by some aspiring musicians, two scrappy punks, friends of a hen who took us under her wing, her name was XC. She was the one who secured us a spot in the squat, impressed with my age and Debris' rage. The punks had a drumset and a guitar. In search of a bassist, they decided instead to take on a dog, convinced Debris could be trained into some basic vocalist tricks. What they really wanted was her presence. The divine swagger and indolent bearing always teetering on spitting electric fury. It was so ideal especially because they didn't want to write lyrics. Why waste time with words? Their music was going to be pure raw. True hardcore! They said.

Debris enjoyed the attention. Their first band practice was their very best performance, I'm sorry but that's the absolute truth. It was in an impoverished mother's cluttered modest

garage, where they stored their instruments in a gasoline funk. They got a microphone for Debris and she downright wriggled with excitement, loving the encouragement from her bandmates and loving the amplification of her own barks. The boys attempted making melodies around her canine noises, and it was elemental, very punk, the best. XC and I thrashingly danced. This was one of the most beautiful moments of my life, and I can confidently say it was among the best for Debris too.

Spotty practices for two months and they played their first gig. Now we're in 1987. The punks argued about a name until the night of the concert, so they weren't put on the flyers. They played first. It was a crummy house show. Not a particularly successful gig. Bad acid had made the rounds and people were freaking out. Like I saw a man viscerally weeping from sheer existential terror because the singer of A Caustic Guitar (the name they finally settled on) was a dog. And were those actual words she howled? Feedback fuzz obscured, even I thought I started hearing words, mainly "no."

That night I stole a hot dog from the drummer of another band, and he actually tried to throw down about it. No scruples some punks. I was 14! Granted a lot of people thought I was older than I was. I kicked his ass, while Debris barked encouragingly. That was the kind of protector she was: never unnecessary, never extra, there if you needed her.

I still expect to see her around. There are so many things that I've mistaken for her in a blink, a patch of sunlight, a heap of trashed fortune cookies, a pile of pale rocks, anything. It hurts. Nobody else can tell me anything about love.

A Caustic Guitar made a fast name for themselves in the underground scene, more for the gimmick of a pitbull frontwoman than for the music itself. They had songs, or they said

they had songs, but the songs changed each time they played them. Debris was a capricious singer and frequently forced the boys to adapt. By 1988 their gigs upgraded to dive bars, always the opening act. With the band, I was allowed inside even though I was a teenager. People bought us booze all the time. It was great. Debris was a legendary fun drunk.

The more popular her band got, the more Debris loved to drink, and I think maybe I should have tried getting her to ease up on the alcohol, but what can I say I was drunk. For two years, though, it did feel kind of perfect. Sure, she killed a handful of people: a nazi who started a fight in a mosh pit, a man who touched me at a bar, there were others I forget. I think there was another nazi she killed at a house show once in 1990, but on that night, despite XC's repeated warnings not to, I took the bad acid (any acid at the shows we went to was bunk, the stuff that tastes like metal), so I was distracted and missed that kill. I wouldn't be surprised if she snuck in a few murders under all of our radars. Maybe that's my hope. If we uncovered another secret murder, it would almost be like she was still alive and killing.

We had plenty of quiet moments too. Rolling along on my skateboard, Debris led us on walks in the dried out L.A. river, leashed for appearances, but the collar was extremely slack around her neck, practically not there. She led the walks through the wild technicolor orange garbage air of the endless city. We never went to a beach. Debris never saw the ocean. She wasn't interested in it. Whined if we ever got too close to the coast. I think she didn't like the smell of salt. She preferred pollution, it was what she knew. While skating I'd carry a fishing pole because I liked the way it felt in my hand and liked to practice some casts, and I had ambitions of becoming skilled with handling it, skillfully tossing my line to steal sunglasses off people or whatever, just to be shitty. I didn't think much about the logistics or like safety concerns of essentially throwing hooks at people, because Debris encouraged it. She'd carry the

fishing pole in her mouth and headbutt my butt to goad me into our walks. I guess it was her idea all along.

Debris didn't listen to much music, despite her involvement in the craft, and despite the punks frequently pushing their beloved hardcore bands. She'd sleep through the songs they played for her, and they'd throw their arms up and say "harsh!"

But she liked this tape XC had from her time squatting in New York City, a band called Y Pants, toy pianos and synths, odd music, not at all like what she performed. Debris would bark along to a song they had about a fly. It was adorable, but it wasn't the kind of thing most the punks we knew would be into. Still, it was what she liked during her down time.

I've been avoiding this part. A Caustic Guitar never should have taken on a bassist. What is a bass anyway? It's just a shitty guitar. But the band was fully gaining a devoted following and the band wanted to go bigger. They wanted to explode.

Debris showed her teeth when they introduced her to the bassist. Her tail was slightly down, which basically meant she didn't like the guy, but she didn't hate him either. I hated him and I hate him still. I hope he's in hell, or heaven if that would be more uncomfortable for him.

Then there was the literally short-lived manager, a friend of the bassist and a dweeb the guys trusted for some reason. He claimed he was arranging them a minor west coast tour for the end of 1990, said he got them gigs opening for 7 Year Bitch and The Gits in Seattle. He asked me to write a biography of Debris, for some kind of press release he said. I didn't believe this guy was for real, but I got to work on the biography anyway. I liked the idea. I stole a dictionary, thesaurus, and writing stuff and began putting together her story. I guess that was the beginning of this memorium.

Soon the manager's fraud was revealed, the guy didn't have a long con in mind. The time came for their big first tour, and there was no van, no real plan, a shrugging manager saying it all fell through, unconvincingly. He was hoping we'd part with at least a little money before the tour, which is hilarious. We had none. The band planned on stringing him along for years.

After he confessed, and Debris understood what happened, she killed him, but her heart wasn't in it. She crawled onto his lap lazily and he had enough time to look at us all like *what's your dog doing?* Debris calmly tore out his throat and sleepily dropped it to the side. I think she was sad to see her bandmates so sad. She slumped into a mope in the gathering puddle of blood.

However, the band's following remained devoted as ever. Some of their fans claimed they had songs memorized, which was impossible. They began headlining their own house shows and the place would be packed, full of Debris' adorers. I still saw a bright future ahead for her.

But that goddamn bassist. For some reason he didn't get kicked out of the band after his friend turned out to be an asshole. It wasn't long after New Years when the horrible night happened. While I was asleep, the bassist gave Debris heroin, then overdosed himself and good riddance.

I'll be real, Debris was starting to be all about the drugs. She was licking pills out of people's palms at shows, but of course fans took this in stride, all part of the experience. Fans didn't care when she puked and pissed on them, which was common near the end, when we were all cranky and burnt out after our squat burned down and we had to find another one, and we were all too drunk all the goddamn time.

We've calculated that Debris lived 27 years in dog years. Hardly a comfort, but I do think she wanted to die like this, fast, no nonsense, done with the world who needs more, it was too small a world for her anyway. I can't say I was into her funeral service, but it was

undeniably epic. Worthy of Debris. Her fans delivered. Somebody stole an industrial microwave from the kitchen he (briefly) worked in. They zapped the remains of Debris, and it smelt like the radiation it was. The slightly paled dog corpse was taken out piping hot and thrown to her followers, who tore and chowed in like wolves, like acolytes, raw mouthfuls of furry colorless meat, eating it vivid red bloody and screaming, growling, a kind of singing, and that you fucks could be the apex the climax the very epitome of your entire hopeless little millennium—fuck you and long live Debris.