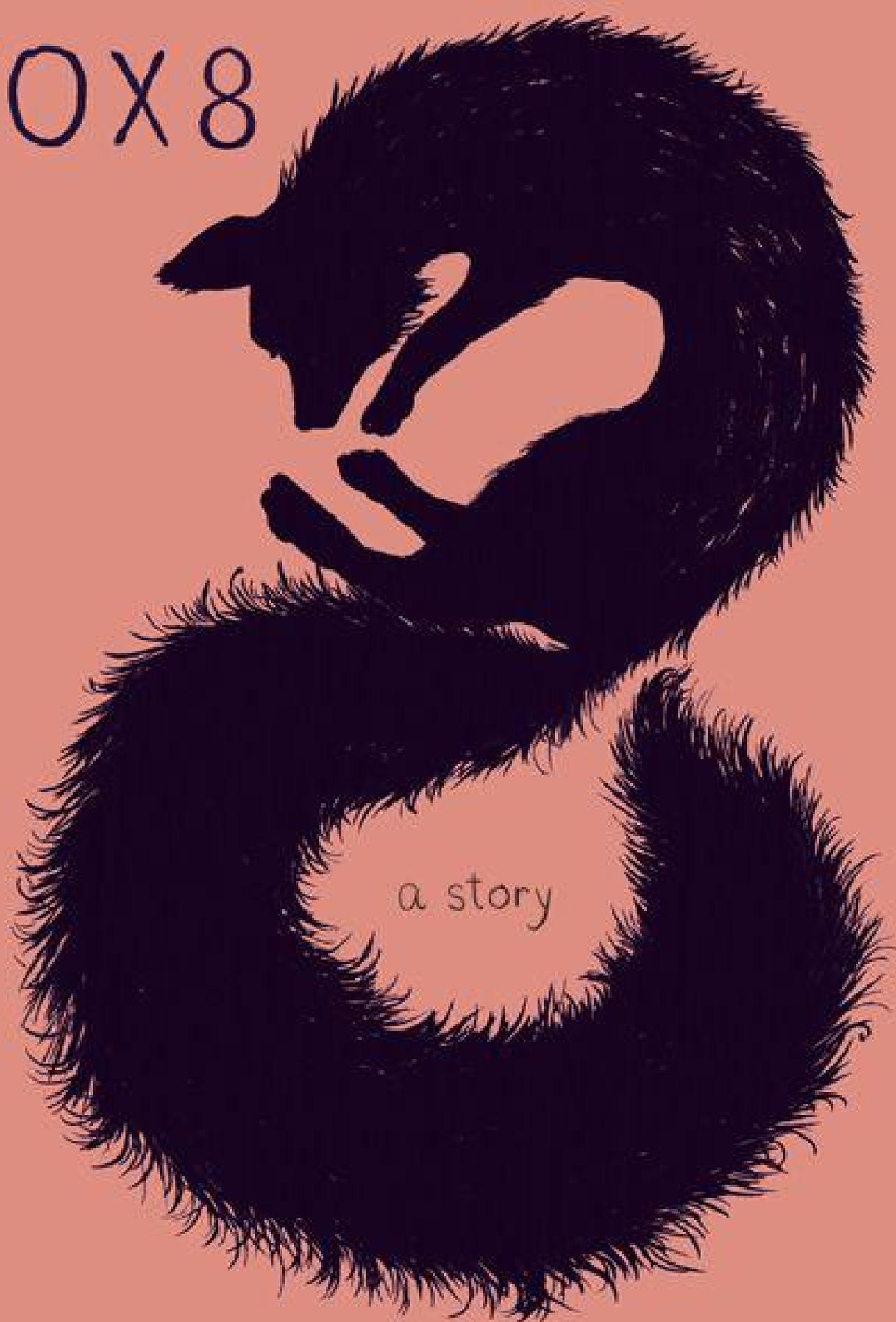


FOX 8



GEORGE SAUNDERS

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *TENTH OF DECEMBER*

FOX 8

A Story

George Saunders

Illustrated by Chelsea Cardinal

Random House



New York

Fox 8 is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, persons, or animals, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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Deer Reeder: First may I say, sorry for any werds I spel rong. Because I am a fox! So don't rite or spel perfect. But here is how I lerned to rite and spel as gud as I do!

One day, walking neer one of your Yuman houses, smelling all the interest with snout, I herd, from inside, the most amazing sound. Turns out, what that sound is, was: the Yuman voice, making werds. They sounded grate! They sounded like prety music! I listened to those music werds until the sun went down, when all of the suden I woslike: Fox 8, crazy nut, when sun goes down, werld goes dark, skedaddle home, or else there can be danjer!

But I was fast and nated by those music werds, and desired to understand them total lee.



So came bak nite upon nite, seeted upon that window, trying to lern. And in time, so many werds came threw my ears and into my brane, that, if I thought upon them, cud understand Yuman prety gud, if I heer it!

What that lady in that house was saying, was: Storys, to her pups, with “luv.” When done, she wud dowse the lite, causing dark. Then, due to feeling “luv,” wud bend down, putting snout and lips to the heds of her pups, which was called: “gudnite kiss.” Which I got a kik out of that! Because that is also how we show our luv for our pups, as Foxes! It made me feel gud, like Yumans cud feel luv and show luv. In other werds, hope full for the future of Erth!

But one nite I herd something that made me think wise about Yumans.

And I still am.

What I herd was a Story, but a fawlse and even meen one. In that story was a Fox. But guess what the Fox was? Sly! Yes, true lee! He trikked a Chiken! He lerd this plump Chiken away from its henhowse, claming there is some feed in a stump. We do not trik Chikens! We are very open and honest with Chikens! With Chikens, we have a Super Fare Deel, which is: they make the eggs, we take the eggs, they make more eggs. And sometimes may even eat a live Chiken, shud that Chiken consent to be eaten by us, threw faling to run away upon are approche, after she has been looking for feed in a stump.

Not Sly at all.

Very strate forword.

That Story was also fawlse due to the mane Chiken is whering glasses. Which, Chikens that I know of? Do not where glasses. I do not think this is because all Chikens see grate. I think it is because Chikens do not even know when they don't see grate, due to, altho I have the highest respek for Chikens, luvving their eggs, they are perchance not the britest.

But Chikens whering glasses was not the only fawlse Story I herd.

Like I herd Storys about Bares, in which Bares are always sleeping and nise and luvving. Beleev me, as someone offen chased by Bares, never was a Bare chasing me (1) asleep or (2) nise and (3) luvving. You shud heer the many not-nise things a Bare is saying, in Bare, as he is chasing you, as lukily you slide into your Den just in the nack of time and try not to start crying in front of your other Foxes.

And in terms of Owls, Owls are wise? Don't make me laff! Once a Owl nipped Fox 6 kwite crool on his nek just because Fox 6 was saying a frend lee greeting to the baby Owls with his snout!

For a long time, no one but me knew I knew Yuman. Then one day, as faith will have it, I am walking threw the wuds with Fox 7, a gud pal, when all of the suden a branch drops down on us from upon hi.

And I woslike: O wow.

But said not in Fox, but in Yuman.

Fox 7 was so shocked he just sat with haunch on ground and tung lolling out, along with the wide eyes of being complete lee astonish.

To which I said: Correct, what I just now spoke, was Yuman, dude.

And he woslike: That is prety gud, Fox 8.

To which I woslike, in Yuman, to perhaps show off slite: It is super gud, no dowt, Fox 7.

And he woslike: We must tell our Grate Leeder. This is so— To which, in Fox, I woslike: I know, rite?

So we went to our Grate Leeder, Fox 28, and I spoke him some Yuman.

When I had spoken my Yuman, Grate Leeder turned his hed sidewise the way us Foxes do when feeling quizmical or a noise is hi, and said: Fox 8, how did you akomplish this?

I woslike: By studying their speech patterns every nite without fale.

He woslike: Perhaps you wud be gud enough to use your new skil to help the Groop?

I was kwite flatered by this show of respek from Grate Leeder, famus among us for wize consel, plus always leeding us grate.

I woslike: Hapy to help.

Grate Leeder woslike: Folow me, Fox 8.

Which I did, shooting Fox 7 a prowld look of: Dude, chek me out.

Soon we are standing before a sine, and upon that sine are some Yuman letters like the ones I had been lerning. And thanks to my studies, I cud reed it. (Lukily, I had lerned their alphobet, by skwinting my eyes, threw that window, at their buks.) What those werds said, is: Coming soon, FoxViewCommons.

I red them to Grate Leeder, who, bak in are Den, said them alowd to the Groop.

Those werds caused many suden questions in all our branes. Such as: What is a FoxViewCommons? Wud it chase us? Wud it eat us?

Terns out, it cud not eat us. It cud not chase us. But what it cud do, was even warse.

Because soon here came Truks, smoking wile tooting! They dug up our Primary Forest! They tore out our Leaning Tree! They rekked our shady drinking spot, and made total lee flat the highest plase of which we know, from where we can see all of curashun if it is not raning!

Whoa was us.

As far as we cud see, it is just flat, no trees. Upon troting to our River, we found it rekked due to so much suden dirt floting in. Also rekked were are Fish who, not even swoping a single flipper, just glansed up blank at us, like: Wow, we do not even get what just hapened.

Wile trying to explane it was Truks that hapened, we lerned one reason they cud not swope a flipper is, they are ded! Plus not only are our Fish ded, but all the things we luv to eat, such as Bugs, such as fat slow Mise, are total lee gone! We serched all day, snouts low. But not one snak.

Soon sevrал of our Extreme Lee Old Foxes become sik, and ded, because: no fud. These ded frends were: Fox 24, Fox 10, and Fox 111.

Gud Foxes all.

One lesen I lerned during my nites at that Yuman window was: a gud riter will make the reeder feel as bad as the Yuman does in there Story. Like the riter will make you feel as bad as Sinderela. You will feel sad you cannot go to the danse. And mad you have to sweep. You will feel like biting Stepmother on her Gown. Or, if you are Penokio, you will feel like: I wud rather not be made of wud. I wud rather be made of skin, so my father Jipeta will stop hitting me with a hamer. And so farth.

If you want to feel as bad as we Foxes are feeling at this time: (1) bare lee eat for weeks, (2) note that many frends, including you, are getting skinyer every day, and (3) watch sevrал of your beluvved frends get so skiny they die. At this time, Grate Leeder grew kwite sad. It was like he grew too sad to leed. And wud sit for hours staring into spase. It woslike Grate Leeder blamed

himself that we had lost are Forest in which we had always lived since time in memorial. But we did not feel it was his fault. It happened so fast, who could have been grateful enough to stop it? (I for sure did not know how to stop it. Once I snuck into the back of a Truck and stole their hammer with my mouth. I know it is not good to steal but I was so mad! But my stealing that hammer did not even slow them down. They must have had other hammers?) Finally some of us went to Grate Leeder and are like: Grate Leeder, let us go farth and find some fud, plus a better place to live.

But he just did this mone, and woslike: No, no, it is too danjerus. Everyone stay rite here where I can see you.

And once again played hed between paws.

Week upon week the Trucks kept working. These Yumans sure could work. They worked and worked until soon a hole forest is gone. How did they do it?

With their hands, plus Trucks.

Turns out, what they were making is: several big white boxes, with, written upon them, mystery words. Upon my reading of these words, my fellow Foxes looked at me all quizmical, like: Fox 8, tell us, what is Bon-Ton, what is Compu-Fun, what is Hooters, what is Kookies-N-Cream?

But I could not say, those words never being heard by me at my Story window.

FoxViewCommons seemed to be a place Yumans came to put their Kars. They would go into the white boxes and wait there until their Kars were ready to go home? Sometimes I would go up to a Kar, inside of which there is a Dog, and, due to speaking decent Dog, would be like: How's it going? To which the Dog would either look blank at me, as if I was not even speaking Dog, or fling themselves around inside their Kar, as if they would like to brake out and do damage to me, a Fox!

But finally one Dog does answer, going: Pretty good, how about you? It is really hot in here.

And I woslike: Friend, what is this place?

He woslike: Par King.

I woslike: What is it for?

At which point he took a paw to lick his but. While I politely leered.

Finally he woke: The Maw.

I woke: But what is the purpose of the Maw?

By this time, however, he is asleep. With legs running, yet still trapped in that Kar, probably dreaming he is a Fox, with Fox-like freedom, and less pudgy.

But he was right: it was Par King, it was the Maw. Yumans would go: You kids stop fighting, we're at the Maw, quit, quit it, if you don't stop fighting how would you like it if we just skip the Maw and you can get right to your aljehbruh, Kerk? Or, speaking into a small box, a Yuman might go, I have to run, Jeenie, I'm just now Par King at the Maw! Or one Yuman slaps the but of a second, and the slapped one leans in, quite fond, going, Elyut, you kill me. Or a lady drops her purse and bends to retrieve her goods, when suddenly her hat blows away, at which time, speaking a bad word, she looks ready to sit and cry, when a nice man appears, and rises off in quest of her hat, though he has a slight limp.

Yumans!

Always interesting.

One day I am crawling at the edge of Par King, gazing over at the Maw, when out comes a pair of Yumans.

One woke: OK, I will meet you at the Fud Court when you are done with your lip waks.

And the other woke: If you are late I will totally kill you, Meggen.

And the other woke: Don't worry, I'll find you. You'll be the one with the way red lip.

Then they laughed.

That phrase of "Fud Court" pricked up my ears but good.

Might there be fud in a Fud Court?

There might, I felt.

Here I should say, all my life, I have had quite curative day-dreams. They would just come upon me. And I would enjoy them.

With some favorites being:

Some Yumans heer me speeking Yuman so gud they give me some Chiken, and I sit rite at there Table. And they go: How is it being a Fox?

And I go: Fine.

And they go: Foxes are our favrit Animal.

And I go: Thanks.

And they go: Why o why were we so stupid as to choose Dogs for our mane Pets?

And I go: I reely don't know.

Or: Some Bares are chasing me. I stop and, holding one paw aleft, give them a speech about being nise, and they are like: Maybe this is weerd to ask, but cud you, a Fox, be our Grate Leeder, and teech us to be nise and not walk funy? And I go: Sure. And they applawd with their paws. But awkword. So I teech them to clap gud and they look at me with luv.

Or: Some Berds fly around my hed, going: What a prety Fox, we have flown everywhere in this werld and never seen one pretier! And one Berd goes: And smart too. And the others churp there agreement.

Now, krowching neer Par King, I had a curative day-dreem, about Fud Cort, which was: Go in, get some fud. Why not? How hard cud it be? If there is fud, it shud be fud for all, rite?

That nite, at Groop Meeting, I brot farth my plan.

But sad lee, my somewhat reputashun as a dreemer preseded me.

And not in a gud way.

Grate Leeder woslike: What is Fud Cort anyway? Sounds danjerus.

I woslike: Yumans are nise, they are cul.

And Fox 41 woslike, all snoty: O rite! Very funy! I'm sure we are going to trust the same Fox who once clamed he went to Collage with some Baby!

Fox 41 bringing up that Baby was so not cul.

Once, long ago, at that Story window, I day-dreemed those Yumans invited me in and let me hold there Baby. And that Baby luvved me so much, we soon jerneyed to Collage together,

whering are little Collage Hats! It was grate! At Collage we lerned such Yuman skills as Werking Machines, and How to Play a Violin Complete Lee Screechy.

But when I came home and told my Foxes about going to Collage with that Baby, they did not beleev me. To proof it, I desided to show them my Collage Hat.

Which was when I remembered I had day-dreemed the hole thing.

The only Collage Hat I had was in my brane!

Tray embarasing.

So that is why, in Groop Meeting, Grate Leeder woslike: No, Fox 8. No Mawl. Gud input tho.

I terned to my other Foxes and woslike: Guys, please suport me on this.

But fownd the eyes of my other Foxes lolling up at the seeling.

Fox 4 woslike: No ofense, Fox 8? Your ideas are not super praktikal.

Dreem, dreem, dreem, said Fox 11.

Fox 41 woslike: Fox 8, does this honestly never get old for you?

Grate Leeder woslike: I have spoken.

And something in me woslike: Grate Leeder, bla.

I still luvved him but it woslike he was not being all that Grate. Or even a Leeder. I meen no disrespek. It was just a strong feeling in my hart that it was no gud for Foxes to give up and just be ded on perpose.

All that nite I cud not sleep for beens. But just lay awake, looking sad lee around at all my sleeping Foxes. And woslike, in my brane: Friends, you do not look so gud. The hare of your cotes is manjee. You are neerly all eyes, due to: super hungry. Your sides are like heeving in your sleep. Deer Foxes! You have known me sinse, as a Pup, I tryed to bite my own face in our Rivver. You knew me bak when, day-dreeming, I stepped in Poop of Wolf and brot it bak inside the Den, causing everyone to rinkle their snouts, going like: Fox 8, jeez, how cud you not smell Poop of Wolf when it is rite on your own dang paw? But you forgave me, and when I

had got most of the Poop off, by rubing against a tree, even helped me lik myself all the way gud.

And sinse I luv you, shud I not do my best to save you?

Hense I desided to go alone.

And next morning set off for the Mawl.

You may have herd the Yuman frase, What are frends for? Well, I will tell you. Friends are for, when your hole Groop terns its baks on you, here comes your frend, Fox 7, of who I spoke of erlyer, as being the first Fox I ever spoke Yuman to, trotting up beside you.

He woslike: I'll go with you, Fox 8.

I woslike: Dude.

He gave this small shrug, like: No big deel.

We troted awile in gud cheer. Soon here was the Mawl. Cud we kros Par King? We cud. And did.

Here is how you do it:

Take a deep breth. Look left and look rite, very vigrus. Careful, careful.

Go. Go go go! Do not even paws.

FoxViewCommons is now bowncing, because you are galupping so fast.

A Kar almost gets you! Do a panic-yip. Stop. Take a slite brake under another Kar. Try to go. Too bad, you can't. Too skared! Do a miner worry-yip.



Go!

Paws!

Look again, look again. Go. Stop! Look again.

Just reely buk it!

You made it!

And are not ded.

But now there was a problem we had not mulled, which is: a Dore. Dores being a problem for Foxes, due to being hevy, plus there handels may be hi.

But luk was with us.

Just then, a very Yung Yuman, a meer Todler, todled past with a smile of possibly thinking we are Dogs. There in her hand, we noted: some fud! It looked gud and smelled grate. It is a Bun! All of the suden, we desided to enter into a Fare Deel with her, whereby we wud share her Bun, by us taking it.

But then, quik as the wink, she is intaken into the Mawl, with one hand in the hand of her Mother and, in the other hand, our

Bun! And before we knew it, we too, lerd by her fud, had been intaken into FoxViewCommons, rite threw their Dore!

There is a hi music sound. The ground is like glas. Or ise.

And o my frends, the things we saw!

We saw the Gap! We saw Eye Openers! We saw a Pet Store, with captured Kats! We saw a small River that, tho flowing, did not smell rite. We saw some Fake Rox. We saw Trees. Reel Trees, inside FoxViewCommons! It made us want to dig a Den! We saw a groop of Yung Yumans, waring brite close and dansing fast, and some Old Yumans we think are there mothers, hopping about kwite eksited, yeling advise, such as, Pik it up, Kristal! Or Smile, Kara, why look so sad wile dansing, babe? We saw a round thing which had Fake Horses upon it, on which they are enslaved and made to go circular, as Yung Yumans enjoy it by being plased on bak of them. I was left to wonder: Why wud Old Yumans enjoy putting Yung Yumans on Fake Horses? It was a total mistery. And remanes so. It is as if an Old Fox enjoys putting his Yung Fox on a Fake Deer. I for one wud not enjoy that. Altho it might be funy at first.

Yumans wud walk by and go: Hey, look, Foxes. And drop a bit of fud at us. Soon we had karmel korn, sevrал parshul biskits, plus a pare so fresh it did not even stink.

I woslike: This must be Fud Cort.

Fox 7 woslike: I gess so.

We were so happy we sat between those Fake Rox, speeking dreemy lee of our future, such as: We wud get some pants and glases. We wud ride in a Kar, plasing a coffee on are breefcase. We wud make such gud frends with the Yumans, they wud cut a Fox Dore in there Mawl.

Never had Yumans seemed so cul. We were sarounded by splendor no Fox cud curate. Hense were fild with respek. Cud a Fox do this? Bild a Mawl? Fat chanse! The best we can do is dig are Dens.

Then it was time to go home.

For we now had fud sufishent to save the lifes of our frends.

Holding that fud in are mowths, we troted bak threw FoxViewCommons, heds held hi, having such a feeling of pride, being probly the first Foxes or even Animals ever inside FoxViewCommons, except for those captured Kats.

Out we went.

Here again was the Sun! Here again Clouds! I cud not wate to see Fox 41, and go: Hi, Fox 41, perfeshunal turd, care for some fud?

But upon reaching the edge of Par King, guess what we did not find?

Fox 41.

Or are other Foxes.

Or are Den.

It woslike we had gone out a hole difrent Dore than we had gone in threw.

Now, one thing I lerned from Storys is, when something big is about to okur, a riter will go: Then it hapened!

This tells the reeder: Get Reddy.

Here I go:

Then it hapened!

There at the edj of Par King was a teem of two Yumans doing some digging. One woslike: Holy krap, Foxes! As if he had never seen a Fox before. My feeling was: Yes, yes, we are Foxes, hello frends, we have just seen the wunder that is your Mawl, we congradulate you! We glamped your fake River, obserbed your cute yung ones dansing, gladly acsepted your generus gift of Fud. You are so nise! What a grate day for the Fox/Yuman conection!

Then that first Yuman, kwite huje, took off a blue hat he was wearing. And I woslike, in my brane: It must be a form of saloot? So did a Fox saloot back, which is: reach out with front legs, bow, yawn. Only then, running toward us in a startling maner, he threw that hat at us! From the sound it made upon not hitting us, but only Par King, I saw it must be made of rok. I gave Fox 7 a glanse, like: What did we do rong? Then the other Yuman, kwite small, ran at us, and threw his hat, and o my frends, what hapened next is hard to rite. Because that hat wonked Fox 7

skware in his face! And sudenly his nees go week, and he gives me one last fond look, and drops over on his side, with blud trikling out his snout! I breefly tried to revive him, by sniffing. But here comes the huje and the small Yuman, running as if in viktree, making a noise that made my hare stand on my nek, and what cud I do but flee?

Glansing bak wile trotting, I saw the huje and small Yuman doing such things to Fox 7 as: further hits with their hats, and kiks and stomps, wile making adishunal noises I had never herd a Yuman make, as if this is fun, as if this is funy, as if they are proud of what they are akomplishing! Reeching a dirt klod big as me, I lay behind it, panting wile shaking. Which is when I saw the last straw of there croolty, which was: the small Yuman pikked up Fox 7, now ded, and flung him threw the air! Poor Fox 7, my frend, was spinning wile saling, like something long with a wate at one end! And what did those Yumans do? Stood bent over, laffing so hard! Then retreeved there crool hats and went bak to werk, slaping hands, as if what they had done was gud, and cul, and had made them glad.

Rest of the day I hid amung those dirt klods, kwietly wimpering.

When darkness fell I snuk over and vewed what remaned of Fox 7.

I had herd many Storys at that window but never had I herd a Story in which anything like what hapened to pore Fox 7 hapened. I did not know a Fox cud look that way. Even our Foxes who got hit by Kars did not look as bad as Fox 7.

And it was Yumans had done it.

I troted all nite, tray stunned. I wud stop to sleep, but dreem of Fox 7 and his sad last glanse. Kwaking there under the moon, I wud remember the nise way Fox 7 had of doing a nose-nudge, if a frend of his mite be feeling low. Then I wud rise and run, trying to ferget.

And by morning was kwite lost.



For days I romed, lerning many things, such as: A rode can pass over a River. There is more than one Mawl. A tree can flote in a lake. Sometimes Yumans run in groops, waring yelow. Once on a sine is a picture of a Duk chopping down a tree with another Duk, who looks tray mad. Soon my pads are bludy. There is no fud. Sometimes I cud find a Grasshopper. Once I fownd a ded Berd, who had been ded so long he had bad hi gene. So I cud not eat him. I tryed but no way.

Perhaps, reeder, you have herd that frase called: It was the best of times, it was the werst of times? (It is from a buk. Once that Mother tried reeding that buk to her cubs. But it pruded boring, with too many werds. Therebuy her cubs began doing what Yung Yumans do when bord, which is, rolling around with

fingers up nose, pinching there baby brother.) All I cud think was, Fox 7 is ded, and it is all my fawlt. Why had I ever had that dum idea of entering the Mawl? Why was I born so weerd? Why cud I not be a simple Fox, having no day-dreems, speeking just Fox, obeying my Grate Leeder?

It was the werst of times, it was the werst of times.

And tell the truth, my hart went slite lee bad.

Troting thru a forest, I wud heer such things as Berds swoping down prasing all nature, and Mise saying it is a super day, and Cows in a nearby feeld going, O wow, isn't the werld grate and so farth, we are just reely luvving this super grass. That is how Animals are: kwite cheer full. But I was not like that now. And knew I wud not be like that again. Now their songs of luv seemed like the dopy chater Fox 7 and I had been saying to each other as we lay all hapy between those Fake Rox in the Mawl, sharing are hope full plans of getting pants and glases and so farth, and inviting Yumans to are Den, serving them some froot if we have some, all that time watching those Yumans with such luv, not knowing what was coming next, like two little Babys, fast asleep in the middle of a horeable werld, who did not yet know how horeable it reely is.

Sometimes, troting on my bludy pads threw a Yuman zone, such as RiverWalkEstates, along such rodes as Hummingbird Way and Slow Stream Ave or even Melody Manner Passage, seeing so many grate Dens, with lites like indoor suns, and water shooting majik lee out of there grass at will, seeing that long line of Kars trot away so proud every morning full of Yumans, and the other splenders Yumans cud do, such as make grass short, such as cause flowrs to grow inside there Dens, I woslike: Why did the Curator do it so rong, making the groop with the gratest skills the meenest?

Then one day I came upon a Forest, the like of which I had never seen before, so deep and green and dark and grate-smelling it made those holes in my nose go super wide with sheer delite. O, the lite threw the Trees! The moving shadows when the wind wud blow! The millyun grate smells, such as water not far away! The

wind in the hi part of the Trees, and sometimes a branch will crak!

All of the suden, I smelled Fox big-time. Then saw Foxes big-time. A hole other groop. Just like us. Only not. Compared to us they were (1) less skiny and had (2) no feer in eyes and (3) cotes of the pretiest red ever, a deep Fox lee red that made me ashamed of my own dul cote.

I told them my name and let them smell me, hoping they wud like me.

Which they did. They did smell me. They did like me. They tuk turns smelling and liking me.

I told them all that had be fallen me. They beleevd it about the Mawl. They did not beleev it about Fox 7. I cud tell. They looked at me funy. Then looked at each other funy.

Tell the truth, I wud not have beleevd me either if I had showed up and told me that.

Those Foxes were super nise. One came over all shy and out of her mowth dropped a froot at my paw. One dropped a gift of a part of a Berd. They showed me to a pond, where I drank so much they were slitley laffing.

And I woslike: There is no fud or gud water where I live.

One of them woslike: We kind of figgered.

Then, thanks to my habit of day-dreeming, I saw myself, in my brane, leeding my other Foxes to this paradice, one by one, threw FoxViewCommons. I wud show them the Gap. I wud show them the Fake Rox. If one was skared I wud say: Don't be skared. And make a joke. If one was slow I wud give a push from behind with an enkeraging snout. If one was looking around all freeked out, I wud calm lee go: Fokus, fokus. If one was old, such as are Grate Leeder, I wud carry him or her on my bak.

Soon, in my mind, we are all safe lee there. And my other Foxes, looking at me with shy glances upturned, are like: Fox 8, we cud not have been more rong. And they fan me with there fans.

I snapped out from that day-dreem to find the New Foxes regarding me with kind lee smiles.

When I told them my day-dreem, they were like: Cul. Bring your frends here, we can all live together very hapy. There is so much fud here it is like crazy.

Wud it be easy?

It wud not. It wud take Guts. But I have Guts. I once likked the tire of a Truk that was moving to see how it tasted, which the Groop teesed me about it, because hey Fox 8, why not wate until one found a Truk not moving, wud that not be easier?

Only too bad. If this was a buk, all it wud take is Guts, and I cud have done it. But no. It was reel life. For many weeks I tried to find my Old Foxes. My new frends even helped.

But no way.

We serched and serched but never fownd my frends, or even a trase of FoxViewCommons.

It is as if my beluvved Old Groop had fallen off the fase of Erth. (Gudby deer frends. I will not forgit you.) So now I live here. I have fud. I have water. I have frends. One frend is Fox SmallNose/Alert + Funy. She is prety. She is nise. These new Foxes do there names somewhat difrent, having werds in there names. These werds tell what is note werthy about each Fox. Like one Fox is known as Fox Complanes Constantly/Yet Nise. One is known as Fox WhySoHefty? My frend Fox SmallNose/Alert + Funy has a small nose, plus is alert, plus is funy. Hense her name.



Sometimes she is like: You are not all here, Fox 8. Come alive.
Be happy.

Yesterday she was like: You have a sad dark view.

And I was like: So would you.

She was like: Well, I do not want are Babys having a mopy dad.

To which I was like: Wait, are we having Babys?

And she spun around, and did a hop-and-yip.

Hearing that gave me paws. I did not want to be the kind of Dad who is so mad he just skowls, and hence his Babys are like: Ugh, Dad brings us down, he does not find life good, but only sits mad in the Den while us other Foxes stare up at the moonlight, nuzzling close, moving our tale areas back and forth the way we Foxes do when glad. I wanted to be the kind of Dad who, years hence, when thinking of me, are Babys are like, good old Dad, he was always there for us, showing us with the old snout-nudge what is good and what is not.

So asked myself: What mite somewhat retreev the old and hope full me? And replied: Some ansers.

Which is why I am riting this leter to you Yumans.

I wud like to know what is rong with you peeple. How cud the same type of Animal who made that luv lee Mawl make Fox 7 look the way he looked that time I saw him? Wud a Yuman do something like that to another Yuman? I dowt it. Whenever I saw a Yuman, he or she was laffing wile smiling wile approching the Mawl. Sometimes one Kar mite hit another Kar and a Yuman mite be slite lee mad, but always, by the end, they are at least nise, and give each other the gift of a scrap of paper. Never onse did I see a Yuman hit another Yuman with a rok hat, stomp and kik that Yuman, then fling that Yuman, laffing when he or she came down in a puff of dirt with a sikening sound.

Maybe Yumans do that.

But I have not seen it.

I know life can be gud. Most lee it is gud. I have drank cleen cold water on a hot day, herd the soft bark of the one I luv, watched sno fall slow, making the wuds kwiet. But now all these happy sites and sounds seem like triks. Now it seems like the gud times are mere lee smoke that, upon blowing away, here is the reel life, which is: rok hats, kiking, stomping. Every minit with no kiking and stomping now seems like not a real minit. Do you get what I mean? It is like some frend who preveusly was nise suden lee says some crool thing and does this nip on your flank. Even when he goes bak to being nise, you will never feel exact lee safe. And meenwile your other frends, who did not get nipped, are trotting arownd with hapy smiles, going: Fox 8, why so glum?

Preevius to lerning we wud have Babys, I felt, about Yumans: I brake with you. If you see me in the wuds, do not come neer. Stay in your awesum howses, play your music lowd, however you make it play so lowd, yap your Yuman jokes, sending forth your crood laffter into the nite. I will not approche you. I will just stay in my plase, skwatting low, fearful and kwaking, which is how you seem to like us Foxes.

But now, Babys on root, I do not want to feel that way.

I want to feel strong and generous. I want to feel hope full. Which is why, upon compleeshun of this leter, I will leeve it at that howse at the end of Clear Circle Way, where offen I see a serten rownd guy feeding Berds. His male boks says his name is P. Melonsky. You seem nise enough, P. Melonsky. Reed my leter, go farth, ask your felow Yumans what is up, rite bak, leeve your anser under your Berd feeder, I will come in the nite to retreeve and lern.

I am sure there is some eksplanashun.

And wud luv to know it.

Reeding my Story bak just now, I woslike: O no, my Story is a bumer. There is the deth of a gud pal, and no plase of up lift, or lerning a lesen. The nise Fox's first Groop stays lost, his frend stays ded.

Bla.

If you Yumans wud take one bit of advise from a meer Fox? By now I know that you Yumans like your Storys to end hapy?

If you want your Storys to end happy, try being niser.

I awate your answer.

Fox 8

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Essays

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About the Author

George Saunders, a 2006 MacArthur Fellow, teaches at Syracuse University and is the author of the short-story collections *CivilWarLand in Bad Decline*, *Pastoralia*, *In Persuasion Nation*, and, most recently, the *New York Times* bestseller *Tenth of December*.

Read on for an excerpt from George Saunders's
The Tenth of December

TENTH of DECEMBER

The pale boy with unfortunate Prince Valiant bangs and cublike mannerisms hulked to the mudroom closet and requisitioned Dad's white coat. Then requisitioned the boots he'd spray-painted white. Painting the pellet gun white had been a no. That was a gift from Aunt Chloe. Every time she came over he had to haul it out so she could make a big stink about the wood grain.

Today's assignation: walk to pond, ascertain beaver dam. Likely he would be detained. By that species that lived amongst the old rock wall. They were small but, upon emerging, assumed certain proportions. And gave chase. This was just their methodology. His aplomb threw them loops. He knew that. And reveled in it. He would turn, level the pellet gun, intone: Are you aware of the usage of this human implement?

Blam!

They were Netherworlders. Or Nethers. They had a strange bond with him. Sometimes for whole days he would just nurse their wounds. Occasionally, for a joke, he would shoot one in the butt as it fled. Who henceforth would limp for the rest of its days. Which could be as long as an additional nine million years.

Safe inside the rock wall, the shot one would go, Guys, look at my butt.

As a group, all would look at Gzeemon's butt, exchanging sullen glances of: Gzeemon shall indeed be limping for the next nine million years, poor bloke.

Because yes: Nethers tended to talk like that guy in *Mary Poppins*.

Which naturally raised some mysteries as to their ultimate origin here on Earth.