Sacha's Dog

By Karen Brennan
Illustrated by Stephen Romaniello

featuring

Sacha
Rosa
Dog
Tonio
Charlie
There is a little dog that belongs to Sacha and we see it here and there walking the street like a human being with a destination. More often than not it is in search of Sacha who is getting drunk and then falling asleep some place. Sacha’s dog, who is golden haired and as small as a cat with a pointed face and ears like mittens, is no familiar breed, even as a mutt it is not familiar.
Tonight Sacha is at the Cantina dancing with a woman with long hair. He does not know her name and thinks he will probably not ask because she is obviously a Gringa and communication becomes so frustrating. Also, he is very drunk. He has been drinking margaritas and beer for three days and also smoking a little pot, and he is happy to dance to the Salsa band & groove with the music.

The dogs here are different from the dogs in other places mainly because they have been allowed to roam the urban streets for centuries and one senses they have evolved in ways that please them as opposed to ways which please the human population. They strike us as a bit uncanny these dogs, as if they were scaling the edges of their

This dog, the dog of Sacha, does not strictly speaking belong to Sacha; that is to say, Sacha didn’t purchase this dog or find the dog and then decide to feed it. This dog, like most of the dogs in the city, is entirely self-reliant in the matter of food and entertainment. It loves Sacha, this is clear, and when Sacha is off on a long drunk the dog is disconsolate for a while, wandering anxiously trying to ascertain Sacha’s whereabouts.
The dog, who is nameless to humans at least, has no idea where Sacha is, but at this moment decides to try the Cantina where the door man, recognizing the dog, steps politely aside to allow it entrance.

When it spots Sacha on the dance floor with the long haired woman it gives a sharp yelp which Sacha recognizes as the signal for him to call it a night.

On the way home, Sacha is so drunk he stops every once in a while to get his bearings by holding onto a wall or the side of some building. Also, he takes a piss in the street. The dog is very long suffering during all of this and only nudges Sacha once when it appears he might fall asleep in a doorway against a green door.
At his own door, which is black, he fumbles with his key and then with the lock; he drops his keys once and they fall into a grating. Then through the Xbars of the grating he has to rummage in a pile of leaves with his bad eyes at night.

Soon they are inside, the dog curled in a corner of the room on the cool tiles and Sacha lying horizontally across bed with his clothes on.
Why does the dog love Sacha? Does Sacha play catch with the dog? Does he enter the dog in beauty contests? Does he send the dog to school or buy the dog doggie treats or make sure the dog has a nice flea collar? None of the above. Nor is he especially affectionate with the dog in other simpler ways: he hardly ever scratches the dog on the neck nor does he feed the dog scraps. But the dog loves Sacha in the neurotic, overbearing way that most people love their pets. It worries about Sacha, worries that he might get into a bar fight and lose all his teeth like Antonio and worries that he will forget to feed himself. Many of his companions—the other perros of the city—tolerate this rather unconventional attitude in their friend, but to them it is strange to want to mingle so intimately with another species unless there is a payoff of some kind. But Sacha’s dog is an altruist and expects no recompense for its trouble. He tells his friend the dog with the spiral tail...

Here he pauses with a degree of smugness unbecoming in a dog. And so the white dog merely nods and smiles a little insincerely, because none of this makes sense to him and he secretly thinks this dog, his old friend, is possibly unbalanced.

Now Sacha is lying horizontally on the bed with his clothes on. The dog would prefer Sacha to be under the covers with his shoes lined up neatly against the wall, but what can it do? It only has so much influence, especially when Sacha is drunk. It is content to have gotten this far with Sacha after his three day binge. When there’s a knock at the door and some shouting at the stoop, the dog doesn’t think twice about it, he feels sure that Sacha is unconscious enough that he will not be disturbed. The knocking continues, louder, as if somebody began by pounding the door with their fists, and wound up by pounding it with an implement of some kind.

The reward is in the deed itself, the feeling of peace it gives.

I do what I can for Sacha and if not for me I think he would actually be pretty lost. I’m grateful I have this chance.
The dog gives a long sigh and goes to nudge Sacha awake. But Sacha is presently having a dream about the woman with the long hair who is riding a horse in the mist and he is the cowboy with the lasso on a sand dune and then he is at his mother’s house and she is feeding him ice cream, and then he is at the beach with his childhood friend, Jose the bell ringer, and they are throwing stones into the sea. Sacha has never actually seen the sea, but in his dream it is green with little specks of orange shot through it and covered with rolling waves that look like the white scalloped hems of his sisters’ communion dresses. He is experiencing great happiness being at the sea with Jose and suddenly in the moment of throwing a flat purple stone, he realizes he is dreaming and turns to Jose so they can laugh together about this miracle of meeting in a Then Jose throws a stone at Sacha’s head and he wakes up with the dog thumping his tail in his eye and to the sounds of people hammering at his door and shouting his name and other profanities.
The people who are visiting Sacha are his friend Tonio and some others who happened to be passing by at this hour. There are two men counting Tonio...

Don't you have any beer Sacha you son of a bitch, what's wrong with you?

Hey Rosa, Sacha thinks you're hot stuff.

I didn't say that.

...and the one woman Rosa, is wearing cut off blue jeans and a Guatemalan vest with nothing underneath. Sacha can see her small breasts, the nipples dark brown and protruding at the tips. It excites Sacha to glimpse them through the gaps under her arms and he gives Tonio a knowing look when the
MAYBE I HAVE A LITTLE WEED, MAYBE JUST A JOINT, BUT I DON’T HAVE MUCH WEED, I DON’T EVEN KNOW IF I CAN FIND IT.

WHAT KIND OF JUICE? I THOUGHT YOU SAID THIS GUY WOULD FIX US UP. DO YOU HAVE ANY WEED?

MAYBE I HAVE A LITTLE WEED, MAYBE JUST A JOINT, BUT I DON’T HAVE MUCH WEED, I DON’T EVEN KNOW IF I CAN FIND IT.

Now the other man, who hasn’t said anything until now says...

WHAT KIND OF JUICE? I THOUGHT YOU SAID THIS GUY WOULD FIX US UP. DO YOU HAVE ANY WEED?

Then the other man, who hasn’t said anything until now says...

LET’S HAVE SOME ATMOSPHERE! WHAT DO YOU SAY SACHA?

I DON’T HAVE BEER, MAYBE SOME RUM

RUM IS OK. RUM IS GOOD. DO YOU HAVE COKE?

NO, I HAVE MILK AND I HAVE JUICE.

LET’S HAVE THE JUICE!

YOU ARE SO DRUNK AREN’T YOU SACHA?

I’M STILL PRETTY DRUNK, I’VE BEEN DRINKING FOR DAYS.

NOW TONIO IS PLUGGING IN THE CHRISTMAS LIGHTS AROUND SACHA’S WINDOW.

I DON’T HAVE BEER, MAYBE SOME RUM

NO, I HAVE MILK AND I HAVE JUICE.

LET’S HAVE THE JUICE!

YOU ARE SO DRUNK AREN’T YOU SACHA?

I’M STILL PRETTY DRUNK, I’VE BEEN DRINKING FOR DAYS.
Charlie kicks something on the floor and the dog gives a howl.

Fucking Dog!!!

LEAVE THE DOG ALONE CHARLIE

FIND THE WEED, MAN, I'M SICK OF THIS SHIT

I DON'T KNOW IF I CAN FIND IT

WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
MY NAME IS SACHA

COME ON CHARLIE, BE NICE,
SACHA IS A FRIEND OF TONIO
AND THIS MAKES HIM A FRIEND
OF MINE.

COMES CLOSELY AT THE MAN FOR
THE FIRST TIME. THE MAN HAS A VERY
SMALL EYES IN A MEAN FACE AND HE IS
WEARING A TANK TOP THAT SAYS LOS
ANGELES LAKERS ON IT.

THIS PLACE IS A SHITHOLE!

FUCK OFF! WHAT DO
YOU WANT WITH MY NAME?
CABRON!!!

I DON'T KNOW IF I CAN FIND IT
Rosa rolls over on the bed and the vest rides up her back and Sacha notices her flesh above her belt and how smooth it is, and the smooth backs of her legs.

He is still so drunk and on top of being drunk and tired, he cannot stop staring at Rosa, her skin is like the ocean in his dreams with orange glints of light and when he is thinking this he is simultaneously having a fantasy of what it would be like to have Rosa in bed without her clothes on and how he would like to touch her dark nipples and the flesh on her back...

...which is when Charlie knocks him on the side of his head with something hard like a rock, it can’t be his hand, and he falls over.
Sacha is on the floor with his eyes closed and the dog is licking his face.

TAKE IT EASY CHARLIE! SLOW DOWN MAN!

THE GUY WAS LUSTING AFTER ROSA! THAT’S WHY! I SAW THE WAY THE SON OF A BITCH LOOKED AT HER, MAN, DON’T TELL ME TAKE IT EASY, CABRON!!!

Rosa from her place on the bed, still languid, starts to laugh and says she thinks she found the weed in Sacha’s pillowcase and sure enough she is holding up what looks like a joint.

Sasha’s eyes are opened now and he is thinking that if Rosa is Charlie’s girlfriend he can understand why he hit him with whatever it was.

IS SHE YOUR GIRLFRIEND?

NO MAN, ROSA IS CHARLIE’S SISTER.

Sacha, can understand that too and he says...

...but Charlie is on the bed lighting up the joint with Rosa and Sacha can hear the hissing sound of the joint being inhaled and held in the lungs and then the hissing sound of the smoke being exhaled.
Rosa is laughing because she can see that Sacha is too drunk and hurt to get up and it suddenly strikes her funny that he is on the floor with a certain look on his face of resignation. And she is laughing so hard she starts to cough.

SACHA, WHY DON'T YOU GET UP FROM THE FLOOR AND HAVE SOME OF THIS WEED?

SACHA, UP, UP!

SACHA, WHY DON'T YOU GET UP FROM THE FLOOR AND HAVE SOME OF THIS WEED?

SACHA, UP, UP!

There is a stunned silence in the room, even Rosa stops laughing and looks nervously at Tonio who is standing over by the window drinking rum and has been especially quiet all this time but now he finds his voice.

AWHAT DO YOU MEAN, MAN, WHAT'RE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

THIS WEED IS SHIT, I THINK IT'S POISONED, I FEEL LIKE SHIT, I BET IT'S LACED WITH PCP OR SOME SHIT

NOBODY LACES WITH PCP ANYMORE, CHARLIE, YOU KNOW THAT

THIS Fucker'S BEEN TAMPERING WITH THE F***ING POT AND I'M GOING TO F***ING KILL HIM

Charlie is quiet now and he is taking many hits of the joint and inhaling and exhaling very fast and when the joint is down to a roach he says in a deep growling voice, a muffled voice buried under the weight of marijuana.
Charlie is now standing over Sacha and Sacha sees his little eyes in his mean face, eyes that are so small they are inscrutable really in a face which is actually a fat face with little pock marks on the cheeks and large nostrils. Sacha looks briefly into the nostrils and they are dark inside and he can see the little hairs in the nostrils quiver and he closes his eyes. How stupid to notice someone’s nostrils right before death, he is thinking.

NO! Charlie, don’t be crazy, sit down over by me Charlie, relax and take it easy.

Meanwhile the dog has decided to howl. It goes over by the window, by Tonio, and starts in, it throws its head back and lets out the howling sound...

...and Rosa is delighted by this.
Sacha opens his eyes and there are Charlie’s nostrils in the same place but Charlie himself seems to have fazed out slightly, his eyes are a little out of focus and he seems not to paying attention anymore, even though he continues to stand over Sacha in a menacing way.

And he frowns to himself because it doesn’t occur to him until this minute that the dog might require a name, the dog who has been his faithful friend, who has stuck by him, even now the dog is probably howling to save his, Sacha’s, life.

**THE DOG’S NAME? I DON’T KNOW ITS NAME,**

**YOU DON’T KNOW ITS NAME? HMMMM, YOU DON’T KNOW ITS NAME! HOW LONG HAVE YOU HAD THE DOG?**

**WHAT?!! I THINK IT’S A GIRL**

**WHAT DO YOU MEAN YOU THINK? YOU DON’T KNOW IF THIS DOG THAT YOU’VE HAD FOR THREE OR FOUR YEARS IS A GIRL OR A BOY?**

**IT’S A GIRL I’M SURE OF IT.**

**MALE OR FEMALE?**

**I DON’T KNOW HOW LONG MAYBE THREE OR FOUR YEARS**

**YOU DON’T KNOW ITS NAME?**

**THE DOG’S NAME? I DON’T KNOW ITS NAME,**

**WHAT’S THE DOG’S NAME SACHA?**
This is another thing that Sacha has no idea about. The truth is he never had any curiosity about the gender of the dog until this minute and he closes his eyes again and tries to remember the dog in various contexts and tries to recall if he ever noticed balls or a penis on the dog and since he couldn’t call forth an image of this sort. Then he thinks that if it were a girl it would have had babies by now and Sacha knows for a fact that the dog hasn’t had any babies.

Rosa rises from the bed and tugs a bit at her vest which has this time begun to ride up in the front, though Sacha doesn’t see since he is still on the floor between the legs of Charlie who continues to look down on him in an out-of-focus way. Then Rosa is going over to the dog who all this time has been howling at various pitches and she grabs its forearms and tries to turn it over. Now there are a series of hard little yelps which Sacha never heard coming from the dog.

There’s only one way to settle it

Leave the dog alone please

What’s up? What’s up with the dog?
Then Charlie’s hand goes up and there’s something in it. Sacha from his position on the floor can’t see quite what it is, and he shouts, No and at the same time Tonio tries to grab Charlie’s hand but it is too late. The hand with whatever is in it crashes on the dog’s rib cage and the dog gives a long shudder and Rosa screams...

NO!!!

Tonio walks over to where Sacha is still lying on the floor, this time with his hand covering his eyes...

WE BETTER GET GOING. SORRY MAN

WHAT THE FUCK CHARLIE, YOU FUCKER!

...and she beats him with her hands
Sacha hears the door opening in back of Rosa’s terrible screaming. Rosa must be the last to go, and she must still be hitting Charlie because behind her screams Sacha hears the soft thudding of her fists on his shoulders. Then the door closes and it is silent, except for a thin noise coming from the dog and Sacha rises uneasily to his knees and crawls to where the dog lies with its eyes closed, taking deep breaths of air and shuddering uncontrollably in between and making that thin noise.

...and the dog is in too much pain to have a corresponding thought.

THE DOG IS DYING, AND THERE IS NOTHING I CAN DO ABOUT IT. WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT?

Sacha puts his hand on the dog’s face. Until this minute he never noticed what a valiant jaw the dog has, even though now it is clamped tightly in pain.

Sacha pulls himself to his feet and runs the tap water in the sink. Then he takes out a saucer and fills it and, without bothering to turn off the tap, he puts it over by the dog’s head.

He goes to his own bed and rips off the blanket and covers the dog with the blanket, wrapping the blanket more or less around the shuddering dog, only not too tightly because he can see it is injured in its chest. Then he kneels on the floor next to the dog and listens to the little breaths of the dog coming faster and then slower, and the thin noise fading out and then coming on again.
And so it goes deep into the night with the dog breathing and the water running into the sink, and after a while Sacha doesn’t know if it’s the water or the dog he’s hearing. It seems to him he hears the dog in the sound of the water and the water in the sound of the dog, and eventually he drifts off to sleep with his head next to the where the dog is breathing its last breaths and he continues his dream about the ocean.