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Stained glass, cut, sandblasted, engraved, painted, stained and fired, and assembled with copperfoil, 30 x 32 in

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The New Domestic

Lessons humans can learn from lobsters, tortoises, and glaciers

Lobster Farm

Tucked away on the wind-chafed Atlantic coast, down the looping island roads of a gnarled archipelago, sits the cottage my grandfather built in some unknown year that was after the First World War but before the Second. It was here on this tiny island, population four hundred, where I learned to fish with a mackerel jig and to dive head-first into the eelgrass, because eels don't live in eelgrass at all. It was here on this island, this great windy lump of sandstone sitting stoically in the Gulf of Maine, that I sat on as a little girl, getting fat on fried clams and working off the calories by running through the bentgrass meadows. My skin was covered in the sticky slime that shoots out when you snap a milkweed plant between your fingers. My feet were hard and lined with soot from the island's garbage fires; my hair was short as a boy's but soft in the orange evening sunlight.

Now, the island is treeless, a bald rock that juts out of the gulf like an approving thumb, steep on the sides and dotted with more vacation homes every year. Despite the lawnmowers and the porch swings and the SUVs, the working waterfront still churns. There are men tanned and sinewed like old ropes in the sun. They pick the traps up and empty them and throw them back again, work that bends their backs and hollows their eyes. But still, on this island filling with people, they continue to hold the power, because in those traps is the one thing that makes this whole place run. The locals, the summer folk, the tourists, the whole economy—well, nearly the whole state, really—they all come back for one reason: the crustaceans.

Lobsters, really the *only* crustacean worth talking about in Maine, are more iconic to the state than the flannel shirt and the summer blueberry. On the island, when I was young and surrounded by a herd of barefoot, popsicle-faced cousins, lobsters were a rite of passage: at first, the only tastes were stolen from a parent's plate, a spindly leg to suck the meat from, alongside a hot dog dinner. When I go to the island as an adult, it's an occasion unto itself, a celebration and a ritual for my family. The ritual process of lobster eating is always the same on the coast of Maine:

Walk to the dock, find a tan-skinned lobsterman spraying down his boat.

Small talk: "Looks like rain?" "Only hard shells this month."

Gossip about the rich, bald mainlander buying up the beachfront.

Always buy pound-and-a-quarter lobsters. Never pound-and-a-half.

Lug the bags, sweating sweet salt water down your chest.

Drop them onto the linoleum kitchen floor, pull out two, hold them up to the face of a screaming child.

Place them, stoic and claw bound, into the steaming pot, as their eyestalks careen around the kitchen, hurling silent accusations.

Tie on bib (plastic).

Crack the body and suck out the soft meat, carnal evisceration.

Savor the sensation of too-fullness on the porch, cicadas whistling into the dark.

The system that allows for this ritual is the Maine lobster fishery, an industry as iconic as it is prolific. For a state of 1.3 million, Maine's lobster production—at 124 million pounds a year—is staggering. There are just under 7,000 license-holding lobstermen in Maine, making up only 0.005 percent of the population. This decimal, however, controls the largest lobster industry in the world and four out of five of the lobsters on American dinner plates. If you're eating lobster in the U.S., chances are one of those 7,000 lobstermen hauled it out of the Gulf of Maine. And if you're eating a Maine lobster, chances are that that lobster has been fed for years by one of those 7,000 lobstermen, fattening him up the whole time. This is because lobster, unlike most (or, arguably, any) other American seafood products that have been heavily fished for over a century, is more plentiful now than ever. Over every square meter of the murky Gulf of Maine ocean bottom, you can find one to two lobsters crawling around, antennae outstretched. The recent record-breaking abundance of lobster is thanks, in large part, to daily meals provided by none other than the lobstermen themselves.

Feeding is perhaps a generous word for it. Each lobster pot—a trap consisting of a series of concentric ropes and "rooms" through which the lobster must navigate to reach the delicious herring chunks stashed in the center—draws lobsters in. But the trap also lets them out, often at a rate nearing 90 percent loss. Bellies full, the lobsters escape and move on to the next pot. Even when they are caught, strict fishing regulations mandate that only a perfectly sized lobster may be kept, meaning that the bulk of those caught are thrown back. The bait herring is imported, much of it from Japan, and inserted by the truckful into the food chain in the Gulf of Maine—a subsidy that allows the lobster population to grow unbounded by the normal limitations of ecology and food supply.

The lobster, as it lives today in the frigid Gulf of Maine, is no longer a wild animal. It's an animal that isn't *quite* domesticated but lives in a place of half domestication, dependent for survival on its human caretakers—those same ones that will one day throw it in a pot and suck the sweet juice from its legs. It lives now in a place somewhere between wildness and domestication that we haven't quite given an English word to yet. Though we've certainly tried.

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Semidomestication—a term that has arisen to cover all of the many indecipherable and novel ways that domestication can manifest now—lives in an amorphous place, somewhere in the hidden genetic sequences between wild wolves and dog-show beauties. Charles Darwin, in *The Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication*, used the phrase to describe dogs on the coast of Africa and in New Guinea, dovecote pigeons in England and Columbia and Sierra Leone, and some of the world's semi-cultivated races of pigs. Since his writing (and for the thousands of years before it), humans have been domesticating animals halfway or partway, often *just* enough so that they could utilize them for one thing or another.

The breeding for food took a long time. By some estimates, the coevolution—dictated only by the needs of humans—began with plants in what is now the Middle East some 11,000 years ago. Gourds and peas and wheat sprouted, under the careful guidance of early gardeners.

But the breeding for friendship goes back even farther; 14,000 years ago, a dead dog's jawbone was buried in the mud, covered many times over by sand and soot. Just miles from Switzerland's northern border with Germany, the jawbone sat in its soil until it was picked up and dusted off by a German graduate student. At the time of its discovery, in 2010, an archaeologist named Susan Crockford from the University of Victoria in British Columbia called it an "incipient dog"—not quite a wild animal anymore, but not yet the pet we wanted it to be.

Since then, domestication has reached nearly every corner of the planet. The straining muscles stretched across the back of the ox melted into the soft sinews of the dairy cow. A boar became a pig, now rutting its once-worn nostrils in the soft flesh of a trough. Years before we counted years, a flying dinosaur lost his teeth, grew more feathers, and was eventually stuffed, tame but still squawking, into a dusty coop.

Now, name an animal smaller than a human, and you can bet that someone has tried to domesticate it at least once. The reasons are usually one of just two: food or comfort. In the U.S., we have livestock for food (cows, sheep, pigs, chickens) and pets (cats, dogs, the roundest and fluffiest breeds of hamsters and their compatriots) and rarely do these categories overlap. At least in this country, the one with the highest per capita consumption of animal protein in the world *and* where nearly three-quarters of the population owns an animal as a pet, animals are not both. We don't eat our labradors when they stop fetching, and we don't scratch pigs behind the ears before they walk through the slaughterhouse doors.

Domestication in its many forms is all around us, realize it or not. There is no line between the wild ostrich and the tame, the pet cuddly fox and the feral creature picking at our garbage. The wilderness itself is in a state of transition—from a once-complex and frightening world to a simplified, quantified series of delineated reserves and recreation areas and national parks. There can be no doubt that we have begun, slowly but with steady steps, to domesticate the wild—to extend our ever-searching and sticky fingers into the remotest corners of Earth, places into which, until recently, only satellites could peer.

Tortoise Day Care

There is a one hundred-year-old tortoise living on the Galápagos Island of Santa Cruz who is father to more than eight hundred. Living in a pen at a breeding center with other holdouts of his species, Diego, as the staff call him, is a wrinkled fig of a creature. The convex lines puckering around his chin give him a perpetual look like he's just tasted something sour, and there's always a blade of wet grass clinging to his jaw, fluttering through the air as he chews. I lean down, over the wooden railing, to get a closer look. His eye meets mine, then darts away. He dips his head into the grass, unfazed.

That morning, I'd landed on the island with great expectations—giant tortoises have been on the top of my list for years. The brown-paneled facility around Diego is singlehandedly responsible for keeping the giant Galápagos tortoises—the same species encountered by Charles Darwin on his famous journey—alive and breeding, around 20,000 of them. In the center, the tortoises are arranged by size. Visitors walk through a kind of turtle life cycle in warp speed: first are the very young ones, just about the size of a plum, crawling around in frantic piles and snatching scraps of lettuce from one another's mouths. Next come the midsize tortoises, gaining weight and losing maneuverability, trundling alongside each other, avoiding contact. In a large pen at the end of the visitor path, looking like parabolic mounds of dirt, are the big ones, the ones that weigh the same as a grand piano. They are unmoving, staring back at their audience with disinterest or chewing in steady rhythm. Their size is astonishing, but particularly so as an indicator of age. While many live past one hundred years old, a few giant tortoises have been estimated at nearly two hundred at death.

Tortoises are a great conservation success story, one that the Galápagos is particularly proud of. Because they can live for up to a year without eating or drinking, they became an ideal to-go meat for passing whalers and buccaneers in the seventeenth century. They would live, pitifully, in the hold of a ship, flipped helplessly on their backs, until the crew decided to cook and eat them, straight out of the shell. Darwin himself partook: "the breastplate roasted . . . with the flesh on it, is very good; and the young tortoises make excellent soup." This, coupled with the influx of egg-hungry rats brought as stowaways by the ships, caused the tortoise population to decline precipitously and drove several species extinct.

Now, the tortoises are recovering, albeit on life support. Since 1965, scientists have been capturing tortoise eggs from the wild, tiny and full of promise. They bring the eggs back to the breeding facility to incubate them and let them hatch, born into a world with four walls and a door. The tortoises live there in the center until their fifth birthday, at which point they are released into the wild, large enough now to fend for themselves and escape hungry predators. As

of last year, 7,000 tortoises had been through this process and released back into the wild.

The animals are incredible, no doubt. But there's something about the normality, the unremarkableness of their ubiquity on the island, that's striking, too. Driving through Santa Cruz Island, I catch glimpses of them scattered on the sides of the road like fallen logs, having just made the harrowing crossing or been pushed there by some compassionate motorist. They're all over the place, great lumps that dot the island and occasionally eat up peoples' vegetable patches.

What is this place? With its tourist vans speeding past ancient animals, its dedicated scientists whose efforts have saved more than one species, but who cannot leave, now or ever? This is no longer a wild place, I think as I pass by the door of a coffee plantation and glimpse a giant tortoise crawling amid the unripe fruits. Is a species any longer wild when its existence relies wholeheartedly on the careful nurturing of a pair of gloved hands for its first five years? Or the motorist who stops to drag it, helpless, across the street and out of danger, every time it ambles into the wrong place?

Perhaps *domestication* isn't the right word for what we've done across the land and the water. It doesn't quite cover it all—the word is too soft to explain the absolute control that reaches every corner of the planet, the utter domination of one species over all the others. We need a new language, a new set of nouns and verbs to give to the conditions in which we live. What we're using now—the dichotomy of wild versus captive, of free versus farmed—just isn't cutting it anymore. There is no longer anything wild.

The Last of the Great Ice Cubes

The glacier is a carcass now—a disintegrating relic of its former self, a liquefying, pathetic pile. Just off Alaska's Glenn Highway at milepost 101—a road that will make you just about come to Jesus and prostrate yourself right there on its glimmering shoulder, unabashed and naked in front of the rubberneckers in their passing sedans—the Matanuska Glacier was meant to make you see God on Earth. It was meant to be seen for miles. It was seen for miles for many, many years.

Before I saw the carcass shimmering in the cold Arctic sun, I had driven two hours and one hundred miles north in my musty rental car from Anchorage, my head swiveling at the rising peaks around me. I went to witness the real, untamed Alaska: the last frontier, what I'd been told was the wildest of the last wilds. I turned off Glenn Highway, recovering from a battery of some of the most spectacular landscapes I'd ever seen. I sighed, in a state of bliss.

I steered, knuckles tight on the wheel, down a precipitous dirt road, carefully avoiding the No Trespassing sign. There was no way I would drive two hours and not see my first glacier. My tires slipped on the dirt, grasping at a ground that wouldn't hold. I hadn't seen it yet, but the glacier was near; I'd felt the air change, the temperature drop, and the moisture pool in the lines of my fingerprints. All at once, a turn in the bend, and the windshield was gone. In its place, a blue—no, not blue . . . fluorescent, glowing, pulsing white—a monster that looked as though it were alive, a massive chunk of prehistory. It was cracked, broken, but nevertheless fearsome beyond my wildest expectation. A terrifyingly great ice cube. I thought immediately of Charybdis—my high school Latin, at last relevant. At the monster's base was a stream of water, pouring into a wide lake, which reflected its melting face back to it. The waterfall gushed into a kind of swirling whirlpool, a mouth of dangerous waves that occasionally belched out a white foam. The monster was contracting before my eyes.

It wasn't until I drove the three hours back to my Airbnb—a curtained-off mattress in a living room belonging to a lab technician who moonlighted as an Alaska marijuana delegate—that I could research what the glacier had once been. As the skunky smell of a bong rip wafted over my curtain, I saw the Google image of the glacier on my laptop that I'd pulled up before I'd left that morning.

The resemblance between the Matanuska Glacier of yore and the Matanuska today is fuzzy, at best. The glacier began its journey 10,000 years ago, when it came to a great and grinding halt from its slow creep southward. Once, it had clutched the whole valley with its frozen tendrils, ancient ice covering a swath that is a fraction of what it now covers. The near-frozen water is now forming a lake at its heaving base. The glacier on my screen was a hero compared to the anthill I'd just witnessed. Now, you can climb its side and straddle its peak in an hour. Your guide will bring a bologna sandwich for you to enjoy at the top, as you look out over all the land that used to be glacier. And I thought I'd seen God.

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The places that we once thought were wild and would always be have invariably been touched, at least in some small part, by the fingerprint of a faraway hand. Even a place as far-flung as Antarctica—an icy shelf home to 70 percent of the planet's fresh water, all of it undrunk—still bears the marks of living on a planet dominated by one species. Earlier this year, researchers working there found tiny bits of plastic floating in waters they long thought were free from pollution, protected by the enormous barrier of the Southern Ocean. The plastic was in the water and in the ice, they reported, and probably in the bodies of the fish that feed the bodies of the whales.

Now, we must accept that there is no place left untouched, no site left unfiltered by the sieve through which we order the world. We control it all, a giant poker game with a single player. Climate change, the most powerful force in our quest to domesticate Earth, is the final hand—the suit that beats them all. In less than a century, somehow we have harnessed enough energy and cooperation and money to do the impossible, a task that would have made the God of Genesis fall to his knees. We now control the movement of all species on Earth—an act of domestication that rivals all the others. The only problem is, we haven't figured out how to domesticate ourselves.

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