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Larry Llama and All the Other Animals

Larry the Llama smells my face in detail, very close, almost touching me. It startled me the first time he did it, when I first met him, and I drew away from him. I understand now that it's his form of greeting and catching up on the latest news, and I stand still until he's finished.

Larry is light grey and white, as tall as I am, long necked, very friendly. Buckaroo, a mostly black llama, is more reserved and doesn't like people to get too close to him. Pauly is somewhere in between, friendly at times, but skittish at other times.

The three llamas hang out with two goats and eight sheep. I sometimes take care of this place and all the animals while the owners travel to distant places. Sadie, their black lab-mix dog, goes with them when they drive, but she stays home when they fly.

The animals tell me their needs as clearly as if they used words. If I walk down to the pond and the two ducks follow me back up the driveway, that means they haven't been getting enough to eat by foraging in and near their pond, and they expect me to put out cracked grain for

them to eat.

If I don't go to the pond for a while, and they are hungry, the ducks walk up the driveway and stand outside the window. These ducks don't quack. They make loud creaking noises until I come out and feed them.

I think they say things like, "What's up with the help? Have you closed the restaurant? How's an honest duck supposed to make a living if the hired help sits around and reads books and lets good ducks starve?"

The grey duck sometimes runs at me when my back is turned. I assume his intention is to nip me so that I stay alert to everything that's happening around me, but I'm not sure, since I've always seen him in my peripheral vision and turned to face him. He acts innocent and says "I wasn't doing anything. Just checking to see if you're using your senses."

When I walk close to their pen, the chickens say, "We haven't had fresh vegetables for a long time. It gets boring in this pen, and we need access to gravel for our craws to grind our food." They are voluble and loud, but I learned that if I let them out early, they spread out too far and explore the flower beds. They scratch the ground and turn soil when they look for food, and they aren't concerned if they damage carefully-grown flowers in the process.

I walk to the garden and harvest greens for them. It hasn't been that long since they've had fresh vegetables,

but chickens don't keep track of time well. I let them out of their pen late in the afternoon. They eat the grain I've spread, scratch in the gravel driveway, and voluntarily return to their roosts with dusk, when I lock them in again.

Late in the afternoon, I put out corn, oats, and barley for the hooved animals. They crowd closely around me, though they will move if I stride confidently forward, expecting them to give me room to walk. Except Lucy, the black goat. She likes to lean on me. If I pet her a moment, then gently push her away, she will allow me to pass by.

Sadie, the dog, thinks highly of me, except she thinks I'm not to be trusted to come up with reasonable car rides.

I had invited Gregg to come to my house for dinner before we scheduled this caretaking event, and I decided to keep the dinner engagement. Since I don't like to leave her alone for hours at a time, I took Sadie home with me. She checked every room of my house several times, then stayed close to me.

Lightning and thunder and wind and hard rain blew in. Graupel blew in the wind and bounced from the windows and the deck. I think Sadie knew ahead of time the storm was coming and wondered why in the world we came to a place without a basement where a good dog could take refuge in a storm.

All through dinner, Greg and Laura and I carried on convivial conversation, and Sadie lay on my left foot

under the table, taking some comfort from closeness.

When we got back to Sadie's home, dryness indicated there had been no storm there, though it is only seven miles from my home. I'm sure Sadie thought I had taken her for a ride only to seek out a dog-frightening storm in a place with no basement for refuge. She is a very forgiving dog, but she's no longer as interested in getting into my car. I think she's decided it's best to lie in the dust beside the driveway while I'm gone, chew on old bones, and let me seek storms entirely on my own.