

*Rebekah L. Cowell*

### **That Dog**

She stood looking out the glass patio doors into the yard where dead leaves blew circular piles, and her gaze was drawn to the sight of that dog stumbling by the stream, where it hunched into the accordion shape of dog taking a shit. Legs like stilts, muscles wasted, barely moving with tendons and bone, they quivered in the windy day as the shit plopped out of its anus and onto the frozen ground. She looked away; the sight made her ill, and it wasn't just the way steaming turds left this dog's body.

Hate for the dog rose in her throat. The helplessness of the beast, the grotesque caricatures its body took as it shit, plus everything else about the dog had become something she despised.

It wasn't her dog. It was his. When they first started sleeping together, she loved that dog a little. It was his, and she loved him, so therefore she would love that dog too. The dog was almost thirteen when they first met, already starting to slow down. They took her on the very last camping trip of her life. It had to be the last, she was too old for his endurance hikes, and she laid down on the trail, not moving while her legs shook with exhaustion. He finally picked up her bleached out blond and matted hair, and carried her back to the cabin, admitting she wasn't up for it anymore.

She didn't really notice that dog as an annoyance till they had the baby, and they moved in together because he was finally interested in being a part of what his sperm had helped create. Soon she found herself alone all day with the baby, the two little dogs who weren't really all that much trouble, and that dog who was growing senile, blind, deaf and obstinate.

She moved upstairs with the baby, the master room too crowded with three dogs, and that dog who smelled so rank no matter how many baths you gave her. He acquiesced because he was not ready for her, the baby, or any of this mutual togetherness. He wasn't entirely on board, and he certainly wasn't in love with her.

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Perhaps she grew to hate that dog because she began to be alone with her the most, letting her out to wander in the yard, to piss and shit, to dig up the occasional mole, to leave the yard and cross the street while she with an infant in arms looked in panic. Or perhaps she hated that dog because it was the last tie he had with his old life, with what he was before she came into his life. Perhaps it stemmed from the name, the gift, the story. Abbie, that dog, was a gift he gave to a girlfriend one Christmas, the girlfriend rejected the gift, but not before bestowing Abbie with the name of his very first real love, real loss. So, Abbie was named by an ex for an ex, and that story seemed to cling to her with all the sordidness it implied. How else would that ex, who received the gift, name the dog with the same name of the ex he's never forgotten, unless she too was forced to hear that story of his – never getting over a woman, regrets, and what not. She grew angry with the stories of that dog, with how she had seen all the women in the last thirteen years of her life. That dog represented something she was held back from, a time in his life when he loved, and passionately gave.

Five years later still living with him, she finds herself wishing that dog would die. It is a wish she is horrified to embrace, but nevertheless she does. He travels often, and some nights that dog won't come in, if the weather is mild she leaves her out, but she can't help but worry she'll find a stiff dead dog in the morning and then have to tell him how that dog died.

Once, only a week ago, she left that dog outside, she didn't even bother looking for her before turning in for the night. At 2:30 in the morning a massive thunderstorm ripped through the night, and woke her. She ran downstairs and looked out the screen door for the dog, but she could not see her, as the rain splattered in huge sheets across the brick terrace, and she didn't really care enough to produce a slicker and boots to search for that dog. Early the next morning, the rain long cleared up, she went out, but still no evidence of that dog. Finally, she found that dog huddled up against a bush. Guilt overcame her, and she knew she was a wicked person. She protested to herself that the baby, the other dogs, the house, everything was just too much for her to handle.

But it did not keep her from leaving her out again, a few nights later.

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Finally, when that dog is eighteen years of age, she dies. Stiffly sprawled on her doggy bed.

She calls him to deliver the news, he, another time zone away lightly brushed the news away. Can she dig a big hole? He won't be home for a week, you know. Yes. She can. She expects something more, grief?

He rushes back to a client, and she is left to dig a massive grave alone. As she sticks the spade into the soft pliant spring ground tears form, and before she's done she's sobbing inconsolably.

The business of bringing the stiff dead dog into the yard unnerves her, and she sobs some more until drained. s\he dumps that dog into her grave, and covers her with a shower of dirt.

She calls him to say it's done, and he's shocked by her grief. She knows it's not grief for that dog, it's grief for her loneliness, and her meanness, for having to bury a dog she's hated, and feeling somehow she too will be this vulnerable one day, and that's unbearable.