

## “Doom Dog”

Some thing had died in a corner of the room, and Sean’s stomach frowned through breakfast. She strutted into his life on Valentine’s Day and was limping out this summer. Arthritis, the veterinarian told him, was common in smaller dogs. Her black body remained in the room, buried under a blanket, and it moved like a tired piston up and down.

One brown Cerberus eye could be seen, doleful and questioning.

Four years held down the time between meeting her at a Philadelphia rescue shelter and the present. She was named Dawn, and Sean thought that was a misplaced moniker for this surly, spike-eared mongrel.

“Lucy” was much better.

She took her Schulzian namesake seriously, it seemed, in some attempt to be as crabby as possible. No person could enter Sean’s gloomy home without encountering a snarling demon, fourteen pounds of bug-eyed meanness. And they, boy and dog, had walked for a long time through familiar streetnames before she couldn’t chase squirrels. He wished now that she would.

Now squirrels sat brazenly on back porches and now the doorbell rang without harmony and Sean could feel the shadow of penitence for his weakness—now it came from that corner of the room in wisps of smoke and sadness and howled for vengeance, and it burned and blinded him.

Bounding down wood slippery steps that had taken his dog’s legs, he opened the front door as the barking continued in the background. There was a brown package lying meekly on the welcome mat. Sean muttered, irritated. The package

was a gift for a friend, inconsequential, but at the moment it had created an uproar of agitation. Lucy didn't like the idea of strangers on her territory, and even the unaccompanied box left her in a defensive fury. The door was closed and Sean came back, soothing his tempestuous conscience by addressing the dog.

"Heyheyheyhey Lucy it's me, Lu, just me. No one else." The dog barked once more, to get the last word in, and punched her head back into her blanket-shroud. She was a skeleton now and she loomed over Sean's thoughts as a dark terror, her future absence bit at his ankles and chased him through the circles of his mind. She had to be killed because it was too hard to live with, this thing on the edges of existence, immobile and agonized. Her eyes had died some time ago and now they waited for the rest. Today was the last day, but now his heart rose up in protest, thrumming in hate and nausea at the idea of conclusion.

Leaning back on a chair and spinning through his circles of Panic, he saw a shackled future—permanent remorse for this execution. She was proud, and he was ashamed. But Lucy could not walk, and Sean slumped into the floor and waited for some self-deceit to make an action possible.

He picked her up, gingerly, and went into the garage. Some dark hand guided his eyes to a wagon, a kid's wagon, long forgotten as that kid grew up into a less certain thing. Now he smiled. With a perverse royalty the servant and his dog trundled through the neighborhood, and as she sniffed the sweaty air as Sean's world blurred into sadness.

Later, with an afternoon summer sun still bright, he walked back with an empty wagon, a scarecrow man frozen to a sidewalk.

