

New Fiction by L.W. Smolen: “Dirty-Rotten”



Where mom and dad and me used to live in the Haight, from the brush in the empty lot across his street, with a BB gun, I shot a big, scary German Shepherd guard dog – right in his gonats. Wasn't my gun. Was a big-kids' dare. The oldest one told me, "You're just a dweeb fourth-grader. His tail's always in the way. Only time you can get him's when he lifts his leg to pee. You'll get two, three seconds and that's it." So I held my fire. I waited for the Shepherd to pee, and I got him! One shot. They went, "Jeeze! The kid did it!"

I don't know what I thought would happen when I shot the Shepherd. It yiped and yiped and skidded all around on its rear. I dropped the gun and I ran. Could hear the dog blocks away. It was awful. The big kids knew where I lived and they told my mom. Said I stole their gun.

They took 'em both – the Shepherd's owners did – both his gonats. The Shepherd never charged his fence or growled or barked after that – just wagged and smiled and let me pet him sweet – like he never knew it was me shot him. Like he never knew at all – just smiled and wagged, but always wanted me in particular to pet him and let him lick my hand. Nobody else. Just me. He never acted like he knew what hit him, but it was like forgiveness anyhow – forgiveness I never deserved on the dark side of the moon.

Later, coupla times, I brought the Shepherd special gizzard treats and he used to go nuts and spring his front paws up on top of his fence double-happy and smile to see me just like he knew the way how dogs know and do things, like he knew how my heart was hurting – like he knew all along I shot him.

After a while, I couldn't stand it. Couldn't look him in the eye. Couldn't stand – didn't deserve his happy dog-love – my false, trigger-happy truth stuck festering inside me.

Finally, I quit going even down that street. The big kids said I was a jerk for taking the dare and called me a dirty rotten, little gonat-snatcher twirp and worse – and it's all true.