

The Other Woman  
By Betty McPherson

Spring came, and with it the purchase of new living room furniture. After scouring every store in central Little Rock, I finally found a lovely sleigh-back couch and leather chair.

Ahh, the chair; beautiful, comfortable.

On our way home one evening, my daughter, Heather, spoke up from the back seat, "Did you tell her?"

"Tell me what?" I asked.

Father, in his infinite wisdom, replied, "Nothing."

Immediately, I knew it was bad.

Several years before, my husband had walked through our front door with a small creature tucked in his arms. At the time I sent up a silent prayer that a logical explanation existed other than the obvious.

"Isn't she adorable?" he asked, letting loose what looked like a very large rat.

"Adorable? You've got to be joking." I took a closer look; a small dog, russet in color, with curly hair, big ears and a pair of blazing eyes.

"They kept her in a cage," he cooed, stroking the Boykin Spaniel.

"Kept? Cage?" I repeated in disbelief.

"You wouldn't want her to live like that, would you?" he asked.

I could have either been a soft, compassionate woman or express my true feelings. Desperation laced my voice as he bonded with the female.

"Please tell me she's not going to live here," I pleaded. It didn't take long to realize all was lost. Lady was here to stay.

The beautiful hand-embroidered bedspread that once graced our bed was no more, tucked back in a safe haven away from sharp nails and curly, short hair.

Like a huntress in the night, Lady would search for the softest, closest spot next to my husband. The minute I relinquished my hold on consciousness, a soft bounce would ripple across our mattress. With a snap of my fingers and shove of my heel I could persuade her to move, then, as my shoulders sank back into the pillow, I realized I was losing this war. Morning found her stretched out on the bed, little russet reminders of her presence everywhere.

Then there was the front door set-up. Lady had a fondness for the neighbor's cat and took advantage of every opportunity to make good an escape. My husband accused me of trying to murder the dog.

He insisted my motive was to give her access to the street in order to shorten her stay in this world. Now, if the two 10oz chocolate bunnies she devoured one Easter hadn't done the trick, who was I to think that she'd get scored by a passing vehicle? Fact was, when she darted out she went between my legs and I'd grab the door to steady myself. One spiral break to the left leg and crushed ankle was enough for one lifetime; thirty-three year olds and tricycles don't mix.

Finally, there was the episode with the City Pound. The woman working the front desk had been to boot camp, I was sure of it.

"It's a mistake," I told her pleadingly. "I just went over the edge a little bit when I couldn't get all the coffee grounds out of the carpet. My husband thought he

was doing me a favor by bringing the dog to the Pound, but he loves that animal and he will hate me for the rest of his life if his favorite female is locked up.”

“No. You can’t have her back,” she stated sharply. The punctual pounding of a date stamp coming over the phone kept time with my pulse.

It was the same feeling as looking into your review mirror and seeing blue lights; that sinking sensation that flows from the tip of your brain to the bottom of your toes. It’s bad.

I sighed deeply into the phone. “I promise I will be the kindest, gentlest mother to our ... pet. She’ll have run of the house and I’ll buy a trash can with a metal lid. I won’t get angry at her; I realize she is small and defenseless.” I asked God to forgive me for that lie.

“Well...”

The date stamp paused; the Sergeant was melting.

“May I come pick her up? Please?” I begged in a hushed whisper.

“Well, I suppose, but we usually don’t release pets back to owners who have dropped them off.”

“Thank you, thank you so very much. I’ll be right there.”

Three hours later the mistress of the house was back in place. I had been dethroned.

So that night, when we pulled into our driveway, I didn’t panic as I got out of the car and unlocked the front door. Walking in, I turned to the right and that’s when I saw the chair. Falling to my knees, I heard a long, slow moan break the stillness of the room, “Nooo...”

My fists clinched as I made my eyes open once more to the carnage in front of me. Thirty five more payments and my dog, my Lady, had decided to claw the leather, leaving streaks of discoloring marks over the entire cushion.

I heard Heather say, “I told you she’d be mad.”

I calmly got up and proceeded to lock myself in the bathroom. I mimicked Janet Leigh’s shower scene as I slid down to the floor, feeling as if each claw mark was a stab to the chest. I kept my sobs silent as I told myself over and over, “It’s only a chair, it’s only a chair – don’t think about the carpet, or the bedspread, or the Pound – don’t think.”

Through the door I heard my husband’s “bad dog,” which frankly sounded more like endearment than punishment. And then my mind flew to the many times when he would wrap his arms around me and coo in that Harrison Ford voice of his. I moved to the edge of the bathtub, my head in my hands, and all I could see behind my eyes was Lady’s little nubby tail wagging until she was almost airborne when she sensed his presence. And that’s when it hit me: If I could just shake my backside like the dog...