

# The Little Dog from Outer Space

*by Mathew Paust*

I heard her behind me almost the instant I saw that damned thing on his desk. “Kinda thought maybe I'd find you here,” she said, her voice strong with youthful promise.

“Hi, Sal. Just get up?”

“I smelled the coffee.” Holding a steaming mug, she reached over and set it on the desk next to mine. She inspected my cup. “Can I warm this up?”

I looked at her, shook my head and tried to smile. She smiled back, beaming a radiance that pushed away the chill.

She slipped an arm around my shoulders, and kissed my cheek. Her scent was warm and innocent. “Dad,” she said, “you think they'll find him?”

“It's been three days, Sally. If he was in the tower, I don't think so.”

She squeezed my shoulder. “Uncle Mark call?”

“He's probly still on alert. He'd be here if he could.” I said this without conviction, knowing my brother's indifference to the family. It was he whom I'd always suspected of stealing the dog. He'd been jealous when Dad gave it to me, had even taken it a couple of times when we still lived at home. Clyde, the oldest, had taken it back the second time, warning Mark with a cuff on the head not to do it again. I hid the dog when Clyde went off to college.

Wasn't much to look at. Size of a walnut, but heavy, a dull bronze color. A man Dad knew, a farmer, hit something with his plow. Scientists at the university said it was a meteorite. They broke off a chunk to study and gave him the rest. He had it made into these

little dogs. I was about 10, and I found it magical. Treasured it for years. At some point it disappeared.

And here it was on Clyde's desk.

The little pooch couldn't have picked a worse time to show up. If emotions played football I was the skinny third-string halfback caught in the bone-crunching clash of behemoth linemen. Love for an idolized brother, stunned at the cusp of certain grief and now hammered by treachery. The word *why* ballooned to fill my consciousness.

"Oh, there's your little dog," Sally said, her voice trying gamely to cheer. She reached across me and picked it up, brought it close to her face. "Hi, little guy," she cooed.

*All these years*, I was thinking.

"Oh, Dad, I'm so glad Uncle Clyde kept him."

"Yes," I said. "me, too." My voice sounded odd.

My only child held the little metal pup a long while. "You know, Dad," she patted my shoulder again, "I've always felt kinda bad about that."

"Bad? About what, Sally?"

"After we lost our house and Uncle Clyde was helping us move. He was always so nice..."

"What do you mean, Sally?"

"Well, I gave him the little dog. He saw it in a box and picked it up. He seemed so pleased to see it. I told him to keep it, as a present. He said it was yours. And that's when I told a lie. A little one, I thought..."

She looked away, face turning red. "I said it was mine, that you gave it to me."

In a blink a seam opened in the crush of football linemen, and I dashed through into an open field. I climbed slowly out of Clyde's squeaky chair, turned and wrapped her greedily in my arms.

