

# Squog

by Lynn Beighley

She sips her pint of cider, and smiles at me. I love her smiles, maybe because they're so rare.

"What are you scheming now?" she asks.

The word "scheme" alarms me.

I've not had the courage to tell her about my latest project, but now, sitting at the King's Arms, pint of Guinness in front of me, I clear my throat.

I say, "I am creating a cross between a dog and a squirrel. I'm thinking of calling it a squog. Or a doggerel."

She doesn't say anything, just stares, her smile fading.

I blurt out, "The hardest part has been figuring out what breed of dog to start with..."

"Wait," she says. "Before you get going like you always do, please tell me why," she pauses, takes a drink, "why you want to cross a dog and a squirrel?"

I choose my words carefully, "Dogs love to chase squirrels, squirrels hate being chased by dogs. It's a pattern that results in both dogs and squirrels being frustrated."

It's been so long since I've seen her, I've almost forgotten how much I love the way she plays with her hair when she's unhappy. Like she's doing now. I want to kiss her, but if I do, she'll leave.

She says, "So you want to create this, what was it, a squog, just so dogs and squirrels will get along?"

"Yes," I say. "Dogs and squirrels should be friends. They both love to frolic, they're both cute. Think of the end result. You'd have an animal that would love itself. Doggerels would be so much fun to watch."

"So you'd go messing with the nature of things just to create a happy animal?" She leans away from me, frowning.

I say nothing. We've had this discussion, or variations on it, many times before. There's no point in trying to convince her that it's possible to fix things that are fundamentally flawed.

She stands up. "I'll be right back," she says. I want to follow her, stop her, but I notice she's left her bag on her chair, so I know she'll return. While she's gone, I take out my wallet and pull out a photo of the world's only squog.

She returns and I show her the picture. "You've already done it?" She's upset, but the undeniable cuteness of the squog charms her. "It's adorable," she grudgingly admits. "Okay, tell me about it."

"I used a toy poodle," I begin.

I tell her more about it. But I don't tell her about the many other doggerels I created. Until this one, the others were self-loathing beasts that destroyed themselves. She would leave, and I'd never see her again. Some things she doesn't need to know.

