

Michelle from Southport

by Nonnie Augustine

“10 percent of any population is cruel, no matter what, and 10 percent is merciful, no matter what, and the remaining 80 percent can be moved in either direction.”

— Susan Sontag

I was trying to write a poem. Write a poem? No. That's too lofty a description to give to what I was doing. I was scribbling, then crossing out my scribbles. Drago was sleeping in his hospital bed. We were in a familiar (to many of us) situation. A rumor of possible discharge that day circulates and so waiting ensues. Neither my brother or I are the kind of patients who require, or enjoy, the constant presence of another, however much we might like them, in our hospital room while we lie there being sick, at least if there isn't a crisis going on with us. But since I was there, and there was a rumor, it seemed best to stay so that I could get him home. Six and a half hours later I did get him home, which was a wonderful relief, but I would have been happy to go home and come back to the hospital. Well, you know what I'm nattering about.

At one point during the afternoon, two LPN's were hanging out with the man in the next bed. Yes, hanging out. Michelle, the nurse who my brother had told me was very nice and had been on the day shift with him for three days was sitting on the floor with her back against the wall, and the other was in a chair. Was the guy in the bed a pal, I wondered?

Our neighbor, down in Southport? My brother's girlfriend? Well, she fed my dog antifreeze, Michelle said.

I stopped trying to write and listened. My brother and I have a dog and three cats who share a house with us. We adore them and

they adore us right back.

It took him three days to die. Good Lord it was one horrible death. He started with throwing up and acting sick, and then on the third day he had seizures. That's when we had took him to the Vet. Our Vet told us he would of had crystals formed in his kidneys and spreading all over until he shut down. We didn't know what was wrong or we would have had put him down sooner.

I've seen suicides come in here who have taken antifreeze. It's an awful way to kill yourself, I think, Rita, the LPN in the chair, said.

Okay, now I was just taking dictation.

He was one of those tall, long-legged Pit Bulls? And we had a chain link fence and an underground shocker thing if he ever was to have got near enough to the fence. He did when we first put it in and that taught him good. Should have seen how it got to him! I laughed all day. We wanted to be careful with him because, you know, his being a Pit Bull and all and the way people are about them. But Tebow was as sweet to me and my husband as anything. Now, he did like to play "Toss the Kitty." But they shouldn'ta have let their cat get in our yard. By the time I found out it was her who done it? She'd moved to friggin Arizona! And so now I'll never get my hands on her.

Rita said, I'm thinking about getting a dog. A small one. Maybe a Chihuahua.

Oh, don't do that if you want a smart dog! They are so stupid. My own house dog is a Chihuahua and it took me two years to train it not to pee in the house! "Lord," I said to it "How many times do I have to beat you?" My son, Austin? He has a Jack Russell and that dog's e-ver-y bit as hyper as my child. I was about to give him some of my son's ADHD medication, but I might have had run out of pills.

*They just try to wear each other out all day long, the two of them.
But they never do settle. It don't matter what all I do to them.*

My brother's cell phone rang then and I listened to his end of the conversation. When he got off the phone he told me that the gym had gotten people to cover the yoga classes he teaches. I didn't notice when the nurses left the room. Eventually Michelle came over to our side of the curtain with discharge papers for my brother to sign. She was pleasant, polite, and helpful, but I'd had an image of a Pit Bull playing "Toss the Kitty," in my head for several hours and I wasn't fooled.

