

The Chihuahua Cure

by Rosanne Griffeth

The Chihuahua was already old when her daughters gave it to her. Pearl knew why they got it. The Chihuahua Cure was a heap of nonsense as far as she was concerned; if anything, the dog would make her asthma worse.

It came from the animal shelter, seizing and shivering, with eyes almost bigger than its head. Eyes that followed Pearl like it couldn't stuff the whole picture of her in its tiny skull. Her daughter put steps next to Pearl's bed so the bitty thing could climb up on the bed with her.

Pearl thought it looked like a rat.

She came home from her chest doctor, after a day of tests, breathing through a tube until her chest hurt, to find her daughters in her parlor with it.

"What the hell is that? I don't allow no dogs in my house."

"Oh, Mommy, it's for your asthma."

The dog quaked, its eyes rolling around a bit. It sounded like it was choking to death, struggling for air.

"It's already taking your asthma. Lookit!" the daughter said.

Pearl felt her chest constrict and wheezed along with the dog. The dog panted louder, its eyes, tiny upended teacups, bugged at Pearl.

Pearl's daughter picked the dog up and deposited in her lap.

"Works better if it's closer."

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Pearl gasped, sucking air from her oxygen canula, hands gripped the armrests of her wheelchair, as if she could push the air in and out of her lungs that way. The Chihuahua scabbled its tiny mouse paws on Pearl's chest, gulping and convulsing along with her.

Both she and the dog stopped at the same time and Pearl saw her daughters were quite pleased with themselves.

"Worked real good, didn't it?" one said.

The dog snuggled closer to Pearl and licked a spot of gravy from her blouse front. Its pink worm of a tongue touched its nose; it looked at Pearl and blinked once.

"Get this thing off of me."

An uneasy alliance developed between Pearl and the Chihuahua. Pearl refused to name it, or so she told the daughters, but she called it "Rat" when it was just the two of them. Rat continued to look at her with teacup eyes and went into fits on a regular basis. Pearl cooked Rat boiled chicken and fed it when no one looked. Rat used the dog steps the daughters left to climb on the bed with Pearl, but waited until she fell asleep. Pearl knew Rat slept on the bed, but Rat snuck off like a one-night stand in the early hours of the morning. Rat sat at his dinner dish waiting for his boiled chicken in the kitchen when she rolled in for her coffee.

The daughters stopped by to drop off groceries and Rat saved particularly violent convulsions for those times.

One said as Rat jerked and coughed, "That Chihuahua Cure sure seems to work good."

"You girls need to take that thing and get it out of here. I don't have

time for it."

Rat ended his spasm by throwing up a pool of yellow mucus and bile on the daughter's shoe.

"Ewww."

Pearl feigned a wheeze to hide a snort of laughter.

The daughters closed the door behind them, and Pearl heard their cars start up. She wheeled her chair toward the kitchen, her breath whistling through her windpipe like a broken harmonica. Rat waddled behind her, watching her back with teacup eyes.

