Polly

by Sian Barbara Allen

I taught Polly to turn on a flashlight with his nose. It became his favorite occupation and he'd sit for hours with the light between his paws, watching the things it lit—sometimes jumping up to lick the wall. He'd shine it on our daughter's crystals, my full length mirror, and the dark parts of our house. In his regular life he played with a Jack Russell neighbor named Ruby.

My husband was fine with it the first months, but later he'd throw out the plastic carcasses, saying “Flashlights cost $5.99.” Polly went through them quickly. I bought a re-charger. Polly carried the flashlights around even after the mechanisms were shot. He'd stand in front of visitors, drop his flashlight on the floor at their feet, wag his tail and drool.

When Polly got sick and the vet said he had weeks, we agreed that we would know when. We'd have him put to sleep when he would no longer eat chicken from our hands. We were separated then, and my husband called me crying like a kid one morning (holding chicken). We met at the vet, and he died in our arms while we stroked him and whispered into his ears that he was the best dog ever.

We got divorced, and sold our house. I moved up north into a one-bedroom apartment filled with boxes of stuff I couldn't part with.

Going through things, I came across a blue can that held the baseball my husband had signed for me by Bruce Sutter in lieu of an engagement ring, and a battered flashlight. Polly's ashes were in the can, and the can was the exact color of my new walls, Navajo blue.

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