

Coyote Killer
By Matt Buchanan

You'd never know it to look at me, but I'm a stone killer. Stone cold. I'm not proud of it. The things you learn about yourself.

I got Archie when I was two and he was my best friend. Sometimes, like when Dad went away, and when my stepfather first moved in, it seemed like he was my only friend. He used to sleep in my bed every night—except I think after I was asleep he left to go hunting, but he always came back before I woke up. Not that he ever caught anything but dust bunnies, because when he was a kitten he tore up a ratty old chair that used to belong to my great-grandmother and my Mom had his claws ripped out by the vet. But then again she also had his balls cut off and he never seemed to miss them either.

Archie loved me as much as I loved him. He didn't love everybody—just me. He hated my stepfather. When my stepfather would come into the living room, Archie would get up and leave. I don't think he was afraid of him—he just got up, real stiff, with his tail in the air, and marched out of the room. *Every* time. He liked my Mom okay because she fed him, but he really *was* afraid of my little brother Charlie.

Until last fall, Archie stayed indoors most of the time. He sometimes came outside to play with me when I was little, but we live near some woods and my Mom thought it would be dangerous for him to be out at night. But then Charlie started getting sick all the time and it turned out he had allergies. Suddenly my Mom didn't care how dangerous it was outside. The day she told me I threw my first real tantrum in like ten years.

“You're the one who always said it wasn't safe out there!”

“The neighbors have a cat and it's fine.”

“But *she* has *claws!*”

Then my stepfather has to get his input in.

“I can't believe you're being so selfish! Is your pet more important than your own brother?”

“I've had Archie a lot longer than I've had Charlie, and he's a lot nicer! Why don't you make Charlie sleep outside?”

Well, I said a lot of stupid stuff and I ended up grounded with no cell phone for about a month and Archie ended up outside. At least out there Charlie couldn't catch him. Maybe his allergies wouldn't have been so bad if he hadn't tortured Archie so much.

the squirrel tree.