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Writers' Contest!

The 1st prize winner of the Writers' Contest featured in our winter 2008 issue, Stephanie Haddad, told her story with a compelling grace and wit, winning the opportunity to design the next writer's contest which was featured in our recent Summer issue.

Enjoy the results of the fresh, fun contest she prepared below as the next winners are unveiled!!!

Summer Issue Writer's Contest- by Stephanie Haddad

Premise- Your dog knows what you did and he's going to betray you, breaking the sacred code of being man's "Best Friend"

Narrator- The dog

First Sentence- The first time Mabel ever committed a felony...

Word Limit- 1,000

First Prize Entry:

by Shawn W. Thomas

The first time Mabel ever committed a felony was my opportunity for freedom. I'd been entrusted to her after the death of Old Man Riley who'd owned me since I was a puppy. The church had dropped me off on his doorstep, thinking I would brighten his isolated days. From his sunlit porch, curled by his feet, I took in my new surroundings. Riley was a fisherman and we had a decent mutual existence together, though ours was not the stuff of Lassie. Still, it was peaceful. But that peace of lazy days by the river was not to last.

Mabel seemed intent from the outset to believe that I was a girl. I'm an English bulldog named Frank. She called me Dharma and paraded me around at the parties of her obnoxious relatives in tutus. *'Really, lady,'* I thought to myself, *'...let's see me put you in a muzzle, a leash and a plaid collar- and putting it on YouTube...'* The children at these hellish parties were untamed, popping around the room like they'd had intravenous Red Bull pumped into them. One had the audacity to try and ride me like a horse. This one, Mabel's favorite nephew, could eat cartons of ice cream simultaneously. With the face of a toad, he scrambled toward me wearing a red cowboy hat that barely fit his round head. He'd slip off me and fall to the floor, but it couldn't harm him any. That kid could've jumped off Everest and bounced.

Nevertheless, Mabel didn't find it funny and I was locked away in her bedroom for the rest of the day. Cigarette smoke and perm solution clogged the air. Diving under the bed for cover, I found an open carton from Burger King- rank. Then I found a box of wallets. Intrigued by leather, I opened them with my mouth, only to see that the pictures of the people inside were strangers. Next to that box was a cardboard box of DVDs- brand new, unopened. I knew that Mabel couldn't possibly afford all these, yelling at the utility companies that she was old and flat broke.

It became clear that in addition to being a heavy drinker, Mabel was also a thief. Now I don't go sticking my nose in other people's business- it doesn't reach that far. But man, if a dog took another dog's bone, they'd best take to the streets, lose their collar, and get catnip to pay off any cats who'd talk.

The night somebody tried to break in, I did the dog thing and scared them off. I'm a no-nonsense mutt and there are certain ethics I don't question. It occurs to me now, though, that the person was probably just trying to get back whatever Mabel stole from them.

Yet for my good deed, I got taken for a walk near the park. Can't say it was a great experience to be seen attached to a creature with green netting over the gnarled gray hair choked around curlers atop an even scarier pink housecoat. The fuzzy pink slippers with bears had one eye scratched out on each. Not my doing. Just creepy.

Avoiding stares, my focus rested on a young boy who was trying to impress his mom by bouncing a soccer ball from his knee to his head. The ball fell and rolled with increasing momentum toward the street. The boy was stepping off the sidewalk... Mabel wasn't holding on to my leash tightly. Bounding forward suddenly, I managed to sink my teeth in the cloth of the boy's shirt just as a car sped by. Back on the sidewalk, the boy and his mother were petting me all over, saying "good, good boy."

"Tryin' to scam insurance companies by havin' that boy walk out into traffic?"

Hearing Mabel's voice shattered the euphoric moment.

"No, no... Your dog saved my son. He's a hero!"

"Oh yeah, Dharma?"

"Dharma?" the little boy repeated. "But this is a boy dog."

Mabel sneered. "Don't make a bit of difference to him what I call him."

So she knew from the start... It wasn't being senile... It was cruelty- death by pink tulle...

"Are you going to put him in the "Best Dog Contest" at the county fair this weekend?"

" Ha! Why would I waste my time..."

"Well, I hope I see you there, boy..." the mother called, taking her son by the hand.

It wasn't till the next night that the importance of the fair took root in Mabel's rotted brain. She was watching the TV intently, not paying attention to the red nail polish she was streaking all over her toes. An ad for the fair popped up during commercials and she nearly spilled the whole bottle.

They were having a fine jewelry auction at the fair but everyone was to attend the dog show first.

Mabel peered down at me, dollar signs nearly visible in her eyes.

Roused early to make the sign-up sheet, I was brushed and sprayed with hairspray. She grabbed my leash, yanked at my neck and we were off to the county fair. I did a few poses for a routine I'd been rehearsing in the mirror in case I ever got discovered. The crowd cheered. Mabel was backstage, ready to yank at my collar again.

Straight to the open auction booth we went. Guards were busy watching poodles tossing plastic rings. 'Amateurs...'

With quick bony fingers, Mabel was scooping up jewelry left and right. Some of it she put on me- earrings, necklaces, a tiara... When Mabel thought I'd relaxed, she dropped the leash.

Like a flash, I darted across the lawn, bounding up onto the dog show table. People laughed and snapped pictures, but the guards recognized the pieces I was wearing. They rushed to the auction booth, calling in reinforcements.

The mother of the boy from the park knelt down beside me.

“You need a good home, boy.”

She stood, patted her hip. I followed.

Second Prize Entry:

by Sheila Carter

The first time Mabel ever committed a felony, I just sat there and watched. She was usually so intuned to me but when Vinny was there she behaved so differently. Especially when they put the white powder on the table and sealed it up.

She didn't notice how my eyes darted from one to the other. She didn't know my past either. All she knew was that she had brought home an orphan. I never felt loved till I came home with her. She saved my life. I would've done anything for Mabel.

I worried for weeks that she'd get caught. I even worried that she'd continue to behave differently towards me because of what I'd seen.

It was just the opposite. After Vinny left, she gave me my favorite foods, let me sleep in her room... I even got new toys.

I thought, *'Wow, this is great.'* I doubted the trouble I witnessed that night would never happen again. Mabel was a good girl at heart. I was glad that Vinny seemed to be gone for good. She had thought it was love, but it was about control for him. I thought best that he was out of the picture and that she was back to being herself.

I was wrong. She began to act funny again. She seemed to be irritable, skittish, agitated and Vinny was back, giving her orders.

The second time they packed up the white powder there were people in the apartment helping them. Vinny was really bossy but he had a lot of friends. I didn't like all those people in our home. I liked it better when it was just me and Mabel. Some of these people were mean and they kicked me out of the way or yelled. Mabel looked upset.

I tried to stay far away but I heard Vinny say, "You're going to have to get rid of him..." It was like he knew what was going on. It gave me the creeps. She didn't say anything. I couldn't believe it. He was going to get rid of me.

Another one of Vinny's friends came to the door. An older guy. Really friendly to Vinny but tough like he was. Said he'd heard what was goin' down and just wanted to help.

His voice was familiar. I barked by habit. The guy looked at me really quizzicly; then it hit me. He had on a disguise but I knew his voice, his smell. He recognized me too.

By the time he arrived at the apartment, the drugs had been stashed away

and everyone was having pizza and beer.

Suddenly, he pulled out a gun on them and they all freeze as other officers rush the stairs. He whistled to me to show him where the white powder was.

I pawed the wooden floor boards whimpering. Mabel looked like she was going to cry.

I knew she'd only get aiding and abetting. I've heard the terms over and over again. I felt like a traitor but it could've been worse for her. She could've gotten more involved and received a prison term like Vinny did.

Bill from the precinct knelt and petted me. He'll take care of me till Mabel gets out. Guess I'll go back to being a drug sniffing dog, but I know that I'll be back on the streets soon enough. The guys at the precinct are ok, but it isn't love. Not like with Mabel. If she'd have me, I'd even risk being put back in a shelter to find her. Like I said, I'd do anything for Mabel.

Third Prize Entry:

by Adam Bright

The first time Mabel ever committed a felony, I was a young pup.

It was also the last time she committed a felony.

It was a warm September afternoon and I was lying in the tall grass atop one of the hills that surrounded my home. A strange creature I had heard Mabel call a "butterfly" landed on a blade of grass to my right and lazily I pawed at it, sending it madly into the sky. It was lonely and boring waiting for Mabel to get home from some place called "high school". She generally had company and barely paid me any attention. I longed for her to pick me

up and dance around her room or dress me up in her old baby clothes... the kind of fun that we'd had over the summer late at night.

Mabel's voice at last cut through the air of boredom and settled in my ears like a memory of curling up beside a fire. I was intent on recreating that magic. Within a flash I was up and running to her; visions of being welcomed into her arms preceding each footfall.

At last, I could see Mabel. Excitement rushed through me like jumping into a cold lake at first light.

A few more feet and I skidded to a halt. Something was wrong. Mabel's face was stained with clear liquid coming from her eyes and bore a strangled face. In between gasps of air, I heard a name: Teddy. I remembered him. I lived with him a short time before being given as a gift to Mabel. He was very friendly and warm. Never did I hear him speak of someone so much as Mabel. Hearing his name like this though... it ripped my heart out. I heard Mabel say a few other words- "car accident" and "coma". Neither meant anything to me...

Carefully, I slid away and walked down the street. Feeling sad about Mabel, I wanted to find something to cheer her up. Next door, a man nearly stepped on me as he climbed out of a large machine with wheels which I later learned was a "car". A shiny object fell from his pocket and immediately I picked it up.

Later in the evening, I sought out Mabel who was in her room. Without hesitation, I jumped up onto the bed, dropped the shiny thing and licked her hand.

She looked at me and smiled. It was the only recognition I got from her, but it was strangely unsatisfying. An odd look came over her as she looked at the present I had brought her. As Mabel picked it up, I saw a ring with a strange symbol dangling from it. I had seen the same symbol on the machine that the man next door had climbed out of. Suddenly, Mabel got up and started throwing clothes into a bag. I was confused: Did my gift upset her? What had I done?

Making no noise, Mabel walked down the hall with me tagging behind. She

stopped at the table by the front door and wrote on a piece of paper. When she was finished, Mabel looked around and sighed. Then with that same liquid running down her face, she picked me up and hugged me. At last! Here it was!! My comfort. My safe place. The next minute though, I was on the floor and she had closed the front door behind her.

Ever the more confused, I jumped up into the window to see her using the shiny object to open the machine next door. I suddenly realized I wasn't going to see Mabel again... but I needed her. I needed her warmth... her love.

I barked. Barked with all my might. The machine had rolled away with Mabel inside and still I barked.

A moment later, a light came on. Mabel's father came to the window then turned to the table by the door and found the piece of paper Mabel had written on. He rushed upstairs and a minute later I heard loud voices which I barked at, sensing danger.

The next night, I awoke in the window to see two men with shiny objects on their chests. They didn't look friendly. To be honest, I was a little scared. Then, I saw a sight that thrilled me. A familiar and delightful sight; Mabel was home.

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