rough draft -

# "Survived by Muffin"

~~Each morning~~ May 30, 1981

~~As sure as the morning sun~~

Before the morning sun could place of the tin ~~coffee~~ car shed & spill through the crack in the ~~bath~~ kitchen door, she would rise & tend to her needs, first. ~~Muffin morning in the bath room.~~

The bed springs would creak, then her feet would drag across the floor to the ~~decaying~~ locked-on bathroom. Often she belched & mumbled to herself. There was noone else to mumble to but Muffin, her dog, ~~who~~ was allowed to sleep on the bristly mat by the ~~door~~ door. Over (over) When finally she had done all she could or cared to, to make herself presentable for the other nurses where she worked, she would mope ~~out~~ in to the kitchen. Smelling of talcum & sulfur, she would rinse the coffee pot & put it on the blue gas flame whooshing to meet it in the gray room.

Usually she drummed her fingers on the stove while she waited for it to boil, as if she she were late for work. She never was. Her white nylon uniform, snugness of stocking, rustled as she ambled from the stove to the table blowing foul breath into the mug. The steam softened the lines on her bunched brow. ~~Her face~~ Her hair, was the color of denim fade, ~~had~~ Muffin ~~closed~~ closed his eyes, ~~with~~ Before he became allergic to fleas. ~~Then~~ Then he kept up a steady rhythm, drumming on the floor as he scratched, gnawing at his tail at the same time.

Click, click, click, ~~click~~ knock, knock, knock! Click knock! Click knock!

Water ~~sou~~ gushed; the pump clicked, hummed
& died; she cleared her throat.

She ~~[illegible]~~ rose from the paint slick table & opened the ~~back~~ door, saying, "Git!"

Allergic! One of her nurse words. She was only a practical nurse. But she told the veterinarian in Valdosta before he told her, crossly reminding him of her position. That's when she started the abrasive scrubbing & douzing ~~him Muffin~~ with chemical dips which made Muffin's eyes ~~burn~~ smart & his skin raw. All summer. The house flea wouldn't even light on his back! But the fleas kept on, burrowing deeper till his hair fell out. Then she really set in. He rode with her in her old blue Chevrolet to the Feed & Seed store, tolerating her fussing over the ~~fox~~ ~~acid~~ ~~shelves~~ shelves & cures. The costs were out of reason! So was the vet. But she took him any way, ~~[illegible]~~

~~Her hair was thinning too & had been thin for eight years.~~

~~"When a German Shepherd~~

"Miss Addie, I ain't never seen it fail," Doc Grover said in a stentorian voice, thumping playfully at Muffin's ears. "Soon as a German Shepard gits about ~~[illegible]~~ years old they ~~[illegible]~~ git to where they can stand the fleas."

"I want him shed of them things," she shouted, like a shout would make him give.

~~His round face, pot cheeked face~~ would grow serious and his head would shake, causing the flourescent light above to skate off the sides.

"Yessum, I can imagine," he'd say, looking down at Muffin's balding backside. "He smells like he's been eating carrion," she snapped, sticking her calloused ~~[illegible]~~ up in the ~~[illegible]~~ antiseptic room.

"Yessum," ~~Mr. Grooser~~ Doc agreed. "Same thing as burned flesh."

"Y'all just keep up what you been doing awhile longer. Dip him regular and lets see if we can get some results before we do away with him. I know you need some protection out yonder where you live. You living by yourself & all."

He rose & the shadow on his ~~pouch~~ belly put Muffin in the shade.

"We ain't much protection no more. Can't do nothing but scratch," she said, scowling at Muffin.

Muffin demonstrated for her, the sounds ~~Catherine~~ like an approaching bond.

"That's a mean cow, it?" said Doc.

"Keeps it up all the live long night!" she sighed. "And on my pay I can't afford running back forth to no fancy ~~veterinarians~~ dog doctor."

"Well, if worse comes to worse, we'll get shed of him," he said jovially, opening the door for her. "Tell you what, they're really coming in every day from folks trying to ~~give away dogs~~ get rid of dogs just like him. Wine a dozen!

"Miss Amy, see if you can't check on a new dog for Miss Addie," he yelled down the hollow green hall at his receptionist.

"Well, let me see if it can't get some results from this here," Miss Addie said, bouncing the green bottle in her ~~big~~ rough hands.

"Dip him ever two days & see if that don't

do it," Doc Grover said, ushering ~~them out.~~ her out with Muffin lagging behind on the leash.

"If it don't, ~~it won't to know about it.~~ you'll hear about it," she said, relying on the dully drone of the air conditioner. "You could send him to Fla or Texas if you could find somebody ~~did~~ take him. Georgia climate just ain't good for this kind've dog. I declare!"

"I ain't got that kind've cash money," she said, turning back to face him. "If I did I'd get my horse painted. Besides that, I ain't got no connection with nobody nowhere else."

"Maybe ~~somebd~~ some of your friends do," he said, looking back at a ~~dog~~ collie howling at the light in the waiting room.

"What friends?" she scoffed, going out toward the car.

(2 op.)

To her credit, she would make sure Muffin got turned out each morning before she left for the hospital; she would dutifully fill his ~~dog~~ ~~bowl~~ mended pan with food, too. Cheap chunky ~~foo~~ dog food. That was before his teeth wore down from gnawing his hair. After that she started ~~pu~~ soaking it in water till it puffed up like toads.

At night she would stroke his head as ~~she~~ he lay on the ~~sofa~~ couch while she watched

(over)

T. V. Once she even patted his fine head for barking at a rattle snake in the wood pile where he gathered kindling before the fleas.

She had switched him for killing a mocking bird then told him to "sic" a squirrel caught stealing her pecans in the orchard. He was given an old shoe to play with — when he was cute — then spanked for playing with her bedroom slipper with the roses on the toes. Then he had to endure a sour kiss on his head. Before the fleas,

She had confided in him about the stupid doctors & nurses, bragging about what she knew that they should have known, the sounds trundling about in his head; her voice was like a nail scraped across a chalk board. Lazy, bilk, hypocritic — all the things she loathed, she told him about. Even men.

The new dip smelled like the creasote on the fence posts she made Mr. Savry replace after his cow broke in her garden last spring. She came around every morning that summer after she had gone to work, wheeling, with her cap like turned up to the sun. Muffin tagged behind him, grateful for the pat on the head even when he said, "Pore ole mangy dog," & wrinkled his pug nose. "I'd bet she shore gives you a hard time, stinking like that."

While he dug the hole for the post with his pinchers post hole digger, he let Muffin lay on the fresh damp earth, gently sliding him aside with his boot to scrape the dirt back in the hole.

"Yessirree, I'd bet she ain't at all pleased with your ailments!"

Muffin scratched wildly, fanning dirt in the hole while Mr. Savry packed it around.

When the sun cleared blown from overhead, Mr. Savry gave him bits of his bologna sandwich.

"See if you can't chew that, old feller," he said, moving over on the grass a little. "Come on boy! You gave smack dab in a ant bed!"

She jerked her handkerchief out of her back pocket & flapped at Muffin's back. Muffin slunk away to his mat she had tossed under the edge of the porch.

"Pore ole feller!" said Mr. Savry, dropping the handkerchief. "R'aerd looks like a possum."

That's when he got sorry for Muffin & dunked him in a vat of sulphur & burnt motor oil – eyes & all.

"Now," he said, his squinty blue eyes full of hope. "See if that don't do it!"

"Muffin needs a cussin out!" (with some acquaintin') she shouted after she drove up & Muffin had skidded up alongside her car, leaving brush strokes all on her white nursey stockings, too.

"I'll reckon! I wouldn't have him on Christmas Eve."

"Git on away from here yourself!" she shouted & threw a clod of dirt from the base of the fence post.

Muffin dodged it & scampered under the house, burying his head.

"I swannee!" she stormed. "I ain't got no choice!"

She cast a remorseless glance Muffin way, and he watched her white shoes pounce up the door steps.

The next morning she called early. He watched her shoes from where he still lay.

"Here, puppy!" she called. "Chum on!" she coaxed. "Muffin, come! Come here, right now! Git out from under that house & come here! I see you laying up under there."

He could see her, also. Her eyes & her shoes, her upside down face sagging to the dirt.

"If I git a hold of you, I'm gonna wear you out! You hear?" she shouted, reaching now towards Muffin's face. He scented

back ~~to~~ still lay ~~his~~ head on his front paws, facing her, blinking.

"~~If~~ I have ~~to~~ come up under there after you, it's gonna be ~~too~~ bad. You hear me? All right! I give you ~~your~~ chance!" she threatened, stopping to examine the effect on Muffin.

He twitched his ears, lying placid in the ~~cool dirt~~ ~~dr~~ powdery dirt.

~~He~~ Watching her flute shoes move away, he dozed. Suddenly water shot straight in his face & he sprang up, dashing out the other side with her head, ~~snaking~~ striking ~~snaking~~ all the beam, like a stick ~~dragged~~ along a picket fence. ~~Stopping to shake~~, he saw her dart around ~~the~~ corner of the house clutching ~~a rope~~ the leash. Her face, compressed with fury, made him hesitate, and she swooped down on him like a ~~vul~~ buzzard, ~~bunks~~ looping the rope around his head. She set out ~~[illegible]~~ around the house with Muffin ~~straining~~ ~~she~~ struggling behind. The more he tugged & stalled ~~the~~ tighter the rope grew, ~~and she~~ but her pace never faltered. At the car, she ~~[illegible]~~ crawled into the back seat, covered with news papers & a plastic shower curtain, and tugged him through, slamming the door before ~~his head~~ he could pop out behind her. ~~on the other side.~~ ~~He~~ turned back ~~[illegible]~~ to exit ~~through~~ the side he ~~[illegible]~~ had entered &

She shot forward, slamming the door, scowling at him ~~through the~~ window. She jerked the door open, pressed the sole of her shoe in his face & twisted around to the front seat, slamming the door behind her.

Muffin could see her face in the rear view mirror & drawn & huffing. She placed her head on the steering wheel and the ~~clotted~~ blue ray curls on the nape of her neck ~~looked~~ ~~raw together~~, stuck out.

The keys jingled; she swore, tried another & sighed as ~~she~~ ~~started~~ the ~~car~~ engine ~~sputtered~~ sputtered & caught.

She sped onto the highway without looking, raising herself up ~~to the~~ steering wheel, peering ahead. Once she glanced back at Muffin lying on the rattley ~~show~~ plastic & paper.

Her ~~old~~ eyes filled with tears & ~~ran~~ trickled over creases ~~of~~ her long cheeks. Her head ~~slumped~~ forward; the car veered to the left, to the right, indecisively. Of its own volition, then, it shot straight out ~~across~~ the ditch and rammed ~~into~~ a pine tree. Pine straw rained on the car. Muffin ~~stuck up~~ peered up at the ceiling, ~~like~~ ~~the~~ ~~car~~ fixed in ~~the~~ startled expression. She was checking for fly specks. Her mouth gaped open just as the door swung wide.

Muffin waited, panting, watching her face ~~and~~ from ~~where~~ the front seat beside her where he had settled after the impact.

As blood began to trickle from the corner of her mouth, he hopped onto the back seat & out the door in two beats. He whined once, looking out at the vacant road. ~~A~~ ~~Pasture~~ ~~the~~ ~~the~~ pasture ~~spreading~~ in front of the car, ~~the~~ sunlight ~~stroked~~ from a passing cloud. He ~~leapt~~ romped across with yellow butterflies flowing south, circling back to the highway.

When he reached home he entered the door she had at last forgotten to close & curled up on the couch.