Puddles

by David James

The first inkling that I might be in love with Josie came at our high school senior day outing at, oh, what's its name, state park. I forgot, but it doesn't matter. She smiled, did a little wave and stepped away from her friends, lifted her sundress a little to keep it dry, and waded into the edge of the pond's marshy water. In just a couple of minutes she came back with this lavender-colored salamander. She told us she was keeping it as her pet and she had already given it a name: “Puddles”, because she found it in one.

That Josie was thrilled and delighted with her find confirmed for me that what I felt for her was more than just a teenage crush. She found a little fast food box for Puddles's temporary home. The class asshole, that dumb-assed, doughy slob, Clarence, reached over and knocked Puddles from Josie's hand, laughed and stomped it on the gravel path. The fast food box became Puddles's flattened casket.

Normally, were it some boy's salamander, I'd just feel pity and tell him I was sorry for his loss but, because it was sweet, tender Josie, my eyes began to blaze. I have a razor-thin temper and our classmates who knew me stepped back. Clarence was much heavier and I've see him fight, delivering wild, looping, punishing blows so I altered how I would normally channel a schoolyard dustup. I looked over to Josie, noted her tears and delivered a devastating kick to Clarence's nuts. He doubled over in pain, but I continued with my fists and gave him a well-deserved ass whipping.

It was a school function and thus I got a 3-day suspension from school. Josie told her parents what happened and her dad invited me over, shook my hand, patted me on the back and offered me a celebratory bottle of Newcastle Brown ale. We each drank two. Josie told him she was proud of me because I took on Clarence.

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Out by her pool on a green, plastic recliner after her folks went to bed, I accepted her gift which she said she had been saving for her wedding night.