

Myra's Accident

by Doug Woodhouse

Myra's slumped up against the steering wheel crying, and I don't know what to do. I put my hand on her shoulder to rub her back, and she unbuckles her seat belt and leans over to hug me. I quickly try to unbuckle myself as well, but I fumble with the release and it takes me a second to hug her back. It's an awkward hug, but when you're both sitting in a car any hug will be awkward. After about a minute, I get out of the car to see if the dog is still alive.

It had been getting pretty tense before we hit the dog. We had pulled off the highway to find someplace to eat, and Myra had gotten us lost in a suburban section of town. That was enough for me to start getting snappy with her, and seconds before we hit the dog I had called her a bitch. She turned her head, glaring, but before the car could become a full blown war zone a puppy dashed out in front of us and Myra swerved too late.

The dog was dead. It looked to be only about three or four months old, and it wasn't wearing a collar. I've never killed someone's pet before, and I didn't really know where to go or what to do from here. I don't even remember walking away from the car, but suddenly I'm knocking on a door, asking if they know anyone in the neighborhood with a little golden-haired puppy. Why yes, the Johnson's have a puppy. The house with the green door.

The Johnson's *had* a puppy, I think. I get Myra out of the car and put my arm around her as we walk over to the Johnson's house. She stopped crying, but she looks like she could start again at any minute.

I don't know what to say to the woman who answers the door. I start stammering an apology about the little golden dog, and Myra chokes back a sob. The woman suddenly turns her attention to Myra, and the next thing I know we're sitting in their kitchen with Myra crying on Angela Johnson's shoulder. I'm instructed to go out into the backyard and get her husband Chael.

Chael goes to the garage and get an old blanket to wrap Buster in. After I move the Nissan out of the road and park it in their driveway, I follow Chael into the backyard to help him dig the hole. There's only one shovel, though, so Chael tells me to sit under the willow tree and try to take it easy. You've been through a lot today, he says. He tells me about his first car, and how the very first time he backed it out of the driveway he backed over his neighbor's cat. He's trying to make me feel comfortable, and I can't help but marvel at how beautiful and wonderful these people are. We killed their dog because we were in a fight, but both Angela and Chael seem more concerned about putting us at ease than their little Buster. I'm not sure what I expected, but I didn't expect this.

I look up at the house, and through the sliding glass door I can see Myra, wrapped in a blanket, sipping steaming liquid out of a mug. Angela says something to her, and she smiles and responds. It strikes me how beautiful Myra is when she smiles. I can't believe that twenty minutes ago I was trying to bait her into a fight. It all seems so petty and hypocritical now. I'm no saint. I wasn't always the best boyfriend to her, and I've left a trail of broken hearts in my past, too. We've both been broken, we've both been defeated and jaded and we've both cried uncontrollably, but we've always managed to get back on our feet. I had some pretty powerful weapons I was going to use against her, but before we could spew our poison we found ourselves on Angela and Chael's doorstep, which is probably right where we needed to be at that moment.

Chael finishes up and we go inside. Angela has put some pasta on, and she asks me if I prefer marinara or alfredo sauce. I guess that means we're staying for dinner. I give Myra a feeble smile, and she gives one back. She looks like she's had a really rough time of it, but it's obvious that Angela has been taking good care of her. I opt for the marinara and take the seat next to Myra. Chael starts telling funny stories, and as I watch Myra laugh, I realize that this was not an accident.

