

Little Yappy Dog

by Mark Reep

When I got home Cherise downstairs was out front waiting for her little yappy dog to piss somewhere. He was sniffing things, deciding. She'd told me what kind of dog he was but I didn't care and I'd forgotten. The dog considered me briefly and moved on.

Hurry *up*, Ling, she said, it's fucking *cold!*

She was in flipflops and a longsleeved T-shirt that hung nearly to her knees. The sleeves hid her hands. She wore hangover goggles. I said hard night? She said you don't know the half of it. Somebody broke in your apartment.

I stopped. You okay?

She said I been better. Her big black coverups hid her eyes but her cheek looked swollen.

I said shit. Can I see?

She shrugged, locked the dog's leash, took her shades off carefully. Her cheek was fat and shiny. Her eye was blackened, swollen nearly shut.

I said honey, I'm sorry. You been to the ER?

No need. I ain't cut. They'll gimme ice, Tylenol, try'n charge me for a X-ray, call the cops. —Which I hope you 'preciate *I* didn't.

I said I owe you big. You want to go, I got it.

She shook her head, winced. I felt around, she said. Ain't nothing broke, I just got the eye. I'm thinkin' you owe me a couple onions—Least one big fat one. You good with that?

I said least I can do. So what happened?

She slipped her shades back on, took a deep breath. Okay. I take Ling out. We walk around the block. When we come in, he looked upstairs and barked, and I thought it was you home early. I said where's your car? And then I saw it wasn't you, and he had your door open. I had my key out, but he come down quick, and he grabbed me, got me up against the wall.

A schoolbus came down the hill, stopped at the corner. Nobody got on. A boy stared dully from a window.

I was yellin' get the fuck *off* me, trying to kick him, key him, *something*, but he was big, I couldn't do shit. Fucker liked it, he was laughing. Ling was barking, and he *kicked* him, and he said you didn't see me, did you? Did you, honey? *Honey!* She spat. She was shaking. She hugged herself and shivered.

So I said no, and he laughed again, and he said I can't hear you, what? I said *No!* I won't say nothing! And he said he'd like to believe me, but he didn't, and I knew I better try something else.

The bus pulled away. The dog strained after it. She thumbed the leash's release and slack ratcheted out.

So I tried to knee him in the balls, and I thought I got him, but not good enough, and then he hit me. Couple times I think. You know how sometimes your legs just go?

My stomach hurt. I nodded.

And I kinda slid down the wall and he said should I believe you now? I said fuck you. I knew better but I said it. He kicked me some but I covered up, he didn't get me bad as he thought. When he got tired, he took my doorkey off my ring. Said make me come back, and I'll kill you. And he left.

The dog had wound its leash around the lamppost. It wanted to be untangled. It barked.

I said fuck it, *I'll* call the cops. Just lemme run upstairs first, okay?

She shook her head. He'll know it was me.

I said it won't matter. You've my word.

She laughed. It was harsh and startling.

Y'know what I like about you, Mickey? You say shit like *my word*, and you probably think you mean it. Look, this ain't the first beating I took, but I ain't sleepin' here again. You know? I called my cousin, she's borrowin' a van. I ain't got that much, we might get it all one load.

The dog was chewing on a flattened Skoal tin. Ling, she said, leave it. The dog ignored her.

I said Cherise, I'm sorry. You didn't know him, then?

Knew we'd get 'round to that. —Ling, *leave* it. The dog gnawed the Skoal tin. She knelt. The dog growled. She got the tin away. The dog strained after it. She got stiffly to her feet.

Who you know drives a mudtruck, she said. Big old four wheel drive, beat hard.

I said what kind?

She shrugged. Muddy. I don't know trucks. I was out here yellin' for Ling, and a truck come down the hill, and I didn't think, I just hid behind my car. And it went by slow, and he was looking at my house. —You got Photoshop?

I said what?

It's dark. He didn't come out good. But I took a picture with my phone.

