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Charlie worries sometimes that his dog is an idiot. When Mitchie wants to lie down, he just falls over on his side. When he gets excited, he pees a little. But what can Charlie do? You can't take a dog back after fifteen years and say, "You gave me a lemon." Charlie's too old to find another dog, anyway.

At the end of his leash, Mitchie is laid out on his side in the middle of the crosswalk, panting. In a minute these cars are going to start honking, but right now the drivers are probably struck dumb at the sight of a dog this stupid.

"God damn it, Mitchie," Charlie says. "Come on."





There are tree branches on the ground in the backyard. They're not attached to the tree, like branches ought to be. They're severed. Sawed off. This was Jackie's first-kiss tree, and it used to hang over the backyard, back when this was Jackie's yard. Back when 10 Osborne Street was her address and the curtains were blue.

Two blocks down that way is her broken-arm tree. She has a car-accident tree, too. There is a tree at the hospital where Jackie's mother passed away into the long goodnight. And when Jackie gets lonely, or sad, she goes and she finds one of her trees.

Her first kiss was with a boy named Carl when she was ten years old. Carl told everyone at school that they'd made out. He said she kissed him and that he put his hand up her shirt. For one week Jackie was the great big slut of grade 5.

But she didn't kiss him. He kissed her. And in return he got kicked in the shin. At the time it didn't even seem important. It was just one more stupid thing she was supposed to like but didn't. Jackie doesn't even really remember the kiss.

She remembers how Carl's mother came to pick him up that day, and that dog jumped out of the back of the car and ran right at Jackie, smelling like the woods and like fire and like the ocean, all at the same time.

But it was her first kiss, and the first sign of her indifference to boys. She'd been indifferent before then, of course. But indifference is hard to notice until you're in a situation where you're supposed to care.

Jackie visits her trees and she remembers. Or sometimes she doesn't remember. It helps just to sit under them. It's familiar. And her trees are always okay. They have a nice little visit together and Jackie goes home.

But today is different. Today there are branches everywhere, bright wood exposed. Her tree is cut down. And Jackie bites the inside of her cheek to keep calm.

She knocks on the front door of the house, all gentle and polite like a lady. Like a gentlewoman. She knocks again. The door has a knocker, below the big Welcome sign. Jackie makes herself smile, in case she looks as angry as she feels. Her father always says, "Anger never solves anything."

Mrs. Hubert answers the door.

"Pardon me, ma'am," Jackie says.

"Oh hello, dear." Mrs. Hubert is in a housecoat. Jackie is wearing her Sunday best.

"Pardon me, ma'am. I'm sorry to interrupt your Sunday, but I just wondered if I could ask you a question. What happened to that big, old tree in your backyard?" Jackie says. And Jackie smiles. She is all sweetness, prim and proper.

"Oh, we needed some light back there," Mrs. Hubert says, smiling back at her. "Jim bought a barbeque, but it's always so dark. We thought, wouldn't it be nicer for the grandkids if there were some sunlight back there in the afternoon? My son came out this morning with his chainsaw. It really opens up the backyard, don't you think?"

"Oh, it certainly does." Jackie is chewing the inside of her cheek. She keeps thinking, *anger doesn't solve anything*, but she can taste blood.

“Are . . . are you bleeding?” Mrs. Hubert says. “Your lips!”

And then, violence. Jackie picks up the biggest rock she can find, and she carries it to the driveway. She puts it right through the window of Mrs. Hubert’s car. *Smash*. It feels good. She loves that sound exactly because it makes no sense. There’s broken glass on the pavement and everywhere. It’s on the car seats and on Jackie’s dark sneakers. All her arm hair is standing up. Her muscles are warm. Her mouth tastes like blood.

Mrs. Hubert, of 10 Osborne Street, won’t be calling her *dear* again anytime soon. Jackie’s Sunday best gave the old woman an incorrect first impression. Mrs. Hubert saw a young girl, clean and well dressed, fancy black pants and a nice white shirt, and she thought it was one of the proper young ladies from her church. It wasn’t. It was one of those proper young ladies she sees being helped into police cruisers on the TV news at night.

So now Mrs. Hubert has her front door locked, to keep Jackie out. It’s a heavy wooden door, with a sign in the center that has the word *Welcome* burned into it. The curtains look like lace in the small half circle window at the top. This would be easier if Mrs. Hubert didn’t look so scared. She’s yelling something that Jackie can’t hear. Police, police, police. Something like that. She has a phone in her hand.

Jackie looks like the bad guy here. Mrs. Hubert is crying and Jackie is all covered with violence and broken glass. But Jackie isn’t the bad guy. The tree was cut down. Jackie’s first-kiss tree. And so Jackie is angry. But she didn’t start smashing things right away. She went over to the house. She rang the doorbell. She was a nice young lady with some questions about that old tree in the backyard.

“Pardon me, ma’am,” Jackie had said.

“Oh hello, dear,” Mrs. Hubert said.

Jackie is just as surprised as anybody. She didn't come out here to break windows. She came out here to visit her tree. When she got off the bus, there was no blood in her mouth at all. She was quiet, thinking about her friend Ann. Visiting her trees always helps Jackie think. But now her thoughts are thinking themselves for her. Her body knows what to do. She lifts up the second big rock. She's confused by how heavy it is. She almost can't handle it. It's been a long time since she lifted anything this heavy.

She aches. She stumbles a bit. How many trees get cut down every day? What if every one of those trees had someone who cared? Someone to avenge it? Jackie is just a good girl, doing her part for the environment. *Smash!*

Now there are two big rocks in the shiny, gray car. She leans her head in through the window of Mrs. Hubert's car and brushes the glass off the passenger seat rock. She pulls the seat belt across and fastens it securely. She tugs to make sure it doesn't come undone.

The rock looks so handsome with the black seat belt around it. So does the first rock. This is nice. It paints a pretty picture. Out for a Sunday drive with the windows down.

Mister and Missus Rock.

Lovely.

"I'm calling the police!" yells Mrs. Hubert from inside. She has the window open a crack. She doesn't sound angry; she should sound angry, she should get righteous about her car windows. She's supposed to be the bad guy, not the victim. But she has her lines all wrong. She sounds scared. "Please stop," she says.

And Jackie's not a monster. She hears the fear in Mrs. Hubert's voice and suddenly she can see what this looks like from the other side.

Mrs. Hubert cut down a tree. Everyone cuts down trees.

She didn't even do it herself. This was just a bit of yard work, one of a dozen chores her son helps her with. She called him and he came out in the morning with a coffee in one hand and a chainsaw in his trunk and he cut down a tree and poor Mrs. Hubert had no way of knowing about Jackie's first kiss underneath that tree.

She had no way of knowing that Jackie had spent all last night going over and over in her head what she would say to Ann. It is not an easy thing for a girl to ask her best friend on a date. Oh god.

But Mrs. Hubert couldn't have known any of this.

The tree is in pieces on the ground. Cut down. Jackie needed to see it today. She needed to sit underneath it, but she can't. When Jackie saw Ann at school today, down at the other end of the hallway, she waved. She waved and Ann closed her locker and walked away, like she didn't see. Maybe she didn't see.

It was just a chore to Mrs. Hubert. It was a bit of yard work, and then she answered her door and said, "Oh hello, dear," and then violence. Jackie knows that Mrs. Hubert isn't the bad guy.

But what can Jackie do? Run? There's already glass everywhere, and if she doesn't look over and see Mrs. Hubert's face, this feels right. On this side of the door there are no tear-stained faces. Just tree branches on the ground, and justice. Jackie shakes her head. No. It isn't right. She should stop. She should leave Mrs. Hubert alone and just run. This isn't right.

She bends down and picks up another big rock.

You know how mothers play Mozart against their bellies during pregnancy? Jackie's mother went around swinging a tire iron, bashing headlights in the street all night, belly enormous. Who else could say their mother had been in a riot while pregnant? Kicking in windows while little Jackie grew inside.

Throwing bottles against police cars while little Jackie listened and learned. That was the real Patricia. She was the glass-bashing mayhem, even pregnant. Good old Tire Iron Pat. She wouldn't be caught dead in a hospital gown. Or crying. Well, Jackie is her mother's daughter. *Smash!*

The glass sounds so perfect.

Anger seems to be solving this quite nicely, actually. Her father never got angry about anything. Sometimes he took his glasses off, and he folded and unfolded them really slowly, but he never got angry. He wrote letters to his local representative, instead.

"That's how you get things done, chickadee," he said. He calls his daughter chickadee now that they live together. He didn't have a nickname for her before, when her mother was still alive.

Mrs. Hubert opens the window further. "I'm calling the police!" she yells. Jackie can hear the fear in Mrs. Hubert's voice, but she yells right back at her anyway.

"It's really opening up the back seat, don't you think?" Jackie says.

“It is an ordeal,” Charlie tells his dog. “Walking you is an ordeal.”

Mitchie isn't listening. He's licking the filthy hands of apparently homeless children. Again. Every day with this. His stump of a tail is wagging like crazy.

“Don't you go to school? Don't you have mothers?” Charlie says to the children. But they don't answer him. The blond one with the missing teeth looks like he might have several mothers. Mitchie loves the attention, though, and so Charlie tolerates them a while longer. The things he will go through for that dog.

When the children are gone, Mitchie looks up at Charlie with cloudy eyes. Cataracts make the little guy half blind, but he doesn't seem to care. It hasn't changed him at all. There's a siren nearby, getting louder. Truant officers, probably.