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## On How I Am Afraid

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# On How I Am Afraid

*Jeremy Richards*

"Hello," I say into the phone receiver.

"Hey." Kevin's voice sounds intense, which is normal.

"Hey."

"So did you talk to her?" Whether it's watching a football game, ordering pizza, or prying into my personal affairs, the current moment is always of the utmost significance to Kevin.

"Yeah."

"Well, how did it go?"

I pause. I really don't want to tell him. "She gave me Leeland."

Silence.

"What?"

"She gave me Leeland. He's in the other room right now. I should probably go check on him soon." I stand up and stretch.

"What? This doesn't make any sense. You were supposed to break up with her and now you have Leeland?"

I walk from the kitchen, past the front door, to the living room. "Well, you know she's leaving for vacation with her family today—that's why I was going to break up with her this morning—but when she came by her whole family was with her and they asked me to watch their dog."

The window is open and the air smells like smoke—thick and hot. Maybe it's Gerald down the street. The burn pile in his back yard has been getting pretty big. It needs burning.

"You should have said NO!" Kevin is practically screaming at me now.

Leeland, a small Jack Russell, sits in the middle of the floor chewing on the leg of my coffee table. He looks at me and almost smiles. There is a patch on one eye that is black with brown in it. In the right light—like right now—it looks like he has a shiner.

"They were on their way to the airport, what else could I do? Besides, her family is nice and I like Leeland," I say.

"So she doesn't know that you know?"

"No."

"Why don't you just man up and tell her?"

"I'm not convinced that she actually cheated on me," I say, and then brace myself.

"But I'm the one who saw her!" Kevin's voice is quivering.

"I know...but I'm just not sure—"

"Look dude. I saw her. She came out of that bedroom with that douche bag Luke Gardner and her hair was all...it was all...she had sex hair."

"Okay, Okay, I'll admit that's pretty shady but—"

"Yes. It is shady and instead of going ape shit on her you're watching her dog for free?"

"No, they're going to pay me." I walk over and sit down beside Leeland.

"THAT'S NOT THE POINT!"

"Look, I made myself a really good breakfast this morning—with bacon—and then I took Leeland for a walk and the air was crisp. We saw Mrs. Harris, the old lady down the street and she says to say hello, and I'm having a pretty good day. I don't want to talk about it. Don't ruin my afternoon."

Leeland looks so happy. It's like he goes on loving everyone, not giving any thought to the person who apparently clobbered him—whoever it was—whoever gave him that black eye.

I don't care about the coffee table, I got it for free and it's ugly anyway. I hope he chews right through that leg and the whole thing comes crashing down.