

A Dog by the Ears

The car he was driving was not his own. It could be said to belong to his girlfriend, but to say that would be to snag on a reef of language. She was not a girl. Girlhood was a state she had left behind several decades previous. And she was not simply his friend, if even his friend at all, being to him someone of a more precarious intimacy.

Such are the limitations of language.

She is not the subject of this story, nor is her car, which was a good fifteen years old and looked it.

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His teenaged son stole his car and wrecked it; hence, the driving of the girlfriend's car. To the supermarket. For groceries. On a Saturday morning. In summer. Clear sky. Bright sun. His girlfriend, neither girl nor friend, was not with him.

Was he angry? About the stolen wrecked car, was he still angry? Was it a smoldering anger, hot ashes inobvious but ready to flare up if provoked by a sudden breeze?

Yes to those questions.

Did he know he was still angry?

Not yet. He was sedated. He thought he "felt good." That was what he had told his non-girl non-friend that morning when he borrowed her car and she asked him how he was doing:

"How are you doing this morning?"

“I feel good.”

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So this is what happened, and it is a small thing, a thing unto nothingness. He wheeled his shopping cart of fresh-bought groceries out of the supermarket and across the parking lot, under the bright sun in the summer’s clear morning sky. He loaded these groceries—a bag of this, a box of that, bottles of other things—into his non-girl non-friend’s old yet reliable and unstolen, unwrecked car. As he finished this transferring of objects from here to there, he heard two men’s voices rising in anger across the parking lot, just one row over. He looked up to see:

Two men arguing over the right-of-way—one wanted to go left, the other wanted to go right, or one wanted to go back and the other one forth—and our hero, the driver of the borrowed car and owner of the wrecked car, fastened on his cape, peeled off his pants to reveal his superhero’s tights, crossed the lot, and intervened.

“Hey! What the hell’s going on here! Cut it out!” Etc.

At which point one of the arguing men, the shorter of the two—and all three of these men looked to be about the same age, which was old enough to know better several times over—whipped out a butterfly knife, waved it threateningly at the driver of the borrowed car who didn’t realize how ridiculous he looked in tights and a cape, and said something very similar to the following:

“Fuck off, tall boy! Get your skinny ass out of my face and go fucking mind your own business!”

The sedated, good-feeling driver of the borrowed car returned to said car and attempted to open its hatchback, for he knew that within was a long, heavy, rusty piece of some other car’s suspension, kept in this car for obscure and most likely slothful reasons. Swingable in a pinch, this heavy object.

He had his back to the man with the butterfly knife.

He heard angry men’s voices.

He couldn’t get the hatchback opened.

He heard a car start up and drive away as the angry voices ended. He turned around and looked. The man with the butterfly knife was no longer there. The other man, who had seemed nice enough and didn't seem to have provoked the confrontation, was getting into his own car and starting it up. Scattered bystanders were suddenly apparent through their dissipating, their casual turning and wandering off.

Our hero unfastened his cape and pulled his pants back up over his superhero's tights. He went away and never came back. The groceries were donated to a food bank. The car was found abandoned by the old mine, one of which every story has, or ought to have, at some point, even if it's not made explicit or if it shows up at the very end.