

The crackhead in the duplex next door is enjoying kicking the shit out of his dog for five minutes before Jordie snaps. Martin's on the couch, nerves fraying with every whack, whimper, skitter of paws across the floor. "Jesus Fucking Christ," his brother roars, slams his fist through the vanity mirror, races out of the bathroom dripping blood and water. So enraged his teeth are grinding, incapable of speech.

"Don't go over there," Martin pleads.

A useless request cause Jordie's as familiar with restraint as a diaper wearing compulsive gambler. The dog's yelps start and stop. Short stifled howls through thin walls. A brown Lab, usually docile, understandably nervous. Jordie stands naked in the middle of the room listening, snorting quick hard breaths, runoff from his busted hand turning a dustbunny on the parquet spongy red. Raring for battle.

"No worries," he assures Martin confidently, "I'll return unscathed."

An old childhood refrain that wasn't always true.

Jordie yanks on gym shorts, no shirt, leaves his impressive pecs and biceps uncovered. Pops out the fake orb filling in for the real baby blue lost at 15 in a snowmobile accident. A high speed collision with a single strand of barbed wire. Jordie saw it coming and managed to duck sideways, the wire grazing across his cheek, rusty barb gouging into his eyeball. He got off lucky. His buddy Dez riding on back took the full razor slice across the throat, his severed helmeted head landing twenty feet away. Jordie carefully wraps his artificial eye in a napkin, drops it gently into a glass candy dish on the kitchen counter. He pulls on an eye patch, downs a Perc, motions to the dish as if Martin is responsible for the eyeball's safekeeping. Hooked on painkillers since he

fucked up his knee on a construction site, he's edgy and irritable when he runs out of pills or periodically makes a half-ass attempt to quit. Uncooperative Saran Wrap can throw him into a rage. He throws on a fruity looking shirt when he's overly frustrated, cruises tough bars hoping to get taunted so he can fight. His warped sense of morality won't permit him to just walk up to some random brute on the street and punch him in the face without provocation.

Jordie's kicking the junkie's door, banging on his front window, screaming for the Shithead to come out. He runs back in and grabs a wooden straight-back chair.

"The last thing you need is another assault charge," Martin yells at his ripped back.

They've both been jackhammering concrete since high school, Martin's no pussy, but he can't work up the rancor needed for close bodily contact with an infectious drug addict. His brother is five years older, but 10 years behind in common sense. Willing to draw blood, risk serious harm, at the faintest sniff of injustice. Being the hero a socially acceptable excuse for brawling. Martin feels bad about the abused pooch, but its lack of a strong will to intervene in matters outside his own personal well being, not cowardice, keeping him on this side of the wall.

A plate glass window shatters, seconds later Jordie's shrill voice is inside threatening, "If you hit the dog again, I'll fucking kill ya!" Forearm pressed tight against windpipe, he drags the toxin stuffed turd outside. Martin skulks out to join the small crowd of onlookers in the parking lot. Except for slight moaning, the junkie is mute, his body rag-doll limp. The approving rabble cheers Jordie on as he twists his captive's head like a corkscrew, shouting, "Give a Goddamn about your chewed up sneakers now?"

Toronto's finest show up surprisingly quickly. A twitchy female officer fingers her taser. Her partner keeps a hand near his holster. Jordie will never be mistaken as an easy takedown. He's big and hard-core lookin' with his one eye, shaved head, tattoos and scars. Won't surrender or loosen his death grip until he extracts a 'cross your heart, hope to die' promise from the police they'll have the dog taken away. He flashes Martin a victory sign before he's cuffed. Getting arrested is not the outcome he was going for, but he's content and familiar enough with the end result. Co-operative and polite has he's assisted into the back of a cruiser. Already charming the chick cop who minutes before was eager to drop him to his knees with 50,000 volts.

Jordie's not back five minutes from spending overnight in jail before he's on the phone yapping to his buddies about his grand adventure. Fucking Mr. Canine Champ. It's turning Martin's stomach having to listen to him repeat and reinvent what actually happened. Jordie enjoys hogging the limelight, but Martin's not comfortable with close attention. He hates to give out personal details freely, suspicious of people's interest, slightly paranoid about exposing himself to judgment and ridicule. There's no reason to be evasive with his parents when they call from St. John's on Sundays. They rarely ask questions. Afraid of truthful answers. Martin can't recall them ever once asking how he was feeling about anything. Jordie thinks they live in a hazy bubble, comfortably insulated by an unwavering 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' navy-like policy. A seriously stunted empathy radar. Some parents are like that. You know they're there for you. But just enough to make you feel like an asshole for not being more grateful.

Jordie refused to speak to their mother last week. Overreacting to news of her new prized possession - a Chihuahua. One of those fashionable accessory lumps celebrities cart around in purses. He's disgusted because pets were strictly out of the question when they were growing up. Not even a hamster or fish. No matter how much they begged. Suzy Homemaker saw animals as dirty undesirables in her spotless house. God forbid there be hair on carpets, muddy paw-prints on a scrubbed floor. In her OCD-tinged brain, dogs and cats were dirty disregarders, eager to shit, piss or cough up a hairball in hidden corners or under beds while spitefully thumbing their damp noses at her long list of rules for domestic civility. "Our carpets have to be showpieces," she kept reminding them. Since they left home, Jordie and Martin move around a lot, never rent apartments with carpeted floors.

Their father sold Electrolux's back in the day when vacuum cleaners were something women still got excited about. Successfully charming lonely housewives earned him a neglected spouse and sons at home, plus bonus trips to Jamaica, a Cadillac and Top Salesman in Atlantic Canada three years running. He works for a security company now, teaching university students and new immigrants the fear mongering techniques required to hawk security systems. He doesn't have a burglar alarm at home. Forgets to lock his own front door at night.

He also forgot lots of birthdays, school events, sports games and holidays. Away working or spending time with someone else's wife. One particular shitty Easter stands out in Martin's mind. His father never came home on Good Friday. Always the same fucking story. His mother on the phone all weekend crying. Asking over and over, "Why are you like this Thomas, why?" Pacing the length of the kitchen, wine glass never out of

her hand, empty bottles stacking up on the counter. The eggs and treats hidden in obvious places like she'd put no thought or effort into it at all. She didn't notice that Martin and Jordie were eating in the living room, leaving sticky handprints, bouncing off the walls and furniture from the sugar buzz. Didn't yell at Jordie when he bit both ears off Martin's bunny and snatched his favorite crème egg.

On Sunday evening when it was clear he wasn't coming, their mother scraped the entire untouched Easter dinner into the trash and went upstairs to bed without a word. Left her kids alone gorging on a refined sugar dinner until they made themselves sick. Jordie kept lifting the garbage can lid, staring at the ruined ham and scalloped potatoes. "I can't believe she friggin' just did that," he said. "What about us? We're here."

Jordie's slathering on sunscreen, squinting glumly up at the perfect blue sky. Only half-heartedly rating the bodies of the women parading around Woodbine Beach.

"Too much sun will boil our blood thicker than your accent," he warns. "Dull, sluggish, every speck of color steeped out of us."

A tall blond with a muscular physique, big tits and toothy smile catches Martin's eye, waves, comes bouncing over. Asks if they're East Coasters as if she can smell it off them. Eyes Jordie like he's safari wildlife. Says she has lots of fun lovin' Newfies in her apartment building.

"Best kind," she mimics, "best kind."

"Everybody loves a happy Newf," Jordie says dangerously.

Martin spots the 'Jesus Saves' button pinned to her halter too late. They're

ensnared in an evangelical shakedown. Avoiding further eye contact, he rummages through his backpack for a beer. He's here to gawk at tits and ass, not blab about Jesus. Jordie feigns curiosity, lets church chick spew her brainwashed, brain-dead bullshit.

"Yes, yes," he nods agreeably, "I get all that. Creation, sin, divine retribution, heavenly reward, blah, blah, blah. But how come no one ever questions God's motives? Why he just woke up one day and decided to create something so grandiose and sketchy?" he says, walking towards her with his hands out, palms full of excess lotion.

Her radiant smile disappears; she steps backwards quickly and folds her arms across her chest when he leans in close to squint at her button. Obviously a newbie, theological unprepared, in over her slewed ideological head. Jordie senses confusion, satanically plows ahead.

"What do we really know about God pre-creation? He has no backstory. What did he do before to keep busy? Was the earth his first attempt? Are we a sequel? Was he bored, curious, lonely, arrogant? In a science competition with other Gods? The world's a mess, what if he's a quitter? God clearly has all the advantages here. Are we really comfortable with that?" he presses.

She tells Jordie she'll remember him in her prayers.

"Like I need some stranger worrying about my fucking redemption," he says spitefully.

Realizing there's little hope of saving a soul here; Miss Jesus Freak finally stalks off, all the righteous swagger gone out of her hard round little ass.

"Nothing screams fraud louder than a tele-evangelist busted with a tranny dick in his mouth," Jordie screams down the beach.

“You were a bit hard on her,” Martin says half-heartedly. Cause he really doesn’t give a fuck.

“Zealots are hard on the world. It’s payback.”

Martin can’t argue with that logic. Jordie’s right. Religious recruiters expect too much in return for their offer of salvation. Rules and regulations, piety, devotion, servitude, denial, church attendance on a regular basis. A complete lifestyle change, eternal commitment, not a crash diet. And salvation is rarely as enticing as it’s cracked up to be.

Jordie burrows down into the sand, covers his face with his Tasmanian Devil beach towel.

“Sex, drugs and rock and roll is the only constant religion,” he muffles through his Disney shroud. “Everything else is just blind speculation.”

When their mother calls on Tuesday instead of Sunday, Martin’s alerted to bad news by the oddness of her voice. Several subdued octaves lower, missing its self-assured briskness. Their father is in a coma from a brain aneurism. Prognosis iffy. No clue what to say, Martin hands the phone to Jordie.

“We’ll be home by the weekend,” he reassures her, “Hold the fort.”

Four hours later at a hastily arranged ‘forget about it for now’ party, Martin’s pissing in a garbage can right in front of the horrified administrative assistant he was hoping to bang later. Jordie is massacring a Buddy Guy song on his battered Stratocaster.

“I’m good enough for a Blues band,” he’s bragging to a giggly purple-haired girl, “I know three fucking cords.”

A couple more drinks he'll be whipping out his eye to amuse her. He dates women who are impressed with that kind of thing.

"You're only good at popping pills and causing trouble like a rock star," Martin yells across the room, "You inept Plebe!"

Preoccupied caressing his groupie's arm with a guitar pick, Jordie says placidly, "I don't even know what that means."

Not insulted in the least. Jordie's forever warning Martin his vocab is too grandiose for his present station in life. "I'd be cautious tossing big words around on the job," he surmises, "the boys might start thinking you're not a good worker." Not that it matters now cause they're quitting tomorrow. Heading to Newfoundland indefinitely.

Weaving his way towards his bedroom, Jordie's sporting a smug grin, clutching tight to his cigarettes, gin bottle and girl. Martin's amazed by the number of women eager to bed his banged up brother. A mutilated chick magnet. In high school he used to have half a dozen on the go the one time. Marred good looks and lost of his best friend only improved his score sheet. Lots of pity fucks from super hot girls. The bizarre attraction of the wounded and damaged.

Martin strikes out more than he scores. Maybe that means he's normal. He manages the scattered one night stand or date or two, but has never had a serious girlfriend. He meets lots of girls he'd like to have as girlfriends, but none of them ever want him. He's not ugly or stupid, so that can't be it. Jordie says he aims his sights to high. Tries to hard too impress women that are out of his league or unattainable cause they're attached to boyfriends or husbands. Not that Jordie's an expert on relationships.

He's tore through dozens of girlfriends; none of them ever close to sticking around permanently.

Cornering office chick as she's struggling with her coat in the narrow hallway, Martin grabs her in a bear hug, tangles his fingers in her lacquered hair, bites her lower lip hard. He sticks his tongue down her throat and she surprisingly kisses him back. His hopes and hard-on rise for a few wonderful seconds until they lose their balance, crash sideways, her nose smashing unpleasantly loud against the wall. She shoves him away when Martin tries to wipe the blood off with the sleeve of his sweatshirt, stuffs a wad of Kleenex up her nostril. Hisses "Asshole" before slamming the door in his face.

Jordie comes out of his bedroom wearing only underwear and socks. Sweating like a pig, red in the face, holding his balls tight in one hand.

"Over so soon?" Martin sneers.

"Just getting started," he says happily, "loosening her up with my gold-plated saliva."

Martin goes to sleep with his stereo volume cranked and a pillow over his head. Nothing worse than hearing someone else getting lucky when you're not.

Jordie badgers Martin out of bed at 9 a.m. by waving an extra large double double under his nose. No sign or gloating mention of the groupie. Martin's a sick puppy, hunched over, hands so shaky he's leaving a trail of coffee splotches from bedroom to kitchen. Excited and furtive, Jordie drags a large grey duffle bag out of the broom closet, orders Martin to hurry up and get his shit together. Says they're going on a mission. Too

hung over to guess, not the slightest bit curious, Martin slumps his head down on the table.

“No way.”

“Oh, you’re coming,” he insists. “And you might want to bring along your camera.”

Barrowing down Yonge Street towards a seal hunt protest, Jordie drives with savage abandon, understands the tone of discourse of these big city caged Jehus. He’d heard about the protest on the radio last week, immediately started formulating a disruption plan.

“You got me out of bed for this stupid shit?”

“North Atlantic seals are not scarce!” Jordie shrieks. “Not friggin’ in jeopardy at all. What the fuck man? You gonna let those bastards bad mouth the Motherland?”

He’s hunched over, fumbling under the seat for his arsenal. Bags of fake blood, a small bullhorn and a pile of Mactac stickers proclaiming **FUCK SEALS, SAVE MARGINALIZED PEOPLE!**

His rage seems genuine. Seals and celebrity lovers of seals have managed to shit kick him into kamikaze mode.

“Relax,” he snarls, “you’ll be an innocent bystander.”

Treacherous prick. He knows there’s no such thing as an innocent bystander.

“Are you insane?” Martin asks. A habitual rhetorical query.

“Just enough.”

An honest answer, delivered with a half smile, half grimace as Jordie bolts out of the truck. A lunatic tailor-made for a bolded headline. Martin slides into the driver’s seat,

snare fast getaway parking nearby. Dundas Square is packed with stoned peaceniks loving everything. Walking through the noisy crowd, Martin feels light-headed, almost queasy from the strong aura of positive energy, youthful zeal and naïve utopism.

“Fight!” someone yells, pointing to a crowd gathering over by Planet Hollywood. Martin follows a scattered trail of mactac stickers over to where Jordie’s pawing at the furry white chest of a protester dressed as a baby seal. The activist is pummelling Jordie’s head and back with his fake blood spattered flippers. Wailing, scrapping hard like he’s fighting for his life. There’s no police or security in sight. No one jumps in to help.

“Twenty bucks on the mauled seal,” the skinny guy standing next to Martin says.

“Catch!” Jordie yells. Something metal clatters at Martin’s feet. A ‘Newfoundland Sucks’ button.

“Proper thing!” Martin shouts, “Proper fucking thing!”

Jordie grins back, head butts Seal-boy hard, drops him to the pavement in a blubbering heap.

The possible repercussions of free speech another hard lesson learned.

When they pick up their final pay later in the afternoon, the boss’s wife Betty leaves them waiting in the stuffy hallway outside her office while she fucks around making a hair appointment. She’s so morbidly fat the phone looks like a child’s plastic toy in her hand. Her pinched ‘cat trying to shit’ shaped mouth tosses out phrases like insufficient notice, ungrateful departure, piss-poor workers.

“I never considered us valuable assets to your company either,” Jordie injects cheerily. “Especially him,” he says, pointing to Martin.

Betty looks confused, like she hasn't been the one promoting the idea. Doesn't say, “Sorry for your troubles.” Their father's massive brain fart is an inconvenience for her. Two healthy bodies she has to replace.

Martin's driving because Jordie decided to swallow his last three Percocet all at once. He's super alert and rambling non-stop for hours until he exhausts himself talking and crashes hard. Martin white-knuckles through Montreal in silence, freaked by crazy lane changers, French signs telling him God knows what, universal symbols he can't understand. Jordie drifts in and out of sleep until Riviere du Loup, wakes up to piss in his Pepsi bottle, bitch about the snail's pace. He demands to take over driving. Despite seriously doubting his brother's mental fitness for navigation, Martins sleeps through most of the fastest scenic blip through New Brunswick in the history of Atlantic Canada out-migration. Getting off the ferry at Port aux Basques just before dawn, Jordie's loaded drunk, but threatening to drive with a patch over his good eye if Martin doesn't maintain constant high speed.

The road race grinds to an abrupt halt just east of Badger. A forest fire has traffic backed up for kilometers. Martin and Jordie join fellow travelers lounging on the side of the TCH in their Canadian Tire canvas fold-up chairs, until a cop on a bullhorn tells everyone to head back to Badger. The fire has jumped the highway.

“What do you think about heading on through,” Jordie asks casually?

“Trouble,” Martin says, frantically trying to pull a U-turn before he can grab the highway patrol officer's attention.

No such luck. Jordie's earnest story of half-dead dad wrangles them passage through sooty blackness to Grand Falls sandwiched between two police cars. A funeral procession crawl through seared pine and spruce stands, spot fires igniting brassy bough torches, petrified animals sprinting through blackened poles one step ahead of flames. Jordie's fist pounds the dash every time they pass a carcass.

"Some moron flicking a cigarette," Martin guesses.

"Smokey's friends don't fuck around with fire," Jordie says bitterly.

Martin's reminded of the time his father caught himself on fire. Jordie talked him into taking them camping while their mother was in the hospital having her uterus yanked out. The one and only time he ever took them anywhere. Martin trying hard all weekend to get his father's attention, coax him away from his porn magazines and newspapers. Jordie kept sneaking their father's rye into his and Martin's tumblers of Pepsi every chance he got. They bunked out in the car the first night cause their poorly secured tent was no match for gale force winds. Jordie and Martin scrunched up in the back with their feet in each other's faces. Martin woke up around dawn, sick to his stomach, puked down the side of the car door. Jordie feed him saltines and water, kept him distracted talking about the good fishing they'd do the next day until he felt better. Nothing by CBC radio, Old Spice cologne and their father's drunk snoring drifting back from the front seat.

Working his way through a 40-ouncer of Canadian Club the next night, Martin's father decided to shortcut through the campfire on his way back from taking a piss. Ignited his pant cuffs. Jordie quickly tackled him headfirst to the damp ground, yelled for Martin to kick sand over his legs. Not even a blister. All the booze he'd guzzled, spilled down the front of his clothes, he should have went up like a torch. After their father

passed out in the tent, Jordie showed Martin how to properly douse a fire. Warned him to never be stupid around flames.

Their father only stayed home one day after their mother came back from the hospital. “Take good care of Mom,” he ordered and left a nine and fourteen-year-old to play nurse. She grilled them relentlessly about his behaviour in her absence. How much he’d drank, if anyone had dropped by to visit him, if he’d gone out at night and left them alone. His tumble into the fire didn’t make her laugh. She was too livid he wasn’t sticking around until she got back on her feet. “Too bad he didn’t scald his balls off.”

Martin and Jordie inhale a couple of cigarettes in the Health Sciences parking lot while working up their courage. The hospital room atmosphere is evangelical Hell House ghoulish. Their father masquerading as a corpse, not even remotely recognizable, his lower face all sucked in without false teeth. Not a remnant of ‘Dr. Feelgood’ left. Unusually wrinkled in linen pants and a slouchy sweatshirt, Martin’s mother is listening to the radio way too loud, eyes riveted to the hospital bed. Afraid she’ll miss a finger tremble if she glances away. She awkwardly hugs them hello, seems startled by Jordie’s tattooed and pierced appearance in the flesh. Comments unnecessarily that they both reek of tobacco smoke. It’s the first time Martin’s stepped foot inside a hospital since Jordie’s snowmobile crash. He’s the only member of his immediate family who’s escaped illness or serious injury. Knock on wood.

Irritated by Martin’s barrage of questions, demand for clear answers when there aren’t any, the doctor brusquely assures him if his father does pull through he’ll never be the same. Massive bleeding and swelling tends to turn brains into unreliable mush. Jordie

is spooked, barely contained, ready to bolt any second. Desperate to get high. Coming up to ICU in the elevator he was threatening to shred his arm with a scalpel, suck his own blood for the adrenaline rush. If their father comes out of the coma, Martin hopes his mother can manage more compassion than Jordie got waking up missing an eye. Practically the first words out of her mouth were, “See what happens when you smoke dope.” She always blamed marijuana or lack of strong fatherly guidance as the culprit behind their teenage trouble-making shit. She’d never actually caught Jordie or Martin smoking pot, but she’d smelled it off them plenty of times. You couldn’t hide anything from that nose.

Back at her immaculate home, Martin’s mother cradles Princess, the Chihuahua, like she’s a holding a kid just popped out of the womb. Coos nonsense words in its yappy little face, lets both her cheeks endure a sloppy saliva bath. Jordie asks her if the little runt is hypo-allergenic. He’s smiling, but there’s an edge to his voice. The house is Lysol scented and lint free. She was probably up at dawn vacuuming and dusting the empty rooms. Original artwork and photographs on the walls. No school graduation photos of her sons. Jordie tries hard to maintain a disdainful distance, but soon enough he’s on his hands and knees roughhousing with the skittish dog. He playfully pokes Princess in the ribs with the TV remote, laughs when she jumps about a half foot off the floor, Princess recovers well from the sudden jolt, gets all feisty, starts chewing on Jordie’s arm happily, stupidly trying to drag a 230-pound human across the carpet despite the ridiculous size difference. Their mother loses patience with the noise and flying fur tufts, snatches Princess up, gets a set of ungrateful teeth marks in her fleshy forearm.

“Didn’t anyone teach you how to play nice?” she scolds Jordie.

After Jordie falls asleep on the couch with the rat dog wedged under his armpit, Martin's stuck listening to his mother's angry complaints while she's pan-frying pork chops for supper. Bitching about the hospital staff, insurance provider, health care system, federal government, the neighbour not properly feeding the dog. She's fragmented with uncertainty, worried to death about Martin's father. Blaming a man no longer able to defend himself. She'd nagged him to go to the doctor when he first started getting severe headaches.

"He never listens to me," she complains, banging Martin's plate of food down on the table so hard he's startled, "but I don't know how I'll get by without him."

Jordie would have a quick comeback ready for that statement. Probably remind her that she managed to for most of her marriage. But Martin says nothing. He doesn't like to beat his head against the wall as much as Jordie does. And there's not really much you can say to alter a determined person's life long devotion to dysfunctional co-dependency.

When Martin goes upstairs after dinner, he's not surprised that his room is still exactly as he left it a decade ago. His mother's not big on change; whether it's needed or not. Same metal frame bed, fake wood desk, navy blue curtains and unstained carpet. Martin's closet and shelves are completely bare, but Jordie's old clothes are hanging in his bedroom closet, his dresser drawers crammed full of socks, underwear and teenage mementos. He left in a faster hurry than Martin. Grabbed his guitar and whatever he could stuff into a knapsack one bitter afternoon. In amongst sports ribbons, jigsaw puzzles and hockey cards, Martin finds a folded piece of yellowed newspaper he's never

seen. A photo of a dead dog lying next to a doghouse, leash and collar still attached to its neck. The caption alleges a despicable act of animal cruelty by parties unknown.

Martin bolts downstairs, drops the clipping on Jordie's chest.

"What the hell is this?"

Jordie yawns, sits up slowly, lets the paper slide to the floor without looking at the photo. Says wearily, "Someone getting the facts all wrong as usual."

The summer before Jordie's accident they rode their bikes a lot around the trails at White Hills. Martin's bike had a purple banana seat and red and blue vinyl streamers dangling from the ends of high handlebars. A round silver bell that stuck. Forcing just one clang always made his thumb sore. Jordie rode a black ten-speed with a plastic clip-on for his water bottle. The dog in the photo was a stray mutt Jordie almost creamed when he bolted out of thick brush. Mangy and old, matted white and black fur, a pointed snout. You could see beagle in him. He walked with a weird sideways shuffle. Martin was nervous when he first approached. Afraid of rabies. The dog *was* drooling, but he didn't look menacing. Wagging his tail. Starved for food and affection, Jordie figured. They boiled water, cleaned his sores, feed him their ham sandwiches. Named him Buzz.

All summer they pretended he was their dog. Jordie stole a dog brush and leash from Woolworths. Martin knew it was pointless to ask to keep him, but Jordie had hope. Sucked up to their mother for months. He couldn't see she was never close to giving in. Let himself be devastated every time she said no. They brought the dog back to the house only one time, tossed a Frisbee in the backyard until their mother came home and insisted they take him back to White Hills pronto. They didn't see Buzz as often when school started back up, but Jordie started building a doghouse for when the weather turned cold.

Martin helped him haul it to White Hills in a wheelbarrow during an early snowstorm in October.

They found the dog frozen to death in some bushes, stiff as a board, half buried under drifting snow. Jordie put his leash on, laid his lifeless body inside the doghouse. Bawled facedown in mucky slush while Martin sat shivering in the wheelbarrow waiting.

Martin's mother picks up the clipping, glances at the photo before tossing it on the coffee table. She doesn't remember the dog. Her face registers no recognition of the true act of cruelty or that she's the guilty party. Leaning over to rub the belly of her pampered pet, she comments dismissively, "A broken down old dog nobody wanted probably."

"No fucking doubt," Jordie says.