

## Weeping for Jed

Mum was making tea. Her eyes were red and her cheeks looked a bit stained. It was only then that I realised when she'd said, "he's gone" she'd actually meant, "he's dead". I was never going to see Jed again.

I had this sort of wobbly head moment. My neck was stiff and my eyes blinked. I felt all this nothingness whooshing about my head. Mum touched my arm. I swallowed but my throat wasn't working. I wanted to cry but I kept hearing dad's voice. "Men don't cry, son. It's women's work, crying."

Mum rubbed my arm. I think she knew I wanted to blub. She didn't say, but she kind of nodded, like she was giving me permission, but by that time, I just couldn't. I had to be a man. Dad would freak if he saw me. I took a deep breath like mum said. I couldn't believe my hands were shaking. Mum said it was shock. She suggested I lay down, but that would have been too much of a reminder – Jed always came into my room and lay down with me. We just used to lie there, for ages, thinking. He was my best friend.

I went out to the garden. That was a mistake. I could instantly feel him. His bowl was by the back door, a tuft of golden fur caught on a snag on the deck. I thought I heard him lollop up to me. I ran back inside and slammed my bedroom door. That was when I felt soooo angry. I wanted to punch everything, but at the same time I didn't want to break anything and get into trouble, so I thought it might be best to just pummel the pillow. I must have made a noise because mum came in to check on me. I said I was fine. She said I wasn't and that I had to express my feelings. I told her that was why I was thumping the pillow but she said she didn't mean that exactly.

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“Are we going to bury him, or the other thing. Jed was frightened of fire and he loved digging, so I reckon he might like to be buried.”

Mum nodded. “We’ll plant a tree too. Would you like to choose one?”

“I want one of those greeny-yellow ones, with the hanging down branches. Like the ones down by the creek.”

“Weeping willow. That’s a beautiful idea, Riley.” She held my hand again and I felt better, just sitting there with her.

“Where’s dad?” I was worried that he was having a good time somewhere and we were all sad and then he’d come home and wonder what was wrong with us.

“He’s in the shed.”

“Thinking?”

“Thinking,” she said.

Dad’s shed is a no-go area. He does a lot of thinking. Sometimes his brother comes round and thinks with him, sometimes he just thinks on his own. I really wanted to go and think with him.

I looked at the photograph of Jed on my dressing table, nosing a soccer ball. He used to sound like he was laughing. I’m really going to miss that noise. I thought about that noise when I took the path down to the shed. I thought about all the places that Jed used bury his bones, looked for the telltale mounds of earth in the garden beds. I thought about the times Jed knocked the heads off the dahlias.

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I pulled open the shed door. Dad didn't move. He just sat on his stool, a beer in one hand and Jed's blue collar in the other. His shoulders rose and fell. When I was level with him I placed my hand on his. He turned his eyes towards me. They were watery and in them I could read every thought and memory of Jed that we shared. I put my head on his shoulder and we stayed like that for a long time. I felt my tears run like the creek and I imagined weeping willow swaying in the breeze.

Me and dad decided that our long, hard think in the shed would stay just between us and Jed.