The Apartment is Locked

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After it was plowed, the snow in the parking lot of my apartment complex drifted into sharp edged drifts. One morning I heard my neighbor driving his truck through it in the back yard, the whine of the engine below my balcony rattling the window panes. I tried to explain to Jacob that his cousin drove it while intoxicated but he wouldn't believe me.

"Jake, the idiot was drunk and wouldn't leave with me. I mean, look..."

I walked to the balcony door, which overlooked a drifted mass of wet snow on the side of our apartment building. A brown Chevy pickup was imbedded in a five foot snowdrift and brown streaks of mud lay behind the rear wheels. I pointed to the truck. "See. He drove around the building and planted that piece of shit in the snowdrift, just because he wanted to see if it would make it through. Does a normal human being ever do that?" I asked.

Jacob looked out of the door window and gazed at the truck with dull eyes.

"God, Adam, everybody does that at least once in their life, come on." He laughed but it shortly died away.

"I've never done that," I said.

"Oh, well sorrrrrry, masa, I forgot you's perfect," he sputtered, frowning.

Back to the couch he walked, then slumped into it.

"Look, let's forget about last night and concentrate on what to do tonight, okay?"

I was tired, unsure if I had enough energy to withstand another weekend night, but since it was the weekend I didn't want to sit home. All the talk about Elie moving in was exhausting me even more. I figured something exciting could happen, like I'd meet the girl of my dreams or find a wad of money. Whenever I was tired on weekends I'd always think about those things and they'd never happen. Yet I'd still go out.

"Hum, well...we can go to the Hilldem again. They've got the Astros playing. They're supposed to be excellent. Whataya say?" I asked.

Jacob scratched his chin and puckered. He inhaled his cigarette, leaned forward and crushed it in the ashtray.

"I'll go, but I promised Elie that I'd afternoon, Okay?" he said, his eyes sliding.

"Fine."

Elie spit a stream of brown tobacco juice passed it. In his hands he held two bottles, the other by tobacco juice.

With a loud grinding, the truck turned as high as it could go. My ears rang.

After a few minutes Jacob yelled, "Elie got out. His cheek looked like he smiled I could see brown bits of chewed tooth. In his hands were the bottles. saliva into one bottle and took large sips to watch. Sometimes I'd feel ill when

"Well, cuz' you talk to your bud up there."

Perched on Elie's head was a grease spots.

"Yeah, but play it cool, he's not sure."

Elie crouched before the left rear wheel. "If we rock the bitch then she'll move, Okay?" said Elie. "Okay, let's try it," Jacob said.

Elie walked back to the cab, stepped opened the balcony door an inch or two and saying to each other more clearly. I more detail about Elie's living situation door watching the two attempt to move vehicle was out of its atmosphere. It rear wheel coughed up mud, painting plank under the left wheel splintered over the snow.

"Hold it, Hold It!" Jacob yelled.

The engine died down, then Elie walked back to Jacob he spit and with he didn't notice. Jacob crouched before the brown indentation in the earth that Elie crouched next to him. "Well her to move, or what?"
In the parking lot of my apartment orifts. One morning I heard my it in the back yard, the whine of the the window panes. I tried to explain to the intoxicated but he wouldn't believe wouldn't leave with me. I mean, which overlooked a drifted mass of wet building. A brown Chevy pickup was brown streaks of mud lay behind truck. "See. He drove around the shit in the snowdrift, just because he rough. Does a normal human being window and gazed at the truck with dull at least once in their life, come on." away.

"You's perfect," he sputtered, then slumped into it. and concentrate on what to do through energy to withstand another weekend I didn't want to sit home. exhausting me even more. I open, like I'd meet the girl of my whenever I was tired on weekends I'd they'd never happen. Yet I'd still go them again. They've got the Astros excellent. Whataya say?" I asked. cackled. He inhaled his cigarette, ashtray.

"I'll go, but I promised Elie that I'd help get his truck out this afternoon, Okay?" he said, his eyes shielded underneath his puffy eyelids.

"Fine."

Elie spit a stream of brown tobacco juice onto the left rear tire as he passed it. In his hands he held two beer bottles, one still filled with beer, the other by tobacco juice.

With a loud grinding, the truck turned over and he revved the engine as high as it could go. My ears rang.

After a few minutes Jacob yelled, "Okay, Elie, that's enough!"

Elie got out. His cheek looked like he had a golf ball in it. When he smiled I could see brown bits of chewing tobacco threaded between his teeth. In his hands were the bottles. He dropped his gravy colored saliva into one bottle and took large swigs from the other. It was vulgar to watch. Sometimes I'd feel ill when he did that.

"Well, cuz' you talk to your bud up there?" he probed, smiling at Jacob.

Perched on Elie's head was a green John Deer hat stained with black grease spots.

"Yeah, but play it cool, he's not sure yet."

Elie crouched before the left rear tire and shoved a wood plank under it. "If we rock the bitch then she'll most likely give, I bet."

"Okay, let's try it," Jacob said.

Elie walked back to the cab, stepped into it and started the engine. I opened the balcony door an inch or two so I could hear what they were saying to each other more clearly. I figured they were bound to speak in more detail about Elie's living situation for next year. I stood at the door watching the two attempt to move the truck but in the wet snow the vehicle was out of its atmosphere. It rocked back and forth and the right rear wheel coughed up mud, painting Jacob's jeans a deep brown. The plank under the left wheel splintered and the shredded wood scattered over the snow.

"Hold it, Hold It!" Jacob yelled.

The engine died down, then Elie stepped out of the truck. As he walked back to Jacob he spit and walked into it. It landed on his boot but he didn't notice. Jacob crouched before the left rear wheel, staring at the brown indentation in the earth the tire had produced.

Elie crouched next to him. "Well, whatta ya think? Think we can get her to move, or what?"
Jacob caressed his chin hairs.
“What we need is some salt. It’s warm enough out that it'll melt the
snow, you know.”

Elie stood up and spat. He took his hat off, wiped his forehead with
the back of his greasy hand. “Well, hell, cuz, I’ve got some in my
storage closet,” he said.

Jacob stood up, gave Elie a bewildered look, then walked to the
storage closet. He returned with a small sack and handed it to Elie.

“Here, spread some of this shit under the tires. I’ll drive.”

Elie dug his hand into the bag, brought out a handful of salt and threw
some under each tire.

“Ohay,” he gurgled, ”give her a try.”

The truck rocked but didn’t move. Gears ground and blue smoke
puffed from the exhaust. Jacob stopped the engine, then walked back to
Elie. The two stood looking at the rear wheels.

“Elie, I think you’re gonna need a wrecker to pull it out,” Jacob
declared, shaking his head.

Elie peered at the wheels and chuckled.

“Cuz, I ain’t got no money to pay for a wrecker,” he announced.

Jacob clenched his face. Whenever he did this I pitied anyone who
had to suffer his impetuous whining.

“God, Elie, you drive this thing into a snowdrift and now you say you
don’t have any money to get it out? What the hell is wrong with you?”

As soon as Jacob said that his face relaxed. Elie stopped smiling and
looked off into the dead field in front of the drift. Clouds of snow,

elifted from the wind, whipped around the dry cornstalks like white
tornadoes. I’d never seen such a determined look in Elie’s face before,
not even when he spoke about different brands of chewing tobacco or

beer.

“All right, all right, let’s try something else.”

Jacob scanned the parking lot, absorbing all that he saw in one swift
turn.

“I think we can get it if we maybe shovel some of the snow out of the
way.”

They walked to the general storage locker opposite the drift, about
twenty five feet away. My car was parked next to the closet and inside
the small wood storage were two shovels. Both frowned as they walked
back. They dug around the tires until the brown grass appeared, and
then Jacob laid salt into the exposed areas.

Okay, it should work. Get in and start it up.

“Cuz’, you really think Adam wouldn’t let me live with you’s next
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year?" Elie asked, walking back to the cab.

Jacob studied the white pellets of salt in the brown grass. His cousin

sat in the truck playing with the radio tuner, passing every station on

the dial. Jacob walked over to him and rested against the side of the

truck.

"I don't know, Elie. I'm trying to persuade him but you know Adam,

won't do anything unless he's gotta reason."

He looked at the snow and Elie rested his chin on the steering wheel.

"Well, if it's 'cause I'm a pig, I can straighten up, that's no

problem," he said.

I smiled and thought that at least Elie wanted me to like him. He'd

never attempted that or any other form of responsibility before and I

knew he wouldn't have if he didn't have the chance to move in with Jacob

and me.

The truck erupted into a loud whine, its hind wheels digging

furiously into the brown grass, flinging blades and mud onto the snow.

It rocked back and forth. On its forward motion, Jacob stepped behind

and gave it an extra shove.

The sight of the two cousins working together was ironic. Elie was a

pig, a drunk. He always smelled like wintergreen chewing tobacco even

when he wasn't chewing, and his lip was permanently extended from his

mouth in a pout. His only goals in life seemed to be to chewing tobacco

until cancer set in and drinking more beers than any human is capable

of consuming. Nothing, it seemed, demanded his attention more than

these two things.

And behind the truck, pushing, heaving, sweating in the cold winter,

was his cousin, with mud splattered all over his jeans. If my car was

trapped in the snow and Jacob was getting mud all over his clothing, he'd

whine and complain. But with Elie he was more patient, less open to

speculation about his cousin's actions than anyone else.

"Wo, wo, Elie, stop!" Jacob yelled above the engine.

The wheels began gripping the mutilated earth. He moved to get a

better angle to push the truck so that when it moved he wouldn't fall

forward into the mud.

I stepped onto the porch and rested on the railing.

"How's it going?" I yelled.

Elie glanced up at me, displaying a wide grin of white teeth enclosed

in brown gums.

"Hey, why don't you come down and give us a hand, Adam," Jacob

asked.

I looked at Elie, then back to Jacob.
"It's just about out anyway. We could use the extra shove," he said, opening his eyes wide.

"All right, I'll be down in a second."

I walked into the apartment, put my shoes on, got my jacket and gloves and went downstairs.

It was damp and humid outside. The snow was wet and in some spots icy, the kind of ice that looks okay when you're driving on the highway and suddenly the car slides into a ditch. Its dull shine reflected off the sidewalk and parking lot. As soon as I walked on the snow it compressed down and my boot didn't pick any up with the tread.

I walked over to Jacob. He stood behind the truck, groping at the ground with his boot for a good position. I stood at his left, placed my hands on the bumper and waited for Elie to start rocking the truck.

"Okay, Elie, go ahead," Jacob's voice boomed.

The truck whined and its rear wheels dug into the ground, spitting crumbs of earth on our pants and on the snow.

After minutes of rocking, Jacob asked, "Adam, why can't my cousin move in with us?"

We heaved and sweated and I said, "Well, I guess I don't really have a reason, except that I'm not sure he has the money. But maybe you'd know more about that than me."

Jacob grunted. The truck shot a wad of mud a bit high and it covered his hand.

"I think he can get the money if he really wants to move in with us, you know," he said, wiping his hand on a dry patch of his jeans.

"What's he spend it on anyway?" I asked.

We pushed and I could feel the muscles in my arm tightening.

"Well," Jacob began, "he likes to party, you know that, maybe a bit too much."

We rocked the truck harder and it was beginning to move.

"See, Jake, that's just it. With his partying all the time, I don't know if he'd be able to stay in school. I don't even know how he's been able to stay in school the last three years. I mean, maybe he's got a problem."

Jacob stopped pushing and stood up. He frowned at me, like I was a stranger. I continued to rock the truck. I considered what Elie said about being a pig and straightening himself up. It was comforting to hear him say it because I'd have some statement to judge him by if in fact he did move in, a sort of escape mechanism. I could press this against any action of his that affected me in the least and then maybe I could help him overcome it.

"He doesn't have a problem, Adam, stop bring that up, Jeez," Jacob whined.

The rear tires produced a cloud of wood burned bologna. They made a deep grind and piled up on the edges of the trenches the car had dug in the ice.

I stepped back and watched the truck, looking at me as it shook and when it last collided with the back end of my car.

Elie sat in the idling truck without moving, the brake lights were still on.

Jacob closed his eyes without turning his head. I could hear him breathing, heavy and deep. Elie backed the truck up. Then my car sounded like a piece of tin foil being ripped.

He stepped from the truck. He looked around, staring at the rust spots. He touched his right ear, it looked like a chunk of tobacco, let it drop into a puddle of mud at once.

I looked at my car with my mouth open, my teeth clenched, but I didn't care. Jacob stood next to me, it was his fault. I sighed. I shook my head, went into the apartment and locked the door behind me.
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"He doesn't have a problem, Adam, God, why do you always have to

bring that up, Jeez," Jacob whined.

The rear tires produced a cloud of white smoke that smelled like

burned bologna. They made a deep grinding noise and bits of grey rock

piled up on the edges of the trenches they created.

I stepped back and watched the truck hop over the drift. Jacob kept

looking at me as it shook and when it landed it shot into the carport,

colliding with the back end of my car.

Elie sat in the idling truck without moving. His head didn't move and

the brake lights were still on.

Jacob closed his eyes without turning his head towards the truck and

I could hear him breathing, heavy and deep.

Elie backed the truck up. Then my bumper dropped to the ground. It

sounded like a piece of tin foil being ripped.

He stepped from the truck. He looked at my car. He walked to the

bumper and attempted to put it back on, but it fell off again. He stood

staring at the rust spots. He touched it with his foot, his eyes twitching

rapidly as he looked at me.

"God, Adam, I'm sorry. I guess...I guess I shoulda seen my truck

doing that. Sorry," Elie stammered.

He looked down and put his finger into his mouth. He removed the

chunk of tobacco, let it drop into a puddle, and the water turned brown

at once.

I looked at my car with my mouth open. The cold air numbed my

teeth but I didn't care. Jacob stood next to me with his head down like it

was his fault. I sighed. I shook my head. Then I walked back into my

apartment and locked the door behind me.