

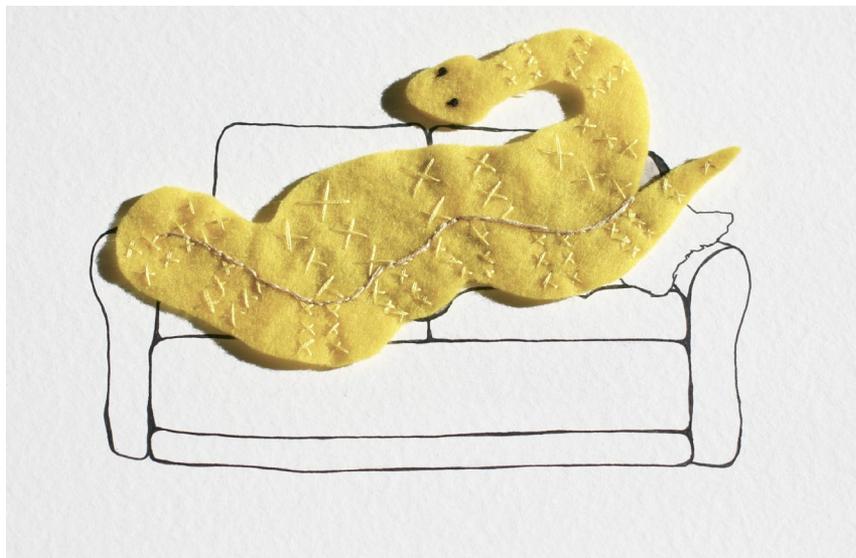
RACHEL LINN

## It's Your Little Red Wagon!

When I didn't leave the couch for the third day in a row, my girlfriend came out of our bedroom in the morning carrying a neatly folded, detergent-scented t-shirt, which she set down on the coffee table so that she could use both hands to lift me into a sitting position. I saw the writing on the shirt, above the image of a hamburger with entangled curly fries for buns. I slid back down onto the cushions each time she tried to prop me up against the couch's arm and eventually she said, "Fine," and left.

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*8:15 a.m.: I imagine boyfriend has been devoured by a large snake, making it impossible for him to move.*



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I studied the wood grain on the back of the closed door that led to the hallway. Traces of flame-shaped layers of the original tree flickered beneath a pudding of matte brown paint. A shifting shadow dappled the off-white wall near the door in the late afternoon, the gray companion to a branch of yellowing

leaves rustling slightly in the wind.

I wasn't sure where she went or how long she'd been gone when the door opened and she walked back into the apartment carrying a small bag labeled "Police Dog Surplus" and a much larger one from "The Actkidity Store." They were decorated with images of tossing and fetching and protective fencing. The only living thing in our apartment is a cactus we call Crown of Needles or the Pinocotpon depending on how dehydrated it becomes.

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*10:27 a.m.: The tree outside our window is still standing and has failed to crush boyfriend.*



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The bags dropped to the floor with a crinkle of stiff plastic, scraping of cardboard edges, and low metallic rattle. I remained unmoved, the back of my head securely wedged into one couch corner and both hands tucked under an ear. My knees were drawn up close to my body and feet shoved down into the space between the upper and lower cushions, as if being eaten by the couch, for traction. The cross-stitched throw pillow made an imprint on my forearm of the words "No Place Like Home" with letters made of raised, threaded exes.

She struggled to pull a massive box labeled "Wheelz" out of the bag from

the children's store and to use our dull set of scissors to stab at the tape holding the flaps closed. The scissors were left-handed and she was a righty. They were mine, I was the cutter. Opening the box, she took out four wheels and what looked like a large plastic washtub. She used some bolts and a wrench to attach the wheels to the tub, and I realized it was some kind of wagon.



*11:03 am: They say if you freeze to death, it's just like falling asleep.  
But it's too warm for it to snow on boyfriend.*



Then she took a harness—the kinder, gentler version that goes around the dog's body instead of its neck—out of the pet store bag. The packaging read “XXL: For Your Husky Husky” and featured a photo of a dog with a smiling toddler grasping its harness as it strained away, white half moons in its eyes.

She shoved the straps under my chest and clipped them together to encircle my body, then rolled the wagon and held it against the couch with her legs as she grabbed onto the harness and tugged me across the cushions until I tipped over the plush curve into the plastic tub. I'm heavy—she must've learned techniques for moving bodies in one of her nursing classes.

I landed askew, limbs hanging over the sides. I felt a splinter slide into my pointer finger as my left hand tumbled across the wooden floorboards. I

should have been in pain, should have flinched. I silently confronted the light fixture and bits of glitter spackle on the ceiling while she folded my limbs inward. Twinkle, little star. She turned me on my side and curled my neck to fit my head inside the tub. The skin on my knees fought the denim fabric pressed tightly against them. I counted threads.

“I forgot the handle,” she muttered to herself, and I heard a loud snap near my head as she attached it. Then we were rolling. She opened the door and yanked me into the hallway, where I heard our neighbor say, “How nice, out for a walk?” My girlfriend nodded, I suppose, since I didn’t hear her response. She bumped the cart down one flight of stairs to the ground floor, slowly backing down and holding on to the side.

Right after we’d passed through the building’s front entryway, a strange man’s face appeared above me, and I measured him out of the corner of one eye.

“You’re lucky he’s so quiet,” he said. The man was clean-shaven with the hair on his head carefully molded to frame his face flatteringly. His unwrinkled shirt was further restrained with buttons. He looked employed, and emotionally open. He continued, “Yours doesn’t speak at all?”

“No,” she said, “though he was never much of a talker.” She continued, “Yours is beautiful. Did you braid her hair yourself?” I heard a whimper nearby.

“I think she’s tired,” he said, “or hungry. Sometimes it’s hard to tell.”

He smiled and waved at me with an enthusiasm usually reserved for small children or pets and I stared past his head to see blue sky through a gap in the canyon of buildings. He left.

Clouds took shape. One looked like a hammer and another like a truck with a shovel attached. Others formed into swords, ray guns, and rockets, shredding in the wind as soon as they revealed themselves.

The cart began to roll again and I found that I was not curious about where we were going. We bumped more often as the sidewalks become rougher, and we passed under the awnings of auto repair shops and scrap yards, quiet, at rest on this Sunday morning. I could smell oil slicks in the canal, and hear the crunching sounds of pieces of glass as they broke into smaller shards under the wheels.



11:59 am: *Boyfriend disappears.*

