

## The Lizard in the Garage

by Alyssa Hollingsworth

My novel 'The Eleventh Trade' follows a refugee named Sami as he embarks on a series of trades to try to get his grandfather's beloved instrument back. One of Sami's biggest allies is his friend Dan. Though the book focuses on Sami's journey, Dan isn't without his own problems. Here is a little moment that happens off-screen that gives insight to Dan's conflict and feelings.

I poke the dead lizard with a stick, listening to the murmur of Mom and Gran's voices inside the house. The garage smells weird - like old magazines and concrete and gas. I shift on the old rusted Mustang Gramp never finished repairing. While he was still alive, Gran often talked about getting rid of it, but she hasn't mentioned it again since the funeral.

Mom sounds frantic, even though Gran's been talking her down ever since we got here last night. The court date didn't go well. My dad spun a real nice story about how coming home to take care of me was all that kept him going in Afghanistan. The jury ate it up. Mom was breathing in gulps by the time she got us to the car. She drove straight from Boston to New York without even stopping to get an overnight bag.

I flip the lizard onto his belly. He looks nicer that way. Less creepy and stiff and weak. More like he's just catching his breath.

My phone buzzes. Apparently I missed a text from Sami, my friend, a few hours ago. Signal's bad out here.

Sami's cool. He's from Afghanistan, actually, and he has this epic quest to get back a stolen instrument. It's a way bigger deal than stupid court cases and dumb dads. I'm trying to help - I've got a guitar at my house that we're planning to sell for some money, but this whole random trip has thrown off our plans. Course, I couldn't tell Mom that when she was speeding down the highway.

The text I sent this morning shows up first: Hey! Mom FREAKED after the court thing! She's dragging me off to New York to see Gran. Sorry!!

Sami's text flashes underneath: Thanks for letting me know. Is everything OK?

My thumb hovers over the keypad. Is everything OK? I'm not sure. But everything definitely isn't not OK. Right?

I type: Yeah.

But that doesn't look convincing. It looks small.

I hop off the Mustang and kneel by the lizard to take a photo, then text it along with another message: LOOK I FOUND A DEAD LIZARD IN MY GRAN'S GARAGE!

I make sure the lizard looks big and cool in the picture.

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