By throwing darts, I won a pot-bellied pig. This was during the school carnival at City High, where I teach advanced English to bright-minded students and future car thieves. The pig, a donation from my star pupil Jimmy, was earmarked for me.

“I don’t want it,” my wife Shiloh whispered as the tiny creature was led toward us, squealing at the end of its leash. Shiloh gripped my hand when they held the pig up for me to kiss. This occurred in the MPR. Students and teachers applauded. I wiped my lips, Shiloh grimaced, and Jimmy grinned like he’d just won the World Series. It was all part of his plot: he’d raised the pig all year for the school’s farming program and had already named it, Joyce, a big joke on the English teacher.

I was wary at first, but it hasn’t taken long for her to win me over. Maybe I needed something else in my life, something simple and good. She is a young pig, hairy and quick. Her stumpy legs are like springs: she leaps in joy when I feed her, spinning tight curls in the air. Sometimes she sneaks out of the house and goes next door, where Jimmy lives. I’ve found them swimming in the pool, Jimmy holding her front hooves as she kicks through the water, snorting with joy.

Joyce is a true hero, too, a modern Susan Anthony: yesterday, she came racing in from the backyard with an injured robin in her mouth. She does this often. “The cats,” I told my wife as we drove the bird to the vet’s, “represent Phoenix. The birds symbolize my students.”

“What’s Joyce?” asked Shiloh.

“Me,” I said. “Isn’t it obvious?”

“You’re a weirdo,” she replied, snapping me on the head.
My pig, my wife and I live in a cookie-cutter development on the north side of Phoenix. It’s a passable area, nearly a neighborhood. For example, there’s a high-strung residents’ association which exacts heavy tribute four times a year. Even better, my high school principal, known as the Dragon Lady, lives next door. We don’t dine together often.

Nice looking children sometimes glide like ghosts down the road, floating by on rollerblades, and occasionally, on gray driveways that stretch out like beards, I glimpse junior high boys shooting buckets. But this pleasant sight is rare. When I do see it, I wonder if maybe their gangly arms and legs are a vision rising from the burning pavement, phantoms shimmering in the exhaust fumes. Behind my backyard runs a highway, the road to Utah. The highway is fairly quiet at night, as no one goes north when the angels are on break.

Late last night, I woke frightened from a drowning dream. I was sailing with my wife on a catamaran. Shiloh leaned over, I thought to kiss my neck, but instead she swung the boom and knocked me into waters that were too thick to swim. I sank deeply. The swirling faces of my students beat about my face like angry birds. I fell until it was so dark I had to wake myself.

The bedroom was still. I tried to count to sleep, but my students ballooned in my mind. This week, they have turned on me. I do not know why. I hear their mutters, see the insulting graffiti they leave on desks. Perhaps my slang diction and pop references are useless. Perhaps they no longer respect me. Even Jimmy, of late, has been less fond.

I slipped out of bed for a glass of water. The moon cast through the hallway skylight, suffusing hammers and nails and paintbrushes with a pale, bluish glow. I toed through the wreckage fearfully. My wife is remodeling. She leaves crafts scattered on the floor, on counters and in doorways. There are splotches of paint everywhere but it’s all right because we’re getting new carpeting, she says. In the kitchen, as I filled a glass of water, I heard a whimper. I set the glass down. Again the whimper.
Maybe, I thought, Joyce had been having bad dreams, too. “C’mere, honey,” I whispered. “C’mon out, Joyce.”

A cupboard rattled. I opened it and she was there, squirming in a punch bowl. I lifted her by her hind legs and cradled her warmth to my chest. She smelled gassy, ill, and her thick hairs were damp. Through her ribs, her heart quaked. “What’s wrong, sweetie? What is it?” She belched, sighed, and licked my chin. I set her down, poured a shot of brandy and she lapped it up. If only my students were so easily handled, I thought, then headed back to bed.

After my shower this morning, there are no towels in the bathroom. Shiloh has used them to mop a paint spill on our gas fireplace, the one that rattles like a time bomb. “What about paper towels?” I ask. As I drip, she stands watching me in the doorway. She winks, cups her breast. Her pink robe falls open. I repeat the question. She glares at me and leaves. We’ve been married eight years. I am used to these strange passions and so say nothing.

I pad into the hallway and drip on the carpet. The hall mirror reveals all my splendor: six feet, a very padded two hundred twenty pounds. I jab at a roll of belly flesh. Maybe my students would like me if I were in better shape. They seem to prefer their coaches, who do one-handed pushups and encourage physical violence. Maybe I could learn to wrestle.

Shiloh strides toward me. Her blond hair bounces against her shoulders and her cheeks are young and rosy. I try to recall how long it has been since we’ve slept together—months?—and look again in the mirror. “Bob, you’re dripping all over,” she says as she passes by. She walks into the kitchen. “Your pig looks zonked.”

I limply flex my left arm, then my right. “I gave her brandy. Think that’s okay?”

“She’s still breathing. Hey, come here. Something’s up at Dragon Lady’s.”
In the kitchen, Shiloh peers out the window, the blinds mangled in her fist. An ambulance is parked before the neighbors’, lights flashing. There she is, my boss, the immaculate Dragon Lady. Her black hair is beehived and hard as stone, her face pale as a ghost. As the ambulance pulls away, she steps inside and slams the door.

“Do you think it was her mother?” Shiloh murmurs. Dragon Lady’s mom lives with her, a crotchety gnome who reeks of garlic and gives me evil glances at the mailbox.

“I’ll know soon enough,” I say. “Jimmy will tell me.”

“Yeah, Jimmy will tell you,” Shiloh agrees.

I gaze at Dragon Lady’s shut door, the black square of it like a passage to another, darker world. It makes me nervous. “This doesn’t bode well for today.”

Shiloh releases the blinds and they slap into place. “Everything is fine,” she says. She softly pinches my penis. “Put some clothes on, hon.”

My job is okay, though I’ve had some run-ins with Dragon Lady. Eleanor Bowden is her Christian name. It’s only her second year as principal. I and two other teachers, Ralph and Donnie, ran the curriculum quite radically in years past. Our students wrote poetry demanding the fall of corporations, read the true bloodbath that is American history, and worked low-level chaos math. She’s been trying to break us up à la Yoko Ono, hence the name.

“She’s a joke,” Ralph said one morning last fall. We were in the parking lot, watching students walk to class. He was hot-boxing Pall Malls. “She’s a bureaucratic stooge.”

Donnie agreed. “What can she do? One woman against three geniuses?”

“We’re high school teachers,” I said. “We teach high school.”

They nodded enthusiastically. “Exactly!” Ralph cried. “New revolutionaries!”

At this war call, a pair of necking students poked their heads up from a truck bed. The girl laughed at us. The boy glared. I
blushed and headed inside, leaving Ralph and Donnie. A couple weeks ago, the two of them got drunk with some cheerleaders who graduated last year. I don’t judge this, because once we start judging others, do we ever turn those heavy, honest fingers on ourselves? No. Regardless, Ralph admitted to me that he talked the girls into slitting Dragon Lady’s tires. He laughed and punched my arm. I smiled weakly. Now, each morning on the intercom, Dragon Lady announces, “The suspects remain at large.”

I used to spend more time with Ralph and Donnie, but lately I keep my distance. They think it’s because I’m married. They couldn’t be more wrong, but the fact is they’re lonely and bitter. Unlike me, they don’t care about the students; they simply like having power.

Since I’m no longer their buddy, Ralph and Donnie don’t ask me to sit beside them at this morning’s faculty meeting. I slouch against the back wall, watching an unusually worked-up Dragon Lady tear into P.E. teachers she wants to fire but can’t because they’re good coaches. The room is on edge as she berates Jonesy, our varsity football coach.

“And furthermore,” she expounds, pumping a fist, “we’ll be cutting weight training sections because your meatheads are flunking English. They can’t read!” Maniacally, she looks around the room. Her gaze finds me. “Bob!” she shouts. “Can they read?”

The room swivels. Jonesy squints at me like he’s Clint Eastwood. Behind him, Ralph and Donnie grin like Cheshire cats. I say, “They can hardly tie their shoelaces.”

Dragon Lady nods aggressively. As Ralph and Donnie give a mock cheer, she rotates her glare toward them. “Today also marks a high point in my duties as principal here. I need to have a word with you two gentlemen, regarding the tire slitting incident. New information,” she says, letting the syllables tumble from her lips, “has come to light.”

The room hushes. As I strain to see my friends’ faces, Dragon Lady points to the door. “Everyone leave now, except you two.”
I try to linger, but the other teachers clear out like it’s a cattle stampede and I get caught in the rush. As the door shuts, Ralph lifts his fist in the air and shouts, “Viva Zapata!”

By noon, they’ll be gone.

As I trudge to first-hour class, I know that even if I were in Ralph and Donnie’s shoes, I’d hardly worry. I’ve got a bargaining chip: Dragon Lady’s son, Jimmy. He adores me. She’s always asking about him, pulling me aside in the lounge. “Bob,” she pleads, “is Jimmy doing well in your class? I just want to make certain he’s learning in there, no offense.”

To be honest, I hoped the kid would be an easy F, but he’s a sweetheart, a little on the weird side, which is good for his age. Last month, we were reading *Henry IV, Part I*, and he and I were doing the scene when Hal and Falstaff pretend to be father and son. I was doing Falstaff—I *do not speak to thee in drink, but in tears, not in pleasure but in passion*—when Jimmy suddenly got teary. All the other kids thought it was a comic scene, but not him. He understood. I sat back in my chair, pleasantly shocked. “Jimmy,” I said, “are you all right?”

“Sure, Mr. Leatham.” He ran his arm under his nose. “This is just heavy, that’s all.”

I hid a smile, surprised at how happy I was. Jimmy felt the tragedy. He’d stolen a glimpse into the heart of the Bard. Even the class was stunned, until a dumb blond lifted her arm and yawned. “Are they gay or what? Wasn’t Shakespeare a switch hitter?”

Jimmy cracked up. I managed to hold my tongue.

This morning, though, Jimmy doesn’t show up. All hour his desk is vacant, a gaping emptiness in the class. This throws me off-balance, as he’s been my only redemption lately. His grandmother is definitely ill. He’s probably spending the day at the hospital, at her bedside. What grief must he be feeling? What sadness? All day, I wonder. My afternoon classes, expecting to watch Frost’s inauguration poem, instead endure old vinyls of Dylan Thomas. I need to hear the Welshman, the low voice that
rumbles like a wave summoned from the ocean floor. I need to hear a drunkard’s pain.

The seniors get pissed. Halfway through “Fern Hill,” Zack Rattay raises his hand. At my desk, I’m so focused on the despairied throb of Thomas’s voice that Zack has to shout. “Mr. Leatham!” I pull the needle from the record player too fast and the entire class winces.

“What?”

“Can we stop listening to this? It’s kinda crappy. What happened to that Frost dude? Walking in the woods and shit. That’s way cooler.”

“The tape combusted,” I say.


One of the girls pipes up. “Yeah, doesn’t he write poetry or something?”

Surprised, I click off the record player. Bob Dylan is a personal fave at the homestead. I like *Highway 61 Revisited*, Shiloh’s a fan of *Nashville Skyline*, and when we first got Joyce, she’d only sleep to *Blood on the Tracks*. I nod to the class. “Actually, you guys are right. He changed his name from Robert Zimmerman because he loved Dylan Thomas’s poetry. That’s why his songs are so lyrical.”

“Yeah, ‘One Headlight’ is like a story,” Zack says. Several students murmur in agreement. “It’s awesome.”

“I don’t know that one,” I admit, “but I think it’s safe to say he’s the greatest lyricist ever. He completely changed music, had as much an impact on the sixties as anyone. Check this out.” I stand, a little excited, and start chalkling out lyrics: “Masters of War,” “Tangled Up in Blue,” “Watchtower.” The class chatters, animated for the first time in weeks. When finished, I fold my arms and beam. “I’m really happy you guys know Dylan. He smoked out the Beatles their first time—bet you didn’t know that.” I stand here, grinning.
No one speaks. Twenty-five sets of eyes blink, a herd of sleepy cows. Zack’s hand creeps into the air. “What Dylan are you talking about, Mr. Leatham?”

When I get home, Shiloh’s pounding nails into a new entertainment system. Already she’s donning her pink robe. She gets Fridays off early and beats me home every week. Usually I lag around school, helping those students who need or just want the extra time. “You’re home early,” she says. “What are you doing home so early?”

I drop my backpack onto the couch and enter the kitchen. “Ralph and Donnie got canned.” Shiloh begins to laugh, but when she glances at me, she stops. I nod. “First thing this morning. And you know what? That’s not what bothers me. I can understand why they were fired. But my students. When did they stop caring? When did they lose respect?”

“At birth?”

“Do you know what those shits were talking about today?” I pull a glass down from one shelf and a bottle of Beam from another. Joyce is up, wandering over my feet. When I reach down to pet her, though, she skitters away. “They were talking about how great Dylan is. So I tried to relate to them, you know?”

Shiloh sets down a hammer and sinks into the couch. She grabs the remote, flips on the TV. I take the ice tray from the freezer and a can of Coke from the fridge, then crack out a couple cubes, like teeth coming loose in a mouth. “Are you listening?”

She angles her head toward me, says, “Bob Dylan,” and turns back to the TV.

“Right.” I stomp into the living room, drink in hand, and slump beside her. “So the kids were talking about Jakob Dylan, not Bob. It’s Bob’s son. They’ve barely heard of Bob.”

“Did you know who Carl Perkins was when you were growing up? Honey, you know better than to be worried by your students. They’re dumb kids.”

“But they’re not dumb kids, not all of them.”
“Right. Jimmy. I forgot.” She turns back toward the television, which is showing Jeopardy. “What is Malaysia,” she says to the screen.

I slam the rest of my drink and head back into the kitchen, tripping over a pile of frames. “Dammit,” I mutter, kicking my foot loose. “Dammit dammit dammit dammit.” I keep my voice low, so as not to bother Shiloh. Joyce wanders in again. She noses the dishwasher, rubbing her face up and down. “Hey, what’s up with Joyce?”

Shiloh peels herself from the couch and comes toward us, folding her arms. “She’s been acting up all afternoon. Chewing the walls again. She had blood coming out of her you-know-what and wouldn’t eat any apples, not even with honey.”

We both look at Joyce. She begins gyrating, rubbing against the dishwasher and moaning like a cat. It’s pornographic. I say, “Should we call the vet?”

“I did. He said to feed her vitamins and if she’s still weird tomorrow, bring her in. He said she’s probably in heat, or whatever they call it for pigs.”

I quickly pour more Coke and whiskey. I eye Shiloh. “Are you putting me on?”

She shakes her head.

“Pigs go into heat,” I remark. “That’s rich.”

The phone rings. Shiloh answers it and holds it out. “Dragon Lady,” she mouths, and I cradle it to my ear. “Hello,” I say. “This is me talking.”

“Bob?”

“Eleanor, how pleasant! It’s Friday. I’m enjoying a cocktail, and my wife and I are watching our pig who appears to be in heat. Care to join us?”

“This is not the time, Bob.”

“Of course it’s the time. What else is it time for? Or did you want to fire me, too?” As I speak, I realize that I’m unbearably nervous; never has she called me at home.
“Bob,” she says again, and there’s a twinge in her voice that wipes the smirk off my face. “I thought you should know that Jimmy is in the hospital.”

“What?”

“He accidentally swallowed too much Valium this morning. Maybe you saw the ambulance. He thought it was codeine or something, I don’t know.” Her voice cracks. I wander into the living room, sit heavily on the couch. “He’s okay, though,” she says. “I just wanted you to know.”


“We’ll be okay.”

“But wait—” A click sounds. The phone has taken on the weight of a thirty-five pound dumbbell, and gingerly I set it down. Shiloh slides beside me. On the television, Alex Trebek frowns. I try to picture Jimmy downing pills and looking frantic or in a hospital bed, but I only see him bent over a volume of Shakespeare, his eyes glowing red at the edges.

I hear Shiloh breathing and suddenly feel melodramatic. “Jimmy tried to kill himself today,” I tell her. My voice sounds distant and the thin walls of the house seem to let the wind in like a sigh. Shiloh’s hand brushes the edge of my ear. We sit still, silent, softly.

Then an odd sound comes from behind us, a moan and a clacking. We turn. Joyce is banging her head against the kitchen cabinet. I press my fingers, still holding the whiskey, hard against the damp glass, to make sure it is there, that it hasn’t slid from my grasp because suddenly it feels very loose and slippery.

“What on earth is happening here?”

All evening, Shiloh and I sip drinks in the living room. The booze cheers me a bit, or at the very least, it helps me forget Jimmy. We
don’t order the pizza until late, after several whiskeys. This is not good for the delivery boy.

“That’ll be twelve dollars and eighty-three cents, sir.” He stands in the glare of ninety watts of porch light. Red uniform, red hat, red shoes. His hair is bleached. His face is pockmarked with adolescence. He blinks in a slow and steady rhythm, one, two, three.

After a few minutes, Shiloh comes up. “Bob, maybe you should pay the guy.”

I lean over to whisper in her ear, my eyes still locked on the kid. One, two, three. One, two, three. “Wait,” I say. “I want to study its habits.”

The kid’s face is zitty and ugly. One. He looks like every single one of my students except Jimmy, and I want desperately to hurt him. Two. To take my glass and crash it into his nose or kick him very hard in the shin or balls until he staggers down the street. Three.

“Sir?” he asks.

“SILENCE!” I roar. “I do not want to hear you speak! You are a fool!” I jab my finger, extending it toward his face inch by inch until his eyes cross.

Shiloh opens her purse. She moves toward the pizza boy, holding out cash, says, “Don’t mind him, don’t mind him, I’m sorry, okay? Keep it,” she says. “Just keep it all.”


The kid grabs the money and runs. He jumps into his car, revs the engine, and leaves.

I’m shaking. Furious. Afraid.

Shiloh puts her arms around me and squeezes. I know her grasp is tight not because it feels tight, but because I see the effort in her face: cheeks red, eyes screwed, breath held. She looks like she’s trying to hold the world together.

I bend and toss her over my shoulder. “To the feast!” I proclaim.

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We eat in the living room at the coffee table. Shiloh pours me a glass of water and says, “No more booze tonight. I don’t want you to hurt yourself, okay?” I nod. I’m cross-legged on the floor, next to home furnishing catalogs and pastel wooden coyotes. Everything seems harmless. Shiloh lies on the floor, hemmed in by paint-smeared newspapers. Her eyes are shut and she sings along with Del Shannon on the oldies station. The song ends and she says, “That’s sad about Jimmy, isn’t it?”

“It is that.”

“He’s been your favorite student, hasn’t he? In all these years, your favorite one.”

“Yes, he has.”

“You really like him. He’s a good person, isn’t he, Bob?”

“Exceptional.”

“Exceptional,” she echoes. She turns over. Her back is to me now. She says, “I like watching him when he swims in their pool. When Joyce sneaks over and they swim together. He’s so pretty.”

For a moment, she’s quiet. I look and she’s shaking as if she’s crying. She says, “And do you like watching him, Bob?”

The question does not make me pause. “Shiloh, that’s a crazy thing to ask me.”


She doesn’t say anything more about Jimmy, which is nice because I don’t want to think about it. There is a lone pizza slice slathered with onions and mushrooms. I grab it, wave it around.

“What the hell is this?”

Shiloh sits up, looks at me with a pair of dark, watery eyes.

“What the hell is what?”

“This.” I shake the slice. A mushroom flies off and lands on her robe.

“That is a pizza. This,” she says, plucking the mushroom free, “is horseshit.” Shiloh rests her chin on the table. Her eyes peer over the edge. “I want to fuck you tonight,” she tells me. I know we will not. As I start to answer, though, she holds a finger to her lips.
“Shhh,” she whispers. She motions to the radio as it plays the opening chords to “Let It Be.” This is her favorite song. She lies down again and closes her eyes.

I close my eyes, too. I see Joyce and her hormonal frustration welling up inside. I see Dragon Lady, unhinged like a door in a hurricane. I see my students. Jimmy in the hospital. I feel about for Shiloh’s wine and my fingers graze the glass. I lift it to my lips but only a small sip, a thimbleful, leaks into my mouth.

The song ends. Shiloh is snoring. I carry her down the hall. In the darkness, I lay her upon the bed and slide off her robe. I rest her head against a pillow. Her face is slick with tears. I leave them there to dry and walk back to the living room. It smells like pizza and grapes. The phone rings but as I move to answer it, the ringing ceases. I sag into the couch, reach toward the telephone, and the automatic callback sound buzzes in my ear.

“Hello? Hello?”

“Jimmy,” I say.

“Mr. Leatham?” he asks. “Bob?”

“Yeah, Jimmy. Are you all right? Did you need to talk?”

“What’d you do, star-six-nine me?”

“Sure. I was worried.”

“Oh. I was watching MTV,” he says. “There was an interview with the Rolling Stones, and I thought you might dig it. But it’s over now. Sorry I called so late.”

“Well, I don’t get cable, anyway. Jimmy—are you all right?”

“Feeling stupid a little.”

Slowly, I say, “You knew it was Valium.”

“Yeah, of course. I told Mom it was codeine, like I was getting high. She bought it, maybe. I don’t know.” His voice is strong and easy. “It’s stupid. Sometimes I feel like I’m falling, like in dreams where you slip and fall through the air. But it’s like that when I’m awake. Do you ever get like that?” Before I answer, he says, “Yeah, I know you do. You told me all about it, right? It’s like what I learned about the universe—the expansion theory, everything getting further and further apart. You know of that?”
“Not much,” I say quietly. “How does it go again?”

“They looked at colors from far off planets and stars and figured that everything is moving, like we were all together at first and now we’re falling away from each other, and we’re not ever going to be close again. Sometimes I feel that’s what my life is like. I thought maybe the Valium would slow it down a little.” He sighs. “I saw them all, those little pills, and went for it. Who knows.” He pauses and it is silent between us, just the quiet static of electricity surging through the telephone. “You really were worried, weren’t you?”

“Of course I was. You know I was.”

He says, “But worried about what?” His voice is small, hurt. “I wouldn’t say anything, Mr. Leatham. Bob. I wouldn’t tell anyone about us, okay?”

“I know. I know you wouldn’t.”

“Good. Trust me, okay?” He yawns. “I’ll let you go now. I’m pretty tired.”

My hands are shaking as I hang up the phone. For a long time, I watch the clock on the mantel, the slow sweep of the second hand. It is midnight, time for bed. I walk to the kitchen, plates cradled in my right arm and glasses in my left. I set it all down. The counter is a disaster site. Pizza box, empty bottle of wine, plates and napkins and glasses, the Beam and empty Coke cans. There’s no reason to feel too terrible about it, though, because it’s only a small mess. I go into the hallway and sit against the wall, beneath the skylight. Above, rain begins to fall. It splatters against the glass, against the concrete of the sidewalks, the oily streets of Phoenix. On the freeway, cars buzz like fireflies. I’d like to think that everything is being cleansed, but the truth is that the dirt that coats it all is just mixing together.

Down the hall, there’s a flapping sound. I crawl toward it. An injured sparrow lies in the bathroom. Its eyes are wide. I lean over it and its neck arches back, a wing beats once against the tile and the bird stills. Unsaved. I usher the carcass into a wad of toilet paper and head toward the garbage, and it dawns on me that
Joyce is gone. The pizza boy. It’s been two hours since I stood there with the door open. She’s been gone the whole time, itching with hormones. I grab a jacket and shoes, then step out into the rain. I hop Dragon Lady’s fence, low and easily negotiable. The house lights are off and the shadeless windows peer at me like black eyes. The pool is lit by an amber light and raindrops fall golden onto its surface. I hold my hands to my mouth and call quietly. “Joyce!” I cry. “Joyce!”

I climb back over the fence and stand in my front yard. My house is a good house. When Shiloh is done, it will be a thing of beauty, on both the outside and in. But now, all I see is the mess. I turn away, facing the dark street. I wonder about neighborhood cats or even coyotes, because Joyce is an easy target, a pig with a spoiled life.

Nothing moves for a long time and for a long time I stand in the rain, no sound but water falling and the hum of car engines behind the house. It occurs to me that perhaps Joyce is gone from the world. Perhaps she lies dead on the roadway, struck by a car whose driver must have been shocked to see a pig dodging traffic, darting through paths of tires and hoods and grilles, until the animal collided with something much larger, much faster than herself.

I walk back inside and out again, to the backyard. The rain doesn’t lighten. The thick scent of wet dirt rises from the ground as I look over the wall. Cars slip past at long intervals. A semi crests a hill, headlights sweeping. There, in the center of the road, huddles a tiny black object. It may be Joyce, it may not be. I grip the top of the wall and press hard, trying to rise above. My arms aren’t as strong as they once were and the wall is high. The black spot in the road hasn’t moved. Anger and frustration well in my chest, and I grab the wall and fling myself over the top. I land stumbling, knees banging into the mud. My head collides with a rock and spots flash at the edges of my eyes; but a surge runs through my limbs. The rain is cool and harder now, thick and reassuring against my skin. Only twenty feet away lies the
wreckage. I stumble into the highway, ignoring horns and rubble, flashes of light that turn raindrops to darts. A tremor rises beneath the road. The black mass is near, so near I can almost make out Joyce’s face, her gentle snout. A horn shrieks. The tremor shifts.

I hold my ground.