



THE SKY BEFORE CORINNA

After we had waited for her for so long, it was almost abrupt, the way she started to swell and form the backdrop to the eaves of our trailer home, which stood out curiously sharp against her distending belly of dark cloud, tinged with a stripe of pale yellow like a warning beacon: the sun making its final feeble salute of defeat through the haze at her outer edge.

"Jesus, Josh," I said, my voice someone else's.

"I know."

We looked at Millie's toys littering the small yard. We should have tidied them away into the trailer, but there seemed no point. They would be littered worse than that before the day was out.

All afternoon, we'd been watching television, listening to the sombre voices of news anchors attempting to line their tone with appropriate solemnity and empathy while enviably, so enviably secure in their far-away studios. From time to time we'd looked outside. The sky was incongruously, acutely blue, giving no sign of the menace it was trailing, as yet unseen, like the spike-scaled tail of an azure dragon. Television cameras with aerial views showed line upon line of cars crawling from the city across all six lanes of the highway, a desperately slow snake slithering away in an unwinnable race, and somewhere in one of its moving metal vertebrae our daughter, squeezed into an impossibly small space together with our neighbours and their five kids, as well as some belongings they could not bear to part with, photographs, journals, a few hastily packed clothes, cheap jewellery which Mona's Mom had given her. We tried to spot their car, but there are so many old white Fords in the state. We imagined it somewhere at the front of the escaping queue, willing it there, willing it away from the encroaching monster.

"I'm sorry," Josh said, and I knew he meant the pick-up, which had broken down weeks ago and was standing uselessly three blocks away.

"Not your fault." I sounded unconvincing and wished I didn't. I hated myself for blaming him, as I'd hated him evening after evening for coming home and slumping into the threadbare armchair, defeated by yet another unsuccessful day. I hated Leroy and Mona for not having enough room for us in their battered white Ford. I hated the sky, the dreadful sky, which was beginning to feather in foreboding, dragon turning to phoenix.

She came, eventually, draped in a funnel-shaped claw of cloud, a swirling disc poised to pluck away at everything that moved and anything that didn't, readying to tear out trees by their roots, lift houses from their foundations, scatter lives and livelihoods at random just like Millie's toys. She strode in like a deranged goddess with her inappropriately musical name, trailing a high wind like a carelessly whipping shawl around her, chanting litanies of imminent destruction in a malicious lullaby-dirge.

I stood beside Josh, shivering. My hands hung by my side like limp dead animals.



"I'm scared, Josh. I'm so scared."

"I know. It's okay to be scared. Let her take us if she wants. Let her! But Millie's safe. Our baby's safe. She won't get her hands on our baby."

He took my hands in his and kissed them, and clinging together we started walking towards the storm shelter as the first drops began to fall.