Fog

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I stood before the edge of the cornfield watching the low fog blow across the brown stalks, obscuring the ends of rows. They seemed to march into the gray fabric of the weather. It was all ruined. The night's freeze had turned the watery stalks to ice just as the ears had begun to ripen. There had been enough to make it pay. But the frost was three or four days early.

The field was unearthly quiet. I stood for hours, I suppose, looking at the fog sweep away the cornfield then reveal the rows again suddenly, surprisingly, momentarily, before swallowing up the field again whole. Beyond the field, I knew, the forest was there. Waiting.

My boots moved heavily. I walked to the house that seemed so far away, and the effort consumed me. I sat then in the kitchen, staring at the black stove squatting on its iron legs, consuming wood in its bowels. I opened the top vent and watched the slowed combustion curl its flaming tongues over the logs, licking hungrily. Steam rose from the kettle.

"How is it?" asked Amy. "The corn—is it all dead?" She stood at the partition between the kitchen and the room we'd named The Cold Room because no heat ever seemed to get to it. She was wrapped in a blanket. I nodded my head and turned away. I could feel her waiting there, wanting to say something, unable to speak.

"What is it?" I asked.

There was silence. Finally, with a rustling movement, she came into the kitchen. I stared at the stove. "Talk to me," I said hollowly.

"Can we still afford it?" she asked.

"Here and now? In this emptiness? Me with no job? No money?"

She was quiet for some time. I thought about the little drawer she'd been filling with baby clothes. She'd taken out one suit with little hearts sewn all over it. "Little hearts," she'd said, a wondrous smile on her face. That was not possible now. There would be no money.

Now, she waited for a few moments, then she walked into The Cold Room and dressed. She came back in dungarees and a heavy coat, pulling on her gloves against the cold. My own coat had grown heavy with sweat from the hot stove. We would have to sell the farm, now. Or the bank would take it. Best to do it right away.

The fog was heavy on the mountain road as we inched our way down to the valley with its banks and graveyards and hospitals and churches. The trees rose straight up out of the fog on either side of the road, soaring into the soft mist, disappearing. The long, cathedral arches over the roads were like hollow tubes, their ends stuffed with cotton.

I almost collided with the station wagon. It sat still, squarely in the middle of the road, obscured by drifting fog, and I got out to see what was wrong, for the family had gathered around it in postures of grief and tension. The man, in a black suit, vest, and tie, was down on his knees, examining the underbelly of the car with regret. He raised his head as I approached, nodded first to me and then at the car.

"Didn't mean to hit him. Dog's under there, and the car went over him. He won't come out. Seems wedged. Just ran in front of the car."

I looked beneath his car and saw a black dog. He was on his side, panting heavily, the gray fog puffing from his mouth and rising in steamy clouds from his wet, black fur.

"O God," I said, feeling sick, suddenly, knowing he was hurt, out of reach.

"He ran right in front. Dove into the car. I *tried* to stop."

"How can we get him out?" the man in black said. His family had gathered like rain clouds. His daughter was crying. His son was grim. His wife looked resigned, but she sadly offered the suggestion he'd be put out of his misery, soon. I looked again. He seemed to be suffering and the thought occurred to me that somehow he'd been the cause of all that fog. I was fascinated by this curious thought, almost hypnotically, until he turned his jet black eyes on me. Fixed me with them. There was an intensity in those eyes, begging: *help me!*

"Come on," I said, softly to him. He immediately rolled on his stomach and crawled toward me, pulling himself with his front paws, clawing the earth, pulling his limp hindquarters after him, struggling from beneath the iron thing that had broken him. He turned several times to snap angrily and to growl at his back legs, lying limp and unresponsive, useless, impotent on the earth. I held his head in my hands, feeling the heat and the strain of his muscles. He whined at me a moment, then turned to growl at his legs, confused that they would not work.

"Open the door of my car," I said, scooping his body into my arms.

"Careful," said the man in black. "He may bite you."

"Shit! I told you to *Open the door.*"

It was growing dark when we arrived at the vet's. I carried the dog in and lifted him onto the table.

"He ran under a car," I said as the vet probed the dog's back with his fingers. Suddenly he stopped and turned away.

"Christ!" he said, and pounded the wall angrily with his hand. "His back's broken. It's nothing but splinters in there." He began to fill a syringe.

When we arrived home, the fog had lifted and a full moon bathed the field in white light. Deer were stealthily

picking their way through the cornstalks, feeding. I could see the forest now, behind the field.

Amy turned to me. "What shall we call the baby?"

"Joshua," I said.