

What I Lost in the Storm

The night of the storm I heard my neighbor's pigs screaming, but I didn't do anything. Even though it sounded like babies, I knew it had to be the pigs. But I was warm and dry, and besides, the storm was raging. Water poured from the sky, not rain--rain comes in drops, strings, sheets even, but this, this you couldn't even see, it came so hard.

In the morning the sun came out like a joke and we all gathered on my lawn, which used to slope down to the street. Tom told me that he and Jody had stood in the storm last, couldn't get to the barn because of the creek, now a river, and they had watched until they couldn't watch, until the water covered their boots and Tom dragged Jody back into the house and up to the second floor.

They saved one pig.

Power was out, but we had our cell phones, knew enough to call 911. *What's your emergency?* the woman asked, and I said, "Our town is gone."

That's what was hardest to believe. Things were gone, just gone. The Canfield's car, Tom's lawn tractor, Mike's woodshed, the covered bridge we'd raised our taxes to repair, the street. More.

In the afternoon, the National Guard called with updates. *We're coming*, they said, but they told us that the whole state was a disaster area, that whole regions were cut off, that people were dead, that it might be a while before they could figure out how to reach us. *We're okay*, Mike told them. *We prepared*.

And we had. We had no power, but we had grills and food and beer. There were just over thirty of us, those who lived in the center of town between the creek and the old bridge. We ate and drank. We huddled closer as the sun went down and talked about whether the Guard would arrive by boat or helicopter. We shook our heads, lamented what this would do to the trout. Then we talked about other things, how Carly had just left for college, who the new second grade teacher was, who was going to organize next year's venison dinner. Normal things. Things that filled the night. We put on headlamps, lit candles, kept talking.

After midnight everyone left. It was cold, but I didn't want to go inside. Earlier, Tom had said we should feel lucky. *We're alive, we're safe, our houses are salvageable. It's not New Orleans*, he laughed. *It's Vermont. It's just things we lost*, he said. We raised our glasses, nodded, *Just things*, someone repeated.

Yes. Things.

Eventually, I climbed into my dry bed as if it were a normal late summer night. I told myself what a great community this was, how lucky we were to have good neighbors, how I had done all I could. But before that, I sat on the porch and drank until I couldn't hear the pigs.