

Bad enough that he went to sleep on the couch angry and after too much wine--and bourbon--but now that damned dog. The bark seemed more frantic and harsh than he'd ever heard it, but he attributed this to his hangover, of anger and wine and bourbon.

He brewed on the couch while the dog barked at the door incessantly. He hadn't wanted a dog. She insisted. After they moved up to this wilderness home. It was a move meant to help his work; the isolation, the peace and quiet, the good air. There was isolation, to be sure. The peace was only there outwardly. Inside, between them, the peace molded into a gulf. The quiet invaded from the shade of the forest and chilled their conversations. The good air mocked them.

The dog was meant to give her something to do, some company for her hikes. It seemed like the right thing, she said, living up in the woods, they should have a dog. A big, furry dog. He and the dog kept their distances.

But now the dog was going insane. The dog wouldn't stop. Her dog was punishing him for the things he said the night before. He rolled over onto his back and used his elbows to pull the pillow over his ears but the yapping haranguing came through. One, two, three barks in a second, he counted twice, over two different seconds, and it consisted and it wouldn't end. He jumped off the couch in one movement and stumbled to the door grumbling and opened it and the dog leapt out, leapt two or three more times up the little hill there, into the heavy drizzle that had been a constant for the last two weeks of his life, then turned and was back at the door just as he shut it.

He paused for a moment at the weirdness. Still buzzed, he supposed, and that's why it felt so odd. He turned and took two more staggers, one time having to correct himself from falling

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over, toward the living room but the dog was at the door, now scratching and barking like he'd never heard it before.

Certainly the dog knew it was raining before he bullied to go out. He shook his head and paused again at the frantic barking and scratching, then stopped and thought to pee, then heard a rumble he felt in his toes. It sounded like a semi was thundering on their little road.

But this made no sense either. Trucks that size were not allowed up here on the tiny, winding roads of these thick Oregon forests.

Then he felt the rumble, not under his feet anymore, but in his gut.

The bark faded but was still frantic, then it was back at the door. He went to the door and opened it, but the dog just bounced on his paws. This one then that one, then it would spin in a circle, then this paw then that one, but he wouldn't come in.

He faded, closed his eyes for a moment. While holding the knob he swayed back, because he was still a little drunk and not quite awake.

Then the rumble grew, the loudness and tremor was unmistakable.

"Earthquake!" his wife shouted, standing at the entrance to the living room from the hall.

Earthquake my ass, he thought. What, does she think we're still in California?

He mocked her with a "pshh" sound. Then the dog screeched. He turned from his wife to the door, because he had never heard a sound like that come out of a dog.

Then the snapping of timber. More like cracking. Big cracks and low groans.

He looked at his wife and her feet went under her and her knees buckled, as if she was on a trampoline when someone else jumped on. All the anger, from the night before, was gone. Her mouth opened, her lips soft and loose, as he hadn't seen them in years, and her arms moved up, for balance, but also reached for him. Her face was so beautiful. He looked at her for what seemed like a minute, but what must have been a second, because during that time he also saw, behind her through the window, the earth moving like a frothing sea.

He watched the trees surfing down the hill, mostly upright, but careening backward, then jolting up again with impressive shaking while struggling to keep leaves nearer the sky. He saw a collapsing home, traveling on its way. It was their neighbor's, from above the road. He recognized the yellow trim. The glass of their back patio--where just last night he and his wife had begun their spat that festered there and became so much more vile at home--was snapping; shimmering shards of glass, large and miniscule, flying through the rain.

The river of land widened and neared the kitchen window behind her as he stepped toward. Her eyes were so large and her skin glowed and her mouth opened into a perfect oval and he felt a different kind of rumble when he saw her that way. He watched her hair raise up wild around her head.

She fell, along with that half of the house, into the wash of fluidized earth. The last thing he saw of her was one hand, out of the brown liquid, fingers splayed.

He only dropped an inch and seemed to bounce back, but then it started to go. He lifted a knee, nearly to his chest, then the other, backing away in large cartoonish steps, thinking, "This a dream." He gulped air and backed away faster than he thought possible. The movement seemed supernatural and not of his will. He turned and ran out the door and fell flat on his face into

brown and green mush and began to crawl up the hill as the house peeled away from his feet and fell into the rolling mud and timber beneath.

Neighbors from two or more miles up the road found him wandering and took him to their home. They were the sorts he never met before. The sorts with a goat they milked and chickens in a shed and dogs with ticks they thought were just nature's way. They were kind to him, even let him bring his wife's dog into the house, as he shuffled about without his mind engaged in anything at all.

They let him peel off his mud-clad clothes and gave him dry things to put on his body.

The dog leaned heavily on his knee. He loved it. Warm and living.

The couple seemed to know how to be and what to do. They shook their heads and clucked and brought him warm cider that he held with two hands and they listened to some sort of radio that was personal; that they could talk back to. They told him facts they heard: Six-hundred-foot high land had slid one mile to flat; a second slide might come; a four-year-old buried to his waist was unharmed; a woman found in a car had died of percussion waves.

His wife had not been in a car.

He thought he might have percussion waves. In his head.

They told of bodies. The living found. The woman asked what his wife had been wearing. He heard words, from them and from their radio. Words such as *crushed*, and *entombed*.

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After a landslide the new, raw landscape left behind is called a scarp, he heard. He loved the word. Scarp. It sounded right. It might be used to describe the sounds the dog made. Scarp, scarp, scarp.

“Scarp, scarp, scarp,” he said to the dog, and chuckled. The wife looked at her husband.

“We need to get him down the hill, Johnny.”

He nodded. “I’ll go up and check the timber road.”

The distal end of the landslide. He liked that phrase too. The distal end. That’s where they found his wife. Alive. Broken, but alive.

From a hallway window of the hospital in the valley, he looked up to where there once was a house that they both lived in. Now just a cut into the earth, as if a massive ice cream scoop had taken it out, exposing the glacial silt. The rain kept coming for those two weeks before and it saturated the land, a steady dripping, building groundwater pressure. The soil loses its cohesive strength when that happens, they say.

Loses its cohesive strength.

It hadn’t been raining hard, just a constant, heavy drizzle for weeks. The drip, drip, drizzle worked the hill and everything came loose.

He went back into his wife’s room and climbed onto her bed. She was warm now and he would never forget her eyes from the moment before it all fell. He would never forget her eyes wide, her mouth oval. He would never forget it again.

Together they watched the evening news. They learned of slides from centuries before and how the regrowth of vegetation hid the violent history of the past. There was just a recent event. Another event, one of many, furthering the leveling of the topography. A slow leveling. He drifted off to sleep.

He awoke and eased out of the stiff bed. He left the room quietly and went downstairs for coffee. When he exited the elevator to return to her room, carrying two steaming cups, sunlight squinted his eyes. He stopped again at the window of the fourth floor and watched as a warm gold crept over the valley, sharpening shadows. He had not seen a shadow in weeks.

This time, he did not look up to the scarp. He looked down to the buildings and trees and bushes and posts and poles of the town and the shadows they threw. All sharp and clear, the fuzzy edges of drizzle wiped clean.

He traced the river that ran through the valley. It had changed course amidst the debris of the distal end of the slide. It looked as though it had always run that way. He knew it had changed course. It conformed to the new landscape and continued on, making its way, peacefully, quietly, without a fight, through the aftermath.