

Pasture, Stubble, Shoulder of the Highway

KATHRYN SCHWILLE

She was a bit of a free spirit, his wife. Not your run-of-the-mill preacher's mate. Pastor Will Simpson knew his congregation, some of them, at least, thought Holly MacFarland and her long, wild hair had brushed against the devil's ways. Her first husband had turned out to be gay. Also, there was her yoga studio, a shady bit of spiritual business. The members of Spring Creek Baptist might have chosen differently for the second wife of Pastor Simpson, but he loved her with all his heart.

Holly had closed her yoga studio—Kiser could not support it—but a little group of them still met on Saturdays, here at the house. Soon they would be coming up the walk in their flowing tops and unfettered pants. Simpson still had tomorrow's sermon to write, and the women would now take over the den, which had the most floor space and also his favorite chair. He'd typed a few words from Job on his laptop screen: *His wealth will become hunger*. Thanksgiving was next week.

Simpson had married Holly on the rebound, his critics would say, two years after her divorce. She had come into the marriage with a large, stubborn pony and a smart but troubled boy. It seemed to Simpson that he'd spent his whole short marriage trying to connect with the child. He loved Frankie but was relieved when, after totaling Holly's car in a wreck a year ago—the day after Thanksgiving—Frankie had moved to Houston to live with his father. That left Simpson and Holly with most of this year to themselves. He'd expected it to be different.

The pony was still with them and Simpson could see him from the den window, staring at his pasture when he should have been eating from it. Drought had brought Texas to its knees; the fields were devoid of grass. There was no hay anywhere in the state, a drought like this not seen since the '50s. Rosco's new diet was all processed, too expensive by far, and still he was chewing on the fence posts.

Holly came into the room and spread out her yoga mat. Simpson helped her move the coffee table to a corner. "I'm sorry, honey," she said. "You mind going in the kitchen?"

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