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ONE EVENING

THE BLEEDING STRANGER touches my shoulder and points to the television.

"Look," he says.

My living room is dark, except for the TV, and in the electric-blue glow the man is a flickering patchwork of blood and clothes and pallid skin. His left arm is missing. He keeps pointing, with his right hand of course, and I cannot help but wonder if he is a natural righty.

I turn to the television to see a gray-haired, pale-eyed old man telling us to repent. It is too late, he says, the end is here, it is much, much too late, but still you must repent. Patchy gray stubble sprouts from the few pores of the old man’s cheeks that aren’t scarred by some ancient acne. We have already caused so many storms and earthquakes and killed so many
hundreds of thousands of people, he says, because we are so little like Jesus.

I begin to think that maybe this man, this bleeding stranger in my house, is an angel—heaven sent as part of some aggressive new “scared righteous” campaign. Why else would he have me listen to this guy?

The preaching man on the television gets louder. Hurricanes have been sent by God, he says, because we search for pleasure in the creases of each other’s thighs. He doesn’t say it exactly like that, but I know he wants to. I also know he isn’t Jesus. I don’t think Jesus had scars like that.

I turn to the stranger still standing beside me and shrug.

“Not him.” He points instead to the bottom
of the screen, to the news ticker and the words scrolling by.

. . . STRONG WINDS IN SOUTHERN UT BLAMED FOR DEATH OF NV MAN WHEN HIS VEHICLE WAS BLOWN FROM INTERSTATE-15 . . . NO FURTHER INJURIES REPORTED . . .

"I'm a news story," he says.

"I'm sorry."

The man shrugs and lifts the dark, pulpy stump that was once his left arm. "It happens."

"Not too often, I hope."

"No, I guess not—not like this. But there are so many ways to die."

The man walks from my living room up the step into the kitchen and starts thumbing through the morning paper scattered there on the table. In the low light I see he is a young man, in his early thirties maybe, with clean, dark hair and a pleasing face—the kind of guy you might nod at while passing on the sidewalk just because he seems decent. He looks athletic, rugged almost, but that could just be the gash that runs the line of his right cheekbone. He continues thumbing through the paper and pays no attention to the blood that drips thick and pools deep and red, almost black, in the grout of my kitchen tiles.
"I have three kids," he says, finally. "I have an ex-wife and still-living parents."

"I am truly sorry."

"I believe you."

On the television the preaching man has been cut short for a sponsor break—something about a new pill that lasts longer, up to thirty-six hours, allows you to choose when the moment is right. The stranger walks back down into the living room and stands staring beside me at the television. Programming resumes, and his banner scrolls by again.

Nothing has changed.

"It doesn't make any sense," the stranger says. "It doesn't even say my name. There's nothing about my family or even my job. It doesn't even say what the hell kind of car it was."

I stay quiet. Am I one who would be curious about what kind of car it was? I might be, but only so I can remember never to get one—because I, too, have kids of my own. Maybe I'm just curious.

"It was an old Volkswagen bus," he says.

"That doesn't matter now."

The stranger shrugs, "I just never wanted to share my death with so many strangers."