

## Fawns

Last fall, fawns dropped dead all over Colorado. It's common for a fawn to die before winter. But when my husband Bill came home for supper, he told me of farmers finding healthy fawns scattered dead along their property. No bite marks, no scratches. No blood. Just decided to lie down and die.

The wildlife department scoured thickets for tagged doe they kept track of every season. But fawns, small and camouflaged, were hard to see. Bill hadn't sighted any dead in our fields but knew of another farm nearby miles off that had three turn up in one week.

Now early spring rain stroked the porch, lit by gray and violet clouds. It would be daylight soon. Wooden wind chimes carried hollow tones through the air. Hands in his pockets near our porch steps, Bill stayed where he was. He wore his soft-shell jacket and jeans stained with dirt from yesterday's work.

"Did they ever find out about those deer?" I asked.

A rocking chair next to him began to rock endlessly, absently, but he didn't stop it. He didn't do anything but let the wind whip open his jacket. I wrapped my bathrobe tighter around my body. I leaned my head on the screen door's frame.

"What deer?" Bill paused and then glanced at me, the wrinkles around his mouth more prominent. "You mean the fawns last year?"

Fractured mountain peaks jutted up behind a solitary barn, their white-tipped edges hidden by subtle darkness.

"Disease, they think," he finally said.

I nodded, looked at the rocking chair, still moving back and forth. "I tried to save one. I didn't know it was already dead."

"You saw one *here*?" He stared at me intently now. I looked at his green eyes, same as mine, but brighter.

I pulled on my bathrobe sleeves, careful not to catch the gauze Bill had taped to my wrists the night before.

I said, "I was walking out past the coop, saw something speckled white. I found it hunched between two fence posts. I ran to the house, grabbed milk and a sheet and came back. You were gone. Its eyes. They were covered with a white film. The fawn didn't move when I reached out to touch its leg."

Bill let out a sigh. "It's about knowing what you can and can't do for each other," he said.

Light was breaking.

I continued, "I left it there. Was thinking about going back and burying it, doing something for it, but didn't."

Bill leaned forward, took his hands out of his pockets, and placed one hand on the peeling porch railing.

"Beth," he said, slightly turned toward me, slightly toward the land. "Did you really want to die?"

"Couldn't," I said.

Bill didn't move.

"What?" he said.

The earth smelled heavy.

"Tell me I wasn't wrong," I said.

He didn't say anything.

I was colder than I was before. I opened the screen door and walked inside.