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Some aspects of our marriage are the best they have ever been. The regular sex stopped long ago but the financial, family and social aspects have filled the space. Inertia keeps us in the same bed at night.

We are both unusually querulous this morning. The questions flow.
Why do you half cook my toast?
How will we pay the power bill?
Who was it that turned your face red with a text message last night?

The warning signs had been evident for days. 'Showers and storms' said the three-day forecast. 'A thunderstorm warning' said the radio this morning. And there is the evidence of my own eyes: I know that in this country, Cumulonimbus at 9.00 a.m. is an ominous sight.

I leave without even our usual tired kiss goodbye. I am angry without true rancour. We agree to talk more that night. For now I just want to get in that car and go.

I drive the old red Holden hard and fast down the valley, past the vineyards, horse yards, car yards and back yards on the road to the city. Work is not my preferred destination today. I really want to sort things out between us. I go over in my head, scene after scene of dialogue, some of it from our past, some of it what I imagine will be spoken tonight. More than anything I just want to find the right words to make it all turn around. But all the synonyms for forgiveness are replaced by the ones for anger and destruction.

Again the radio gives a long irritating crackle as lightning streaks across the sky. Pale light among black clouds and the dank smell of rain is on the wind! At the end of the valley flows the great western highway. To the left—the city with its clients, colleagues and coppers; to the right—the great open plains stretching on and on to the gulf. I am usually so distracted by my thoughts that I automatically take the slip turn left towards the city. But now the dark and brooding clouds over the CBD towers seem to direct me to the right, towards the unknown.

As if in a dream I drive on and away from normality. In this thrall of deep despair I almost fail to see the sheet of roofing iron fluttering butterfly like towards me. Where

had it come from, falling out of a clear blue sky? I use all of my skills to avoid its smothering intent and as I skid into the boggy table drain I notice for the first time the densely opaque purple/black storm cell no more than a couple of miles to the west with its twisting stalk bumping along the ground like an elephant trunk in a stampede. I flatten the accelerator and the engine pops and wheezes but fails to get me out of the bog. As the engine splutters under a shower of mud and grass I understand that I am in shit deeper than even the table drain can throw up. I stay in the car, old and rusty as it is, and I hope that it will withstand nature's worst and keep me, womb-like, from harm.

All my life I have secretly longed for a storm to come and sweep away the detritus of my life leaving me prostrate and detumescent. I have often envied the uninjured victims of cyclones, hurricanes and tornadoes believing that they must somehow have been blessed by the gods. A *tabula rasa*, a blank slate, a clean sweep—aren't these desirable metaphors?

I can hear the storm's noise as of a great wind, yet all around me everything remains unmoved. The sound grows in shrillness and the elephant trunk rises and passes on with a great roar and clatter of sticks. The car bumps and wobbles. It threatens to transform itself phoenix-like into a great metal bird, but old age and inertia keep it and me well-grounded. As the wind and noise buffets us both, the rain comes on; falling in great sheets. It sweeps off the road and crunches onto the car in wave after wave. I'm shaking, waiting for the storm to abate, hoping not to drown in nature's hot tears.

It seems an age, but the wind does die, the rain does slow and suddenly the sun shines. It is over. I burst from the car, tears stinging my eyes and just as quickly evaporating in the surprising heat of true midday. I sob and shake there on the side of the road to somewhere.

After the tears, as with the storm, a great peace settles upon me. I pass the time waiting for rescue in blissful warmth. I don't even feel the need to try out my lines.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Stephen Rodgers.