

CHANGING SWEATERS

Chapter 1: The Cast-off Sweater

Life really *can* turn on a dime.

Fareway had a coupon sale on thick-cut pork chops—now known as Iowa chops—their favorite. Ten cents off, so 39c a pound. They went to the store after school and her father, ever the math teacher, had her figure the percentage off the regular price. Easy, nearly 20%. She was experimenting with the wing window of their newish Ford, adjusting the angle and surfing the chilly air current with her mittened hand, idly wondering when her father would tell her to quit letting all the cold air in. The breeze ceased when they stopped at the light for the turn to Fareway.

Her eyes lingered near the triangular little window and strayed to the rectangular passengers-side rearview mirror, still a novelty. It was marked “Objects in the mirror are closer than they appear.” The object in the mirror was a mammoth Mack truck and it was *close*. And still moving, looming ever larger and more inevitable.

She thought the truck would hit their car until it veered into the empty lane beside them. In her relief, she cranked down the window and stuck her fisted hand out. She gave the truck driver a quick double arm pump, the universal gesture for “honk!” He hit his air horn, not with the usual two toots, but with a prolonged blast that was deafening.

The cab was close enough she could see the driver. He was clearly struggling, his face furrowed with concentration and creeping panic, his eyes wide and skittering, his movements fast and frantic. The blaring truck was into the intersection when she saw its trailer angled behind it, swinging almost sideways behind them. “Daddy!” she shrieked in a shameful little-girl voice, though she was almost eleven. Never mind, they needed to *go*, run the red light and get away from the jackknifing semi. Didn’t he see that? His hand wasn’t even on the gear shift!