Without Allen around, the house was quiet. Janice busied herself keeping things clean in a way that she never had when he had been there. Perhaps there was a part of her that hoped he would come back; or that believed it had been her sloppiness that had caused him to leave in the first place. Whatever it was, all who knew her well couldn’t help but think that this new habit of neatness was a change for the better.

There was as scuffle on the deck, and then one of the dogs started barking, that high-pitched, relentless, “Yap! Yap! Yap!” that made me want to scream. I didn’t even have to go out there. I knew they had seen a lizard.

It was impossible to get any sleep. First the garbage truck was outside clanking and wheezing at 5 in the morning. Then the fire alarm went off down the road followed by ten solid minutes of emergency vehicles with sirens blaring. And finally there was Jim’s mother in the kitchen, banging pots and pans around while she made the breakfast, as though there wasn’t a soul trying to sleep within ten miles of her.