

# THE FALLS by Colleen McMillan

## EXCERPT

When they reach the paddock, the gate is open, ripped apart. Boards lay shredded on the ground, splinters everywhere. It looks as though a tornado tore through, demolishing the wood. The ground is destroyed as well, mud and grass everywhere.

They get out of the truck, and the smell hits Charlie like a hammer. Alpacas are very clean animals, and their manure is not as pungent as other livestock, but the scent of twenty animals all emptying their bowels at once will knock a person flat. There is also a whiff of metal in the air, like copper or iron. Charlie runs through the decimated gate.

Flies buzz around the paddock, their wings beating a rhythm in Charlie's head. The insects settle on the bodies, feeding in clusters. They swarm, forming vaguely alpaca-shaped lumps so the animal fur looks black.

They are scattered around the paddock, but Charlie isn't sure if all twenty bodies are there. The ground is stained dark red with pools of blood. Limbs are scattered, as if each animal exploded. Some of their necks are twisted completely around, and bowels litter the area. Something tore each of their bellies open and spread the organs; half-digested hay and grass steam in piles near some of the bodies. Charlie has a horrible thought of nightmarish pinatas spilling morbid candy.

He walks into the paddock toward the nearest body, pinkish white and brown. He thinks it might have been the pregnant one. Her eyes have been removed, and her tongue dangles from an open mouth. Her body is shredded, and Charlie has a view inside her torso, but there is no baby. He leans closer and touches her leg near the hoof. She is cold. The blood is sticky, and he tries to wipe it on his jeans, but the maroon color spreads.

He takes a step back, leans over, and pukes.

Jemma runs over to rub his back, and when he's thrown up everything from his stomach, Charlie screams.