

Worried

She pulled his shirt tighter around her as she looked out the window. It should have been dark out, but she saw only sheets of white as the snow continued to pelt down. Fat, white flakes obscured the yellow moon, and even though she was inside the warmth of their bedroom, the sight made her colder.

She was tired.

A warm bath hadn't helped to relax her a bit. The warmth of the down comforter hadn't helped her sleep as she lay down in their bed. And pulling on one of his shirts hadn't made him feel any closer to her.

She wanted to sleep, but couldn't without him. Too much worry – she was scared.

Where was he?

Why hadn't he called?

She turned at the familiar jangling of Arthur's collar, and watched through the darkness as their Bassett Hound wandered up to her and deposited himself near her bare feet. As if he understood the situation entirely, his big brown eyes focused out the window as well.

"I don't suppose you know where he is?" She asked no one in particular.

Arthur's eyes turned to her, so she looked down at him.

"You miss him too, don't you?" She asked. She bent down and rubbed his ears, but he still looked sad. "Don't worry. They'll find him."

Someone has to find him.

She stood straight again, waiting for the headlights of his truck to come around the corner and pull into the drive. She knew for him to be this late, for him not to call, he must be hurt, or, somewhere that he couldn't or... He'd never do this to her. Something was wrong.

She folded her arms tighter, and stared at the moon with all her might. That was what it would take – that was how she would hold back the tears and not cry. Even as tears rolled down her cheeks and her nose got all snuffly, she stared into the moon and then closed her eyes.

I'm not going to cry for him, 'cause he's just late. That's all... He's just late.

Where was he???

With a free hand, he reached down and keyed the radio, “KMG 365 truck thirteen to base.”

A scratchy reply came back over the radio speaker, “Thirteen Go.”

“Did you happen to call my wife?” He asked.

“We tried, thirteen,” his boss’ voice said over the speaker. “It looks like the phone lines are down. How are you coming?”

“It’s not good,” he said back into the microphone. “I’ve got the truck all chained up, so I should make it – it’ll just take a bit.”

“How far out are you?” The boss asked.

“About thirty minutes,” He said. “Channel clear.”

“Clear,” Said the voice over the radio.

He watched the road carefully, and kept his speed at a solid twenty miles per hour, but his mind wandered home. He almost always worked late, but he was about three hours past when he should have been home under the worst of circumstances. His cell phone battery had died long ago, so calling to let her know what was going on was impossible, but...

He knew she’d be scared for him.

The lights of town were starting to show up in the distance, as even through the snow it made a bright spot on the horizon. He thought about slowing down a bit more, but his truck would stop easily enough with the chains on.

He’d be all right.

He glanced ahead and saw the first traffic light turn from red to green. He’d have plenty of time to get through the intersection before...

The world ended...

There was a lightning flash of a pickup sliding through a red light of the intersection toward him, and the realization that it would hit his truck right at the driver’s side door panel. There was a jolt of pain from the impact.

And there was darkness...

She sat curled up in the rocking chair, knees pressed against her chest with an afghan around her. Arthur held up his end of the vigil, sleeping peacefully at the base of her chair. Her eyes hurt from staying open so long, but still she watched out the window.

The next set of headlights would be his.

The thoughts didn't exactly calm her, but she thought about all the things they had left to do together. Children, and growing old, and traveling, and retiring, and sitting on the front porch and watching sunsets, and...

As her eyes finally settled shut, she knew only one thing...

The next set of headlights would be his.

She woke to the sound of Arthur tearing out of the room and toward the front door, and knew instantly that someone was pulling into the yard. Her heart was beating like a hammer as she sprang to look out the window, and it stopped just as abruptly when she saw the vehicle parked in front of their house.

It's the County Sheriff. They're here to tell me he's hurt, or...

She closed her eyes, looked for strength, found none, but pulled his shirt tighter around her and walked downstairs. Arthur waited by the door, perched on his haunches.

Her heart clamped down even tighter.

There was nothing in her world – only the doorknob, and the news that whoever was beyond it was bringing to her. She switched on the front light, opened the door, and cast about through the darkness and snow to find the Sheriff.

And forgotten was the fact that she wore only underwear and his shirt. Forgotten were her bare feet as she ran down the front walk through the snow. Forgotten were her tears as he wrapped her in his arms and squeezed her tight. Forgotten were her worries as the Sheriff's pickup backed out of the yard and went on its way.

"I was so scared," she said, still locked in his embrace.

"I was scared too," he said and nuzzled her cheek. A moment went by before he added, "Come on, let's get you inside."

She tip-toed through the snow, holding his hand. "What happened? Are you okay?"

"I am now."

