

Blood

by Kerry Michael Soileau

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Joe the Barber felt the familiar dead weight of the unconscious. The smell of chloroform was strong, even in the cold, windy hospital parking lot. As the woman collapsed, he got a good hold on her limp body and using his free hand, opened the passenger door of the rental and eased her in. Once he seated her, her head lolled back between the headrest and the closed window, Joe took a furtive look around the poorly-lit hospital parking lot. No witnesses in sight. This one-horse burg probably didn't have any camera surveillance, he thought. So far, so good.

Joe tossed the chloroformed handkerchief, knowing from experience that once it was found, all traces of the chloroform would be gone. Just a handkerchief. He got behind the wheel and soon was heading out on the dark country road.

Joe headed north, as planned. As he drove the road began to slope upward noticeably; about ten miles up, there would be a nice deep ravine. As he drove, he noticed an occasional patch of ice, and more than once had to react quickly to keep the car on the road.

"Unnnnnnnnnhhhh."

She's coming to, he thought. Joe looked over at her. Her eyes were still closed, but she was moving her head a little from side to side. He reached into his coat pocket and drew out a switchblade. With a quick, practiced motion, he had the blade out and ready to cut. He reached over and tapped the nurse on the shoulder with the flat face of the blade.

"Sit up."

Her eyes fluttered open and she moved with a start. "What...who...what's going...on?"

"No questions." Joe turned back to watch the road. The icy patches were becoming more frequent. "Hope you enjoyed your Miami vacation."

"H'how did you know about that?"

"It's my job to know. See anything interesting? Like a guy gettin' shot?"

The nurse was quiet for a few seconds. "Yes."

"Well, that's what's goin' on."

A deer suddenly came into view, standing in the middle of the road. Joe swerved, trying to get around the deer, but his Miami driving skills failed him. The car fishtailed into a tree. A loud crunching bang and that was all.

Though Joe's eyes were closed, the smell as he regained consciousness told him immediately that he was in a hospital. He opened his eyes. His head pounded and lightning bolts of pain shot through his body as he gingerly tried to move an arm. Though he was under a heavy blanket, he felt cold. Really cold. Colder than he'd ever felt before. Though the room had the usual illumination, it seemed strangely dark. Brighter, darker and then brighter again. Finally the room darkened, darkened, darkened until all was black.

"One of our cruisers found him out on 288 on the shoulder." The state trooper sipped coffee as he told the doctor what he knew. "At first we couldn't figure out what happened to him. He was really banged up and we could see he'd lost a lot of blood. At first we thought he'd been beaten almost to death and then tossed out onto the road. Then we saw the fresh skid marks on the road behind him. Looks like he tried to brake, lost control and was thrown out. We spotted the car at the bottom of the ravine."

"Anybody found in the car?"

"We don't know. Anyways, nobody in the car could've survived a drop like that. It's too dark and icy to climb down tonight, so it'll be hauled out tomorrow morning."

The warning tone of a flatline interrupted the conference.

"There he goes," the doctor said grimly.

"Hey, aren't you going to see if you can revive him?"

"Not a chance. He lost too much blood, and we don't have his rare type in this hospital. Maybe in the big city they stock it, but not here. We have one local donor with the right type, but for some reason, she never reported for her evening shift."