

STOPPING BY WOODS

"It is snowing pretty heavily, and it is quite windy as well as cold," I think as Marg and I drive along the highway. Marg is my best friend. She is tall, 5'8" with auburn hair and very fair skin. We met in nursing school. She and her husband Roy were married two years ago and now are expecting their first baby in about three weeks. It is mid February and there is another big storm predicted tonight. Last week we got 30 inches of snow and then freezing rain. As we turn off the highway onto the gravel road, the car skids a little on the ice.

"There is still some ice from the freezing rain last week. The tracks from the big truck are difficult to follow. It looks like the storm is coming earlier than predicted," Marg says a little nervously. We are in Marg's old white Austin Mini. We have two bags of horse grain in the trunk for traction, but I am not sure they are doing much good. There are drifts across the road now. Last year Marg and Roy bought an old farmhouse and a couple of hundred acres, two dozen cattle, and six Appaloosas, their favorite breed of horses. The farm is about three miles off the highway down a winding country lane. As we drive along, I can barely see the fence lines out in the hay fields. The snow covers most of the posts. In some spots, the plowed up banks are about six feet high. We creep along. There are now about six inches of snow on the road and several more where it is drifting. The car drags, struggling to get through the drifts. As we go around the last corner about a half a mile from the farm, right across the road we encounter a wall of snow about two feet high. We cannot push through this one. We realize we have been slowly going into the storm which is now a whiteout blizzard. As the wind howls around the car, we plan our next move. Marg is eight months pregnant and huge. Even with her long legs she will not be able to struggle through the drifts to the closest farm about a quarter of a mile away. I am short and about one hundred pounds. The wind and snow would do us both in.

"We have to wait. Roy will come when we don't get home on time," Marg manages to say with false cheerfulness. It is almost dusk. We turn the radio on loud and sing along. About twenty minutes later, the car motor stops. We are out of gas. Now I am getting nervous.

"Roy should be here by now. I always arrive home on time," she says with panic in her voice.

"I think we should try to walk back to the bus shack that I saw at the Blanche farm. We will take some things from your EM kit and just wait there until someone comes," I say, trying to calm her nerves.

In rural Canada where there are school-aged children, there usually is a little building shaped like a guardhouse with a pitched roof called a bus shack. Most shacks have just three sides to shelter against the weather while the children wait for the bus. Occasionally there is a door with a window. "The one I saw has a door," I add. Also most people have EM kits. These contain survival gear like clothes, flashlights, woolen blankets, and dry energizing food like trail mix, peanut butter, crackers, and a small block of honeycomb in a jar. There are also several items like wax-tipped matches, kindling, ski poles, snowshoes, and a compass. In the back seat, Marg actually has two snowmobile suits as well.

"You put mine on and I'll try to fit into Roy's " she says. Roy is a large man and she will fit into his. I think she can do it. I crawl into the back seat to gather the food from the EM kit, remove my unsuitable coat, then squirm my way into her heavy -40-below proof suit. I don an extra pair of woolen socks and find I still have room in my sores to wiggle my toes. "That's good," I think. Before I zip up, I manage to stuff the food into the inside pockets and a flashlight into my left outside pocket. I hand another one to Marg. Then comes the ski hat that covers my face. I wrap my long scarf around the furry hood, then around again and across my chin. Marg has somehow managed to shift over to the passenger side and is now similarly dressed to fight off the chill of the storm.

"Well then, I'll leave a note for Roy. Let's go. We only have about five hundred feet to get back to the bus shack. We can make it," Marg bravely says.

"If we are lucky" I think to myself." I know that we cannot stay in the car and that if the Blanches come home, they will find us in the shack.

We open the car doors to a terrible storm. Snowshoes would not be helpful with these drifts, but we take the ski poles. With Marge urging me forward through the drifting snow, I slowly track back around the corner and down the road--I think it's the road. I am in between the telephone poles. I am falling over, shoving snow, trying to break a path so Marg can get through the drifts more easily. I can vaguely see a row of poles off to the right so the bus shack must be near.

"I see it.Over there on the left," Marg yells. I struggle over to it, dig the snow away from the door, and we both stumble in. I quickly close the door. Marg looks at me and starts to laugh. So do I. We are hysterical. We look so funny.

"Hope you don't have to pee any time soon," I jokingly say. Being so far along, Marg has to stop at every place available. It is the joke of the month.

"Now we sit and wait. We have food and light which we will use sparingly. We can see if any headlights come up the road. There probably will be a snowplow truck and Roy will come soon," I say, trying to keep her calm. We sit, get up, move our positions, and wait and wait and wait. The temperature is cold, but the suits keep us both comfortable. We eat some trail mix for energy. "Did you hear that?" Marg shouts.

"There is something coming. It sounds like a bombardier fairly close by. I shine a flashlight out the window towards the road. "Maybe they will see us," I tell her excitedly. Then I hear another sound coming from the other direction. Both sounds stop near the road. Then they come over to the bus shack, dig out the door again, and pull it open. There is Roy. I do not think I have ever been happier to see anyone. His cousin Tommy is with him.

"The snowplow is coming right now. Marg will ride in it. We will be able to get back to Dad's place in a few minutes. Would you ride on the back of Tommy's snowmobile Merry?" asks Roy.

Would I? Of course I would.