

An Un-Fairy Tale

By J. Michael Squatrito, Jr.

Pain. My shoulder's shattered. A deep, stabbing ache in my side. The dome light's on, the horn blaring in an otherwise silent forest setting. Blood. My head's pounding, my forehead's warm. The airbag's pressed against my chest, the windshield smashed, there's a pungent smell of fuel, and the hiss of steam. What happened? A deer. In the middle of the road. I swerve, going too fast, blow through the guardrail. A fucking deer. Rolling, down the embankment, two, three times. The car settles on its punctured wheels. Trees weep with fresh wounds, their limbs twisted and torn, bark scraped from their trunks.

I look to my right. My wife, the airbag pinning her, blonde hair stained red, not moving. Is she breathing? I lean over to investigate but sharp pains shoot from my shoulder and deep within my abdomen. I gasp. I try again. The pain almost knocks me out cold. I'm still secured to my seat, the seatbelt doing its job. I must get to her. I unclip the buckle from its captor, my body's free. Pivoting to my left, I fumble for the door handle. More agony. Excruciating, but she needs me. I summon my inner strength, push away the pain, flip the latch, and open the door.

I'm outside the car. I hear voices above, people shouting from the road. Red and blue flashes, screeching tires. I lumber around the car and open the passenger side door. She's not moving. Her petite body lies motionless. I know every inch of that body, having been one flesh countless times. My wife, my lover, my soulmate, the mother of our babies.

Our babies! I squint into the backseat. Empty car seats. They're safe at home with Grammy and Pops. It's date night. The deer. *The fucking deer!* I need to save her, to look into her blue eyes again. Pain! I can hardly stand. I lean closer, I can't see her chest rising. I place my ear next to her mouth. I feel shallow breaths! The whir of helicopter

blades pierce the serene landscape. A focused spotlight shines from above. A point of light. Don't go to that light! It's the wrong one!

I strain to see her beautiful face, assess her wounds. A gash on her forehead, warm blood, trickling down her cheek. Tears form in my eyes and roll down my face. I must save her, get her to see her babies one more time. She lays so still, a princess awaiting her prince. I lean even closer and press my lips to hers. Prince charming has arrived. I taste her blood or is that mine? My head's swooning, the pain almost succeeding in overtaking my adrenalin rush. I remove my lips. She stirs. Jesus, you've saved so many other unworthy souls, save hers! Take me, let her live to see her children, she doesn't deserve this. I hope my prayer reaches my savior. My faith says it will.

Her eyes flutter, then open. Indigo pools widen as she begins to fathom her situation. Tears flow as the pain sets in. She's alive!

"Harrison?" she says through sobs.

"Tara."

Thrashing from the embankment, the hovering chopper, the first responders rushing to the scene. I drop to one knee, exhausted, my damaged shoulder screams with anguish, my side's in agony. My head swoons. Shards of flashlight beams flood the area. A hand on my good shoulder, a paramedic has arrived. She's going to make it! Then, all goes black.