

# FROM THE Heart



## Stories of Love, Loss, & Life

Celebrating 100 Years  
of Liguorian Fiction

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# Introduction

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**F**iction gives us permission to look under the hood, so to speak, at the gears, belts, hoses, and fluids of the motor that constitutes the human condition. And it's dirty under there...oil leaks (jealousy), the rumble of worn-out bearings (pride), too little radiator coolant (anger). But that's who we are, a jumble of emotions and thoughts that get connected through chemicals, neurons, muscles, bones, and whatnot. And all eventually leaks out in what we say and do. It's not always such a pretty thing, life.

If we're scared to examine ourselves (and face it, we all are) then the next best thing is to look at the lives of others. How do they react to stress? How do they make decisions? What are their values—do they have values? How do they respond when pushed to change? Who are the men and women who influence them? What is their passion? By looking at others' lives there's a chance we'll see something of ourselves, and in so doing we can see how they have grown as people and we can learn from them.

Reading is one of the most common ways to plunge into the world of another person. To read is to admit that we don't know a lot about what makes me who I am or what life is and I can only get the answer by going outside myself and getting into the lives of others. They can tell me what's most important to them, and while listening to them I can learn something about myself and what's most true for me.

Fiction is an imaginative trip, sometimes brief and sometimes extended, into a character's life. We read about plans that fail to blossom, loves that begin and fade away, children who dishonor their parents and parents who have never grown up. But we get the other side, too: lives broken yet blessed, the bonds of love that overcome selfishness, children who manage to make it through life, and so forth. Some fiction is escapist; other fiction is true even if the events never happened.

For a century, *Liguorian* magazine has contained fiction, and its

readers have regularly written to the editors commenting on the pieces and asking that *Liguorian* continue to publish fiction. It's clearly meeting a need. I like to suppose that readers value the fiction because it gives them a glimpse of God's grace at work. And with God's grace present in creation, we can hold close the belief that while the human condition is messy, it's also blessed. We are the characters—broken and blessed, strong and weak, saints and sinners, in the story of salvation that is being written today.

ERIN CARTAYA

ACQUISITIONS EDITOR

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FEAST OF OUR MOTHER OF PERPETUAL HELP

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# THE Miracle OF LOVE

Biblical Parallels of Jesus' Love,  
the Mystery of Love,  
Love From Above-Guardian Angels



## Stay for Dinner

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Father Matthew Powell, OP (July-August 2011)

"What did he say?" asked the man with a reddish beard. "I can barely hear him back here."

"If we had come early like I wanted, we would have been able to sit in the front," said the woman beside him, who apparently was his wife. "I had work to do. A man can't just up and leave his farm whenever he wants. Cows won't milk themselves," the bearded husband retorted. "I wish he would speak louder," he continued.

The husband had made the long, hot trip to humor his wife who, according to him, chased after every preacher, faith healer, and would-be prophet in the country looking for an easier and more exotic way to God. As for him, he expected nothing from this preacher or any of the others. He was just content if God did not interfere in his life. "I liked the preacher we heard last month; he played music," the wife reminisced. Her husband's mind was elsewhere. "We've been sitting here for hours. My behind hurts," he complained. "Oh, be quiet," his wife snapped.

"If you two would quit talking, we might be able to hear him," commented a bald man sitting next to them with his hand cupped behind his ear. The husband countered with, "Who made you the Emperor Caesar?"

“Please,” uttered the bald man. “If you don’t mind, I’d like to hear what he has to say. This one is at least interesting, even if he does need to be more open-minded.” “Ah, all these preachers remind me of drums; they can make a lot of noise, but they can’t do anything else,” came back the husband. The bald man had traveled here to get away from his annoying wife, but now, after hearing what the preacher said about divorce, he regretted the journey.

“Well, he stopped talking now, anyway.” The words came from a stout woman sitting just in front of them. She gave them both a scowl. She had heard entertaining stories about this preacher and, bored with finding fault with the servants at home, came here looking for some excitement. So far she was disappointed. “He seems to be saying something to his assistants now,” she informed the others. “Ask those people in front of you if they can hear what he’s saying,” the bald man said.

The stout woman leaned over and shouted to someone she seemed to be familiar with who was seated a few rows in front of her. “Judith, Judith! It’s me, Elizabeth. Can you hear what they’re saying?” “Something about food,” Judith yelled back.

“That’s the best thing I’ve heard all day,” the husband stated. “I’m hungry. I haven’t had a thing since early this morning.”

“It’s a long trip into town to get food, we’d better get started,” his wife warned.

“I don’t think I can last that long. I wanted to pack some food, but you were in such a rush to get here,” the husband replied.

“I wish I had brought one of my servants with me; I could send her into town for food,” the stout woman whined. “I’m famished,” she went on: “I could eat half of a goat right now.” The husband whispered to his wife, “I’ll bet she could.” The bald man then noticed babies crying who had been mute when the preacher was speaking. The infants now raised their voices in a noisy chorus as if a silence order had been lifted.

Suddenly the stout woman exclaimed, “Oh, my goodness. I smell smoked fish!” “So do I,” the husband affirmed. They all looked in the direction of the smell and saw a boy about nine years old they hadn’t noticed before. Their view of him had been blocked by the adults around him, but now their eyes fixed on the child. The thin boy with large eyes the color of chestnuts had just opened a basket at his side.

The four adults peered into the basket and beheld fish and loaves of bread. Distracted from the food for a moment, the boy gazed around in amazement. His entire village was not half as large as the crowd here.

"That's an awfully big dinner for a boy as small as you," the bald man observed.

"My mother always gives me too much food, but today I asked her to pack extra in case there were people here with nothing to eat," the boy explained. The others grinned. "That was very generous of you, little boy," the wife commented, eyeing the bread and fish. "Is your mother sitting nearby?"

"No, I came by myself," the boy answered. "My mother has to care for my baby brother and sister, and my father is working in his shop, so I had to come alone." "A boy your age shouldn't be traveling alone," the wife remarked. "No, no. I had to come to hear the Teacher. I had heard so much about him. I am happy that I came. His words are from God," the boy related.

The bald man disagreed; "Words come easy, boy; when you get older you'll realize that it's deeds that count." The wife interjected, "On the contrary, I thought his sermon was too practical. I was hoping for something more mystical, more mysterious. I heard a seer last year who was so spiritual I didn't understand a word he said." The husband broke in, "Can we get back to my stomach." Trying to flatter the boy, he added, "That bread and fish sure do look delicious. Your mother must be a very good cook." "Why don't you share your food with us, little boy," the bald man inquired. The husband muttered to his wife, "Maybe I can just snatch the basket away from him." She grimaced and poked her husband in the ribs with her elbow. "His family must be poor; it's barley bread," she pointed out in a low voice. "My stomach won't know the difference," he grunted.

The bald man glanced around and appreciated for the first time the size and compactness of the throng. With so little grass visible, the area resembled a great hill composed entirely of people.

Just then the boy looked up and cocked his head. His brown eyes opened wider and he gave his complete attention to the front of the crowd. "The Teacher's followers are asking if anyone has any food to share," he said. "I didn't hear a thing," the wife scoffed. "I heard it

very plainly,” spoke the boy. The husband sneered, “You must have the hearing of a dog.” The boy stood up and took a step forward. “I have silver coins, little boy. Sell me some of your food. You will have money to take home to your mother,” the stout woman offered. “Son, if you give your food to his assistants they’ll eat it all themselves and you’ll go hungry. They’re a bunch of big fishermen; they can eat like wolves,” the wife declared. “At least keep a loaf of bread and a fish for yourself,” advised the bald man.

“No, the Teacher said not to worry, that the Father feeds the birds of the air,” returned the boy. “Do I have to sprout feathers to get something to eat?” the husband grumbled.

Holding his basket in front of him as if he were bearing a gift, the boy made his way through the crowd toward the front. The lad’s small frame then disappeared among the tall adults.

The bald man shook his head; “Children can be so naïve.”

“How many people does he think one basket of food will feed?” mocked the wife.

“That is going to be one hungry little boy,” the husband predicted.

The stout woman sighed, “Well, that’s the last we’ll ever see of that bread and fish.”



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# The Healing

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Jane Lebak (September 2005)

Anna had both hands in the pottery when her son Philip ran to the house, gasping with the effort of having sprinted in the noon sunlight all the way from the market. He made a triangle of his upper body, palms on his knees. "It's Dad," he said when his ribs stopped shuddering with the effort to breathe. "Dad can see!"

Anna's wheel slowed, and the cool clay jar revolved in decelerating circles beneath her fingertips.

"The preacher," her son said. "He asked Dad if he wanted to see. Dad said, 'yes,' and the preacher prayed and touched Dad's eyes, and then Dad could see again!"

The wheel creaked to a stop, and the direct rays of Galilee sunlight began drying out the jar's exposed side.

"Isn't it wonderful?" the boy said. "He'll be able to see what we look like!" Anna pumped at the wheel so that the pottery spun more quickly than before. "Go run and tell your grandparents. But drink some water first." "David went already," Philip said, but he ran down the road anyway. Anna continued spinning the clay jar for a few moments before reducing the vessel to a wet lump and putting away the wheel.

Simon didn't get a chance to see who healed him. He felt a touch on his useless eyes, a breath floating against his skin with the softness of a just-plucked feather. Then there was a flood of sensation—the sound of a crowd translated into forms and figures, the heat of fire, a confusion of light and motion in his mind. Simon covered his eyes with his hands in those first moments, frightened by what he had asked—irrevocable—and by the din of the crowd. People shoved up against him, a battery of gawkers needing to see the miraculous. Now he could see, too. The miraculous.

Soon the images began to disentangle. Some flashes began to seem nearer than others. Simon began to recognize objects and people.

Colors confused him most. The stranded softness that rolled between thumb and forefinger turned out to be black. The skin was a warm brown, the color of the sand that surrounded them, while plants, which hadn't felt very different, turned out to have a very different hue indeed. He asked after the man who had touched his eyes, but the man had gone.

Simon matched voices to the images he saw, but he never heard his wife's. Anna would be home, making the pottery she sold to support her blind husband's family. He had often traced the angle of her chin, the soft depressions of her eyes, the firm end of her nose. He had run his fingertips over her mouth and then up the niche in her cheek, the tougher skin under her eyes. After ten years, he thought, I'll see my wife.

The voices-turned-people led him to visit his parents, who on hearing the news had already come halfway to the town. There were cousins and siblings, even his own sons in the fray. It grew difficult to keep seeing all these people and plants and sky. Simon's head ached, and he felt queasy. He sat on the cool side of a tree, understanding for the first time what they had meant by shade.

Anna let the cold kiss of the wadi water run over her hands. She tried to get all the clay from her fingernails, sometimes using her teeth and eventually dunking her head under the water to let her hair do the job. She came up dripping and shivering. She let the sun dry her sopping hair as her tunic absorbed all the water it could. Simon, she thought. Squatting on the loose soil, Anna kept her back to the sun and watched the water as it murmured over the cracks in the rocks. The ripples gnawed at the soil jutting into the wadi until small clumps yielded and floated toward the Jordan.

Anna's finger brushed her cheek, rubbing the scar she'd had since she was a girl. The tan skin had turned pink and tight and tough there. She could follow its course down her face the way she could walk along the wadi during dry times. Both her parents had died in the fire. Her older sister had taken her in, keeping her indoors as she healed, shooing away visitors when their stares penetrated too deeply.

Anna had always known Simon, but they'd spent time together more often after the fire, sometimes talking and other times doing simple chores for her sister. In the end she had married the local blind man.

It wasn't only that her sister couldn't have paid enough dowry to give away this face. When she was with Simon, sometimes even Anna had forgotten it. Simon had found the scar when he touched her face, but it was only a landmark for his fingers. He'd never seen how it twisted one of her eyes, how it stopped some of her hair from growing, how it withered one ear like a fig left in the sun.

She tossed a pebble into the wadi and watched it tumble until it hit bottom and stuck there. After all these years, Simon would be able to see their sons, David and Philip, strong and handsome boys, both of them. Anna stood, but she didn't walk anywhere.

Several nights ago, in the few minutes between lying down and sleeping, Simon had touched her scarred cheek and followed the mark up to her hair. He had said, "You're beautiful." What he thought that meant, she didn't ask. He said that to her a lot, probably ranking it alongside "generous" and "pleasant." Anna looked over her shoulder at their house, then waded across the wadi and headed for her sister's home.

Simon stayed under the tree even after his parents had left. Philip and David were playing with their cousins a short distance away. His eyes closed, Simon heard the familiar shrieks of a safely romping group of boys. Whenever he opened his eyes, he couldn't pick apart their images the way he could their voices, and he kept tensing with the fear that they'd get hurt.

Philip called to his father. "We're going to our cousins' house for a while. We'll be home in time for supper." The boys walked away.

Simon decided to find Anna. He stood up, then stopped. Where was he? He'd never had problems navigating before. He always took the same route into town, his steps unconsciously counted, the noises and smells of certain places clear marks of where he was and which way to go next. But now—in this confusion of green and brown, the houses he could see—he couldn't be sure.

He closed his eyes. The sun fell on his right cheek. He turned a little, feeling the warmth move across his face. That felt correct, so he began walking. He opened his eyes, but the panic struck again. He closed his eyes and kept walking. Recognizing the sounds of sheep, Simon opened his eyes and saw for the first time the animals that had nuzzled his hands, probing for treats. He turned when he heard the

lowing of cattle, when he smelled grain (his cousin's storehouse), and again when he heard the rippling wadi.

Opening his eyes, Simon saw his home. He stepped inside carefully, finding the pots he could recognize by feel, the soft curtain in front of the storage room, and the scent he'd never detected in anyone else's house. His home. He called for Anna, but there was no answer. He went upstairs and lay down, overwhelmed.

Anna's sister asked no questions when Anna arrived at her home. She sent her daughter across the wadi to prepare a meal for Simon and the boys, added more vegetables to the pot, and kneaded another loaf of bread.

"I've heard about this preacher before," Anna's sister told her. Her husband had brought the news from a Galilean trader. "No one else has ever healed a born-blind man. He heals lepers, too." Anna made no reply. "Has Simon seen the boys yet?" her sister asked.

"Philip, briefly, but then he came to tell me. David told Simon's parents. I suppose he spent the day with them." Anna took a knife and began cutting vegetables. "His parents must be glad."

"I'm sure they are." Anna's sister smiled. "The boys must be glad, too."

When Anna didn't look up, her sister touched her shoulder, and they stayed silent for a while. Anna stopped working with her knife, looking into the reflection of her face distorted by the metal pot. Her sister's face looked out from the pot as well, just as distorted in that dented reflection. Her sister's hand remained on her shoulder.

"He's always wanted to be able to see." Anna sliced a turnip to shreds. "Not that he was bitter; he just wished things were different. And now they are." The hot water splashed as she tossed the turnip into the pot.

Simon stared at the sky. It changed colors like the fire, the clouds shimmering on their edges. Was the world ending, or had he missed this visual symphony every night? The night sky's darkness frightened him as it crept closer, robbing heat from the air and causing distant houses to vanish. He reached out to rub David's head as the boy passed. Sound and smell never got fainter at night.

"Where's Mom?" David asked. "I'm not sure." Philip lit the lamps in the house, a chore Simon had never before understood. He moved

nearer to the small flame's haze as it drank the oil beneath. By that light they scrubbed the plates and cups, and the boys went to bed.

Simon sat outside the house and listened. Night sounded the same as before. It smelled the same. The sole difference was his vision, and he rather preferred the inactivity of this new sense for now. His headache, which had persisted all day, receded now in the dark.

At the sound of footsteps he closed his eyes. Two people were approaching, one taller than the other. He heard a voice and decided it was Anna's nephew, probably escorting Anna home. She said goodbye to the boy a distance from the house, and Simon listened to her approach. When he opened his eyes, she stopped, turning slightly to the side.

"I heard about your eyes," she said in a measured tone. "Congratulations." "Come closer," he said, but she didn't. "What's wrong?" Anna shrugged. "I'm glad for you. You can work on the farm now, and you can support your family, and you can see the boys, but...."

Simon walked away from the house to stand close to her in the dark. The light falling from the door made an odd shape on the grass, like the point of a knife. Crickets chirped, and in the distance he could smell the bread other families were baking for tomorrow. When he touched Anna, she tensed. She had turned again as he approached, keeping one side of her face hidden. "Is it selfish of me to think of myself when you're the one who's been healed?" she whispered.

"I don't think so," he frowned. "Are you afraid of the way you look? I'll extinguish the lamps."

She nodded, and one by one the dying lights returned Simon to his native element. As he smothered the lamps Anna moved closer. When the last burned so low on its wick that it gave no light to the room, only then could he hear her in the doorway.

"Thank you," she said.

Simon navigated the room through the darkness, and at the far end he took his wife into his arms. "Why don't you want me to see you?" He traced her mouth with his fingers.

"You'll never call me beautiful again." Her voice broke. "Not after the sun comes up." Anna's hands trembled as she took his fingers and guided them to the scar on her cheek. She brushed his fingertips over the twisted corner of her eye and then up to the withered ear. When

she let her hand drop, he kept touching the scar, running his hand over the niches and the texture he had known for ten years. He took her face in his hands and kissed the scars easily. Anna held him, biting her lip.

"Show me," he said. She made no reply. They stood for a time while he stroked her hair and kissed the scar again.

"I knew you had a scar there," he said. "I could feel it. I remember that you were hurt as a child. It's not any different because I can see it."

She didn't raise her head. With closed eyes, Simon listened to the uneasiness of her breath, felt the heat of her skin against his hands. The clay and the sun had mixed into the scent he knew as Anna's.

"I love you," he said.

Insects sang outside, and upstairs the boys lay asleep. The last lamp continued to smolder, sputtering a little as its flame struggled for purchase on the shortened wick. Anna took a step toward the stairs.

Simon stopped her. "Do you want me to dim the lamp upstairs?" She shook her head. Leading him to the corner, she raised the wick on the last lamp and turned to show him her face. He saw the scar, the rough skin, the old wound. He touched it again, kissed it. Anna tilted her head so her hair fell away from the places she always tried to keep covered. Simon touched the discolored skin on her neck, the parts that had stayed smooth and indistinguishable to his blind hands.

"You are beautiful," he said.

Anna shook her head. The lamp continued to sputter.

"I'm glad I got healed," Simon said.

Anna kept her head down. "I should go to the healer too."

"I don't think so," Simon said. She looked up. He touched her hair and smiled. "I love you." An answering smile started, and Anna's eyes brightened, even the twisted one.

"I'm glad I can see you," Simon said. "Even if it's only once, just to let you know what I see doesn't upset me."

"Wouldn't you rather I were beautiful?"

"Would you have not wanted a blind man?"

"I married a blind man," she said. He replied, "I married you." Anna sat beside him on the steps, resting her head against his shoulder. Simon put his arms around her and held her close. In the corner the lamp continued to burn brightly.

# Roadside Crosses

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Joseph R. Cicero (February 2008)

Like a miniature Calvary, three crosses had been erected along the roadside. Their white paint was flaking, and one cross leaned precariously and another twisted as though it had wrestled with the wind and lost. Silk flowers adorned the hallowed ground, and a wall of crushed white marble surrounded their bases. Occasionally I'd slow to see if I could make out a date or a name, but the flow of traffic never cooperated. One day I'll stop, I told myself. Maybe I can right the crosses and pull the weeds invading their turf. After all, I owed them something—if nothing more than for the awareness they heightened in me of my own mortality.

I vaguely remembered a newspaper account of the accident at the intersection. Teens were involved, but I can't recall the particulars. It's an eerie feeling to pass a spot where another died a violent death. Yet we pass such places every day. Whether a house, a storefront, or another busy intersection, we may never know what stories of death they could tell. Just passing a hospital, where new life and death occur regularly, can be a sobering experience.

It's the abruptness of the death, however, that captures our attention and arouses our senses. Every person has a unique perspective on death—its inevitability—but we avoid dwelling on it and its secrets. We accept its presence—like an invisible galaxy far, far away—and know that one day it will be visited upon us. Most hope that death will visit in the midst of sleep and transport us painlessly from this world to the next with quiet dignity. So we're troubled when it arrives violently—indiscriminately—and chooses those least ready to embrace it.

That's why those crosses command my attention. It doesn't matter if the radio is blaring, a passenger is talking, or an infant is crying; I tune them out for that instant spent passing the markers. Like a general reviewing a memorial to his fallen troops, I want to salute and

render respect. They are my reminder—not only of the fallen but of the blessings I enjoy by not being memorialized in a similar fashion. So I instinctively lift my foot from the accelerator as I acknowledge what they gave and what I hope to avoid. It's my way of recognizing their sacrifice, of honoring them in death for something they may not have been able to accomplish in life.

Kyle and Ryan had been drinking steadily. Sunday NFL football was a ritual for them, and there was no better place to celebrate it than at the home of their buddy Jerry. He had a big-screen TV and always a plentiful supply of beer. The three had graduated from high school the previous May and none were college-bound. They were content to work at a sawmill, plow money into their flashy cars, and suffer hangovers for both just and unjust causes. They were kids. Unbeknownst to them, this Sunday would bring an intervention—like previously unseen ones—from their guardian angels.

“Man, you’re making me nervous. Lighten up on the gas, Kyle,” Ryan complained. A half-foot of snow had fallen the night before, and the plows were still catching up.

“All right, all right,” replied Kyle as he eased off the pedal. They both wore ball caps, as much to cover their disheveled hair as to advertise their place of work. Neither had a steady girl, although Ryan had taken notice of Lacey since she’d gotten her own apartment. They were casual friends in high school, but now the freedoms of living alone had led them to common ground, a ground often irrigated with beer. He had become fond of alcohol and she was becoming fond of him. These two might one day be a pair, but this Sunday she had to take a backseat to Ryan’s gridiron interests.

“I really expected the roads to be worse,” proclaimed Dennis to Margaret, his wife of forty-two years. They typically dispensed with Sunday drives in winter, but today they were going to visit an ailing friend. Their journey would take them south on Route 8 through a sleepy hollow named Centerville.

Many times their travels had carried them along this two-lane rural road. It was farm country—God’s country—and the couple enjoyed viewing the horses and farm animals that often fed near the road. Cruising the highways and byways of the Pennsylvania landscape was

something they looked forward to. In years gone by their parents had accompanied them, but after they passed away, Dennis and Margaret had adopted the drive as their own form of recreation.

"I hope Kate isn't too weak to see us," cautioned Margaret. Kate had been a longtime friend—a cancer survivor like Margaret—so they shared much. But Kate had wrestled and lost a bout with the flu and now had pneumonia. All they knew was that Kate's son was worried enough to suggest that they visit her hospital bedside.

"Me too, dear," replied Dennis. He had no words of encouragement as he suspected that Kate might not be with them much longer. Lifting Kate's spirits was only one dimension of their journey. For six years the couple had made it a habit—more a pilgrimage—to periodically drive by the site where their grandson had been killed in a car accident. He and two classmates had been traveling Route 8 when another vehicle failed to stop at a blinking red light and struck them broadside. They were good kids, smart kids, kids who were going to make something of their lives...but all that ended in a heartbeat. No alcohol, drugs, or speeding were involved. They had simply been yakking it up, displaying exuberance over plans for the upcoming senior prom. Maybe if they had been wearing seatbelts—but the impact was so severe it had hurled them from the car like rag dolls.

The whole school—making the entire community—had turned out for their funerals. It was a dark time for Dennis and Margaret, and Kate had been a crutch for them in their time of loss. Dennis had planted the crosses to mark the spot where their innocent lives had ended. He groomed it faithfully and slowed whenever he traveled by the site. He and Margaret would be passing that shrine in a few minutes, but what they didn't know was that a Penn DOT plow sent to clear the roadway had buried it with snow.

"One more brew ought to get me to Jerry's driveway," said Kyle. They had planned to deliver the case intact, but between them they had consumed a six-pack.

"Roger that, sidekick," answered Ryan and passed him a long neck. "It's 3:45, and the game starts in fifteen. I don't want to miss that kickoff return."

"Gotcha," remarked Kyle as he raised the bottle to his lips.

By now Dennis and Margaret had become quiet, their grandson's cross a short distance ahead. They valued life in all its forms—womb to tomb—so they were careful not to let their busyness distract them from the solemnity owed these crosses. Their behavior, however, was in stark contrast to that of their son and daughter-in-law, who avoided the intersection whenever possible. For them the pain of even getting within proximity of the shrine was overwhelming. The loss of their son was the cruelest blow they could imagine, and so they managed their grief by keeping themselves and the crosses out of view.

Dennis slowed as he approached the shrine, glad that no one was on his tail, then abruptly halted when he couldn't see the crosses. He quickly realized that a plow had covered the memorial with snow. It upset him, and he struggled with whether to drive on or make repairs. *After all*, he thought to himself, *this can't be the first time this has happened*. Dennis was stubborn, though, and decided, over Margaret's mild objection, to clear away the snow.

Kyle was moving swiftly down the road; Jerry's home was now only a mile ahead. He had bet Ryan that they'd arrive in time to get nestled in front of the tube before kickoff. That wager was made, however, before he landed behind a tractor-trailer rig laboring under a heavy load. At the first opportunity Kyle gunned the engine and rocketed around the truck, but he knew that the upcoming flashing red light would further delay him. He'd run that red beacon before without consequences. *Shoot*, he thought to himself, *it's Sunday! Who's going to be coming this way today?*

Snow had brought one vehicle to a stop, while alcohol had worked to keep another moving. Dennis, a bit unsteady on his feet, was busily clearing the snow around the crosses. Their cross-members were just beginning to show when he heard the approach of Kyle and Ryan. Their car's exhaust had been modified and its rumble was enough to shake loose some powdered snow from a low-hanging limb. Turning to resume his cleanup, Dennis saw a car coming from the south on Route 8.

I began slowing for the flashing yellow light, as much out of caution as for the crosses I knew dotted the intersection. Suddenly a fellow beside the roadway began waving me off, scissoring his arms as though he were adrift on a raft and I was a search plane.