Thoughts From A Bed's Edge

by Foster Trecost

He steered to the roadside and stopped. “Something's wrong.”

She stared ahead, then at her father. “Can you fix it?”

“I can try, but if I can't we'll have to use someone's phone to call a tow truck.” His tone was relaxed and unrushed. Under the hood, he poked a light beam into dark crevices. With his other hand, he tinked a wrench against metal. The sound delighted his daughter, reminded her of music from ballet. “I don’t know…”

They walked past several houses until he seemed to choose one at random. “Let's try here.”

Loud knocks brought an elderly woman to the door. She peered out from the opening allowed by a safety chain. “Yes?”

“I'm sorry to bother you, ma'am, but my car broke down, right up the street.” He pointed. “It's just me and my little girl, could we use your phone to call a tow truck?”

She lowered her look to see the little girl, and misgivings melted away. She shut the door long enough to un latch the chain, and then opened it again. “I'm so sorry.” In the kitchen, she pointed to a phone hanging on the wall.

He picked it up and spun several numbers, gave the address, said thank you. “They'll be here soon. Could I use your restroom?”

“Of course,” she said. “It's down the hall.”

“Stay here,” he said to his daughter. Within a few minutes, he was back. “We'll wait for the tow truck outside.”

“Yes, of course,” she said, and saw them to the door.

They reached the car and got in. He started the engine and drove away.

“I thought it was broken.”

“No. It's not broken,” he said, an answer that meant something she never thought possible: her father had lied.
Again, he steered to the roadside. He pulled from his jacket a handful of jewels and gave them to his daughter. “She doesn't need these things, not anymore.”
Her eyes widened. “She gave them to you?”
“Sort of. Choose something.”
She took a gold chain with a heart-shaped charm.
“It's yours,” he said. “If you want, you can help me next time. I'd like that.”
“How?”
"Just do what you did."
She looked at her father and tried to see the same man, but could not; she saw someone she loved even more. “I can do it.” His lie had been forgiven, cased within the taste of something new, an excitement she liked, and would soon crave. They visited another house that night, and many more in the nights to come.
Alone on the bed's edge, she massaged a heart-shaped charm that hung from a gold chain. Her father was gone; she had no idea where he lived, or if he lived. She peered out the frosty window of her motel. The sky was overcast. Wind blew and more snow was on the way. Every town looked the same, every season felt the same. She looked at her watch; it was almost time. She lit a cigarette and left.