

Best Place To Eat in Town

by Jack Swenson

My mother is in the hospital. She has had a stroke. She's in a coma, and the doctor thinks her chances of coming out of it are zero and none. "What if she does?" I ask. He says it would be my worst nightmare.

I stay a week. It's cold. The warmest it gets is twenty above zero. I have forgotten what it's like back there in the winter. I get the hang of driving on the icy streets pretty fast. That sort of thing comes back to you. I forget, however, that you have to be careful when you are outside and it's very cold. One morning it's twenty-five below zero, and I'm cleaning snow off the windows of my rental car. I'm outside maybe five minutes, and when I drive off my fingers start to hurt. I have to bang them on the steering wheel to get the circulation going.

Each day there's no change. I have coffee with my old classmate Bob at the Norseman cafe in the morning. Bobby's the same as he was when we were in school, only he's put on a few pounds. Our friend, Jim, the former sheriff, has nicknamed Bob "Beer Case." Sometimes he calls him "Delco."

Often I eat lunch at the hospital. The cafeteria may be the best place to eat in town. Everything's homemade. One day I'm sitting there, and my mother's doctor walks in and sits down. We gab for a few minutes. Then he asks me a question. "You're an only child, aren't you?" he asks. I nod. "And your father's dead?" I say yes. "The problem with that," he says, "is that you know you're the next one to go." I thank him for sharing that with me. He nods. He stands up. "Well, gotta go," he says.

