

Trapped

by John Olson

They were into their fourth day. They had had nothing to eat but potato chips and jelly beans for four days.

Henry was 63. Louise was also 63. They had been married 39 years. They had four kids, three boys and a daughter, all grown. They also had four cats.

Do you want to play another round of poker? asked Henry.

Maybe later, said Louise. I'm getting kind of burned out on cards.

Henry, who had just retired from his job as a warehouseman at Frito Lay, was wearing a lightweight coat, jeans, and tennis shoes. Louise was wearing a cotton print dress with a floral pattern, sweater, and pumps. They were overweight, diabetic, and trapped in a cellphone dead zone.

It was February. A bitter, 19 degrees bit the rims of their ears and tips of their toes as soon as they stepped outside. Henry had been slipping in and out to get pictures with his new camera, a retirement present from Louise. They had told no one about this outing. They had left on an impulse, a crazy whim to get out of the house, go for a drive, and explore the network of forest service roads near Mount St. Helens in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest.

They were driving a Jeep Grand Cherokee. Henry had hit a rut and lost control of the jeep. They had slid into a ditch and gotten stuck. The rear wheel was embedded deeply. Henry had tried repeatedly to back out. The jeep hadn't budged. Henry stopped his attempts at backing out. He worried about losing gas and electricity. Electricity especially. Their seat heaters were keeping them from freezing to death. And the CDs of old radio programs and Led Zeppelin albums were helping to alleviate the anxiety. Although, "Stairway To Heaven" was now acquiring newer, deeper shades of meaning.

They had argued about walking out. Henry insisted that they wouldn't make it. They'd get lost. They'd freeze. Not a good idea. Staying in the jeep was their best option. At least they had water.

They merely had to step out of the jeep and gather some snow in a plastic grocery bag, spoon it into their water bottle and wait for it to melt.

The snowstorm was beautiful, but was otherwise a very bad sign. Who would be crazy enough to go driving up a remote forest road in a snowstorm? Louise remained hopeful. Henry was not. His anxiety was acute.

You're sweating a lot, said Louise. I know, said Henry. I don't think I've ever felt this much anxiety before.

I'm sure someone will come, said Louise.

Louise, it's been four days. Four fucking days. No one is going to come. We are going to die. And I'm worried about our cats.

We're not going to die. Someone will come.

How do you know that?

I just know it. I feel it.

Feeling isn't knowledge.

My intuition has always been good. Remember what I said about Obama, in 2004?

Yeah, and he got elected. True. But he's a lousy fucking president. Worse than Millard Fillmore.

Well, that's not the fault of my intuition.

I wonder what it's going to be like.

What?

To die.

Henry, we're not going to die.

Have you checked your blood today?

Yes. It's good. Do you want to hear another CD?

Sure.

Led Zeppelin?

No. How about George Burns and Gracie Allen. I couldn't take "Stairway To Heaven" again.

Look. Do you see that?

They watched as a deer walked by. The deer came up to the jeep and looked into the window. Henry stared back. The deer loped

away with imperial indifference to the plight of the two humans trapped in their jeep.

That was weird, said Henry. I wonder what he thought.

He was probably hoping for some food.

Henry stared at the flakes of snow accumulating on the front window. He turned on the wipers and the snow was removed as George told Gracie that his letter felt heavy; he'd better put another stamp on it. What for, says Gracie, It'll only make it heavier.

Louise laughed. I never get tired of that.

I remember listening to those shows when I was a kid, said Henry.

Me, too, said Louise. You don't think we're using up too much electricity do you?

No, I'm more worried about the gas. We have less than a quarter tank left.

Someone will come. I just know it.

I wish I could feel as sure about it. How is your stomach?

Empty. Do we have anymore chips?

Just a few more jelly beans.

I've got to take a piss, said Henry. He hated opening the door. As soon as the door opened, the cold rushed in and ate up all the precious warmth they had managed to accumulate with the seat heaters and their own body warmth. But the need to piss was acute.

Henry opened the door and slid out. The cold hit him like a wall. He was waiting, as always, for something to come, his enlarged prostate blocking the passage, when he saw a figure moving toward him, a woman. Henry inserted his johnson back in and zipped his pants.

Hi, said the woman. Do you need help?

Hell yes, said Henry. Man, am I glad to see you. We've been stuck in our jeep for four days.

I'm Gracie, said the woman, and that's my husband, George.

Louise, hearing Henry's voice, looked out to see him talking to the air, shaking his hand up and down. His voice was muffled, but he sounded happy.

She looked again. Squinted her eyes. The snow was falling again.
Big flakes. Falling, falling, falling. She felt tired. She closed her eyes.
And fell asleep.

