

# Saved

*by* Renee Blair

I woke up pissed off—like that feeling you get when you take a long nap in the afternoon. You wake up irritated and confused. You don't know what time it is, and you can't get the sleep out of your brain. Except instead of being on a couch or a bed, I was trapped in a mashed-up Honda on I-75. I think it was the coughing that finally roused me. I awoke in a haze of black smoke. It smelled like oil and burned my eyes. Every time I coughed, the seat belt choked me and rubbed against my neck. The choking led to panic. I remembered that I was on my way to Lake Erie for a fishing weekend with Greg. Greg's a good friend—the only one who stood by me when I became bitter and intolerable after the divorce and losing my kids. If any man was truly righteous in this world, it would be him. I met him when my firm hired him as an outside consultant. We hit it off great at lunch, discussing ideas for our company's progression, sharing personal stories, and knocking back a couple beers. I think I knew we'd be great friends when, as he was walking out of the office, he stuck a one-hundred dollar bill in a jar we had sitting on the receptionist's desk. Julian, our energetic young mail carrier, was in the hospital after his appendix suddenly burst, and he needed help with his medical bills. As far as I knew, Greg had never even met him.

When Greg asked me about heading out to the lake for a few days, he jokingly said I needed it so I wouldn't self-destruct, but I think we both knew that was closer to the truth than either of us would like it to be. I'd spent all the rage I could muster on hating my wife and hating God, and all that was left was myself. Now, I panicked when I reached out and realized that Greg wasn't beside me.

“GREG! GREG, BUDDY, ARE YOU OKAY? GREG?” I yelled. I choked. Blood ran out of my open mouth, and I felt the raw nerve of a broken tooth graze against my bottom lip. A flash of sounds and images crossed my mind. Greg driving. A semi jackknifing three cars

in front of us. Screaming. The squeal of breaks and twisting of metal. *Christ.*

"Greg!" I choked out. I tried to twist out of my seatbelt and a pain in my right leg shot through me like my nervous system had been set on fire. A wave of nausea washed over me, and I willed myself to keep from passing out. The sound of other voices drifted into the former cab of the truck, and it sounded as though they were becoming more panicked. I gingerly moved myself to the left, using my free arm to search for anything I could use to cut the seatbelt. And I swear I smelled it right before the woman started screaming "FIRE!"

*Oh Jesus oh god if I don't get out of here I'm going to burn to death. Oh God please!* I struggled against the belt and sucked the silky poisoned air in by bucketfuls. I felt like an asshole for wanting to die before and asking God to strike me dead. I heard the voices from other cars screaming and crying for help. *Christ dying is the last thing I want to do especially like this will burning hurt how long does it take your nerves to burn before you feel no pain will I smell it will I smell myself like a pig on a spit.* I couldn't get enough air in my lungs. I felt like I was already burning from the inside out. I tried to remember the last thing I had said to my kids, but I couldn't. Had I told them I loved them? *oh Christ please oh don't leave me here like this*

"Jerry. Jerry, are you with me? Jerry, look at me, please." I turned and looked up into Greg's eyes.

"Greg?" I realized that he had somehow dragged me 20 or 30 feet away from the wreck. It was high noon in the middle of August, but the sight of the truck sent chills down my spine. *How did we survive this?* There was something on the road in front of the truck's mangled remains, but the sun reflected off of it, blinding me.

"Greg...what even...? Are you okay? Jesus, I don't even know what happened." I couldn't take my eyes off the thing in the road. Suddenly, after escaping the wreck, figuring out what it was seemed like the most important idea in the world.

“Greg, what is that man? Can you see that? What is it?” The beam of light bouncing off of whatever it was entranced me. I felt like I knew what it was, like when you remember some stupid line of dialogue, but you can't remember what movie it's from. It made my stomach flip, but I couldn't remember what it was. I tore my eyes from it and turned back to Greg. He wasn't dirty, and I wanted to ask him about his clothes. He was talking, but I couldn't hear. I looked back at the thing in the road.

“Jerry, please. Are you listening? It's a separate Huntington account, and the routing numbers are in my desk at work. You need to tell Marissa. I wanted to surprise her, but she'll need it. She needs to know.” I looked back up into Greg's eyes. I remembered weeks ago when Greg told me he'd been saving up for a vacation—a trip to Disneyworld to celebrate the kids “graduation” from fifth grade and Marissa's promotion at work. But what the hell did that have to do with anything?

“Greg, what? Why are you telling me this right now? Are you hurt? We need to go. We need to find help. Please, I don't understand.” His calm demeanor was disturbing me. I felt like I was going to pass out again.

“Hey man I know, I know. It's okay.” He smiled and put a leathery palm on my cheek; it felt like air. He looked into my eyes. “Everything's gonna be alright.” He smiled as if he understood something I didn't. It frightened me.

I turned back to the thing in the road. I needed to see what it was, but at the same time I would have been content with never knowing. “Greg, come on. I don't know what to do. I think there's a fire, and we should *do* something.” I began to cry.

“There's a fire and people and we need to get help!” I had stared so long at whatever was causing the reflection that spots danced in front of my eyes. I turned again towards Greg, but he was gone. I looked in every direction, but he wasn't there.

“Greg! GREG!” I yelled for him. I kept sobbing. I began to crawl towards the thing in the road. I don't know how long it took me, but the glint slowly began to fade, and I realized it had been

coming from a gold ring on a man's left hand. I stared at the hand. I willed it to move. A group of two men and a woman ran up to me. The woman's eyes were wild, and her chestnut-colored hair whipped around her in the wind. Whatever was attached to the hand made her turn away. I watched her quickly squeeze her eyes shut and cover her mouth. There was dried blood on her hand and arm.

"Oh God. No seatbelt I bet," said one of the men. He turned and saw me in the grass. "Oh, hey, man! Hey, are you alright?" He rushed over towards me, "We need a medic over here!"

"Excuse me," I said to the woman, "that man...is he...is he wearing a watch?"

She looked at me in confusion, "I'm sorry, what?"

"That man who's...that man there. Is he wearing a watch? One of those crappy Wal-Mart ones—'World's Best Dad.'"

She glanced back towards the thing, and then did a double-take. "Yeah....yeah, he is! Hey, do you know this guy?"

I laid back down in the grass and stared up at the sky.

