

The blackness went on forever. Even the headlights were useless against the thick, moonless night. The snow fell around them, creating a stillness broken only by the occasional crunch of the tires as Mick steered around yet another hairpin curve.

Loretta struggled to fend off her own encroaching darkness. She thought this must be what it's like at the bottom of the ocean. The car skidded and slid slightly off the road. Mick quickly righted it and she let out the breath she'd sucked in.

"Man," Mick forced out a shaky laugh. "It's a good thing we haven't seen another living thing the whole time we've been on this godforsaken road, huh?" Loretta said nothing, just nodded with a quick jerk of her head.

"Honey," Mick said softly, almost pleadingly. "All I'm saying is that it's too soon to start trying again. We need more time; I need more time." Time, Loretta thought to herself. She imagined being buried alive in this deep, dark hole for another year and nearly vomited from the horror that washed over her. She took a deep breath, starting all the way from her abdomen, the way Karen, her grief counselor, taught her, hoping to take the edge off the hysteria. She repeated this exercise several times, until she was able to speak somewhat calmly.

"But we don't have more time, Mick. It took so long for me to get pregnant, and then carrying the baby for five months, and I'm going to be 40 soon." She stopped, wanting her words to sink into his brain like small, black, shiny daggers. "What part of it don't you get? How many times do I have to say it?" The darkness clawed at Loretta now, like a rabid animal. She trembled with the effort to hold it off.

She watched the now-familiar weariness take root in Mick's face. "I get it, Loretta. I got it the first ten times you said it." They came upon another sharp curve. Mick turned the wheel too late and the car skidded again.

"Are you drunk?" Loretta asked, incredulous. "Oh my god, you are! How could you get behind the wheel of this car drunk?"

"I am most certainly not drunk! I would never drive if I were drunk! Never! You know me better than that!"

"I do? I know you better than that, huh?" She flung her words at him. "Actually, I feel like I don't know you at all anymore. Ever since we lost the baby, you've become someone else. You do all kinds of reckless shit now – like driving drunk!" She gave in to the darkness and started quietly sobbing. Get a grip, she told herself over and over until she could stop.

"Mick," she continued, softly now, more in control. "All I'm saying is that it's like you've checked out; like you don't care what happens anymore. It's like you're the one who died."

Although her words were spoken quietly, Mick jerked as if she'd physically struck him. "What the hell are you even talking about? Where do you get this ridiculous shit? Is this the latest crap Karen has laid on you?" he barked.

Mick opened his mouth to say more, wanting to hurt her back, but a high-pitched screech drowned out his words as the car ground against the low stone wall that ran alongside the road. Mick yanked hard on the steering wheel as he struggled to break the friction. "Holy shit, I think we hit something." He stopped the car and looked at Loretta, afraid to search for the truth. Finally, after a long pause, he got out of the car.

Loretta sat paralyzed, stunned by the sudden violence of the accident. She shook her head in an attempt to clear her racing thoughts and got out of the car, too. She looked around for Mick, but it was as if the darkness had swallowed him. "Mick," she called softly into the stillness. "Where are you?"

Mick didn't answer right away. Finally, he whispered, "Over here. I'm over here." She rounded the car and came to stand at his side. "Did we hit an animal or something?" she whispered.

They both peered into the darkness. Their hands found each other as Mick said "I can't see a thing."