

## Standing in the Light

By Dave Patterson

Briggs and Jordan were arguing again. Jordan was upset that at dinner, Briggs hesitated when she asked if he thought the blue dress she was wearing fit her right. Briggs felt the question was rigged. "How do I know if a dress *fits* right?" he said. He was driving over the speed limit; he knew this bothered Jordan, especially at night.

"What am I supposed to do with your answer?" she said. She spoke towards her window. Briggs noticed her bare knee sticking out from under her dress. It was dead winter. Snow banks lined the road making passage tight for two cars.

"I didn't answer. I gave a kind of anti-answer," he said gripping the wheel tight as a large truck came towards him in the other lane. He thought he might have to drive into a snow bank to avoid an accident.

"Yes, you gave an *anti-answer*." She sighed. Briggs knew this had nothing to do with his answer or anti-answer; it had everything to do with their marriage. It was as if lately without saying anything they were making arrangements for their two-year marriage to dissolve.

They'd married after dating for a month. They were the couple that made others believe in true love. People described them as soul mates. That supported them for a couple of years, but now they were running on fumes. Dinner had been Briggs' attempt to jump-start things.

After a mile of silence, Briggs saw a deer lying on the side of the road. Its neck craned up unnaturally. A front leg was crookedly forced under its chin. He pressed on the

break. The car skidded; Jordan swore. "What are you doing?" she said. They were still ten minutes from town where they'd recently bought a house.

"We have to move it."

"What?"

"The deer," he said.

"I'm wearing heels; you're wearing a suit. We pay people to do that," she said in a way that was meant not to be cold towards anyone but Briggs.

He put the car in reverse and backed up so the headlights illuminated the deer.

"Look at it. It's so finite."

"What is?"

He didn't answer. He turned to her and placed his hand on her knee. He looked at Jordan, and she did not look away.

Without speaking, they got out of the car. With the hazards blinking and the engine running, they circled the deer. Its black eyes were open. It was small, not a baby, but not yet an adult. Briggs was surprised with the muscle contour of its shoulders where he positioned his gloved hands. Jordan needed no direction as she grabbed the back haunches with her bare hands. Briggs and Jordan shared a look as they lifted the deer. Together, they swung the deer over the snow bank. It landed behind the large bank without any sound. They stood still, a deer-length apart, lit by the blinking hazards, waiting for whatever was going to happen next.

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First Prize Winner of the 2011 Friends Baxter Memorial Library Writing Contest ~ Adult Fiction Category