

Death by cell phone

EDITOR'S NOTE: I

entered this in a Writer's Digest contest and also posted it on my writer's group. The amazing thing was the number of different responses I got about the ending. Everyone wanted to know exactly what happened and there were at least three difference scenarios. What do you think?

PROMPT: A character walks into a kitchen at the end of the day. He finds on the kitchen table something that isn't supposed to be there.

By GERALD L. GUY

Matt Marton's life was a mess. A freelance photographer, he seldom knew from one day to the next what or how each day would unfold. He had busy days, hectic days, and some days that made no sense at all. Then, of course, he would have slow days, too frequently followed by slow weeks.

His photography career was a study of feast or famine, and today he was coming off one of his longest dry spells. It had been four weeks since his last assignment. Today, he desperately needed to cash in. His wife had given him an ultimatum, return with cash in his pocket or don't return home at all.

"This life is driving me crazy, Matt," Betsy had said. "I swear if you don't come home with some money today, I'm going to end this misery for good. I can't live like this. My love for you is almost spent."

Despite the pressure, Matt felt good about today. It was a bright Central Florida morning, good tunes were playing on the car radio, and he was off



on his newest entrepreneurial adventure, taking photographs for businesses to use on Web pages that were popping up all over the Internet. Matt had three assignments, the first at a plastics factory in Orlando, then a new hotel in Daytona Beach and finally a restaurant in Palm Coast. At \$500 a pop, he would in the bucks again.

He knew he was in trouble, though, when he saw a long line of brake lights flashing in front of him as he made his way down Interstate-4 to Orlando. The morning rush, especially his, was being delayed by yet another accident on Florida's most treacherous highway. In a matter of minutes, his VW bug was stopped in a line of traffic that stretched as far as he could see and filled all four lanes of the highway.

"Damn it! Not today!" he yelled out the window to anyone who would listen.

The woman in the Lexus next to him raised both arms in a helpless display that said, "I know your pain!"

But she didn't. Nobody knew Matt's pain. He was fighting for his life today. Any delay would throw his schedule into disarray and possibly bring an end to his marriage. He replied to the Lexus by

pounding on his steering wheel and begging, "Please, God! Don't do this to me! Not today!"

After sitting in traffic without movement for 30 minutes, Matt knew traffic was hopelessly snarled and he must call his clients to inform them of his dire situation. When he flipped open the pocket of his camera bag to retrieve his cell phone, he was startled to find it missing. He searched frantically, but it was nowhere to be found.

As he sat in traffic hour after hour, Matt slumped deeper and deeper into the seat of his aging automobile. He knew his day was ruined, as was his marriage; there was nothing he could do about it. If he had only brought along the cell phone, he could have rescheduled, but simply not showing up was inexcusable. It would have fatal consequences. Neither his clients nor Betsy would accept an apology. He was without hope.

It was 6:30 p.m. when the police officer directed Matt to the off ramp, eight hours after he had first applied his brakes. His day and his marriage were lost.

He slowly made his way to State Route A1A, the scenic route between Dayton and Palm Coast, and drove home. He stopped at the Flagler Pier to take his one-thousandth photo of the wooden structure silhouetted against the retiring sun. As he turned west onto State Route 100, he muttered, "Betsy is going to kill me."

It was 8 p.m. when he pulled into the carport and walked inside to what appeared to be an empty home. His lost cell phone looked out of place on the kitchen table. It rested atop of a note from Betsy that read, "Matt, I can't take it anymore."

The cell phone's message light was blinking. So, he pushed the retrieve button and listened.

"Well, Matt, you've missed all of your assignments," Betsy screamed. "They all have called here looking for you, and they were very upset. So am I. I'm done!"

There was a moment of silence and then the unforgettable concussion of a gun fired from close range. Matt screamed and collapsed to the floor; his life, as he knew it, was over.

Let me Be your Friend

Author unknown

If I could catch a rainbow
I would do it just for you
and share with you its beauty
On the days you're feeling blue.

If I could build a mountain
You could call your very own;
A place to find serenity,
A place to be alone.

If I could take your troubles
I would toss them in the sea,
But all these things I'm finding
are impossible just to me.

I cannot build a mountain
Nor catch a rainbow fair,
But let me be what I know best,
A friend who's always there.