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## Black Ice

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*Black Ice*

He was thrown through the back window  
of his new Honda when it skidded  
into an approach road and flipped—43 payments  
to go, the stereo playing Journey.  
That much is fact.

The rest I do not know. Maybe a girl he loved  
went as far as she could before words broke down  
and left him, alone, talking at a face  
that offered nothing. Left him to drive the midnight  
distance from anywhere to anywhere else.

Or maybe he found Jesus, a love so perfect  
he was unafraid, knowing all others  
were his fellows, temporarily estranged  
on a dark planet with a cooling sun,  
reeling towards an ecstasy of light.

I care but do not know. But I know  
the car he hit held a father, a mother,  
five children coming home from a wedding.  
I kill the siren, leave the lights flashing,  
move the ambulance to block the northbound lane  
where the family's trip is scattered.

Carol is out with the jump kit  
running through litter of broken luggage,  
water, oil, glass and gravel before I stop.

Initial triage:

First Driver: screaming, possible head injury, probably  
leg and spine fractures, multiple lacerations (needs  
to go soon);

Father: mortal wounds to head (forget him);

Mother: conscious, respirations rapid and shallow,  
probable chest trauma, pneumothorax likely  
(might go bad quickly);

Girl, about 12: unresponsive, no respirations (do something  
*now!*);

Girl, about 9: crying quietly, no apparent injuries  
(beautiful cheekbones, long blonde hair);

Boy, about 8: conscious with normal respirations, guarding  
left arm (okay for now);

Girl, about 5: unresponsive, respirations regular but gurgling, maybe blood in airway (needs suction);  
 Boy, about 2: unconscious and cyanotic, eviscerated bowels—

a bystander screams  
 and screams. If this is the world, she will  
 not have it. Cannot escape it. So there she is,  
 her throat vibrating like a frog's leg  
 under an electrode. She screams and screams  
 making it hard to hear the partial quiet  
 of all that can be done.

The oldest girl,  
 between her parents, waits crushed from mid-thigh down  
 beneath the dash. Carol pulls her father,  
 still twitching, out of the way onto asphalt,  
 twists the girl across the seat, cuts her blouse,  
 her tiny bra, begins CPR.

In the back,  
 I slide a pediatric airway into the five-year-old's  
 mouth, work it down her throat, roll her  
 on her side.

Then lift the baby's face  
 to my mouth, blow—  
 nothing goes in.

The useless bystander screams,  
 "No! No! No!"

The baby's intestines are soft  
 and white, no bleeding. No injuries apparent  
 to his chest. With two fingers  
 between his nipples I jab hard four times  
 and he chokes. In his mouth I find  
 what looks like chewed-up hot dog.  
 He breathes deep!

The bystander shifts to a higher key,  
 begins to wail. I glance at her:  
 all dressed up for an evening of make-believe,  
 but standing on a road backlit by ambulance floodlights,  
 trying to outscreech the ordinary night.

*Michael Umphrey*