

**Redwood Writers 2015 "On the Edge" Short Story Contest  
Third Place Winner**

**"The Good Man"  
Bo Kearnes**

Norman Hobson stretched at the crossbars preparing to go for a run, when a woman in a blue sports car drove into the parking lot. Joined by a middle-aged man wearing red shorts and a white tee shirt, the pair came over and began to stretch alongside. Norman couldn't help but eavesdrop.

"Sorry I'm late," the woman said. "Traffic's getting worse every day." She placed her hands on her hips and began to rotate her torso.

"So, how was the picnic?" the man asked, straining to touch his toes.

The woman didn't respond right away.

"That good, huh?" he said, looking in her direction.

"It was okay. My sister forgot the mustard, so I had to go to the store. Then someone else forgot ice, so I had to get that too. Once everyone settled down it went all right except for my brother and his girlfriend."

"You don't like her?" the man asked, swinging his arms above his head.

"Oh, we get along fine. It's my brother who's the problem. He doesn't love her, but he's going to marry her anyway."

"Why would he do that?"

"At forty he probably thinks it's time."

"Have you spoken to him about it?" the man asked

"Not really. He's not much of a communicator. And I doubt it would do any good. Besides, he gets upset when I try to help."

To Norman, it was *déjà vu*. He had married Dolores not because he loved her, but because he was forty and it was time. No longer wanting to live alone, he decided he needed a companion. At first Dolores had been a free spirit, but over time she became distant and withdrawn. Craving demonstrable love and affection, Norman complained she wasn't a loving woman.

"What do you expect?" she declared. "Because of you, I'm miserable."

Norman refused to believe he could be the cause of such distress, as after all he was a good man. He had worked hard to provide Dolores with a home and reasonable wealth. How could anyone fault him for that? So when Dolores therapist suggested couples counseling, he agreed. He had invested many years in his marriage and didn't relish starting over. Therapy proved to be an awakening. He realized he had been selfish, thinking only of himself. He was to blame for Dolores distress.

Norman finished warming up and jogged away leaving the couple still stretching. As he ran, he pondered what the woman had said about her brother and his girlfriend. Concerned, he considered circling back and telling the sister his story. She could advise her brother's girlfriend to leave and save herself from a marriage devoid of love. But how could he tell his tale of woe to a stranger who might think him deranged? Nonetheless, he had to try. It offered a chance at redemption, a chance to make up for what he had done to Dolores. The compulsion within him swelled and he reversed course.

Perhaps he would pass the man and woman on the trail he reasoned, but he didn't. Maybe they would still be at the crossbars, but they weren't. He saw the woman's car in the parking lot and thought about placing a note on the windshield. What if she called the police and had him arrested for stalking? Determined, he decided to take the risk. He wrote his name and phone number on a piece of paper and added, *Please call. It's a matter of Life.*

The next day, his cell phone rang.

“Hello, I’m the woman from the park. I got your strange message. What is this about?” she asked, her voice agitated.

“Thank you for calling. I overheard your conversation at the crossbars. Your brother’s going to marry his girlfriend even though he doesn’t love her. You must warn her. I know it sounds odd, but let me tell you my story and you’ll understand.”

For a moment, Norman thought she had hung up. “Make it quick,” she snapped. Norman took a deep breath and began.

“It took courage for you to call,” she said after he had finished. “You sound like a good man. I’ll tell my brother’s girlfriend so she doesn’t end up like Dolores.”

Norman hung up satisfied he had done the right thing.

A week later, he got another call.

“Hello, I’m the brother of the woman you met at the park. My girlfriend told me your story. I’m a runner, too. Maybe we could run together.”

How fortunate, Norman thought. Not only had he done a good deed, he had a new running buddy. The two men made arrangements to meet the following day.

“I’ll be easy to spot,” the brother said. “I’ll be wearing black.”

The next day, Norman approached the crossbars and saw a stocky man with gray-flecked, close-cropped hair, wearing black shorts, a black sweatshirt, black running shoes and dark gloves, the type worn by weight lifters. A bit much, he thought.

“I’m Norman,” he said extending his hand.

“Just call me ‘the brother,’ ” the man replied.

Norman frowned. He seems odd, then remembered the sister had said he wasn’t much of a communicator.

“Which trail do you normally run?” the brother inquired.

“I usually jog up along the ridge line, where it’s quiet and there aren’t many people.”

“Perfect,” the man said, and the pair jogged away together.

“So how’s your sister?” Norman asked.

“She’s fine, but she should stop meddling in my affairs.”

Norman could understand. He had a sister, too.

As Norman ran, he admired the wild flowers in the meadow and glanced up at the red-tail hawk circling lazily overhead. How fortunate to be alive on such a beautiful day, he mused. The men approached the top and the trail steepened. The brother dropped back. Concerned, Norman glanced over his shoulder, and panicked. The brother’s eyes had turned cold and steely. His upper lip curled in a sneer, his nostrils flared and the veins across his forehead pulsed. Norman’s adrenaline kicked in and he bolted ahead, his arms pumping, his feet barely touching the ground. Had he dared to turn around again, he would have seen the brother reach into his pocket and pull out a stainless steel garrote. Unawares, Norman ran straight and fast. When the glint of wire passed before his eyes, he had no time to react before he was jerked off his feet. He flailed and clutched at the wire at his throat. As the warm blood oozed over his hands, he tried to scream, but his vain attempt ended in a gurgle. He heard the brother’s icy voice close beside his head. “Because of you and my sister, I lost the only woman I ever loved.” The wire tightened, and Norman slumped to the ground.

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The brother’s chest heaved as he stood with his hands on his hips and tried to catch his breath. Then he bent over the bloodied body and removed the garrote. With a red-checkered bandana he took from his pocket, he wiped the wire clean. Grabbing Norman by the feet, he dragged him to the edge and shoved him over the side. The cadaver tumbled down the incline, spewing blood, flipping over logs, boulders and stumps, before settling in the thick underbrush at the bottom of the ravine.

Satisfied, the brother walked back from the edge, broke off a tree branch, and swept loose dirt and gravel over the stained trail. Afterwards, he washed his hands in the trickle of water that flowed down the mountainside. He glanced about one last time, and returned to the parking lot. In the car the brother looked at his watch, and at the garrote on the seat beside him. He smiled. His sister should be home by now.