

# Cold Comfort

by Tanaqui

Ted was working the swing shift. Listening to the rising wind as she huddled on the couch under a couple of blankets, Heather hoped he'd get home okay. She would have read a book to pass the time while she waited for him—especially as there were a few precious hours of daylight left—but Ted wasn't the bookish type: even if there had once been reading material in the trailer, it had maybe been burned long ago. Instead, she tried to re-tell herself stories from books she'd read as a child: *Little Women* and the Nancy Drew Mysteries and *What Katy Did*....

She was half-asleep when Ted banged open the door, stamping his feet and then shutting the door behind him quickly.

"Hey." He nodded at her as she sat up and blinked at him, barely visible in the dark. "It's pretty bad out there."

"Sounds it." The wind had gotten worse while she dozed. "You hungry?" When he nodded, she pushed herself to her feet and made for the kitchen area. "It's canned beans and canned potatoes."

Cold, of course. They'd run out of a way to heat stuff unless they built a fire outside. On a night like this, that wasn't an option.

She managed to light the candle—they were careful how much they used it, because they only had one more left—at the second attempt, but struggled with the can opener, her hands too numb to hold it properly.

"Hey. You're freezing." Ted stepped up next to her and turned her towards him. He took her hands and began chafing them. His fingers weren't that warm, but they were a lot better than hers. He glanced at the heater, which was cold for lack of propane. "Sorry I can't keep the place warmer."

She shook her head. "It's not your fault." She tried not to let her teeth chatter.

"God, you really *are* freezing." He pulled her against him, making sure her hands were trapped between them. Some of the warmth he'd worked up from walking home from the factory began to seep into her.

She rested her head against his shoulder and wondered whether things were this bad in Jericho. Probably. After all, they'd made the trip to Black Jack because they were almost out of gas.

"Heather?" Ted cleared his throat. "I think tonight... you need to get into bed with me. Otherwise...."

She pulled back from him a little and looked up at him. "Otherwise, we're both going to freeze to death? I know."

They ate the cold food and then—because there was nothing better to do, and she had an early shift again the next day—they piled all the bedclothes she'd been using onto his bed, and crawled underneath them. There was a moment of awkwardness, because, God, this was *weird*, and then they curled up close, their hands and arms pulled in between them.

They both slept much better, only waking a couple of times from the cold. After that, they shared the bed every night. There was even a childish comfort in the whispered conversations about what they'd do once things got back to normal, or reminding each other of times back when they were kids.

It wasn't until after she'd decided not to go back to Jericho with the first wind turbine, clearly much to Ted's surprise, that he put his hand on the back of her neck and tried to kiss her. She drew her head back. "Ted? What—? No!"

Even in the dark, she could read his unhappiness in the tilt of his head. "C'mon, Heather. You know I've always...."

She did know. They'd sort-of dated for a couple of months back in high school, the summer before their senior year. But she'd been glad when classes had started again, and the pressure of studying had allowed her to gently let the whole thing peter out. Because she really liked Ted, and he was sweet, and he was fun to hang out with. But he didn't make her heart skip a beat and her breath catch and her stomach flutter. Not like—.

"I—I'm sorry. I haven't." She licked her lips, hating herself for hurting him, but knowing she couldn't return his feelings. And knowing she sure as anything didn't want to give him false hope. Because that was *much* worse.

Ted still had his hand on the nape of her neck, still trying to hold her close. "It's that guy in Jericho, isn't it? Jake."

Heather sighed. Yes, Jake was part of it. Much as she'd tried to get over him, she'd failed miserably. She had a horrible feeling that every guy she met in future would be compared to Jake Green. But her feelings for Jake weren't the only reason she was still in New Bern; there was still plenty of work to do on the turbines to make them better. And they weren't the only reason that getting involved with Ted would be a bad idea. She'd forced herself to believe there would be other guys out there who could make her feel something like Jake did; she even wanted to believe that maybe among them would be one who could make her feel more. But she knew Ted would never be one of them.

She couldn't tell him that. She knew how hard it was to realize that someone you had a thing for only saw you as a friend. So she nodded and half-lied. "Yes. I still—."

Ted took his hand away from her neck and wrapped his arms around himself. "Okay." His voice was rough with hurt.

Heather lay awake for a long time, knowing Ted was awake too, but not knowing what to say to him.

They never spoke of it again. The weather was still bad enough that they shared the bed the next night, and the night after, and for many more nights, forcing themselves to huddle close. Until the first hint of spring came, and she retreated back to the couch with the excuse that she wasn't sleeping well and she'd keep him awake.

And then, one morning, she left for her shift at the factory....

**Disclaimer:** These stories are based on the Junction Entertainment/Fixed Mark Productions/CBS Paramount Television series *Jericho*. They were written for entertainment only; the author does not profit from them nor was any infringement of copyright intended.