Her Smile

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He turned to tell her something, smiling, but all he saw over his shoulders were mosquitoes, smiling, glad to see him, thank you very much. He just couldn't get out of the habit of looking for her smile.

He still packed too much when camping. Still packing for two, it seemed. In the old days, he used to camp a lot by himself. She could never understand his need to be alone.

"I'll miss you, honey."

"I'll miss you too."

"Why do you have to go?"

"Well, you can't miss someone if they never leave, can you?"

She smiled and he smiled. A standard parting that had become ritual over the years. Except now the joke was bittersweet. He hadn't understood what he'd been saying. He never missed her until she was gone.

He missed the getting ready to go camping. Or the trying to go. Looking for his boots. Where's the bug spray?

"Honey, are you sure you won't come with me this time?"

"No, you don't really want me to come."

And they both smiled because they knew it was true.

He missed the joy of returning. The hugging. The kissing. The glad-you're-back, welcome-home smile he'd learned to look forward to.

He missed the old green Pendleton shirt she wore after she did start to come camping with him. He missed bringing her coffee in the morning as she lay in her sleeping bag. He missed her whistling back at the birds in the trees. He missed her falling asleep by the campfire in the evenings. He missed looking over his shoulder to tell her something and seeing her smile.

He missed her smile.