

## COLD HARD NIGHT

Twenty-five days ago, he drove into the side of a hill going around a long curve. He had been drunk, but since there was no police report, he kept up the lie to himself and to others that he had only fallen asleep. He got out of the car, walked down the road to the highway, and hitchhiked back to town. The next day, he borrowed a friend's car and went back. He took off the license plates and grabbed his stuff; anything that might somehow link back to him. It was all pretty clean. The car has gone into a small ravine, into thick brush. No one could see it from the road. No one would care anyway. The car was a piece of crap, but he had wanted to be sure about things.

His neck had been stiff for the next couple of days, but that had went away soon enough. Last week, she had come by to drop off some of his things and then that was it, just like that. They had had a thing between them about property, from the start. The conversation had gone something like this:

'Hey...how's it going?'

'Fine. I'll only be a minute.'

She had come in, moving through the rooms, making one last sweep, as if she were planting grain in a field, stowing it away with her memory.

'See you,' and she had slammed the door behind her.

'Take care,' he had said to the door.

How can so much become so little? How can you be with someone and then turn around and be with someone else, as if it were nothing? You take what you had with a person, everything you had, and wake up one day feeling different; and, then, that is it, just like that. It never seems to matter anymore, anything you do. It always seems to somehow end bad.

Sitting at his kitchen table, he flipped the cards over, bending each one hard, almost to the point of putting a crease in them. He scraped each card against the grain of the wooden table, listening to the sound. He wasn't even playing a game. Read a book, he told himself. No, that was no good. Maybe watch TV. Lame.

If he stopped and concentrated for a minute, he could hear the distant traffic on the street below. You can never have silence. Never, ever. The kitchen light above him shined down on the table. There was no dining room, just a narrow closet by the door. The light in the short hallway was off. There was no light coming from the bedroom, either, so the way faded into darkness. There were two green beer bottles in the sink, empty, their labels removed with hot water. His stiff chair creaked every time he shifted.

It suddenly started to rain. The rain quickly picked up intensity to the point where it was sheeting against the kitchen window, even the walls.

He steadily continued flipping his cards, despite the intensity of the rain: a Two, a Ten, a Jack...and then a King.

“What is life?” He said to the King of Hearts -- the Suicide King, because the knife goes straight into his head, he reminded himself.

“Life is a game of cards...” he said, smirking at his game. It was a silly game, he told himself, and he terminated it. Still, he flipped his cards.

The rain began levelling off from madness into a constant denudation. The presence of the rain felt good. He thought about opening the door and feeling the cool, fresh, rain-air in his face; the mist hitting his skin and the wet air blowing against his hair; but he did not do that. Instead, he slowly turned over one more card; his last card, and placed it down. He looked at it for a long time. How ironic, he thought, that should be my last card.

He got up; but he did not push in the chair. He walked down the hallway, disappearing into the darkness, his body slowly becoming one with the shadows.

Sometime later, the rain tapered off to a drizzle. A flash of lightning exploded and lit the dark rooms, as its alarming crack rang through the house.