

A Black Night

by Deborah Rickard

The hairs on my arm lift with the breeze; a haunting breath from the open window carrying night-scented stock from the black-shrouded garden. I smile, a self-indulgent smile, and submerge myself in the memory of his touch, his soft caress and his silken words whispered in my ear; "I love you." I hear his murmured promise; "I'll never leave." And beneath the cool cotton of the duvet, I wallow in the cashmere wrap of love.

I allow myself another indulgence and pull my arm back beneath the downy lightness and let my fingers meander across the mattress, slide over the sheet and negotiate the rucks and runnels made by our loving. My hand reaches the cold outer edges of my world.

He's not here.

My eyes snap open. But it doesn't help. The night is black, and besides, I *know*. I lie and listen, motionless. I strain my ears.

Nothing.

I sit up and turn on the light. It doesn't help.

And then, the flick of a switch. Or was it the snitch of a latch? A cool breeze runs along the narrow hallway, lifting the hairs on my arms.

He's gone.

