

Cold

by Jake Barnes

I take her to dinner at a nice restaurant in the city. It is supposed to be a “let's just be friends” occasion. I had too many martinis and forgot my rehearsed speech. I told her I didn't love her. She said love wasn't important; she wanted to marry a man she could respect. I asked her if she respected me. She smiled, and even inside a dimly-lit restaurant, the sun came out, as it always did. Oh, yes, she said. Very much.

I drove her home, kissed her goodnight, then took the highway out of town and headed toward the rental on the big lake that I shared with friends. It wasn't snowing, but it was cold. I got sleepy and opened the window a tad on the driver's side. Didn't want to fall asleep.

I woke up when my car hit the ditch. Bounced. Rolled up an incline and onto some poor suburbanite's neatly clipped lawn. When the car hit a tree, it stopped, and I was thrown out. I ended up on my back looking up at a full moon in a black sky.

The cops came and asked me if I had been drinking. No, I lied. Then the ambulance came and whisked me off to the hospital. What have I done now? I asked myself. How was I going to wiggle out of this one? What if my leg is broken? What if she's pregnant?

The boys in the ambulance were all very nice. They said I'd be out of the hospital in no time.

