

The King of Cups
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By

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INT. NEW ORLEANS APARTMENT - DAY

KENT HARRISON, tough, about 30, looks out the window at the storm outside. He packs a handgun into his backpack and moves away from the window.

EXT. SAINT ANN STREET - DAY

New Orleans is flooding. The latest hurricane is in full effect, delivering more destruction than any city could withstand.

Saint Ann Street, in the heart of the French Quarter, is now a river. Debris swirls in the filthy water. Submerged cars lie abandoned. Rain continues to pelt down through heavy winds. Sandbags are stacked in front of doorways in a vain attempt to hold back the deluge. Many doors and windows are boarded up.

Kent emerges from one residence, pushing against the weather. He hoists the bag to his shoulders and walks into the street.

Kent trudges through knee deep water, then grimaces as he sinks to his waist. Soon he is half walking, half swimming.

EXT. JACKSON SQUARE - DAY

Kent makes for high ground in Jackson Square. He steps from the water, but there's no viable shelter here. He moves on.

EXT. SAINT ANN STREET - DAY

A gust of wind knocks Kent back on his heels. Debris from a nearby building rains down on him. He slips and hits his forehead on an iron park bench.

Kent is dazed. He slips under the water. After a moment, he comes up coughing. He checks his head. There's some blood, but he's not concerned.

Kent continues swim/walking northwest up Saint Ann. He doesn't see anyone. The quarter is empty of life.

EXT. LE SHADE HOTEL - TWILIGHT

The day is ending. Kent sits atop a sedan with a dented roof. Down the block, he can make out a lit sign: "Le Shade Hotel". It's the first indication of humanity he's seen.

Kent ducks his head against a blast of wind. When he looks up, he sees a curious sight. A rowboat is moving towards him across the river/road. At the oars is a YOUNG BOY.

The boat docks alongside Kent's car. The boy looks up expectantly.

Kent wastes no time climbing in.

KENT

Thanks.

The boy nods wordlessly and turns the boat around. He rows to the hotel, its doorway glowing in the dark.

As they approach, it becomes apparent the hotel is a real hole in the wall. More a flophouse than a legit hotel.

The front door is underwater, so Kent climbs from the boat onto a second floor balcony. The boy follows, tying up the boat swiftly.

Kent pulls some coins from his pocket.

KENT

Thanks, kid. Here -- sorry I don't have more to spare.

Kent offers the boy a quarter. He takes it. They move inside.

INT. LE SHADE HOTEL - HALLWAY - NIGHT

In the hallway is the biggest dog Kent has ever seen. He stops in his tracks as the dog growls. The boy approaches the animal without worry. He takes the dog by the collar and gently tugs him out the way. He chains the beast to the wall, then gestures for Kent to continue.

Kent moves on, but can't take his eyes off the dog. The dog stares back, licking its lips while the boy rubs its ears.

INT. LE SHADE HOTEL - LOBBY - NIGHT

The lobby's decor is accidental in nature. Mismatched furniture, remnants of newspapers, dingy wood paneling.

An OLD MAN sits behind a counter, watching a snowy black and white TV.

KENT

Hell of a night. I'm so glad I found you here. Any port in a storm, right?

The old man looks him over.

OLD MAN

The only port, for some. How'd you come to be out in this weather?

KENT

I should have left days ago, but there was some business I had to attend to. Now it's worse than I ever expected, and I just want to get to higher ground.

OLD MAN

It's 20 for the night, 50 by the week.

Kent pulls out his waterlogged wallet.

KENT

Sure. You take--?

OLD MAN

No credit here.

KENT

Oh, wait. I don't have cash. I mean look at this.

Kent drops a handful of coins on the counter.

KENT (CONT'D)

Two quarters, two dimes, a nickel, and four pennies. I was hoping to spend it on a soda or a bag of chips. I haven't eaten all day.

The old man looks at Kent silently.

KENT (CONT'D)
Can't we work something out? It's
a hurricane out there.

OLD MAN
What do you have in mind?

Kent rummages through his bag and pulls out a Tarot deck.

KENT
How about a reading?

The old man's face softens.

KENT (CONT'D)
I tell fortunes, mostly for
tourists. I've been told I'm
pretty good at it. This deck is
one of the few things I was able to
save from my apartment.

OLD MAN
All right -- should be
interesting. Let's see what's in
store for me.

KENT
And you'll let me stay the night?

OLD MAN
I like what you have to say, you
can stay forever.

INT. LE SHADE HOTEL - LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

Kent shuffles the deck.

KENT
Ask your question. What would you
like to know?

He offers the cards to the old man. The old man cuts the
deck.

OLD MAN
Hmm. How about, "Will this storm
bring me more business?"

KENT
All right.

Kent lays down the first card on the desk blotter.

KENT (CONT'D)

The Ten of Swords. This is your prime energy... ruin. Could represent sadness following a catastrophe.

OLD MAN

Not looking good so far.

KENT

Well, it's only the first card. We'll see how it relates to the others.

He sets the next card down above the first. It's the Three of Swords.

KENT (CONT'D)

This one is Air -- your spirit. Three of Swords means a betrayal of trust.

He looks hesitantly at the old man.

KENT (CONT'D)

There may be a painful truth revealed in your future.

OLD MAN

This is getting better all the time.

KENT

The next card is Fire, your motivations.

He sets the third card to the right of the first.

KENT (CONT'D)

The King of Cups. Wisdom, a beloved leader with knowledge of human nature.

OLD MAN

Me? Beloved? Heck, I'd settle for feared.

Kent looks at the old man. There is a howl of wind outside and a sudden power fluctuation. The lights go dim and come back brightly. In the fluttering light, the old man takes on a sinister look. Kent reacts, then resumes his composure.

KENT
The fourth card represents Water.

OLD MAN
We got plenty of that outside,
don't we?

Kent lays down the fourth card below the first.

KENT
The Tower. An abrupt change, water
brings about a new existence.

The power dims again. The room seems to swim. Kent's knees buckle.

OLD MAN
Hold on there boy!

He reaches across the counter to grasp Kent's arm. With surprising strength, he keeps Kent upright.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)
You feeling all right? When was
the last time you ate?

KENT
I... don't remember.

OLD MAN
You know, I got a notion. That
change you mentioned. It might not
be about me anymore. Do you mind?

He holds out his hand.

KENT
Sorry?

OLD MAN
The cards, son.

Kent slowly hands over the cards. The Old Man spins the blotter around -- now the layout of cards faces Kent.

OLD MAN
What's the next one mean?

KENT
Earth. Position in life.

The old man sets the fifth card to the left of the first. It's The Fool.

OLD MAN
See what I mean? It's your reading
now. The Fool!

He cackles with disturbing force.

OLD MAN
Now for the opposing forces. See,
I know a thing or two about the
Tarot.

He lays down two cards. One on either side of the cross of
cards.

OLD MAN
Judgment. Death.

The wind howls. The lights strobe. Kent stumbles again,
this time falling to the floor. The old man just laughs.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)
You know what Judgment means, of
course. But don't get down about
the Death card. It's not such a
bad thing. Why, it represents
rebirth. A new existence. Like
what happened to you when you paid
the ferryman and walked through my
front door.

The old man walks around to Kent's side of the counter. He
kneels down next to him.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)
You do remember dying, don't you?

Kent's head wound is bleeding profusely. He tries to
speak, but his jaw waggles soundlessly.

FLASHBACK - EXT. SAINT ANN STREET - DAY

We see the moment when Kent fell and hit his head. Only this
time, he doesn't regain consciousness.

Instead, we see him from underwater. His body twitches,
then drowns. He floats lifelessly.

INT. LE SHADE HOTEL - LOBBY - NIGHT

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

As for judgment, that's why you
came to me.

The old man dumps out the contents of Kent's bag. The handgun. Several Ziploc bags, taped up, containing white powder.

OVER BLACK

We hear two gunshots.

FLASHBACK - INT. NEW ORLEANS APARTMENT - DAY

Kent aims his gun at someone offscreen.

We cut to reveal his victim. The dead DRUG DEALER slumps on the couch with a bullet hole in his head and another in his chest.

Kent looks out the window. He puts the gun in his bag. He moves to a nearby table, where several bags of heroin sit. He sweeps them into the bag.

INT. LE SHADE HOTEL - LOBBY - NIGHT

Kent regains his voice.

KENT

Who are you?

OLD MAN

Who do you think?

The old man smiles.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)

Buddy boy, we're gonna have so much
fun together. C'mon. Let's finish
that reading and see what eternity
has in store for you.

He holds out his hand and laughs.