



**AN AXE, THE TREE, AND
THE TWO CARDS**

by **JOHND. WICINAS**

“An Axe, The Tree, and The Two Cards”

NOW

“CRACK”

Not much longer now.

“CRACK”

The axe strikes again.

“CRACK”

My axe strikes again.

“CRACK”

It’s getting closer.

“CRACK”

My hands are blistered.

“CRACK” – “CRACK” – “CRACK”

One more shot.

“CRACK”

The tree strikes the ground with a horrendous thud and splinters into pieces like “pick-up sticks.” Fortunately, no birds were hurt. They flew after the first couple of cracks.

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THEN

Our parents told us not to climb into the old tree house in our new backyard, “That tree house has been rotting up there for at least twenty years before we even thought to move in here,” Dad said. But damn it, my brother Jack and I had to climb up there anyway.

It was huge. For real, for real.... it was just straight up great. We had a grand time running around and goofing off in that “old rotten’ place.” Plus, it was the best spot to smoke a couple a’ Dad’s cigars when Jack had the nerve to gleek a pair.

I could say that one day Jack just happened to bring his deck of cards with him to our hideaway, but that would be nothing other than a lie. The truth to tell was simple: Jack *always* had his deck of cards with him. It was kinda’ like that American Express commercial where Karl Maldon stresses, “don’t leave home with out it!” In fact, Jack always had his cards with him since I could remember. I figured the cards weren’t like other toys. Growing up Mum and Dad would never, ever, ever let me have toys in my hands twenty-four seven, but like I said, Jack’s cards were different. It just seemed fair to me that he could have the cards with him all the time ‘cause they were, like... serious toys or something like that. I don’t know it... it just made sense to me for some reason, y’know.

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This other thing about the cards was kind of funny though. I guess it was funny because I didn't understand it. Jack would play with them all of the time. I mean *all* of the time. Really. Hands dirty or not, he would shuffle, shuffle, and re-shuffle those damn, worn out cards over, and over and over. Mum said his constant playing with the cards was on account of Jack having a case of something called aspergers. She knew all about it because of being friends with some artist named Andy from her old neighborhood in Pittsburgh. She told me Andy constantly fondled a rosary in his pocket and ended up being pretty famous. We did not go to church so often, but this was a big deal for Mum to talk about. Anyway, there was one day that turned out to be much different from any other day since we first entered the tree house.

Of course Jack had his cards with him. Even though we were ferociously puffing on Dad's cigars (we wanted to incinerate them ASAP to get rid of the evidence), Jack still managed to paw over his cards pretty good. I was surprised when Jack asked me to draw a card from his deck. It was the first time he ever offered to cough up a single card. Like I said before, his cards were different from other toys. I never thought he was greedy or anything for always playing with them and holding them close.

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As I went to draw it, it fell to the floor before it even left the deck by my hand. It felt overwhelmingly depressing that I did not grasp it when offered. I was more than startled when I picked it up from the floor. When I turned the card over it was Death.

Jack drew a card. It was the fool. He started to laugh. I did not feel so well all a’ the sudden. He started to taunt me and say cruel things about how I was about to die because of the card I was holding. He was acting crazy.

He was crazy.

He poked me a’ couple a’ times and looked goofy. I felt really sick. Jack told me, “You’re gonna’ die pal, you’re gonna die.” That was it. I got pissed and “bang” off went the shotgun shell in my head. I pushed Jack with both of my arms. I pushed him hard.

I swear to God that I did not mean it, but I guess that doesn’t matter. Jack flew out the tree-house door from my hard shove. I was never so scared in my life. Even though I felt really sick, and even though I was sweating really bad, I made it to the tree house door to see Jack sprawled on the ground. Man, Jack looked really bent-up and not real. I thought he was dead. Thank God, his eyes opened and he started laughing.

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NOW

One more shot.

“CRACK”

The tree falls. Behind me, I hear the now all too familiar sound of my Dad pushing his wheel chair. Jack looks at the fallen giant and a shimmer of his crazy laughter lights his face. He grins a little, “I guess the death card was for the tree?” His smile widens, “I guess my card was right.”

Sitting in his wheelchair, with not only his body bent, Jack laughs.