

Ron opened his eyes and waited for them to focus. As they did, the headache started to set in. Breathing deeply through his nose, Ron reached his hand to the table beside the bed, knocking over several glasses that were half-filled with various liquors in the process. His hand fumbled a bit before coming down on a tattered package of cigarettes. Though it took Ron less than twenty four hours to smoke through a pack, he always managed to destroy the casing before he had even smoked the third cigarette.

This particular pack was dirty and bent. Some of the cigarettes had broken in half, and Ron would have to repair them with the rolling papers he kept in the pockets of all his pairs of pants. Hand shaking, Ron reached into the package and selected his first, unbroken, cigarette of the day. Now that his eyes were fully adjusted to the brightness of morning and sobriety-- a rare experience for Ron-- he was able to locate the lighter, also resting on the cluttered table at his bedside. He lit the cigarette and inhaled the smoke deep into his lungs. As he exhaled, the permanent layer of phlegm which now lined his insides triggered a series of hacking and wet coughs. Ron winced at the pain and turned his attentions again to the table at his bedside.

Selecting a glass that was not particularly dirty, Ron walked into the kitchen, smoking, and began to perform his usual morning ritual. He opened the freezer door and reached for a bottle with a red cap and label. While he poured the vodka into the glass, Ron thought, as he did every morning, of the first time he had taken a drink. Ron's story was different from that of most of the alcoholics he had met during his brief stint in Alcoholics Anonymous. Unlike them, Ron had never even touched alcohol until he was of legal drinking age. His childhood and teenage years had never called for it: his parents never split up, drank occasionally with dinner, and loved him very much. He

had been brought up as an only child, and as such was a little pampered. But he was never in want of anything, nor did he have too much more than most of his peers. In his teens, Ron attended the public high school. Though he attended parties, Ron never felt the need to drink at them. Like most young boys, Ron met a woman in high school, fell in love with her, then fell out of love with her. He did this a few times, before he graduated, and when he did he didn't love any girl, but didn't feel his life was lacking for it.

After high school, Ron attended university. He had the ultimate goal of getting an MBA and working for a bank, in the corporate office. His first year, because school was away from his hometown and because his parents wanted him to have a more social university experience, Ron lived in the dorms. It was there, on his 19th birthday, that Ron first tasted alcohol.

The experience had been a subtle one, at first. When his first shot of vodka slid down his throat, Ron coughed. He felt nauseous. The liquor burned his throat. His friends, all of whom were egging him on, told him that it would pass. That he should have another. That he'd get used to it. They slapped his back and ordered another round. They were right. The second shot went down easier than the first. Instead of burning, this time, Ron felt a distinct warmth. He could feel it spreading from his esophagus to his lungs, from his lungs to his stomach, from his stomach all through his body, right down to his fingers and toes, which tingled with the new ecstasy of this warmth. As it faded, Ron kept drinking to maintain it. And he never stopped.

Now, nearly thirty years later, Ron was no longer maintaining the warmth. He was chasing it. Some time ago, he had lost that feeling. Where first it took him two drinks to maintain it, then it began to take five. Then ten. Then Ron got to the point where he had to start in the morning and never quit until his body quit for him, gave up under the strain of his liver from the alcohol and the aching in his lungs from the smoking. His body refused to take it any longer, and sometime around 1am, Ron would pass out every night, with a half-finished drink and a tattered pack of smokes next to his bed.

Of course, to support such an expensive and consistent habit, Ron had to maintain some kind of employment. Because he began to drink so often, so much, and so hard, Ron was kicked out of his dorm. Following that, he kept an apartment on the university's campus, but the drinking began to take such a toll on Ron's time and cognitive functioning that he couldn't keep his grades up. He was kicked out of the university after his first year, for failing more than half of his classes. His parents, being responsible and wanting the best for him, did not continue to support him. He was forced to find a job somewhere. And that's what led Ron to the suit shop downtown.

It wasn't totally by accident that Ron landed the job. His father was friends with the owner, and was able to pull a few strings for Ron, who started out in the warehouse. His job was to unpack the suits, iron a crease into the pants, and hang them on rolling racks, to be brought out to the store later. From there, Ron never left the suit shop. As the years passed, his responsibility grew, until eventually Ron was one of their top salespeople. And when the shop was empty, or all the customers were being helped by other staff, Ron would slip quietly into the back of the shop and drink greedily from the

vodka he kept hidden in his locker. Then he'd go outside in front of the shop, and smoke a cigarette, all the while trying to find that warm feeling again.

Ron's drinking was no secret from his coworkers. Everyone knew he was always at the bottle. His eyes were bloodshot, his nose cherry red, and the stench of alcohol seemed to trail him through the store. But as long as he did his job and sold the suits, no one questioned Ron's drinking. As long as he was able to bring the store a tidy profit each quarter, Ron was considered a model employee. As reward for his hard work, Ron was given free suits, pants, blazers, shirts, and cufflinks. He had amassed an amazing collection of expensive pieces, spanning three decades of fashion, which he housed at home. Suits, all in drycleaning plastic, were laid out over all the furniture in his apartment, hung on every railing and rack, and were bursting from his closet. Despite the mess of empty liquor bottles and cigarette packages throughout the place, Ron's suits were always in immaculate condition, pressed, drycleaned, and stored in plastic until he wore them. The only thing with which Ron took great care was his suits, everything else was near ruins.

It was this ruin that Ron stared at each morning, while waiting for the coffee to brew. He would drink his glass of vodka, contemplate his life up until this point, and stare at the ruin of his kitchen. Every morning, Ron would plan to come home that evening, put his keys down, not pour a drink, or maybe pour a drink, and start to clean the kitchen. And the kitchen was a mess. The same plates were in the sink as had been for the last month, maybe longer. Ron only washed his dishes when the glasses for his vodka became too dirty to drink from any longer. So the dishes were piled everywhere.

And when they ran out, Ron would pile takeout containers on top of them. So Ron would plan to come home and clean the kitchen, but it would never happen.

The coffee was now brewed, spiked with vodka, and poured into a to-go cup, and Ron headed out the door, and commenced his morning walk to work. He lived only eight blocks from the store, and so he could easily get there and back in no time. The rest of the day was uneventful. Ron drank too much, smoked too much, and sold a few suits. At the end of his shift, he said goodnight to his manager and strolled out into the street.

Most nights like this, Ron would simply walk home, stopping to get vodka and cigarettes along the way. But when Ron stepped out into the cooling temperatures lowering themselves from the high August heat that afternoon, he smelled something in the air. With all the drinking and smoking, Ron rarely smelled at all, but tonight he could smell the stars. He breathed deeply. He did not cough. He closed his eyes. He sucked in the cooling air. He breathed it out. He opened his eyes. The stars were clear, bright, and twinkling. Ron was sure it was the stars that he smelled. He began his walk home.

As he walked, Ron could hear the sound of his heels echoing down the alleyways and streets. Ron was alone in the twinkling light, breathing the incredible air, and hearing an incredible sound for the first time in thirty years.

Ron could not be sure how long it took for him to get home. He felt as though he had walked not for eight blocks, but forever. And yet he felt as though he had not walked at all. But when he unlocked the door to his apartment, Ron felt compelled to put his keys on the table, and walk into the kitchen. Like every night, he went with the intention of pouring himself a glass of vodka, which he did. However, on this night, Ron did not drink it down straight away. He took a sip, then placed it on the counter. He stared at a

cupboard under the sink and to the left. The door was angled strangely. It had come off its hinge, and was resting crookedly against the cupboard. Ron walked over to it. He looked at it closely. The only problem with it was that a screw had come loose. It could easily be fixed with the tightening of the screw. Of course, after thirty years of drinking, Ron could not remember where he had last put his screwdriver. In fact the only screwdriver he knew he had owned in the last thirty years had contained alcohol and orange juice.

Still, Ron could probably improve the place with a bit of cleaning. Grabbing a nearby plastic bag, Ron started collecting up all the empty bottles that were littered about the kitchen. When the bag filled, another one was available readily enough in the clutter so as to allow Ron to continue with the cleaning. When all the bottles were gone from the room, Ron gathered up the packages of cigarettes long since smoked, the papers, takeout containers, mouldy food, and other bits of garbage that were everywhere. When all these were gone, Ron found a towel and soap under the kitchen sink. He wiped down the surfaces in the kitchen, cleaned the dishes and placed them in the cupboards, and stood back to survey his work. The kitchen was spotless; the only thing that seemed off was the crooked cupboard door.

Staring at the door, Ron realized he had a mission. He had to find a screwdriver. He had to fix that door. Nothing was more important. The vodka he had poured when he came home from work that evening was still sitting behind where he was standing, untouched and forgotten, beads of condensation forming on the outside of the glass, and pooling around its base. Ron did not need the drink; he needed a screwdriver. He needed to fix the door.

He walked into the living room and carried out much the same process as he had in the kitchen, time time with the intent of locating a screwdriver he may or may not have. When he couldn't find it in the now spotless living room, Ron moved on to the bathroom, the bedroom, and finally the hallway. And when all of those rooms were spotless as well, Ron opened his apartment door, grabbed his keys, and set out to find a store that would sell him a screwdriver.

When he left the apartment building, it dawned on Ron that he had cleaned the entire night. It was now sunny and bright, like the morning of a day late in August. Ron breathed deeply. He could smell the sun. He started to walk. He could hear his footsteps. He could hear the sun, beaming on his head. He could hear the beads of sweat forming on his cheeks. For the first time in his life, Ron experienced perfect clarity. For the first time since he had started drinking thirty years earlier, Ron experienced the world. Then Ron heard a new sound. A familiar sound. Ron heard his cell phone ringing in his pocket.

Ron didn't have to answer the phone. He knew who it was. The manager of his suit store was calling him, wondering where he was. Ron reached his hand into his pocket and removed the cell phone. He stared at it. He could answer it, but what would he say. He could not possibly explain the importance of correcting the door on that cupboard. Ron thought about what would happen if he didn't go into work that day. Would his manager call the shop owner, a friend of Ron's father? Of course not. The shop owner had died ten years ago, old age, bad heart, long life. And Ron's mother and father had both passed in a car accident seven years past. When they had died, Ron did not feel anything. He drank vodka and passed out. Without being fully aware of what

he was doing, Ron had played the message on his answering machine each day for a week until the reality of it had set in. Then he poured himself a drink and went to bed. His parents' passing had affected him no differently than the news of a car accident involving strangers on the news. Ron was beyond feeling long before then, and beyond feeling until he noticed the crooked cupboard door.

Ron pressed ignore, and continued walking toward the nearest hardware store. On entering the store, Ron's eyes burned from the brightness of the fluorescent lights. The music in the store rang loud in his ears. After thirty years of feeling nothing, seeing nothing, and hearing nothing, Ron's body was making up for lost time. His feet moved quickly, unhindered by alcohol or tobacco. He half-ran through the store, down the tall and overwhelming aisles. Time seemed to be of the essence. He needed to get a screwdriver. He needed to get home. He needed to fix the cupboard. Ron moved lithely, with urgency, but also with a grace that was unfamiliar to a man of his age, and a body as abused as his was. When he reached the screwdrivers, Ron selected one in passing, did not stop to check the price. The price did not matter. Nothing mattered other than getting home and fixing the cupboard door. He grabbed the screwdriver while still moving, rounded the end of the aisle, and, now breaking into a full run, headed for the nearest checkout.

Ron could hear his heart pounding in his chest. He could smell the beads of sweat that were dripping down his face. He breathed deeply. He exhaled. He ran.

The cashier was a trainee. It was her first day on the job. When Ron came running at breakneck speed toward her till, she ducked. She thought he was going to stab her. She thought he might run out the door. She thought he was crazy. She thought

he was drunk. But for the first time in thirty years, Ron wasn't drunk. He was sober. He was on a mission.

He slammed the screwdriver down on the counter. He watched as the hands of the cashier shook, as she scanned the barcode and punched keys on her till. Everything felt to Ron as though it was taking forever. Before the cashier had even finished entering whatever she needed to enter on the till, Ron had pulled out his wallet and slammed a one-hundred dollar bill on the counter. He could hear his heart pounding. He could hear the ocean. He breathed deeply. He smelled the seaweed. He smelled waves. He grabbed the screwdriver. He held it tightly. He brandished it like a sword in front of him.

In his mind, Ron was on a horse. A great, noble, white stallion. He was wearing armor. Ron could hear the breathing and grunting of the beast. Ron could smell the hay and the straw and the sweat of the horse. He was riding into battle. He was wearing shining armor. He was going to save a princess. He could hear her cries. He could taste her lips. Ron breathed deeply. Ron kicked his horse. It arched its back and kicked its front legs up in the air. Ron could feel the sun as it glinted off his armor. Ron could hear the sound of the chain mail clinking against itself. Ron could smell the steel of his helmet.

Moving as quickly as he did, Ron was home in no time. If asked, Ron would not have been able to account for how he had made it there, except to tell people he had taken his horse. Ron, in reality, did not own a horse. Ron lived in an apartment in the city. Ron could not have owned a horse.

When Ron unlocked his door, he ran to the cupboard without even bothering to remove his keys from the lock, or close the door behind him. So consumed with his mission was Ron, that he didn't think about anything. He wanted, needed, craved only to fix the crooked cupboard.

Ron breathed deeply. He could smell the rust from the screw. He could hear the squeak of the crooked door as he opened it.

Ron exhaled. He inserted the screwdriver into the rusty screw.

He twisted his hand once. He could hear fragments of metal shaving away from where they were previously rusted over. He could smell the heat from the iron.

He twisted again. The door straightened a bit. Ron could hear his heart beating in his body.

He twisted again. The heartbeats quickened, the door straightened a bit more.

He twisted again. The heartbeats quickened, the door straightened a bit more.

He twisted again. The heartbeats quickened, the door straightened a bit more.

He twisted again. Ron was now one twist away from having a perfectly straight cupboard door.

He readied himself. He started to move the screwdriver. The screw moved with it. Time slowed down. Ron could feel his heart beating in his toenails. The door continued to straighten, Ron's heart continued to quicken.

As his hand slowly twisted the screw into final position, and the door slowly became straight, he could feel a sense of warmth taking over. It started in his heart, then moved to his lungs, then his stomach, and radiated out to his fingertips and his

toes. Ron put the screwdriver down. He laid on the floor. He rested his head against the tile, where he could stare at the straight cupboard door.

Ron could not feel his heart beating. He breathed deeply. He wanted to smell the wood, now in its proper place, but no air would fill his lungs. Ron stared at the straight cupboard door. He smiled. He felt the warmth fill his body. He could see the warmth. He closed his eyes. He was the warmth.

He was the warmth.