

Bones

<http://nogoodsonofabitch.com>

AN ALCOHOLIC RETURNS HOME FROM WORK

Front door. Hand fumbles for the keys in right pants pocket. Fist emerges with keys and loose change. Coins fall to the ground and bounce off the pavement as key stabs at lock. Shaky hands. Key enters slot. Turns. Latch clicks. Keys back in pocket. Hand grabs doorknob and turns. Door swings open.

Enter.

Cat pounces out of shadows. Rubs against leg. Say hello. "Evening, mother fucker." Leg shakes cat away. Cat heads towards kitchen. Follow. Hurry. Hand tosses laptop onto counter. Cupboard opens. Brand new bottle of Vodka shines. Not yet. Hand grabs bag of cat cereal. Hurry. Run to cat dish. Throat constricts. Saliva lines insides of cheeks. Swallow. Hurry. Dump cereal into dish. Throw bag of cereal next to laptop. Cat races over to his meal. Race back to bottle. Hand twists off cap, protective wrap floats towards the floor. Cat digs voraciously into cat dish.

Eyes close.

Head tilts back.

And drink.

Gaaaaaaaaaddamn....

It's that first pull. That first tug of the bottle. The first splash of sweet clear venom that burns your gums and flows over your dry tongue, washes the back of your teeth, the back of your mouth, and gushes down your throat in uneven spurts. A fountain. An orgasm. Never enough. Keep pouring. Keep swallowing. Keep swallowing until that evil desire inside your chest gets its fill and decides to go back to sleep. It's that first glorious, life-giving pull that makes it all worth it. The loss of wife, house, kids - all the horrid memories that pop up mercilessly in your

brain in traffic, meetings, lunch hour - it's all worth it for that first pull of vodka. Because liquor is the lubricant that washes those thoughts away. And it feels so goddamn good when they're gone.

I'm what one would call a textbook definition of "alcoholic." Apparently, admitting it is the first step towards recovery. Or, for some of us, the last step before giving up. In the meetings, they talk about hitting rock bottom. That horrible point of absolute failure and self revulsion where an addict decides to put his life back together. Me, I hit rock bottom, and I drank to get over it. It worked. Temporarily. And then I woke up, brushed my cotton teeth, went to work, came home, and drank to get over it again. "Rock bottom" for me was three years ago. I guess. My wife took the kids and the house a year before that. I guess that should be rock bottom, right? But I think the third DUI and the three days in jail and loss of license for five years was my dark day. When I had to shit in a toilet in full view of anyone and everyone, nothing to protect my privacy and dignity but a row of bars. The first night wasn't so bad, though. I assume. I don't recall it. But the remainder of my stay in the cell was hell.

On night #2 I experienced my first hangover in probably a decade. I don't know how the college kids can do it.

But, it was a good thing, because when I walked out of that cell I swear to you that I had a new lease on life. I was determined to change. For real this time. To get my wife back. To throw a baseball with my son. To read stories with my little girl.

And then I sat in the back seat of the cab that arrived to take me home, and I smelled the sour stench of the cabbie's cigarettes, and the desire to sit down on a stool and prop my elbows atop a bar overpowered me. And I ordered the cabbie to drop me off at the next exit ramp. I drank myself into such a stupor that night that I'll never be able to step foot in that tavern again.

As for the loss of license, well, I no longer owned a house, so I just moved into an apartment closer to work. I bought a bike. My co-workers think I'm a fitness buff.

It's funny how society will take everything from an alcoholic - house, family, responsibilities. Punishment, they call it. Yet, without these things, drinking only becomes easier. They never thought to take the alcohol from the alcoholic, I guess.

And so I drink.

And now, as my tongue licks the bitter aftertaste off the roof of my mouth, I think of my family. There's a blinking red "1" on the answering machine. I know who it is. The only person who still calls me. My sixteen year old son, Teddy. And no, he's not calling to see how ole' pops is doing. He's pissed about something. I must have screwed up again. Missed a scheduled meeting maybe. For the life of me, I can't think of what it could be.

I pour a glass-worth of vodka over some rocks in my tumbler and step over to the machine. I contemplate hitting "delete." But I want to hear my son's voice. Even the vitriolic, hateful tone that I anticipate is better than silence. I drink from the glass. I press "play."

Dad, it's Ted. Do you hear that in the background? It's Steph. Yeah. She's balling her eyes out. Wondering why dad didn't show up to her recital, even though he promised he would. She looked great on stage, dad, but you wouldn't know, would you? Cause you don't care about her. You don't give a fuck about any of us...

Pause. Trying to contain himself. Failing.

Fuck you, motherfucker. If I ever see you again, I'm going to beat the shit out of you. I fucking hate you!

Click.

Beep.

You have no more messages.

Teddy's playing father figure because there's no one else there to do it. Getting tougher, the young man. He used to cry when he'd leave messages. Used to beg me to quit drinking. Talk to mom. She'd take me back, he'd wail. He was sure of it. But we'll never know.

I wish I could say that it breaks my heart to hear my son curse me like this. I really do. But right now my heart is busy pumping vodka through my veins, to steadily push it from my

stomach to my head, to open the valves in my brain and release the dopamine my body lusts for. And soon, the voicemail will be a memory, distant, years ago. My hands are numb. One more glass and I'll go to bed. I'll eat tomorrow, I guess.

Hand reaches for bottle. Lifts. Tilts. Vodka flows into glass. Ice cracks. Adjusts. Liquid flows over cubes. Drowns them. They stick to the bottom of the glass, tugging, grasping, holding fast against the force of the rising liquid. Until they give up and float to the top, bobbing up against the surface like bodies floating in a pond. Glass rises. Mouth opens. Lips quiver. Vodka streams over them into the cavernous hole where a hungry tongue thanks me.

I am drunk.

In the meetings they would explain how an alcoholic can get drunk off much less than a "regular person." It's like jerking off, I guess. How you can get the job done so much more efficiently than when someone else is involved. They didn't use this example in the meetings, of course. That's my own metaphor. I don't engage in that type of activity these days. Haven't felt the desire in a long time. I wake up feeling numb, go to work, then drink myself to sleep. There's no room in the schedule for human desires. I wish I could say that this bothered me. I really do. But I'm too drunk for deep thinking. And there's a cat rubbing against my leg.

"Mother Fucker, get off me," I murmur. The cat used to have another name. What was that? Steph named it. Furry or Fuzzy or something. I call it Mother Fucker, and it's beginning to respond to it.

Some may question the decency of a man who names his pet cat "Mother Fucker," and I can understand that. But this is the same man who came home from work one day to find the locks on his front door had been changed, spotted his wife watching him through the upstairs window, daughter in her arms, son at her side, and this man turned right back around to get into his car and drive to a nearby motel. With a late night lounge.

So, no, if you think I give a shit about my cat's name... If you think I give a shit about my cat...
Then again...

There has been more than one time when Mother Fucker has escaped through an open door into the great unknown, and I've spent an entire night wandering the streets with a can of Chicken of the Sea, shaking a can opener like a blind bum with a mug full of pens, calling out his name. Mother Fucker! Mother Fucker! Dinner time, Mother Fucker! It's the episodes such as these where, even though I may be bone sober, that my neighbors in the complex must shake their heads collectively and spray judgments on that pathetic lunatic lush.

And I guess they might be right.

Cause I'm wasting away the hours of the night calling for that cat, so dehydrated from the past week's worth of liquor that my swollen tongue can't even rest in my mouth without pressing against the teeth on either side of it, calling for a cat that won't even bat an eye at me on any given day until it's hungry, and then it's all love and leg rubs. This cat who will sit and watch as I scoop its shit from a box and then trot away with its goddamn air of smug self-importance.

And yet, when my son used to lay on the floor, crying hysterically, screaming "Why dad? Why do you do it? Why do you do it when you know it hurts us so bad?" And I'd just reply with vague excuses and false promises and promptly disappoint the little guy at the very next opportunity.

I wish I could say that these thoughts hurt my heart. I really do. But my heart is cold and dead. Drowned in booze. Shriveled like a raisin. Like fingers after a long bath. A vestigial organ that used to pump real blood, clean blood. Joy. Love. Used to beat like I'd just run a marathon when I'd roll over onto my back after a mad lovemaking session with my wife. Used to flutter before I was married and I'd see my future soul mate walking towards my beat up shitty car barely kept running on a graduate student's dime. Twice pounded madly with love and fear and anxiety when my wife held both my hands and announced, "I'm pregnant." Would beat like a hurricane while my wife would scream and squeeze my arm so hard it would turn blue until we'd hear that amazing sound of a newborn baby screaming, and the doctor would smile and say, "You have a healthy baby boy", and later, "a healthy baby girl."

But somewhere and at some point the heart just stopped beating like it used to, no longer caring so much about caring, beating only in anticipation of its increasingly frequent shower of liquor. And soon it beat for nothing else. And it died. And the brain followed suit shortly after. The brain kept me functioning like a normal human for a while, using its powers of reason to make the necessary decisions for survival as a husband and father. The wife says, "I love you." The husband replies, "I love you, too." The child cries for attention, so the father sits at the side of the bed and provides it. But the brain can only take a man so far. For reason alone leads only to loneliness. And without the heart to keep the brain active, the brain soon withers. And then it dies.

And now as I stand here in the kitchen, a full glass of vodka in one hand, and a half bottle of vodka in the other, heartless and mindless, I understand that I have but one more vital organ to destroy.

And when my liver decides that its time has come, it will not go like the others. Not slowly and quietly. Not with a whimper. But with a bang. In short time, with my evil hands as an accomplice, my liver will explode, and my guts will be flooded with the poisons that it has collected for so many years. And my body will crumple to the floor. In the hallway, or maybe the bathroom. And I'll die alone, staring at the reflection of a broken man in the shards of glass from the broken bottle that fell from my wretched hands.

And I will die alone.

My wife and kids miles away.

My cat in another room. Indifferent to my last gasps of air, my hands clawing for something, anything, instinctively grasping for one final attempt at survival.

And maybe when it gets hungry the cat will inquire as to my whereabouts. Click clack it claws across the hardwoods to investigate the limp fleshy form on the floor. Rub against my dead leg. Step up onto my back and lie there, perhaps resting its head against my dead neck, basking in the warmth that emanates from my body, unable to comprehend why the heat is slowly dissipating.

Unable to care. And perhaps it will lie there until the warmth is gone. Until my crumpled useless shell has grown cold.

And then it will stand up on all fours, shake the sleep from its head, step off the dead man's back and wander away in search of something to placate the primitive hunger that grows inside it.

Hand turns up bottle, pours remaining drops into glass. Hand lifts glass to lips. Tilts. Tongue licks desperately at the drops of liquor that collect around the mouth of the glass. Teeth chew on ice. Cheeks suck the juice from the shriveled cubes. Eyes close tightly. Man longs for more. Man feels nothing. Man longs for more. Man continues to die slowly and painlessly.

-Bones

Feb. 23, 2008