

Colors

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Staring at him from the countertop, the frosted glass bottle half-filled with unfinished vodka screams his name.

He sat through his first meeting last week, but the twelve-step program remains a work in progress. Admitting he was powerless was one of the hardest things he has done. But inspired, he came home and poured out all of his booze. This discovery in the back of his closet while cleaning this morning was a surprise and has put a wrench in his plan to avoid temptations. He cannot quite recall when or why he bought the bottle, but he cannot seem to bring himself to pour it out.

When he closes his eyes for a second, he can almost taste the vodka from where he stands at the doorway to the kitchen, and he remembers his first taste of comfort. He was wearing his favorite charcoal heather AC/DC shirt with faded red print so he must have been 12 or 13. Late into the night, his friend smuggled the bottle of bourbon from the kitchen cabinet into the musty basement. They did not even know what the amber-brown liquor was—just that they had to be quiet because they were breaking the rules. He almost choked as the unexpected burn slid down his throat, but it warmed his soul even at that young age. It felt right in all the ways he was always wrong at home. The perfect escape from the screaming and the black and blue marks.

Getting caught with a boy in his bedroom was the final straw. Tears streaked down his bruised face as he stared at the locked door with no key in hand. At first, he stayed with friends, but he hated their pity, so he left. Strangers helped—some from the goodness of their hearts, though most for something in return—but alcohol remained his truest and best friend. Gradually, the tears stopped. His mind went numb and the world gray, but he survived.

One afternoon, a sudden shower from the sky sent him scrambling to a nearby awning for shelter, and there he met John—lanky, awkward, and with the biggest smile. With John, he saw colors again: the mint green pistachio ice cream they shared on their first date, the vermilion hues of the setting sun as they shared their first kiss, and the pink peonies that John gave him on their first anniversary. Little by little, they carved out a life together.

But the gray silently crept back into his world, and along with it, his safe haven; they fought more and more. John did not want to be with someone who hid behind the bottle, so he begged, pleaded, and swore he would change. Chances came and chances went. And one day, after another argument, John walked out and never came back.

His mouth suddenly feels parched as his eyes settle on the words “vodka” in blue print on the bottle. One last drink for old times’ sake and the rest down the drain, he promises himself. He walks over to the countertop. His fingers tremble as they remove the stopper. He lets the smell of comfort consume him. As his lips touch the cool glass, he shivers, like he did that first night he spent with John, clothes off in John’s blue Ford on that desert night. Baby blue like John’s eyes.

His hands turn the bottle over the sink, and he holds his breath, watching as another tether to his past swirls down the drain.

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