Blame It on The Good Stuff

by Sean Brown

“I can't do this anymore.” She said, quiet yet firm; with finality. She stared up at me with dark brown eyes on the verge of tears. Her browns were actually the first thing I'd noticed back at Kelly's Pub two winters ago. Back then, her brown eyes shone with passion and hunger, the love of life we're all searching for. She'd been with her girls and I'd been with my boys, and as these things tend to happen, our respective groups became one. She'd been shy and reserved, laughing at our antics, but offering none of her own. At the end of the night, with a head full of beer-fueled courage, I'd told her I thought she was cute, and would like to see her again. She smiled up me and said she'd like that too. She kissed me on the cheek and slipped her number into my jeans' front pocket.

That was nearly two years and a thousand smiles ago. Now she stood in front of me, on the verge of tears, and I knew it was my fault. If there'd been a thousand smiles, there must have been two thousand tears, again, my fault. I have a problem, and I know it. She used to laugh when I'd drink too much with the boys or at the game. When I'd come home stumbling and singing, smelling like the pub. She'd put on coffee and throw in frozen pizzas for the boys I'd brought staggering back to our apartment after bar close. She'd tell her friends it was the Irish in us, that we were good boys, that we couldn't help it.

We'd had our first fight not long after we'd moved in together. She told me I was too smart for the factory, that I needed to finish school, to do something with my life. I'd told her I wasn't doing nothing, that I liked the factory, the Union, that life. She said going out with the boys was no kind of future, that she needed more out of life, that she needed me to need more out of life. I'd slammed the door on my way out, fuming and swearing my way down to Hyperion

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Liquor for whiskey. Slamming the bottle in the alley behind the store, I'd felt a little bit better, a little bit calmer, but certainly not ready for home. I wandered down Randolph, cold, but numbed by whiskey, my head still raging. I'd gone into Mickey's and drank until I couldn't walk straight, before somehow getting back to the apartment. She'd known what I was up to, and she cried while she hugged me and told me I was sick, that I needed help. I'd laughed and said she sounded like my mother.

The next morning I felt horrible, not just from the hangover, but from the guilt, the shame. We went to Mass at the Cathedral, and I swore I'd never do it again. And I truly believed it. I didn't want to do it again. But this is life, and life tends not to work out as planned. I'd hurt my back on the double shift and was out on worker's comp for four months. At first I read. And then I wrote. I even signed up for business classes at the community college. But the whole thing was a waste of time, and I was bored out of my mind. So I drank to pass the time. At first it was just while she was at work, and I'd brush my teeth and throw out the bottle in the neighbor's recycling so she wouldn't find out. As time went on, and I didn't feel any better, I began to care less if she found out or not. I think I wanted to be found out, I wanted her attention and rage, if only to feel something authentic and exciting. I craved passion of any sort. I was not a college boy, and I was not a church going man, I was an alcoholic; and alcoholics drink.

That was the first time she left me. Went to her mother's house for the weekend. Her dad was a drinker too, and she was determined not to make the same mistake her mother had. At first, I didn't care. I had freedom to come and go when I wanted and do as I pleased. I could drink whiskey with my coffee in the morning or have a beer during the game and not feel like I was being judged. As time wore on though, I realized that I missed her. That I needed her. That she was the only thing in my life worth anything, and that I was throwing it away for the bottle. So I called her, I begged her to come back. I told her the truth, and I meant it, I promised it wouldn't

happen again. I offered to go to rehab or AA or something, or anything, if she'd just come home.

She came home. I went to exactly one AA meeting. In the parish basement with the other sinners, I actually fully admitted to myself that I had a problem. I went home and showed off my newcomer chip, all proud, like a child with his first report card. One week later, I'd gone to the pub with the boys to celebrate a coworker's retirement. Soda water with lime had turned into whiskey and waters, which turned into straight whiskey. I wrapped my car around a neighbor's tree on the way home and spent the weekend in jail. Monday morning she was there to bail me out, but wouldn't speak to me on the drive. I'd gone to work my shift at the factory that day, and she was waiting for me, hands on hips, when I got home. She'd called me a liar, and she'd been right. She'd said that I was too good for this kind of life, and I wasn't sure if she was right about that or not. Which is where we stand, alcoholic and woman who loves him.

“I can't do this anymore,” she repeated, voice cracking.
“I know,” I said, knowing that she couldn't. Knowing that deep down, I was no good for her, for myself, for anyone. Finally understanding that I wasn't going to get better. That she really was better off without me. “I'm going to miss you.”