Tom missed his DWI court date, and his lawyer yelled at him on the phone “Where were you? This is serious They could do a bench warrant for you and get you arrested!”

Tom said “ok,” which made the lawyer yell louder

“Do you understand what’s going on here? I can’t help you if you won’t help yourself!”

This shook Tom a bit so he came out of his stupor for a moment “Ok. I’m sorry,” he said

“I don’t need an apology, I need you to show up next Monday at 9 am for a court date You think you can do that?” He continued to yell.

“Ok.” Tom said, and hung up the phone for another pull on his tequila bottle.

He'd been taking it easy on the booze today because he planned to go to another AA meeting. He knew better than to go to one of those meetings where they sat in a circle and talked, so he was headed back to the speaker meeting from last week Hopefully, Baseball Tim wouldn’t be there, but fuck him if he was. At 34 , Tom didn’t have to take his shit. Screw his advice to bunt singles.

Tom went, and Tim didn’t, so Tom felt ok When it came to his turn, he said, bravely, he thought, “I’m Tom and I’m alcoholic and I need a sponsor.” He sat back and looked at the front for the first speaker to start his story. No one was at the podium so Tom looked around as he waited, and he saw that guy from last week who said he’d been sexually abused. Why admit that? What’s the point? Tom wondered.

So he sat back and listened to the speakers talk and he thought, again, that I’m not as bad as they are, so I’m not an alcoholic. Sure, I’ve got a DWI court date and no job and I’m about to lose my apartment, but I’ve never done heroin like those guys. Or crack for that matter. I’m definitely not an alcoholic if I’m better off than the others.

After the meeting, Tom stood hastily and put on his coat to leave when a big guy in a Green Bay Packers ski hat stood in front of him.

“I heard you say you need a sponsor,” He said.

“Yes,” Tom said in a moment of candor.

What’s your name? I’m Don.”

Tom said his name and took a step toward the door.

“I can be your temporary sponsor until you find someone you like,” Don said.

“Tom stopped. “Huh? What do you mean? I guess. That’s cool.”

“Ok,” Don said. “Can you do a couple of things for me?”

Tom looked toward the door. “Yeah I guess.”

“What meeting are you going to tomorrow?” asked Don, looking at Tom’s eyes.

“What? I don’t know.”

“Listen Tom, it’s easiest to stay away from a drink if you know what meeting you’re going to tomorrow Can you stay sober one day and meet me at the noon meeting here?”

Tom thought about that for a moment, though he had absolutely nothing to do tomorrow. “Ok, I guess.”

“Good, What are you doing now?”

“Just walking home, why?”

“Where do you live? I can give you a ride home if you want one.”

Tom said, “No no, I’m cool, thanks I can walk home.”

“I know Tom, do you want a ride anyway?”

Something about Don made Tom stop. “Yeah, sure, Thanks.”

Tom followed Don out to the parking lot and waited while he opened the driver’s door of an old white pickup truck and then he leaned across the seats to lift the button to unlock Tom’s door. Tom stepped up and inside the tidy red interior.

Tom sat and looked out the windshield.

“Where do you live?” Don asked, so Tom told him “That’s close.” He said as he started the truck and put it in gear.

“So, Tom, when was your last drink?” Don asked softly.

“What? Like 10 minutes ago.” Tom said and looked at his feet.

“Do you want to stop?” Don asked, softly again.

Tom’s eyes got watery “Yes,” Tom said, and he meant it.

“Are you going to drink when I drop you off?”

“I think so, yeah.”

“Want to go to a diner for some coffee?”

Tom sat back. He’d been tensely waiting for the drive to end so he could drink. Now he thought about coffee. It was weird. He suddenly forgot about booze for a minute. He looked out the window on his side as Don drove through town. He nodded his head slowly.

“How long have you been coming to meetings?” Don asked, and Tom thought “A few years,” he said.

“Ok,” Don said, “No worries, you’ll get there when you get there.”

Tom continued to look out the window, frowning now. He had the urge to cry and he didn’t know why. It had been so long since anyone was kind to him. He stared at the floor. “I guess I could bunt singles and do the next right thing,” Tom said, and Don smiled. “Yeah, that’s good advice,” he said, turning into a parking lot.

“Cmon, let’s go inside,” he said as he turned the truck off and hopped out and Tom followed him into the diner where they found a booth and sat across from each other.

“What do you do?” Don asked as he picked up a menu and handed the other one to Tom

“Nothing at the moment,’ Tom said and saw that Don had huge hands with a few missing fingers.

“What do you do?” Tom asked, curious.

“Me?” Don smiled, ”I’m a warehouse butcher. I slaughter animals so I can eat them,” He grinned.

Tom smiled though he felt like shit “How long have you been sober?”

“22 years.”

“22?” Tom said, shocked.

“Yeah. One day at a time. I just bunt singles.”

Tom smiled.

“How’d you get sober?” Tom asked, flat, and put down the menu.

‘A minute at a time, Tom, I just hung on. I had a good sponsor who told me what to do, like I’ll try to do with you.”

“Ok” Tom said, and he suddenly wanted to tell Don everything. His life’s story. How he’d had it worse than the others and how he had no choice but to drink. But he stayed silent in the nest of his thoughts.

“Maybe I should tell you about me,” Don said after the waitress took their coffee order.

“Ok” Tom said, starting to feel human.

“Well I’m a butcher and I‘ve been one for a long time. We used to drink on job, as you can tell,” he waggled the stumps of his missing fingers and smiled. Tom smiled back.

“So I lost a few fingers and then I lost my wife and my son and I went to jail for beating on a guy in a bar fight.” Don sat forward and sipped his coffee. “I almost killed him, but I still didn’t stop drinking.” Don sipped again.

“Then I got in a fight with my old man, who used to tune me up when I was a kid. I was bigger than him now and I beat the shit out of him.”

“That reminds me of the time I had my dad’s penis in my hand,” Tom said suddenly, in a low monotone.

“What?”

“Nothing.”

“No, what?” Don asked sitting forward again.

“Nothing My dad used to do stuff when I was little and I fought him off and he stopped.”

“Tom, what are you talking about?”

“Nothing,” Tom said and shrunk backwards.

“You know we’re going to have to talk about that right?”

“Huh, what? There’s nothing to talk about. What happened after your dad beat you so you beat him up?”

Don though, looked closely at Tom through the steam of his coffee cup. “Who have you told?”

“Told? No one. There’s nothing to tell.”

“Ok,” Don said and they sat still for a few moments, though Tom’s thoughts bounced around wildly. What had he said? Why had he said it?

“It’s nothing,” he said again.

“It’s something,” Don said, looking at Tom. “It’s something.”