

HALF EMPTY

By

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The bottle was half empty. Jaime couldn't remember when she'd stashed it under the kitchen sink, but it had to have been her and not Dani. Because Dani had never hidden the liquor from her—no, Dani had always dumped it down the drain right in front of her. “This is killing you,” she'd say as the booze poured out of the bottle and slapped against the stainless steel sink. “And it's destroying us.”

She'd nearly lost Dani because of her drinking. Last August, ninety-five degrees, rain sizzling on scorched sidewalks, and Dani loading her belongings into her Chevy Tracker. Jaime had watched her in disbelief. Into the vehicle went Dani's suitcases, guitars, amplifiers and sheet music. She'd closed the hatch and Jamie had grabbed her arm, begging, “Don't go, Dani! Please, don't leave me!”

Dani had pulled free. “I have to. I won't let you destroy me along with yourself. It's affecting my music now and I can't let that happen.” She'd gotten into the Tracker and she'd started it up.

Jaime would never forget how awful she had felt at that moment, waves of hopelessness pouring over her. She'd collapsed in a ball on the rain-soaked driveway, sobbing, wanting only to die. And then, miraculously, Dani's arms had circled round her and they'd clung to each other, Dani pleading, “You've got to stop drinking, Jaime. God, please, you have to. I love you so much.”

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“I’ll quit, Dani. I promise. Just don’t leave me. Don’t ever leave me again.”

That night they’d lain together in bed, Dani holding her close, and Jaime had felt ready to try, ready to beat the booze that had somehow become her master. Safe in Dani’s arms, she’d fallen asleep. When she’d awakened in the morning, Dani had already unpacked her things.

Now here she knelt in front of their kitchen sink, wearing faded blue jeans and a white tank top, staring at a half empty bottle of Jack Daniels. And even though she’d been sober for six months, seven weeks and five days, she wanted desperately to drink it. Hand shaking, she removed the bottle from the cupboard and set it on the wood floor. She looked away from it. *Fix the sink, Jaime. Forget about the booze. Fix the sink.*

The sink had been leaking for a week now. She’d had to order the part it needed because their apartment was in an old house and the piping was old and.... Christ, she could taste the whiskey. She could actually taste it. Jerry down at the hardware store had put in a rush order for the part but it had still taken a week. A week of she and Dani taking turns emptying the pail underneath the sink and neither one of them had seen the bottle. How could they not have seen the bottle?

Jaime swallowed hard and sat back, crossing her legs Indian-style. The amber liquid glowed in the light from the bronze and crystal chandelier that Dani had found at an estate sale over on Nottingham Terrace. Dani had a knack for finding diamonds in the rough.

The whiskey beckoned Jaime. *Go ahead*, it said. *You know you want to*. And God did she want to. But why did she want to? Her life was good. No, her life was incredible. She and Dani had put the rough waters behind them. She’d gone back to work at the

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bank. Dani was recording a new album. In fact, that's where she was this evening. She was in the studio, just three blocks from the apartment. *Go there*, her mind told her. *Go to Dani*.

Jaime didn't move. She sat on the floor in front of the kitchen sink staring at the whiskey, mesmerized by it, craving it and knowing that, without a doubt, she would drink it. She picked up the bottle and hugged it to her breast. She closed her eyes and pictured the amber liquid in a glass, over ice. If she drank the whiskey her life would come crashing down around her. Dani had given her a second chance. She wouldn't give her a third one.

Jaime opened the Jack Daniels. She smelled the liquor, smiling. Hell, it smelled warm, smooth and inviting. She licked the rim, tasting the whiskey and resigning herself to what, deep inside, she'd always known. She was a hopeless addict who would never stay clean for long. The phone rang and Jaime jerked, dropping the bottle. It hit the floor with a thud and rolled away from her. "Shit!" she shouted. "Shit, shit, shit." She scampered to her feet and ran to the phone stand in the hall. "Hello." She could hear the breathlessness in her voice.

"Babe," Dani said. "Are you okay?"

Still breathing hard, Jamie said, "Yeah. The sink's a tougher job than I thought it would be. Old pipes, ya know."

"Well, I'm done at the studio for tonight. Everyone is going to Roxy's but if you need my help, I'll come home."

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Jaime looked back into the kitchen. The bottle lay on its side, a puddle of liquid surrounding it. If she got down on all fours, she could lick it off the floor. She looked away from the whiskey.

“Hey, why don’t you forget about the sink for tonight and meet us down at Roxy’s,” Dani said. “I’ll buy you a tonic water and lime.”

Hell, Dani, she thought. Why would I settle for tonic water and lime when I got my friend, Jack Daniels, here at home?

“We could do some dancing, Babe. You know you love to dance, Jaime McGuire.”

Jaime nodded. She did love to dance. And she could go to bars now and not drink as long as Dani was there with her. As long as Dani was sitting next to her, or dancing with her, or up on stage singing to her. She was staring at the spilled booze again. When had she looked back at it?

“You go ahead, Dani,” Jaime said into the phone. “I want to finish the sink. I can do it by myself.”

“You sure?”

“Yes.”

“Okay, I won’t stay out long.”

“Don’t worry. I’ll be fine.” *Liar, liar, liar!*

“I know you’ll be fine, Babe,” Dani said, complete confidence in her voice. “I love you.”

“I love you,” Jaime said. She hung up the phone and leaned back against the wall.

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The whiskey laughed at her. Its laugh was loud and evil. It knew it was going to win. It knew she couldn't resist it.

I know you'll be fine, Babe. I love you.

Oh, Dani. My sweet, beautiful Dani, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

Jaime went into the kitchen, got down on all fours and stared at the whiskey, her tongue rolling around in her mouth. *Are you really going to do this, Jaime? Are you really going to drink this booze like a dog?*

"No," she said, still shaking her head. "No, I'm not a dog. And I'm not a drunk"

I know you'll be fine, Babe. I love you.

Jaime picked up the bottle and said, "Fuck you, Jack Daniels."

She got to her feet, went to the sink, raised the bottle up high over her head and brought it down on the stainless steel. It hit with a loud clunk but didn't break. She raised it again and brought it down. And then again and again, tears streaming down her face, and the whole time she shouted "I'm not a drunk!" The bottle shattered, glass stabbing her hands, cutting deep, blood splattering. She cried out and fell to her knees. She watched the blood ooze out of the wounds. *I should call 911.*

But she didn't. Instead, she opened a cupboard drawer and pulled out some dishtowels. She crawled to the refrigerator and pushed the ice lever. Ice spilled out onto her hands and the floor. Trembling, dizzy, she leaned back against the refrigerator. The ice cubes were cold against her skin but they did not stem the flow of blood. The green and white striped dishtowels were turning red. She was bleeding to death. If she didn't call 911 she would die here on their kitchen floor. The kitchen spun around her. She closed her eyes and drifted away.

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And then Dani was saying her name. “Oh, Jesus, Jaime, what did you do?”

Jaime stared at her through thick fog. Dani was holding her bloody hands, pressing on them, trying to stop the bleeding. In the distance, sirens wailed, drawing closer. “I didn’t drink it, Dani,” she said, wanting her to understand. “I didn’t drink it.”

“I know,” Dani said, nodding her head. “I know you didn’t, Babe.” She took Jaime into her arms, holding her tightly.

Jaime collapsed against her and closed her eyes. Her hands hurt but she didn’t care. She had Dani’s love. And that was what mattered. That was what would always save her.