

To your health

I'm always here. Always drunk. And always dying. Always.

I mean, you are too. We all are. But my card's been marked ahead of yours.

I don't remember the first time I turned up in the hospital waiting room. But then, I don't remember much. You tend to forget quite a bit when you drink. You live a bit more 'day-to-day'.

Anyway, here I am again. Drunk. Again. In the hospital waiting room. Again. Swollen eyes and yellowing face. A cut above my eyebrow. Look of half-guilt, half weariness. Jesus.

Why do I always have to be seen with a drink in my hand? Why am always in the hospital? Why always drunk?

Sorry. I tend to ask a lot of questions when I'm in this state. And when I'm waiting to be seen. It's almost part of my daily routine. They say that drunks make the biggest bores and it's perfectly true. I am, without doubt, the most boring man in my life.

Some of the doctors *do* see me. The regular ones just ignore me now. The one's that have worked here a while - It's almost like I'm just part of the fixtures. They don't see my empty eyes anymore. Fixed, dead ahead. They don't pay any attention to my needs. My longing to be able to put my drink down, even just for a day.

It's not just the doctors, though. No one seems to take any notice of me these days. The odd glance here and there from new patients in the waiting room, but on the whole, I get no recognition. Perhaps, just like the doctors,

everyone can see I'm dying. Perhaps just by looking at me they can see the list of reasons I'm dying.

Of all, liver failure seems to be the most prominent. The one that seems to shout the loudest. But heart disease is there. And cancer, of course. Where would we be if that weren't around every corner to keep us on our toes. Keep us scared.

So, yeah, all the old favourites are there. Present and correct. And even though I know I'm close to them all, even I've stopped paying *that* much attention. My condition is boring to even myself.

Sometimes the waiting room here gets so full, it's standing room only. But I always get my spot. I always seem to be the first in and last out. I seen them all come and go. A lot of people in much worse straits than I. I've seen a guy in here who'd sliced his toe off while trying to cut his nails with, what? a pen knife if I remember. I couldn't really make sense of his ramblings. He was drunk of course.

Alcohol has so much to answer for. Me for one. But every poor fucker in here seems to have had a run in with booze at one point or another. Some of them seem to be getting where they're going even quicker than I am. The man who came in choking on his own sick. I remember that small gargling sound as he was rushed past me on a stretcher. Gasping for his very last breaths of air. The small amount of oxygen to revive him and let him get back to the pub. As if it mattered. Or the woman who was carried in and promptly shat herself. She died too, I heard. Not that time. As yet, I don't think you can die from anything more than embarrassment for filling your pants with shit. (It's a good thing I was so drunk when I saw that, or I might have cried. In my mind I just thought 'you stupid, stupid fuck.') But I'd overheard the nurses a few weeks later saying she'd

died from a heart attack. Booze related, one would imagine. Not sure you could ever really prove that in a court of law, but it's a reasonable odds on bet.

Having said that, not all who come through here are victims of booze. Lot of car accidents. They're never great to see, drunk or sober. (I couldn't tell you about sober). I think my own drinking actually helps me deal with these things. These sights and sounds. I wish I could just get up and walk out, but no. All very self-indulgent, I know. You know – it's all about 'me'. But it's my party and I'll drink if I want to.

The kids that come here are the worst though. The pale kids, getting paler by the minute. Looking confused about what's going on and why they're here. Those who had a lot to look forward too.

I remember the little boy arriving here with his Mum, his nose bleeding. Didn't seem like a big deal at the time. It's just that it never stopped bleeding. The nurses started panicking, which is actually a rather unusual sight. But they could tell this wasn't like a kid coming in who'd smashed his head against a lamppost while fucking around on his skateboard. No, this kid was in much deeper trouble than that. I remember the room was silent when the blood hit the floor. You could imagine what that sickening slap of liquid being brought down to earth and smacking against the lino sounded like. Not just the odd spot. Like... *a lot*. Splat. And that was the only sound. The kid couldn't even cry. He didn't even have time to register what the fuck was going on. Then the Mum started screaming. *Then* bedlam. The doctor's ushered him away – the junior quacks looking as pale as some of the patients.

Anyway. He died. I don't always remember much when I'm in here, but I remember that. And, do you know what? Even with the horror in front of me...

even faced with that little kids nightmare... I still wondered when I was going to get seen. When is it my turn? What kind of person does that make me?

Perhaps I'm painting too bleak a picture. Most people who come through here get out the exit perfectly in tact. This place then just becomes a small part of their story. An anecdote to tell friends at dinner parties and around coffee machines. And the nurses do such a great job and all that bullshit. But you know that.

Anyway, this is my life. I've got used to it. Because I'm always here. Always drunk.

One day I'm sure I'll get the help I need. Until then, however, I'm destined to stay here, drunk. Drunk again. Again, drunk.

As for dying? Well, I'm just another person who's joined the queue marked 'UNLUCKY' I guess. Albeit that I'm making my own luck – bad luck. But dying I am. Fading away. That much is clear to see. Like a big set of words spelling out a death sentence above my head. I'm dying. It's too late for me. It was bound to end this way from the moment I arrived here. It can upset me. Sometimes. In more sober and somber moments. But who am I kidding? Do I ever have sober moments? My permanent condition is drunk. That's my norm.

God. How long do I have to stay here with my thoughts, waiting for someone to do something with me? I'd cry, if I could cry.

Anyway. Anyway. Another day. Drunk again. In the waiting room again. I hope you don't end up like me. I hope my silly little existence can help people to not turn out like me. I try to tell them, the passers by. Honestly I do. As earnestly as a drunk man can.

But I'm not sure people take any notice anymore.

Jesus I can feel myself aging by the minute. Becoming more yellow skinned. More frayed at the edges. One day I'll be gone. Destroyed. Like we all do in the end. By age or booze. Or whatever.

So that's my story. My predicament, if you like. I'm an alcoholic. Always was. Always will be. The best I can hope for is to end up somewhere brighter. Live in a more positive environment. I live in hope. Temporarily, at least.

I can't be reused. I can't help others live after I die. You might see me yourself, if you're ever here. I'm the guy on the 'alcohol abuse' poster. Just next to the pregnant woman who's always banging on about German measles. Look over my way if you get a chance. You know, if your condition allows. I'm always here. Always drunk. Best case scenario? They keep the blu-tack from my behind and use it on someone more deserving. Maybe they'll have more luck than I did.

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