

He decided to drink a couple of beers at the bar, but only to settle down again. Several hours later, he was still sitting there. Like most drunks, he swayed to the music on his bar stool, head tilted back, eyes closed. The liquor couldn't obliterate his problems, but it washed them far away enough that they didn't touch him anymore. After a few beers and several shots, the memories of his day felt like a dream from some long ago era while the here and now seemed light and easy. Alex ordered another round and continued his attempts at sway-dancing. One way or the other, sooner or later, it would turn out exactly like this: you got older, the storms quieter, the inner voices would fall silent, your urge would die down, you would sit at the bar and remember the old battles, wounds and pain, and you would laugh at how powerful and intense it had all been. And how useless and destructive too. That especially. In time, even these memories would fade until you knew them to be there somewhere, but couldn't feel them anymore. Just like he couldn't feel them right now. It would all be reduced to images and thoughts. Or not even that – you would only have a faint notion that there once was something different. That you once had felt and lived like that. But nothing would touch you anymore. You would have made your peace with everything. Eternal peace would rule where mighty battles were once raging. It would be like becoming a new person. Or perhaps rather a different person. A person you had longed to be in those dark, cold moments of your youth. Then you would

finally arrive at the point that Alex had reached long before. You would know that the only possible happiness in life consisted in downing a few beers and having some lonely little thing suck your dick only to give her what she was craving for the most: a tender kiss and arms to hold her in the night. No more, no less.

Having finished that last thought, Alex downed the rest of his drink. He lost his balance, slipped off his stool, staggered a few steps backwards, and fell. He landed on his butt first before his back and head hit the floor. There was no pain; only a bright flash before his eyes. He smiled and put up one hand to shield his face because he thought it was the sun blinding him. Then he tried to look around and find out where he was. As he turned his head to one side, he saw a woman standing there. He strained to see who it was but she seemed too far away. His feeling told him that she was beautiful. Beautiful and feminine. Glowing with a certainty about life itself. Infused with the wonderful joy and excitement of being human. And anchored down by a touch of honest, true, bitter-sweet melancholy that came from the knowledge that life was only a finite part of infinity. Again he tried to see that woman's face. But the more he tried, the farther she seemed to retreat. Alex wanted to get up and follow her when he suddenly realized where he must be: in the garden of his house by the lake. But there was no house to be seen and the lawn felt hard and cold. He couldn't see the lake, either. What he saw were cranes,

earthmovers, and scaffolding. His land had been sold. In the background he heard voices. They were talking to him. It had to be construction workers who wanted him to buzz off. Since he didn't want to move, they grabbed him and carried him off. Alex tried to break free and swore at the men. At last they let go of him and he dropped to the ground. When one of the construction workers asked about a cab, Alex realized that he was lying in the parking lot in front of the bar. Two guys had dragged him out and were about to call him a cab to take him home. Alex picked himself up and waved them off.

Slowly he staggered home, holding on to lampposts and brushing along walls. The exercise – such as it was – and the fresh air sobered him up a little. Enough at least that he could to some extent ponder what to tell Jasmin when he got home. She would be pretty mad, that much was certain. He was about to get lost in his search for possible excuses when he jumped and froze with shock. From an alley entrance directly in front of him sounded the clatter and clang of trashcans that someone must have knocked over.

“Who's there?” Alex shouted, more out of reflex than deliberately.

He took a careful step toward the alley and leaned forward to glance around the corner. That made him lose his balance for the second time that night. He

stumbled several clumsy steps forward and ended up right in front of the overturned trashcans. When he got his bearings, he saw the big, burly dog with rumped fur and gleaming eyes that was growling threateningly at him. Startled, Alex held his breath. Man and beast stared at each other for a long moment. Then the dog sniffed in the trash, picked up something with his teeth, turned around, and trotted down the dark, deserted alley. When the dog was gone, the relief virtually exploded inside Alex. He threw up and fell head long into the heap of trash.

“Damn mutt. Scared me senseless,” he swore as he wiped his mouth with his sleeve.

Awkwardly, using the trashcans as support, Alex got up.

“What a dog,” he murmured.

And then, shaking his fist in the direction where the dog had disappeared: “Don’t let me catch you!”

Slowly, he lowered his fist.

“And where will you sleep tonight, you stupid mutt? All alone under a bridge, on the cold ground?!”

Alex continued to stare into the dark alley.

“What a magnificent dog,” he grunted again.

Finally, he turned around and headed home, muttering under his breath:

“Don’t let them catch you.”