

The Lifetime Hangover

by

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“Michael! Wake up! Wake up!”

“This had better be good,” I thought. I had been out to a party for a majority of the night before and the last thing I wanted was my little sister yelling at me to get out of bed, especially at six in the morning. I had a lot to drink the night before; a little too much. I remember I couldn't even see the road as I was driving, but somehow I made it all the way home safely.

Being out late brings to the table the inevitable fact that when you get up that early, you are going to be hung over. Everything looked blurry, the room was spinning, and I smelled of cigarettes and booze. My head was pounding like a drum, my throat was killing me, and I just wanted a glass of water to get rid of the dry, pasty feeling in my mouth. I was in no mood to get out of bed, and I began motioning for her to leave me alone.

“Michael, please get out of bed,” my sister pleaded. She sounded like a small child begging her parents to buy her a new toy at the store.

My sister was a 14-year-old tomboy. She always let her long, blonde hair lay straight down her back. Rarely was it put in a ponytail unless she was playing softball or some other sport she loved. She was so skinny. I'll bet she weighed close to 105 pounds dripping wet, with a few rolls of quarters in her pockets. When I was younger, she was always on my heels trying to play with my friends and me. We often tried to get her to leave us alone, but as time went on, she just became one of the guys. This was a good thing, as we were close as a brother and sister could be, and we still are today.

“Come on, Michael. You need to get up. Help,” she continued.

My sister has always called me Michael instead of Mike. As a matter of fact, my entire family calls me Michael, while everyone else calls me Mike. It's surprising I haven't had an identity crisis.

“Ok, ok,” I said in hopes that she would go away.

I finally pried my baby blues open from a well-needed night of rest. I looked over at my sister, who was hovering over my bed. Something was wrong. She looked worried and scared, almost on the verge of tears.

“Michael, dad's boss called. He didn't go into work this morning.”

My dad woke up at three o'clock every morning to be at work by four. He was never late, let alone not showing up at all. Everyone knew he was promptly on time for everything. Something was definitely wrong.

“Ashly, just go wake him up. Shake him or something,” I said as I crammed my face into my soft, warm pillow in search of peace and quiet.

She paused for a moment, and then said, “I did.”

I shot out of my bed like a snake was under the blanket in search of some peace and quiet of his own. I had temporarily become a ball of energy, ready to take on the world. “Is it possible? No way. These things don't happen to people like me,” I thought. “This happens to people on TV, not me.”

“What do you mean? He's not moving?”

Ashly replied with a silent headshake indicating that he wasn't. I had to go see what was wrong. The alcohol was still in my system because it felt like I was going to lose my balance at any minute and fall over. I was dizzy and could hardly see straight as I shot out of bed. I began to make my way up the cold stairs from the basement, where my bedroom was. I hobbled down the

long, dark hallway that was full of old photos of our family. One of my favorite ones was a photo of my mom and dad right before they got married. The 1970s looked awful. The clothes and the hair that they had back then instantly made me laugh every time I walked by that photograph, but not this particular morning.

There it was. At the end of the hallway on the right hand side: my dad's bedroom. I didn't want to go in there, I couldn't go in there. I thought to myself, "These things just don't happen. Maybe in movies, but this isn't a movie, it's my life. That's right, it's my life. I'm hung-over and I want to go back to bed! He is just way too young. This isn't happening."

The big, brown door with the golden doorknob was already open to my dad's bedroom. Ashly must have left it open when she went in there earlier to try and wake him up. My stomach was bubbling, my heart was pounding, and the room was spinning, "No more all night parties for me."

I stood in my dad's bedroom doorway and gazed upon the scene. His room was faintly lit in a shade of orange from the fresh morning sun. He was under the covers and laid face down on his bed. All I could see was the back of his shiny, bald head. Was he sleeping? Is this some kind of joke where any minute now someone will pop out and say, "Smile! You're on candid camera!"

Ashly and I stood there, shoulder-to-shoulder for what seemed like an eternity, in disbelief. My dad was a chronic snorer. There were nights where I would be awakened by this chainsaw-like noise, which turned out to be my dad in a deep sleep. Something was not right. I managed to gather up a bit of courage and attempted to make an early-bird conversation.

"Dad?"

Nothing.

"Dad?"

Silence.

At this point, I was terrified. Was this really happening? I decided silently to myself that this was a dream. Weeks prior to this I had a dream that was set up almost like this, except my dad was awake and he was more than eager to get up and make me some pancakes in the shape of a Mickey Mouse head.

This, however, was no dream. With whatever energy I could fathom at this point, I used all of it to shriek one, loud, “Dad!”

His room remained calm and still. No movement, no sound...nothing. I stumbled in fear over to his side of the bed. I reached out to shake him, but I couldn't bring myself to do it. I couldn't see his face. His back and legs were as purple as grapes. Everything would be fine if he just woke up. This couldn't be happening to me.

“Don't be scared, wimp. Shake him, yell at him, do something! Don't just stand there,” I thought to myself.

My body agreed. I couldn't just stand there. The volcano in my stomach was about to erupt and the bathroom was a short stagger away. I rushed across the empty hallway and fell upon my knees right in front of the white porcelain. I hugged it tightly so it couldn't run away. As soon as I was situated, yesterday's dinner became today's toilet stew.

As I sat there, gazing into the wishing well, I stared at my reflection. My eyes were droopy and my mouth sloppily hung open as if I had no control over it. This wasn't a dream. This was a real-life nightmare and I was the star. I could already see my name up in the big Hollywood lights. I was too young to go through this. It was time for me to grow up, but I wasn't ready.

“Now, if I could only get up off this floor...”

“What do I do?” Ashly sounded frightened, and-so was I. My mother was away on a business trip and she left no number for me to reach her in case of an emergency. Needless to say, this was an emergency and I was panicked.

“Roll him over!”

“Yeah, there you go, tell your little sister to roll him over while you sit here alone scared on this bathroom floor,” my conscience yelled. “You are a poor excuse for a brother and a son! Why don't you go have another drink?!” I hate my conscience.

But those were my words of wisdom: “Roll him over.” After 19 years of life, one would figure that I would be a little more intelligent than that. I could have said, “Call an ambulance!” Or, “Call 911!” But no, I told her to roll him over.

My dad was bigger than my sister, by far. He stood about six-foot-three inches tall and weighed close to 240 pounds. The bad thing about my dad's size is that I inherited my mom's genes. Her entire family is short. It wasn't theoretically possible for Ashly to muscle him over. I somehow thought she would be up to the task.

I sat there on the linoleum floor, arguing with my conscience while my little sister tried to roll my dad over. She must have, because she started to scream at the top of her lungs. It wasn't a dream after all.

I wish I had been home the night before, instead of being at a party. I should have been there to say, “Goodnight dad.”

“Goodnight Michael.”