

*Hair of the Dog*

Every morning he made breakfast for the kids—his one, her two. The meals were substantial, consisting of waffles, eggs, pancakes, or cooked cereal. On an off day they would get cold cereal, toast, and juice, but even so, that was laid out and waiting for them as they bounded down the stairs in the morning, ready for school.

There was always a lot of discussion during those morning hours about homework and lunches, who was going where after school, plans for the day. After breakfast, he drove the kids to school. Most days he took the neighborhood kids too. When he returned home to the empty house, his wife having gone to her day at work, he cleaned up the kitchen.

Soon, he opened the cupboard above the stove and put his hand around the neck of the bottle of bourbon. It felt like coming home when he heard the sloshing of the alcohol in the bottle. It was like greeting an old friend. He told himself it would just be a little pick me up, something to get rid of the nagging headache from the day before, and then he would recap the bottle and return it to its resting place. Just one drink...maybe two...three at the most...certainly no more than that.

It was at this point that most of his days began to slip away. Often, he visited his favorite bar and sat on his special stool, almost always by 11am when he could watch the soap opera he liked. He enjoyed watching the bad guy, whom he called “Snidley Whiplash,” a name he used to refer to the bad guys in his life. His life was full of bad guys.

Somewhere around 3:00 pm, he returned home and planned what to make for dinner. Those were his jobs—breakfast and dinner. He favored cooking in the microwave, salmon or meatloaf. Dinners were usually meat, potatoes, a vegetable, and sometimes a salad. Nothing fancy, but his wife was delighted she no longer had to deal with meals. “After all,” she would say, one hand on her hip and an eyebrow arched, “it’s the least you can do.” He got the message. He got it good.

The days sort of ran one into the other. His wife made a few threats, he made a few promises, and nothing changed.



But on the bright side, he loved having the meals to cook. Those jobs gave him some purpose, a reason for getting up in the morning. He loved the mornings, so full of promise and opportunity—a new day. Maybe this one would be different.

He enjoyed having the evening meal to look forward to, he shopped for the groceries, and set the table for dinner so it was ready when everyone blew through the door. Most days, he had started to sober up by this time, although the telltale odor of bourbon usually gave him away. But, some days the nasty side of his personality slipped through, tipping the family off; he noticed their sideways glances at each other. They knew what was up and they knew enough to steer clear of him on the really bad days.

On a good day, he still had his balance, masked the smell with coffee or gum, and they enjoyed the evening meal. The house felt warm and cozy, everyone at the table together eating and talking. He liked that.

One day he noticed their German Shepard was acting strangely. He had seen him eating a plastic bag a few weeks earlier and knew he should take him to the vet, but he liked to avoid anything that was unpleasant. He was good at sidestepping anything that might be upsetting. He had decided the dog would eventually recover.

But he didn't recover. The dog got worse and worse and finally one morning when he took the garbage out after the house was empty for the day, he saw him lying in the woodpile, breathing heavily.

The problem could not be ignored. He had to deal with it and he had to do it today. He went inside, got his gun and loaded it with six bullets, telling himself, "If I miss on the first one, I sure as hell don't want to come back inside and reload."

He propped the dog up against a tree and fired. The first shot dropped the dog like a stone.

He slammed back into the house and grabbed a large, black plastic bag and put the dog inside of it. He found the shovel that his wife used in the garden propped up against the side of the house and started digging. This was a big job for him, as he usually avoided physical activity. It didn't take long for the sweat



to start running off his face, dripping off his beard onto the cold, hard ground. He stopped often to lean against the shovel and catch his breath.

He thought about how he and his ex-brother-in-law worked together years ago building houses on the weekends. When it rained, they would put “the inclement weather schedule” into effect and hit the bar for the afternoon. He missed the friendship they shared, the Saturdays and Sundays spent on the roof, pounding nails and shouting back and forth to each other. He laughed out loud at the memory of those days, but it caught in his throat midway and turned into a sob. His tears mixed with the sweat rolling off his face. He sure could use a drink.

He knew he drank too much. There were days he thought about taking his wife’s hands in his own and looking into her eyes, saying, “Let’s stop this madness and have a happier family,” but those weren’t good “out loud words” at this point in his life. He started digging again, focusing on his job for today.

The hole had to be large and wide. The digging took most of his morning. He finally finished and dragged the dog into the hole, filling it up with dirt and patting it down.

Once inside he cleaned his gun and put it away. He felt bad about the dog, knowing he had let that job slide too long and the dog had to be put down because of it. He should have gone to the vet. A couple of hundred dollars to fix the dog up would have been worth it and he wouldn’t feel so guilty and remorseful. Now he had yet another issue to pile onto the list of all the issues in his life. Some days were just too much to bear.

He opened the cupboard above the stove and grabbed for the bottle. He poured a drink, then another, and finally another. After awhile, he noticed he had stopped thinking about the vet, his wife, and the dog.

Soon it would be time to start dinner.