

apart and ripped to pieces, I miss my baby. "I will wait three months, get pregnant again, and have a healthy baby," I vow. I am determined.

Allan enters the room, his face ashen. He sits on the side of the bed.

"Linda, I have something to tell you. I have her with me, the baby."

"What?" I am shocked and confused.

"We have to bury her ourselves. I had to bring her home. She's wrapped in a sheet. I have her on dry ice in one of your empty wine buckets."

"What are you doing?"

"We have to bury her ourselves. I found a little wooden box and some brass tacks, to make a cross on the box." He starts to cry. "The box will be lined with satin." Tears run down his cheeks. He struggles to speak, "But I can't find any satin."

My heart breaks for him. "It's okay, Allan. It's all right." I vow to make things right.

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I sit in my chair by the window, as I do every afternoon, reading and drinking gooseberry wine from a large tumbler. I listen for the sound of my husband's car. Looking out now and then, I see only the tall walls surrounding our villa and the pale blue sky above. A burning sensation travels down over my swollen belly as I swallow, drowning and intensifying my fear. I exert myself to stand up and waddle to the rows of books, randomly pulling my next read from the shelf. One more attempt - and one more failure. Can you understand?

Epilogue

After four years in Kuwait, I return home to the United States. I am desperate for help, willing to do anything to stop drinking. I recall the stories my parents told me when I was growing up, about my grandfather. He couldn't stop drinking. In 1949, several men from Alcoholics Anonymous had come to his house in Birmingham, Alabama. From that night, he never drank again. His life and that of my grandmother's revolved around A.A. until he died in 1974. Alcoholics Anonymous is listed the phonebook. I dial and shakily say, "I need to go to A.A. Where do I go?"

That spring night, a Friday in 1986, I walk alone into my first meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous. I am very afraid. "Help me, help me, help me," runs through my mind. Spiritually bankrupt, my prayer is answered. I have not had a drink since that evening. Life is good. Thank you, sweet Alcoholics Anonymous.

OASIS

a story by Linda

Summer of 1982 ...

A sandstorm swirls outside the window again, blocking the scorching Kuwaiti sun. I sit in my chair by the window, as I do every afternoon, reading and drinking gooseberry wine from a large tumbler. The walls are lined with massive cases of books, floor to twelve-foot ceiling. Hundreds and hundreds of books, all brought to the Middle Eastern desert by ladies of the American Women's League of Kuwait, a continual trickle since the League's inception in 1963. At my first AWL meeting, I assumed responsibility for housing the League's library. Since then, I drink, and read.

Far away from myself, in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, I play with Scout and Jem and Dill in Maycomb, Alabama. I don't like them looking for Boo Radley, the town boogeyman. No! Will Atticus save me? Defend me? Protect me from my boogeymen?

I listen for the sound of my husband's car. Looking out now and then, I see only the tall walls surrounding our villa and the dusty tan sky above. A burning sensation travels down over my swollen belly as I swallow, drowning and intensifying my fear. I exert myself to stand up and waddle to the rows of books. I return *To Kill a Mockingbird* and randomly take my next read from the shelf. Settling in my chair again, I open *Love Story*. I read, finding refuge with Oliver and Jennifer on campus in wintry New England.

Two years ago, my world was turned inside out. Traumatized by brutality and heartache, alcohol seemed to make my days livable. I couldn't breathe without it. Then, within weeks, I crossed some invisible line. From that point on, no matter how hard I tried and vowed to do things differently tomorrow, I could not quit drinking. I had been trying to stop since I started.

Meeting up with Allan last year seemed a Godsend. While home on holiday from his work in the Middle East, Allan looked me up. He was the same steady adoring guy that he was in high school, and though I was obviously shaken up I still had that girlish energy and wildness that had always attracted him. We shared special memories, like riding the school bus together, dancing at Prom, competing in high school Forensics tournaments, and parking at the secluded spot on Almond Road, kissing and more. He had gone away to college, getting his degree in Geology. I stayed behind in Libertyville, a village between Chicago and Milwaukee, falling through the Midwest hippie cracks in the early 70's.

Ever since then, whenever one form of intoxication or bizarre behavior caused me problems, I was always able to switch to another. This drinking thing had grabbed a hold of me though and wouldn't let go.

I was sure that my marriage to Allan and subsequent move to Kuwait where he worked would be the solution. I figure living in the abstinence-based society where alcohol is banned would be my way out, but cheerful expatriate wives were anxious to share their beer-brewing and wine-making recipes and techniques. Allan was eager for me to begin this wifely duty – making sure the designated “beer and wine room” in our large villa was always fully stocked. I was given a hydrometer, and it was easy to assemble everything else needed to begin. Fifty-six liter garbage cans served as fermenting buckets and were in almost constant use. Dozens and dozens of cases of one-and-one-half liter bottles with hinged ceramic tops, all filled with wine and beer, are stacked in tall rows.

The wine is very potent, over twice the alcohol content of the beer, and it takes less time to be ready to drink. Kuwaiti moonshine, Flash, is available here as well. One of the American Women's Leaguers left a gallon of it on her Formica table last week. The Flash ate through the plastic gallon jug and dissolved the Formica. I stay away from it. I have enough trouble just drinking wine. Allan can have the beer. I'll stick to my wine. At first I mixed it half-and-half with 7-Up, and then switched to mixing it with apple juice because it would, I think, “be more healthy.” I guzzle. I can't stop, but I try to slow this cunning, baffling, powerful locomotive that's tearing through my life.

The maid walks through the room. She doesn't even look over at me. Milgrina, her husband Manino and their extended family live in the servant's quarters adjoining the villa. They do everything for me, except for most of the cooking. I like to cook. It is what I do, besides read and drink. I drink and cook. I don't eat much. By the time the meal is ready, my appetite is drowned. I fall to bed, unconscious to dreams, waking every morning with a punishing hangover.

The baby rolls. My abdomen surges in a wave. I read. I drink. I read, “Love means not ever having to say you're sorry.” Allan and I have our own love story. “Deny. Deny. Deny.” That's my MO. I deny everything, just to make sure I'm covered. Only if necessary and for good measure, I apologize. Then I do whatever it takes to make Allan happy. Our relationship is working well.

The sounds of Allan's car driving up and coming to a stop snap me back from Jennifer's hospital bed, where she is dying in Oliver's arms. I feel I am dying too. I wonder if Allan knows I'm fading fast. I down my drink, lay aside *Love Story*, and grab the bottles from the floor. The car door slams. I move hurriedly to the kitchen and hide the bottles and glass in a low cupboard. I take quick bites from an apple. I think this makes my breath normal. I work very hard to appear normal.

October 31, 1982 ...

Although they are capable of speaking fluent English, the doctors are talking rapidly in Arabic, interjecting every now and then a, “Mrs., not to worry.”, but I am very worried, terrified actually, have been for years, particularly these past nine months.

I lie on my back while they move an ultrasound scanhead around my mountainous belly. I catch the word “cranium”. Head. “Definitely something about the head,” I agonize. “Mrs., we have to get the baby now. It is breech. We must induce the labor, get this baby out now. Not to worry.” “My husband, please get my husband.” “No, your husband will wait. Best he wait.” “I don't want any drugs. Please take care of my baby.”

I am put in a First Class room at Al Salem Maternity Hospital. A pitocin drip is started to stimulate contractions of my uterus. A rare desert thunderstorm erupts outside. Crashes of thunder and bolts of lightning explode. An occasional cat moseys into the room. The artificially induced contractions are harsh and erratic. Excruciating hours pass.

Sunlight pours in through the rain washed window. I am wheeled to the surgical area. My body is out of control; my soul lost in the abyss. The baby enters the world feet first, little legs and arms flailing against my thighs. Time passes. The flailing subsides, and then stops altogether. Much later, delivery of my daughter is complete. Dead on arrival.

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I am wheeled back to my room. Allan walks in. Dead silence. And then, “I want to go home. Get me out of here now.” Within hours, I am home. The next afternoon, I am at home, in bed. Milgrina waits on me. Allan has gone back to the hospital to handle necessary paperwork. I get out of bed only to go to the bathroom or get a tumbler of wine. Not enough wine to make the hurt go away. My body is racked with pain. The awful ache of aloneness consumes me. My heart is broken. I am overcome with guilt and fear. Torn