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**Louis Armstrong International Airport**  
New Orleans, Louisiana

Halloween

I think I'm gonna barf.

I've never puked from a hangover before, but a full-on vomithon in the New Orleans airport on Halloween morning would be a respectable first. Had I actually eaten anything in the last twenty-four hours, I might be hanging over the toilet right now, but a bender of this magnitude neither required nor tolerated food near the end. The final day was alcohol-only, an exclusive stomach club. NO SOLIDS ALLOWED.

I can hardly sit up in this cheap, plastic chair, can barely focus on my computer screen. My fingers are vibrating above the keys, but since my eyeballs are shaking in their sockets, it evens out somehow. I'm *oozing* hangover, a thick goo that coats my skin and crawls down my back in little globs like slimy insects creeping toward the dark comfort of my crack. This is what three days of insane liver lubrication does to a man.

I know I'm not the first person to endure a monster hangover on the hard chairs of the New Orleans airport. The trashcans and toilets of this building have undoubtedly swallowed countless loads of self-indulgent barf, the wandering wasted of America hurling up their excess before staggering onto planes. I'm sure my weekend partners in crime, my boyhood friends Adam and Larry, sat here only hours before, dealing with their own colossal suffering. I bet three quarters of the people in this place on this gray Halloween morning are asking themselves the same damn question I'm asking myself: Why the hell do I pound the sauce until I'm one small step away from the emergency room?

An airport is a godawful place to suffer a hangover this brutal, but it's still a thousand times better than the hotel room I recently fled. I woke up alone in that disaster, Adam and Larry already off on early flights to different regions of the country. Opening my eyes, I felt as if I'd exited the predictable world of temporary hotel accommodation and entered the lair of a violent animal. I gazed around at five-hundred square feet of suite that looked like Mötley Crüe gang-fucked it while I slept, then turned it over to The Who for sloppy seconds. An alcoholic's smorgasbord littered the room: beer bottles, half-eaten chicken wings, frisbeed pepperonis, overflowing ashtrays, empty airplane bottles of whiskey, chew-spit cups, flicked sausages, lonely glasses of forgotten vodka, tipped over lamps, pizza crusts, couch cushions where couch cushions do not belong, smashed potato chips where smashed potato chips *definitely* belong, and cheap red wine bottles dripping merlot blood onto abused carpet. I admonished myself to man up and clean up, then threw exactly two beer bottles into one trashcan before quitting. *Fuck it.* It was no time to be a hero. A wise man knows when to accept defeat and spread his butt

cheeks just wide enough for his tail to fit comfortably between his legs. Then he slinks away, dragging behind him all his guilt and shame.

Since straightening up was out of the question, I staggered through the room and stuffed my suitcase full of everything I could remember bringing. Setting my bag by the door, I wished I had even one measly dollar to tip the poor maids. Christ, what a sorry excuse for a man. I sighed, then scribbled a quick apology note, leaving it in the most visible location amidst the destruction.

TRULY sorry for the mess!!!

Capital letters, an underlined word, and a few exclamation points had to count for something, right? It wasn't a tip, sure, but at least it showed I *knew* I was an asshole for stiffing them. Picking up my suitcase, I fled to the airport, far away from that hotel horror show.

The maids are probably wiping their ass with my apology note right now, and I don't blame them, but really, it's not completely my fault. There's a stripper somewhere out there who shares some culpability, dammit. *She's* the real cause of my temporary poverty, whoever she is, wherever she is. Sticky fingers lurk in every dark corner of Bourbon Street, but they are at their stickiest in the dark corners of strip clubs. Granted, it was a mistake to parade my blackout in front of stripper greed – bringing a blackout to a strip club is like bringing steaks to the zoo – but did she really have to steal *everything*? Apparently so. Practice poles don't come cheap. That New Orleans pole-twirler now owns my credit cards, debit cards, and all my cash, which was substantial. I'm left with

what little money Adam could loan me after we blew through his daily debit card limit. I hope it's enough to get my car out of the airport parking lot back in Denver, but it'll be close.

Jesus, I gotta stop doing this dumb shit. I need a long, long break from the sauce. This kind of debauchery is something I would expect from a 21-year-old frat boy, not a 41-year-old software developer. For chrissake, I own an international software company, have thousands of people around the world counting on my competence. What if one of my servers went down? I'd be fucked. I can't think my way through a shoelace knot right now, much less a server meltdown. That's exactly why I shouldn't be acting like some college kid, pounding Fireball shots at strip clubs until 5:00 a.m. Who do I think I am, Jim Morrison? Even ol' Jimbo gave up the ghost at twenty-seven, bloated in a bathtub. I've made it to forty-one, but if I keep going like this, I might meet Morrison faster than I can say "Lizard King."

Worst of all, Stella is going to strangle me when I walk through the door. I know this, because when I talked to her last night, she specifically stated, "I'm going to strangle you when you walk through the door." As an attorney, Stella could do it...and get away with it. When she passed the Colorado bar exam, they gave her one free murder, no questions asked.

What I really need right now is something soothing, maybe a song, a little tune to help me forget who I was this weekend, something that promises things can only get better. Where are you, Little Orphan Annie? Sing me your soft and melodic version of "Tomorrow," you freckled little freak. Tell me how the sun will come out tomorrow, how I can bet my bottom dollar – had I not stuffed it in a stripper's panties – that

tomorrow, everything will be better. Everything will be roses just as soon as I get home to my Colorado mountains, stretch my body out on my beautiful couch, endure Stella's simmering anger, then sleep, sleep, sleep.

Still, all this whining sounds suspiciously like The Sunday Speech. The Sunday Speech varies slightly from drunk to drunk, region to region, but for the most part, it happens on the Sunday of every lost weekend, and it goes a little something like this:

## **THE SUNDAY SPEECH**

by Every Drunk

- A. I *will* stop drinking so much.
- B. I *will* stop smoking so much.
- C. I *will* stop throwing twenties at strippers.
- D. I *will* begin a new workout routine, starting tomorrow.
- E. I *will* eat healthier, starting tomorrow.
- F. I *will* be more receptive to my wife's justifiable concerns.
- G. I *will* call my mother, maybe next Wednesday.

And *this* time, I mean it.