

A LITTLE DRINK IS HARMLESS

The hills looked like vanilla cupcakes in the late snow. The cars cut black scars around them and, where the road dropped steeply to the river, the bridge looked like a child's Erector set. On the far side was the town—a few church spires and some old-fashioned houses and two or three traffic lights, which were brighter in the gloom of a snowy day.

Bob ordered one more. He was careful about his drinking because Ymelda worried. It wasn't that he was alcoholic. She claimed that it affected his judgment. Not much. A little. Liquor made him happier and more ebullient and more confident and less cautious.

This made Bob smile. Women, he felt, never really understand their men. They are always afraid of something that never happens. Nervous Mel, he called her. He snapped his shot glass up, tilted his head, and nodded farewell to the bartender.

The car outside was his. It was old, but it was all his. He patted it and pulled his gloves on and sat behind the wheel and ran the engine a little. A sweet-sounding baby, that engine. It had a quiet roar of authority. Bob chewed on a mint as he swung the car around, watching in both directions for traffic, and on across the bridge and up into the hills.

He thought of his happiness. He had so much of it. Not much money but a fortune in contentment. He had come home from the war safely and Ymelda had been waiting for him as though she had not stirred since he kissed her goodbye.

Bob had a job. It paid \$118.50 with time-and-a-half. He cannibalized old cars in a junkyard and he had a boss who trusted him all the way. Bob and Mel had bought a four-and-a-half-room house—he called it a bungalow—for \$7,250 and little Mickey had been born in it suddenly and unexpectedly eight months ago.

Now there was another baby coming. A girl, he hoped. A real girl with a yellow pony tail and saucy mouth and laugh-squinted eyes and big, wet kisses for Daddy. Bob drove through the hills swelling with pride. He was richer than Rockefeller and he knew it.

He looked at his watch. Mel should be almost through at the doctor's office. He started back, around the bases of the hills. He was happy. Extraordinarily happy. He moved the car up a notch or two and spun it a little on the snowy turns. There was no traffic up here. Nothing to worry about. He had promised Mel that he wouldn't take a drink. Bob reached into his pocket and popped two more mints into his mouth.

What a woman doesn't know cannot hurt her. He came to the brow of the hill leading down to town and he knew, the instant he passed it, that he was going too fast. It is the knowledge that a road driver feels, without looking at a speedometer.

Bob knew, the moment he tapped the brakes lightly, that he would never make the bottom turn onto the steel bridge. A man full of liquor would be unintelligent in a situation like this. He would panic. But not Bob. He had thirty seconds left in which to think. So, he figured all the angles.

He was glad Mel wasn't with him. She'd scream. She'd complicate everything. The best thing, he knew, was not to try to turn the wheels. The car was going faster and faster down the icy road. He would stay in his lane—luckily there was nothing ahead—and, when he reached the river, he would permit the car to go through the handrail. Before it left the road, he would open the door on his left and jam his foot in the door, so it would not close.

The moment it hit the water, he would push the door open all the way, and strike out. Bob thanked God that he was a man who used his head.

The old car went down, down, faster and faster. People coming up saw it and knew what was going to happen.

TRUE FRIENDSHIP

There were two men in a hospital room. One had a window beside his bed. The other had a blank wall. The one who had the window spent most of the day telling his friend what he saw.

"The nursemaid is in the park again, Johnny," he would say. "She looks prettier in the morning than any dame I ever saw. She sits on the bench and she moves that baby carriage back and forth, back and forth. She knows that young cop will be along any minute, but she always acts surprised when he shows."

Day after day the man at the window saw the world and told his friend what he saw. His friend became jealous. One night, the man at the window had an attack, and needed a heart pill. He begged Johnny to give him the pill. He whispered for a nurse. He tried to press a buzzer. He died.

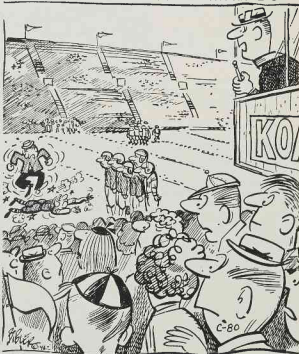
In the morning, the bed at the window was empty. Johnny demanded to be moved to it at once. The doctors were disgusted at his greed. But he was moved to the window. And when he got to his bed, he couldn't wait to look out at the world. All he saw outside the window was a blank wall.

They held their breaths. Bob opened the door, fanned his foot in, and swung the wheel slightly so that the vehicle, instead of crashing into the steel girder, splintered the wooden handrail, arched gracefully over the river, spashed in.

He struck out and headed for shore, shivering in the icy current. He could hear the cheers as he staggered up the bank. Then he remembered he had left little Mickey in a blanket on the rear seat.

These articles are credited to Jim Bishop who wrote *The Day Christ Died*.

LITTLE MAN ON CAMPUS



AN NOW, JUST OFF TH' FIELD - 'BUTTER-FINGERS' M'GEE GETS A REPRIMAND FROM THE COACH."