



*YOU DON'T DRINK?*

*A collection by Lauren Wilson*

**You Don't Drink?**



A book of memories, thoughts, and healing.

## **al·co·hol·ism**

*/ˈɹlkəhɔ̃ˌlɪzəm/*

*noun*

**noun:** alcoholism

an addiction to the consumption of alcoholic liquor or the mental illness and compulsive behavior resulting from alcohol dependency.

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## What I Remember

You were always invited,  
but we weren't interesting enough and  
everything was an inconvenience.

When you stop doing life with people  
they learn to carry on.

You were so draining.

I will let my children climb from my ankles to my neck  
because I know how it feels to be shrugged off of the one  
who is supposed to love you unconditionally.

I want to keep them as close as I can  
for as long as they'll let me.

You ran from me.

We make you look good,  
like a few circus horses.  
Lead us around the ring and let the crowds gawk.  
We're the best thing you ever made.

Do you remember shutting me in my room  
when the sun went down  
and keeping me from my mother?

I'm sure you heard the shrieks from the end of the hall.  
The ones that were distracting you  
from kissing her and more.

You were teaching me what anger felt like  
and how to put myself to bed.



## When I Realized

It hit you hardest the next morning.  
So hard that you'd spend most of your weekend  
on the couch taking up space.

It wasn't until I got older that I finally understood  
why a grown man would need to take so many naps.

You looked like a child home sick from school.  
Spread out the length of the couch with a pillow, blanket,  
and your hands curled up by your chest.

Sounds of movies you'd seen too many times  
would blare through the house  
competing with the rhythm of your snores.

None of them interesting enough to keep you awake.

I think that was the point.

You made promises to hold us over.  
Said you would bring us home the things we wanted  
so you could be the fun parent.

We daydreamed about the skateboards and electric guitars  
during lunch and recess.

You promised us today was the day.

But you showed up empty handed after work.

“I’ll take care of it tomorrow,” you’d say.  
Tomorrow never came.

I learned to not be hopeful.  
I’m realistic.  
Because I had to be.

I could call bullshit early on.

You thought a pizza would suffice.  
You thought it would make up for missing dinners  
and excuse you for the last 12 hours out drinking.

It was never for us.  
You brought it home out of guilt.  
It never made up for the things you missed.  
You've always been great at validating yourself.

You stumbled to your bedroom every time.  
Too drunk to realize that we already ate and  
upset when we wanted nothing to do with you.

You would do anything to be a friend.  
Constantly helping others but  
having no regard for what your family needed.

Willing to go above and beyond for them  
so you looked good.

You always knew a guy.

You did it for the laughs.

Putting on a show for anyone who would watch.  
Acting like someone you were not.  
Seeking attention from our friends.

God knows you didn't want ours.

Questioning us when they treated you better than we did  
because that was how they were raised.

You were embarrassing  
but they were entertained.

Did you even know you were the butt of the joke?

A man who avoided commitment  
never recognized his most consistent routine.  
It was enough to ruin a family.  
You never changed your mind.

When did you decide to stop being a parent?  
Was it before we were here or  
after you realized you would have to  
be responsible for something other than yourself?

You quit  
more than once.

When she told you you couldn't drive us around anymore.  
Was it liberating?  
She picked up your slack because she had to.  
A married single parent.

"Do not put our children in your car," she said.  
You put our lives at risk  
because you had to have one more.  
That was a declaration of our value.

Suddenly, you had no obligations.  
You let yourself off the hook.

That meant you could do whatever you wanted.  
Parent on your terms.  
Whenever it was convenient for you  
to step in and steal the show.  
To make yourself feel like you were being  
the parent you should've been.



## What You've Done

I don't make it home often anymore.  
When I do, you ask if I want to grab a beer.

How do I politely say,  
alcohol tastes like a slap in the face.

When I came home from college for the first time,  
you had just severed ties with my grandmother,  
the one who lived 20 minutes away from my university.

She didn't want to see me anymore,  
because I reminded her of you.

I was praised for my hard work.  
But when it came from you it was disingenuous.

You wanted to know the latest  
so you had something to talk about.  
Surely the chatter at the bars was dulling the older we got.

I stopped letting you know.  
You stopped taking the credit.

That was my way of holding you accountable.  
You had to think about when we spoke last  
and make something up when they asked.

“She’s in Virginia,” you’d say,  
“having the time of her life.”

You are the adult.

It was your responsibility to make the effort.

How can you place blame on me?

I was too young to know I needed to save our relationship.

I don't have it in me to put up with a man acting like a child anymore.

*Thanksgiving –*

When I saw you,  
you said it was good to see me and  
were insulted by my one-armed hug.

I was thanked for coming to something  
that I should be expected to attend.  
Because that's the way your family is –  
surprised when the members show up.

I've never understood why we aren't held to higher standards.

I made my way around the room.  
Hugging aunts I see twice a year and  
asking my cousin about the new baby.

I could feel you staring at me from the kitchen.  
Wide eyed with your mouth hung open  
and nothing left inside.  
Drunk.  
And in disbelief.

Did the short hair throw you off that much?  
Was it the new glasses?

You couldn't believe that I was your daughter  
and looked at me like a piece of ass.

I'm not something new,  
you just don't know me anymore.

## When You Leave

What will you miss in your lifetime because you cut it short?  
Watching someone poison themselves gets you thinking  
about how strong the human body is.

How hard it has to work to keep running on nothing,  
and how much it's fighting to save you from yourself.

Over and over again it has told you to quit.

How long will you last?

*I do.* –

Do you expect to be asked for my hand in marriage?

Do you expect to walk me down the aisle?

To give me away when I am not yours to give?

Do you know enough to give a toast?

Would you stumble if we danced?

I'm not in charge of changing you.

*My dad is an alcoholic.  
I'm learning to live with it.*

