

# Evil Glasses

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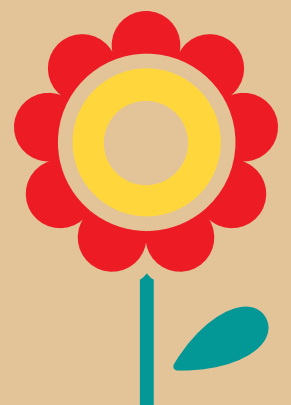
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# Fishing Trip

by Marshall Bowles

"Dad is cheating on Mom," Amanda said in a whisper. The sun was not up yet. She leaned out through the front door of the house, shivering in the cold morning air. She held her jacket closed with one hand.

"What?" John said. He had a late flight the night before, and everyone was asleep by the time he got in. First time seeing his sister in a year, and she drops a bomb on him. John glanced over his shoulder. Their father was busy loading fishing gear into the truck. John looked back at Amanda and spoke softly. "That's crazy. He has the personality of a rock."

"I didn't believe it either," Amanda said. She pulled out her phone and shoved the screen in John's face. It showed a picture of the computer in their father's home office, the one place in the house that was supposed to be off-limits to the rest of the family. A webpage was loaded up with a dating profile. John touched the screen to zoom in. It was definitely his father.

"I found it yesterday while I was cleaning up," Amanda said. She had taken the whole week off to come home. John thought she was crazy for spending any more time here than necessary. "His computer wasn't even locked."

"Why did you go in there?" John said, the anger in his voice surprising him. Amanda frowned, and John looked away. He took a deep breath. "Sorry. Have you said anything to him?"

"No, you're the only person I've told, and I wish I didn't know." Her voice was shaky. Amanda slid her phone back into her pocket.

John shook his head. "Ah, fuck."

Amanda shrugged. "Happy Thanksgiving."

"Ho!" Dad yelled from across the yard. John looked back at the truck. Everything was loaded and his father was waiting behind the wheel.

"Maybe you can talk to him about it while you two are fishing," Amanda said.

"No," John said. His stomach felt uneasy.

"Or we'll just sweep it under the rug like everything else in this family," she said.

"We're both adults now, and so are they," John said. He realized he was whisper-yelling. Amanda backed away a half-step. "I won't get involved in their lives more than I have to." He joined his father at the truck.

The ride to the lake was long and familiar. John was twelve years old when they took the first Thanksgiving morning trek. John had not wanted to go, and he complained about it to his mother. "Can't I just stay home and let Dad go by himself?"

"No, you'll go with your father and you'll like it," Mom said. She used her end-of-discussion tone of voice, and John knew he would get in trouble if he pressed further. He wanted to tell her that he was afraid of Dad, but instead he ran to his bedroom and cried into his pillow.

John and his father made the same trip every year since. It was their only father-son activity, which was one more than John wanted. Dad was like a giant pit bull that never barked and was always on the verge of biting. It was manageable when someone else was around, but John was lost when it was just him and Dad. Growing up and moving out of the house did not make the feeling go away.

John looked out of the window at the dark shapes of trees and houses passing by. He breathed slowly and forced himself to stop gritting his teeth.

The parking lot at the boat landing was empty. No one ventured out early on Thanksgiving morning to fish. Long ago John asked his father why he chose this day, and his father said, "Gets us out of the way so they can do the women's work."

The air at the lake was cold and still, the surface of the water smooth as glass. John and his father sat in the small boat anchored

close to shore. Fishing line stretched from John's pole down to the cork that floated in the water. The fish were not biting.

Time dragged. John stopped bringing a watch after the first few years, because he would check it constantly and that only made the trip seem longer. The silence was too much to bear. "Looks like you finally got a new roof put on the house," John said, searching for anything that might make him feel less awkward.

"Yep," Dad said, reeling in his line. He held his pole up in the air and checked the hook. No worm. He grunted and pulled a new one out of the plastic tub. He threaded the squirming worm onto the hook, cast his line out again, but said nothing more.

An hour passed. Maybe two. Or maybe only ten minutes. John tried again. "I got a promotion at work," he said. He waited, but Dad did not respond. "I'm a manager now. They gave me a decent pay bump."

"Okay," Dad said.

Goddamn. Why did John even bother? It was like talking to a brick wall. The image on Amanda's phone popped into his head, but he tried not to think about it. He told himself not to get involved. He knew his parents were not happy together—they had never been—but they tried to hide it and live the lie.

John reeled in his line and checked the hook. The worm was still there. He cast it out and it splashed into the water.

This is the last year, John thought.

John did not try to start up conversation again, and neither one of them caught anything that morning. Dad turned on the motor once the sun finished burning off the light morning mist. The boat cut through the water on its way back to shore and sent ripples out across the calm surface.

Back at the house, the family of four sat down for the Thanksgiving meal. Mom and Amanda made light conversation, but John and Dad were quiet. The sound of the football game on the living room TV gave the room a false sense of energy. John picked at the food on his plate without much enthusiasm.

"John, are you seeing anyone?" Mom said.

It took him a moment to respond. He was fantasizing about an alternate reality where Mom divorced Dad. She remarried a TV weatherman who took John to baseball games and talked about how proud he was to be a stepfather. The sound of his name jarred him back to reality. "No, still single," he said.

"Hurry up," she said. "I want grandkids. You're getting up in age."

"I'm only twenty-seven," he said. He wanted to say, And what if I turn out like you and Dad?

"*I'm* getting old," Mom said. "I want you to have children while I'm still around to see them. You need to set an example for your sister to follow." Amanda rolled her eyes and chewed on a mouthful of turkey.

Mom reached out and put her hand on top of Dad's. Dad did not move his hand away, but the look on his face made John think he wanted to. Mom smiled. "I'm so blessed to have your father and the two of you. I want both of you to build happy families of your own."

John gripped his fork so hard it hurt. What about all the one-sided arguments where you berated Dad in front of us? What about the time you told us that you would be happier if you killed yourself? And Dad always there, showing no reaction, the gravity of an emotional black hole in their lives. He looked to Amanda, but she avoided his gaze. She stared at a lump of cranberry sauce like it was about to jump off of her plate.

John ate a forkful of mashed potatoes.

The weeks rolled by, and John tried to forget Thanksgiving. He hated his family. His mother was too much of a coward to leave his father. Part of him felt bad for her, but only a small part. No part of him felt bad for his father.

John laid awake in his bed on Christmas Eve. Unlike other families, his did not celebrate Christmas. He told himself he should be thankful that he only had to spend one holiday per year with them, but the taste of loneliness was bitter. Every time he closed his eyes to try to sleep, he saw the image on Amanda's phone.

Tired of retracing the same memorized patterns on the ceiling, John got out of bed. He dug under a pile of dirty clothes and found his

laptop. Screw it, he thought. If Dad was going to cheat, John would let him. Hell, he would even help.

John logged into the dating site and built a fake profile for Sadie, an early-fifties widow who never had kids. He struggled to craft her into a woman he hoped would appeal to his father. The only album Dad ever owned was Queen's *A Day at the Races*, so Sadie's favorite bands were Queen and Pink Floyd. John used an image of a random woman who looked like a poor-man's Farrah Fawcett. Dad had commented on Farrah's body once while watching a rerun of *Charlie's Angels*.

The trap was as ready as it could be. John found his father's profile on the dating site, and the status showed that Dad had been on the day before. John typed a simple message.

**Hi, you seem nice. I'm Sadie.**

He hit "Send." The line was cast and John waited for a bite.

He awoke to a message the next morning. It was his father.

**Nice to meet you, Sadie. I'm Chuck.**

**I read your profile and noticed that you're into 70's power ballads. Me too! My favorite band...**

John raced through the message, unable to believe his eyes. There was more emotion in a few lines of text than John received from an entire lifetime with his father. By the last line, John's jaw was clenched so hard his teeth hurt.

John looked up from the screen and stared out the window. The streetlight illuminated the cars parked along the sidewalk in a ghostly yellow light. It was hard to wrap his mind around what was happening. To know that his Dad had an actual personality hidden away, that he might be capable of caring about something—anything—made the lack of an emotional connection with his father feel worse.

Screw you, Dad, John thought. He was going to set his Dad up and reveal everything when the time was right. John smiled at the thought of what his father's face would look like once he realized he was caught.

The scam was easier than John expected. Dad was very open in his messages to Sadie. John kept everything light-hearted at first, feeling out how his father communicated. John had to guess at what his father might want in a woman, but it was tough work since he really knew nothing about the man.

**Sadie:** Top item on my bucket list? You may think this is silly, but I'd love to visit Mt. Rushmore. I can't believe I've never been...

**Chuck:** Bob Dylan or the Beatles? That's not fair. Only a monster would make a man choose a favorite...

**Sadie:** I'm too young to remember the Cuban Missile Crisis. But one of my earliest and favorite memories is when Neil Armstrong landed on the moon. I was sitting on the living room floor in front of the TV when...

**Chuck:** No, I never did anything that hard. Cocaine scared me. Besides I was out of my wild phase by the time it was popular. But who didn't get baked every once in a...

Enough time had passed, John felt confident enough to set the hook. He sat on the edge of his bed in his boxers, the laptop perched on his knees.

**Sadie:** So, I know this is a heavy question. Feel free not to answer if you aren't up to it. Any regrets in life?

John sent the message early on a Friday morning. Up until this point, his father's responses had been prompt. Nothing came later that day, and Saturday was the same. John worried that he had taken it too far. He was on the couch thinking about how to word an apology when a notification popped up on his screen. He opened it.



**Chuck:** Sorry for the delayed response, Sadie. You're right, that question is heavy. I've been thinking hard about it since you sent it.

I want to be up front with you. I'm married, and I'm still with her. Now that you know, I'll understand if you don't want to continue talking to me. That's ok, and I completely understand.

To answer the question: Yes, I have regrets. My biggest regret is marrying my wife. It's a long story, and...

That's it, John thought. Keep it coming Dad. Once Mom sees this, it will finally bring an end to this sham of a family. Maybe his father would finally show some emotion in real life.

Satisfied with how smart he was, John looked back at the screen and read the rest of the message.

I don't want to bore you with the details. Let's just say that my marriage has been unhappy since the very beginning. My wife and I were dating at the time, and her pregnancy was unexpected. I married her the same week we found out because I thought it was the right thing to do.

Needless to say, it didn't work out well. We are two incompatible people who ended up stuck together. We had a second child and I hoped it would make us get along better. It did for a little while, but didn't last.

The first time I asked her for a divorce was when the kids were still in elementary school. I thought she would go for it because of how awful we were together. But she wouldn't agree to a divorce. She threatened to tell people I was abusive and swore that she would never let me see my children again.

So I stayed. My father walked out on me when I was young, and I hated him for it. I wasn't going to let my kids grow up without a father.

Anyway, that's that story.

John stared at the screen. What was this? He went through the message again to make sure he did not misread it. A pressure built up inside him, but John pushed it down. He slammed his laptop shut and threw it on the couch beside him.

"No, Dad," John said to the empty room. He paced in the small strip between the TV and the couch. "You don't get to do this. You don't *have* feelings." He tried to stop it, but sympathy for his father was creeping in. His chest tightened and it was hard to breathe. For a moment, he felt like he was trapped back on the boat with his father.

John shook his head. He was reading the situation wrong. He had to be. John grabbed his laptop and sent another message.

**Sadie:** So are you planning to leave her?

**Chuck:** No, I don't think so. I'm too old to start over.

**Sadie:** Then why are you on this site?

**Chuck:** I'm not sure. Maybe just trying to find someone who I can talk to. Is that bad?

He looked up from the screen and stared at his empty apartment. There were no pictures on the walls. The furniture was plain and cheap. For the first time, John saw it for what it was—a lonely, lifeless space.

He sent another message.

**Sadie:** That's not bad at all.

The conversation between John and his father changed after that. John looked forward to their correspondence, because he was getting to know his Dad as a person. They spoke several times a week, sometimes

multiple times per day. John gifted his own personality and experiences to Sadie.

**Sadie:** What's your favorite movie? Mine is *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*.

**Chuck:** *Road House*. Swayze is my idol.

John rented *Road House* and watched it that night.

**Chuck:** How was your day? I threw my back out while I was cleaning the garage. It's times like these that make me realize I'm old.

**Sadie:** I did some spring cleaning myself, and I bought a painting to fill in an empty wall.

John had been at a garage sale earlier that day, where he found a painting of a small sailboat in rough seas. He hung it above the couch.

**Sadie:** My boss chewed me out again, but I'm getting used to it. I'm looking forward to the day I can retire.

**Chuck:** Don't let it get you down. Bosses only act like assholes because they can.

That made John smile. His boss *was* an asshole.

On a morning in mid-September, John woke up to a new message.

**Chuck:** Out of left field, I know, but what's your darkest secret?

John was practiced at being Sadie, and he had no trouble responding.

**Sadie:** I've never told this to anyone else. I hated my father my whole life. But now that I'm older, I

feel like he and I have reconciled. Or, at the very least, I understand him better.

What about you? Darkest secret?

Dad's message came back later the same day.

**Chuck:** When I found out my wife was pregnant with our son, I asked her to have an abortion.

John closed his laptop and set it on the floor. He felt like he had been punched in the gut, the pain radiating outward to consume his whole body. What an idiot he had been. How could he have allowed himself, even for a second, to care about his father?

The scam was over. John did not care about exposing his father anymore. He did not care about anything. What was the point? His family was toxic, and the only reasonable thing to do was to cut them out of his life.

The next day was a blur. John's thoughts kept drifting back to his father's last message, no matter how much he tried to avoid it. He always knew that his father did not want him, but some part of him hoped he was wrong. Getting proof hurt. John wanted to be angry about it, but he just felt empty inside.

That night, a notification popped up on his screen. It was a new message from his father. Don't read it, John thought. Just delete the account and be done with it. Still, he opened the message and read it.

**Chuck:** Sadie, sorry about that last message. I was having a rough day and was in a dark place. I hope I didn't offend you. I worry that I did since you haven't responded.

What I wrote yesterday is a burden that I've lived with for the past twenty-seven years. There isn't a day that goes by where I don't feel the guilt of it weighing me down. Every time I look at my son, I think of how he would have never been alive if I had gotten what I asked for.

Having him changed me, and it's what made me happy to have my daughter a few years later. The best thing about my son is how he has grown up to be a better man than I ever was. I'm so proud of him sometimes it hurts.

John read the last line again. His heart pounded and he felt dizzy. Dad was proud of him. That was the only thing John had ever really wanted. A tear rolled down his cheek and dripped onto his keyboard. He used the end of his shirt sleeve to wipe it off.

John typed one last message to his father.

**Sadie:** It's okay. You didn't offend me, Chuck.

Your last message made me think a lot about myself and where I am at this point in my life. Talking to you has helped me through a difficult time, but now I've realized that it isn't healthy for me to continue hiding like this online.

Our conversations have been wonderful and I will think back fondly on them. Take care, Chuck.

He deleted the account.

John flew home a few weeks later for Thanksgiving. He woke up early in the morning and quietly helped his father pack the fishing gear in the truck. They rode down the winding road to the lake, and got the boat out onto the water just as the sun came up. Like the year before, the fish were not biting.

# *Call*

by Sara Lufrano

Oscar stared at his phone while music and people filled the room. Her phone number was there. All he had to do was touch it. Just touch it.

He locked his phone and walked over to his girlfriend, Holly. He grabbed her around the waist. She looked at him and kissed his face. He let her kiss him.

By the end of the party it was just Oscar, his roommate, Holly and her two friends. His roommate, Luke, was playing video games while the three girls were laying on each other on the other couch. Oscar sat next to Luke and watched him play.

“I almost called her,” Oscar said.

Luke was focused on the game. “Who?”

“Anne.”

“Why, dude?”

“I miss her.” Oscar had been saying it to himself for a year but supposed this was the first time he said it out loud.

“What about Holly?”

Oscar looked to the sleeping woman. “Yeah.” He stood up. “I’m going to take her to bed.”

He guided her upstairs. She rested her head on his shoulder as they clumsily walked to his bedroom. She fell into bed and he lay next to her. She started to breathe heavy.

He pulled out his phone again and pulled up Anne's contact. He stared at it. Call or cancel? Call or cancel? His heart pounded in his ears. He locked the screen.

It was another Friday night, a few hours before the party started. Oscar was sitting on one of the couches playing around with his guitar.

"Yo, man!" The voice of Oscar's other best friend, Elliot, preceded him. "I think I saw Anne today."

Oscar's body heated up like an oven and he gripped the neck of the guitar. "Where?"

"The grocery store on Vine."

"Did she see you?"

"No, man, she had headphones in." Elliot sat next to him. "I could be wrong though. I thought she moved away?"

Oscar looked at his hand where he held the guitar, "Yeah." He put it against the couch and got up to grab a beer. "How did she look?"

"Look man, it might not have been her." Elliot followed to get a beer as well.

"Then how about the girl you saw? How did she look?"

"Oh," Elliot drank half the beer. "She had short hair, still hot. You know, like Anne."

Oscar leaned against the sink and crossed his arms against his chest.

“Ah man, the cutest dog came into the hospital today too. He was the best and licked everyone who would come by...” Oscar was hearing the noise but not listening to the meaning.

Anne was back. Why? He should call her. Maybe she came back and wants to see him. She might call him first. She could want to get back together. He could move in with her.

Luke came home.

“Hey,” Luke said. He dropped his stuff at the door.

“Anne’s back,” Oscar blurted out.

“What the fuck?” Luke asked.

Elliot put up his hands. “I said I only think I saw her.”

“Oh,” Luke walked to the fridge to get a beer, “So you have no idea if she is? You know I hope she isn’t. She’s a bitch, dude.”

That hung in the air. She did practically steal away in the night without a word. She left her house key on the coffee table and then there was no trace of her.

“I liked her,” Elliot said.

“You like everyone,” Luke said, annoyed to be having the conversation.

Later that night Holly was hanging on Oscar with a beer in her hand and yelling across the room. “Shut the fuck up! You don’t know shit.”

“Fuck off, Holly.” Luke was ready to get her out of his house.

“Stop fighting with him,” Oscar told her.

She turned to him in a labored move. She couldn’t focus her eyes on him. “You’re supposed to be on my side.”



Oscar hadn't drunk near the amount anyone else at the party drank. "There aren't sides."

"Yeah, there are."

Oscar removed her arm from around him. "Stop it. Why can't you be classy or nice? You're fucking wasted."

"You're fucking wasted." She put a finger in his face. "Fuck you."

"Go to bed." He walked away from her. He ended up outside on the front porch of the house.

It was a warm night. He took out his phone and pulled up Anne's number. Call or cancel? Call or cancel? Call. His body was on fire and he thought the phone would slip from his sweating hand. His entire chest pounded against his skin.

He pressed for speaker. One ring, voicemail. The phone's voice rattled off the numbers. Cool relief washed over him and he ended the call. He let out the breath he was holding and bent over, elbows to his knees. What would he have said anyway?

You're back in town, why? It doesn't matter, can we be back together? You know I love you. I always have. The past? Yeah, no, I know I was fucked up. But I understand it now. And since I get it I'll be better to you. I never want to be without you. Ever.

Oscar Googled the symptoms of having a blocked number. One ring and to voicemail.

He walked back into the party. Elliot was slumped against the wall talking to three other people.

"Elliot," Oscar said.

"Yeah, man?" Elliot said without turning towards him.

Oscar stepped in front of him. "What time did you see Anne?"

"Dude," Elliot nodded his head, "she's super hot."

“What time did you see her?”

“I was getting lunch, I got like, Chinese food.” Elliot smiled and leaned on Oscar.

Oscar started to be more social, making everyone go out for drinks, dinner, weird walks around downtown that Luke and Elliot took issue with. He also went to the same grocery store for everything. The one on Vine.

“I hate this one.” Luke was pushing the grocery cart. “Don’t think I’m stupid, dude.”

Oscar grabbed at stuff on the shelves, looked it over and placed it back.

“That was like, four weeks ago. It wasn’t her.”

“She blocked my number,” Oscar said.

“You should block her fucking number.”

“Hey look,” Oscar grabbed a bag of shredded cheese, “I’m getting this.”

Oscar sat in his assigned edit bay running through pilot after pilot of potential shows. His phone buzzed with a new text message. He looked at it. Elliot’s name with the message hidden. It buzzed again. Elliot. Then a call.

Oscar picked it up. “What, dude? I’m working.”

“She’s here. Like it is actually her, man. It’s her.”

Oscar had waves in his chest and wet sand in his brain.

“What do I do? Should I talk to her?” Elliot said.

“Yes!” He surprised himself at how loud he yelled. “Yeah, keep her there. At least try and get where she lives.”

“Hey, Anne!” Oscar heard Elliot say from afar before he ended the call.

Her name actually being associated to her physical presence made him clumsy. He walked away from his desk first without his keys and then pushed his chair so far from his desk it wasn't worth pulling it back. He jogged out of the building.

Halfway to the grocery store Elliot called back.

“She left. I couldn't get her to stay.”

Of course, Oscar thought. She had to have.

A few weeks later Holly had her legs draped over Oscar's lap as they drank beer and watched a movie on TV. Commercials and all.

“Fast forward through these,” Holly said searching for the remote. “Isn't this recorded?”

“I like the commercials,” Oscar said.

“That's stupid.”

“I am stupid, you're very right.”

A sense of real dread followed him wherever he went. A shadow of her that looked over his shoulder but was always too far away to touch. He talked to Anne in his head all the time. He would answer for her, sometimes in the way he wanted her to answer, “I've missed you,” but mostly in the way she would actually answer, “Get away from me.”

He would scan every room he walked in, looking for her, hoping to lay eyes on her and see her smile. See her smile at him.

How sorry could he be? How could he show her that? He'd have to sum up everything he felt in one sentence. The sentence she'd let him get out before turning her back to him and walking away again.

He always asked Elliot to recount his conversation with her in the grocery store. To describe her. Did she look single?

“How does someone look single?” Luke asked.

“Like you, Luke,” Oscar said.

“Whatever, dude. I’m single because I want to be. And don’t forget about Holly,” Luke said.

Oscar shook his head. “She doesn’t matter.”

“And that, dude, that right there,” Luke pointed at Oscar, “that’s why Anne will never be with you again.”

Oscar called Anne’s number. One ring and then voicemail. He thought that if he called enough when he actually saw her he wouldn’t be as nervous.

He hung up and called again. Hung up and called again. Then Googled if the calls showed anywhere for her to see. He didn’t dig very far but found out that she wouldn’t know. So he called again and left a voicemail, “Hi. I miss you.” He ended the call.

He called back. “I don’t want anything from you. I just want to talk.” He ended the call.

He called back. “I know why you left and I’m sorry. I wasted my chance and I deserve it. I just want to talk to you.” He ended the call.

He called back. “I always think about you, even more now that you’re back. I don’t think I love you, but I still might.” He ended the call.

Oscar was walking with Holly from one bar to the next. She was trying hard to get drunk while he was taking it slow. They stood outside so she could smoke a cigarette.

Oscar heard a laugh that invoked a feeling like a familiar smell. He turned his head. There she was. Anne. She was laughing with a group of girls and hanging out in front of a restaurant.

He froze, staring at her. He didn't blink. All he saw was her, as if she moved in slow motion. He felt as if he would remember every way she moved her body.

"I'm ready," Holly said.

Holly's voice was distant to him.

"Okay. I'm going inside. I have to pee," she said and left.

He reached into his pocket and took out his phone. He pulled up Anne's number and pressed call.

One ring, straight to voicemail. Robot voice phone number. Beep.

"Anne. I'm looking at you right now. You're beautiful. I want to run up and grab you, tell you I'm sorry, kiss you."

She reached into her purse and pulled out her phone. He ended the call quickly and moved behind a tree just in case she looked around. Could she see his phone call? Is this the first message she'll get from him? He should have said something better than that. He should have said, I didn't love you like I said I was going to, I'm sorry.

He could tell she unlocked her phone and then she gathered the group to take a picture. Just a picture. He missed those.

Oh God, what was she doing back? Why did he have to see her? Pain set in where he supposed a nervousness should have. His rib cage snapped and twisted into a knot that also made it hard to breathe.

Anne kept laughing and talking, then smiling and listening. She talked with her hands and moved her face in a million emotions as the group meandered.

He fucking missed her. He wanted her face pressed up to his. He wanted to breathe in her air. If he could hold her he'd never let go.

She was happy. His chest tightened even more. She's happy not being with me.

His phone buzzed. He flipped it out of his pocket and almost dropped it. It was Holly.

Oscar looked back to Anne. She and her group were walking away. He went into the bar and sat next to Holly.

"What were you doing?" She asked.

"Getting over someone."

"What's that mean?" She raised an eyebrow and pushed out her lips.

"Good news, I guess, for you." He took down half the drink she ordered for him. "Come on, let's drink."