

A photograph of a bar shelf filled with various liquor bottles. The bottles are arranged on a wooden shelf against a dark background. Visible brands include Jameson, Bombay, and Glenlivet. The lighting is warm, highlighting the glass and labels of the bottles.

**JUST
ONE
WON'T
HURT**

**A SHORT STORY FOR ENGLISH
READING AND SPEAKING**

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Introduction

What is an alcoholic?

Do you know anyone who drinks too much?

What do you think their life is like?

Is it possible for someone like this to stop drinking?

Just One Won't Hurt

Marcus stared at the glass in front of him.

The amber liquid inside, like gold, and the four cubes of crystalline ice.

The smell too. That familiar smell of wood and fire.

Whisky was a refined drink. It was sophisticated. A man's drink.

But to Marcus, it was sheer poison.

He hadn't touched a drop for the last eight years.

Yet here he was, in a downtown bar, with the glass in front of him.

Marcus was the only customer. The barman stood at the other end of the bar, cleaning glasses and lost in his own thoughts.

Marcus had not touched the glass. Not yet.

But there was a powerful temptation to reach out and hold it.

He knew that once he held the glass, he would raise it to his lips and tip the contents into his mouth in one go.

That would happen without any question at all.

After the barman set the glass in front of him, not making eye contact with Marcus, totally uncaring and oblivious to who or what he was, Marcus pulled out his phone.

He at least had that much common sense left.

He made one phone call. The only phone call he needed to make.

To his sponsor.

The sponsor had picked up on the third ring.

The conversation had been very short.

What's going on?

Where are you?

I'm coming right now.

Marcus checked the time on his phone. Just after 11pm.

No clock in the bar. Two places you won't find clocks. Bars or casinos.

But it was late. He reminded himself he would have to thank his sponsor for coming out at this hour.

The barman cleared his throat, and Marcus automatically glanced over at him.

A paranoid feeling that he was holding him up, that he

wanted to close up, and go home.

The barman didn't want to stay there because some alcoholic was having a bad day and needed a drink.

His hand reached for the glass. And, sudden alarm filling Marcus' chest, he pulled it back.

Don't touch the glass.

Keep your hands off the glass.

Do not.

Touch.

The glass.

He placed his hands between his thighs. Gripped them tight there, preventing any movement at all.

He knew where his sponsor lived. Driving here would take around twenty minutes. He might have already gone to bed, so he would have to get dressed. That would take around ten minutes.

He knew that his sponsor was married. Marcus had met his wife. And he would have to explain to her why he was getting up and going outside at such a late hour. Another five minutes.

Parking — five minutes.

Walking to the bar — five minutes.

Marcus added the numbers up on his fingers gripped between his legs.

He was looking at forty-five minutes at the very least before his sponsor walked through that door.

Outside, the streets were empty. People — *normal people* — were at home at this time. They were in bed, sleeping, preparing for the day ahead.

Marcus wanted that kind of life for himself. He wanted a normal, stable life.

Not a hectic life filled full of chaos and nightmares.

“I haven’t seen you here before.”

Marcus jolted and looked up.

The barman gazed over at him.

He forced a quick reply.

“Umm. Yeah. My first time here.”

His voice came out weak and trembling.

In fact, it wasn’t his first time. He had been here before. At least he could remember arriving at this bar. A long time ago. But no recollection of leaving.

That was his usual pattern in going to bars.

A vague memory of arriving. And then the next morning, a mind filled with paranoia as he had blacked out and had no memory of what he did or how he got home.

He could have done anything.

“Tuesdays are always quiet,” the barman continued.

Marcus nodded back at him, allowed a small smile to spread on his lips.

The last thing he needed right now was a conversation. He was not up to it. He could barely think, let alone talk.

“You should come here on a Wednesday,” said the man. “I guess because it’s Hump Day. The place is packed then.”

He slid off his stool and ambled down the bar towards Marcus, picking up the whisky bottle on the way.

As he neared Marcus, he raised the bottle to pour him a drink.

“This one’s on me, man,” he said. Then stopped. “Oh, you haven’t touched that one yet.”

Marcus’s hands fluttered near the glass. Not touching it.

Do not touch the glass.

“Yeah... I'm waiting... My friend will be here in a second.”

The barman eyed him strangely.

“No problem. I’m closing up in a few, though.”

Marcus nodded again. Was he nodding too much?

“I’ll be out of here soon,” he replied.

The barman put the bottle back and went back to his spot at the end of the bar.

Marcus stared at the whisky in the glass. Warm and inviting. Healing.

Don’t touch the glass.

Outside, a car horn. A woman’s voice. Sounds of the night.

Marcus took a breath. Willed for time to pass. He clamped his eyes shut. Opened them, hoping to see his friend walking through the door.

Walking in to save him. To rescue him.

Then a voice inside his head: *Why can’t you save yourself? What kind of man are you that you constantly need someone else to clean up after you?*

The barman cleared his throat.

Marcus knew that sound.

That meant: *Drink your damn drink and get the hell out of here. I want to go home.*

He forced himself not to look over. Not to look into the

barman's eyes.

Then a ping of the bell above the door.

Marcus spun round to the entrance of the bar.

His friend in the doorway.

"Yo, Marcus. Let's go."

He held the door open. His arm gestured to the outside.

Marcus put a ten-spot on the bar.

He nodded to the barman.

The look on the man's face. He knew. He had seen it all before.

He had served hundreds like him.

Then Marcus got to his feet and walked out of the bar.

Reading Comprehension Questions

Look at all the following questions.

Answer them using a full sentence every time. Your answers should be based on the story above.

Who is the main character in the story?

Where is the story taking place?

What struggle is the main character dealing with in the story?

Who is the second character in the story?

Describe Marcus's relationship with alcohol.

How long has he been sober?

Why does Marcus describe whisky as both "sophisticated" and "sheer poison"?

What does Marcus mean when he says he wants a "normal, stable life"?

What does Marcus's vague memory of visiting the bar in

the past reveal about his history with alcohol?

How does Marcus react to the barman's presence and actions?

Why is Marcus uncomfortable talking with the barman?

How does Marcus respond to the barman when asked if it was his first time there? Why might he lie?

What does the phrase "Do not touch the glass" signify in Marcus's mind?

How does Marcus try to physically prevent himself from drinking the whisky?

What does the absence of a clock in the bar signify about the setting or atmosphere?

Who does Marcus make a phone call to?

Why does he call this person?

What role does the sponsor play in Marcus's life?

Why does Marcus calculate the time it would take for his sponsor to arrive? What does this reveal about his mental state?

How does the description of Marcus's sponsor's likely actions (e.g., getting dressed, explaining to his wife)

contribute to the tension in the story?

What does the barman's comment about Tuesdays suggest about the bar's atmosphere?

What is the significance of the barman offering to pour Marcus another drink?

How does the barman's attitude towards Marcus reflect on his experiences with other customers?

How does the barman's last look at Marcus reflect on his understanding of Marcus's situation?

How does Marcus feel about being in the bar alone at night?

How does the sound of the car horn and the woman's voice outside affect Marcus' emotions?

What does Marcus mean when he hears the inner voice ask, "Why can't you save yourself?"

What thoughts go through Marcus' head while he waits for his sponsor to arrive?

What emotions does Marcus experience when he sees his friend at the door?

Discuss the significance of the ten-dollar bill that Marcus places on the bar. What does it represent?

What does Marcus leaving money on the bar suggest about his character or intentions?

How do you interpret the ending of the story when Marcus leaves the bar with his friend?

True or False

Look at the statements below and say whether they are true or false.

If a statement is false, correct it and make it true according to the story.

You can find all the correct answers at the end of the lesson plan!

1. Marcus had been sober for eight years before entering the bar.

2. The whisky in the glass had five ice cubes in it.

3. Marcus immediately took a sip of the whisky after it was placed in front of him.

4. The barman was unaware of Marcus's struggle with alcohol.

5. Marcus made a phone call to his therapist while sitting in the bar.

6. There was a clock hanging on the wall of the bar.

7. Marcus had been to this bar before, but he couldn't

remember leaving the last time.

8. The barman offered Marcus a free drink after noticing he hadn't touched his whisky.

9. Marcus gripped his hands between his thighs to stop himself from touching the glass.

10. Marcus calculated that it would take his sponsor exactly one hour to arrive.

11. The bar was busy, with many customers enjoying drinks late into the night.

12. Marcus lied to the barman, claiming it was his first time there.

13. A woman walked into the bar and sat next to Marcus before his sponsor arrived.

14. Marcus's sponsor arrived and immediately told him to leave the bar.

15. Marcus paid for the drink before leaving the bar, even though he hadn't touched it.

Essential Vocabulary

Look at the table of words from the story below.

How many of these words do you know?

amber	nodded	recollection
liquid	crystalline	blacked
sophisticated	familiar	packed
poison	refined	fluttered
barman	temptation	inviting
stable	oblivious	healing
chaos	sponsor	clamped
conversation	paranoid	willed
memory	alarm	rescue
anxious	gripped	gestured

Exercise

Write down all the words and phrases in your vocabulary notebook. Look in your dictionary and find the meaning of each word. Write the definition next to each word.

Then make up your own sentences using each word or phrase.

For example:

Amber — *A yellowish-orange fossilized tree resin, often used in jewellery and decoration.*

Nodded — *Past tense of nod. To move the head up and down, often as a sign of agreement, acknowledgement, or to indicate sleepiness.*

Then write a sentence of your own that uses the new word or phrase correctly.

As the sun set, the sky turned a stunning shade of amber, signalling the end of the day.

She nodded in agreement when her friend suggested going to the new restaurant.

Do this with all the vocabulary and, over time, this will help improve all your English skills — reading, writing, speaking and listening.

What is the Correct Synonym?

Look at the words in the table below.

Match the words on the left with the correct synonym on the right.

A synonym is a word of similar meaning.

All the correct answers can be found at the end of the lesson plan!

Word	Synonym
Amber	Crowded
Sophisticated	Dialogue
Familiar	Recuperating
Packed	Recognizable
Refined	Nervous
Healing	Resin
Chaos	Save
Conversation	Polished
Rescue	Cultured
Anxious	Disorder

What is the Correct Antonym?

Look at the words in the table below.

Match the words on the left with the correct antonym on the right.

An antonym is a word of similar meaning.

All the correct answers can be found at the end of the lesson plan!

Word	Antonym
Liquid	Opaque
Crystalline	Calm
Blacked	Trusting
Stable	Repelling
Oblivious	Unsteady
Alarm	Antidote
Poison	Solid
Inviting	Released
Gripped	Aware
Paranoid	Illuminated

Words and Meanings

Look at the table of words below.

Amber	Sponsor
Crystalline	Paranoid
Sophisticated	Anxious
Temptation	Gesture
Chaos	Rescue

Now match each of these words with the correct meaning below.

You can find all the correct answers at the end of the lesson plan!

A person or organization that provides support or funding for a project, event, or activity.

To save someone or something from a dangerous or distressing situation.

The desire to do something, especially something wrong or

unwise.

A movement of the body, especially of the hands or head, that expresses an idea or feeling.

Experiencing worry, unease, or nervousness, typically about an impending event or something with an uncertain outcome.

Having the structure and form of a crystal; composed of or resembling crystals.

Having refined knowledge, manners, or taste; complex or intricate in design or nature.

Complete disorder and confusion; a state of utter disorganization.

A hard, translucent, fossilized resin, typically yellowish in colour, used in jewellery and decoration.

Exhibiting or characterized by irrational suspicion or distrust of others.

What is the Missing Word?

Look at the table of words below.

amber	stable
crystalline	chaos
familiar	conversation
poison	anxious
inviting	rescue

Now fill in the gaps in all the sentences below using the words in the table.

You can find all the correct answers at the end of the lesson plan!

The horse stood calm and _____, even as the wind howled through the barn.

Despite the apparent _____, she managed to keep her focus and finish the task.

The icicles hung from the roof, catching the light in a dazzling _____ display.

The aroma of freshly baked bread was _____, pulling passers-by into the small bakery.

Feeling _____, he took a deep breath before stepping onto the stage.

The sunset bathed the room in an _____ glow, casting long, golden shadows on the walls.

Their whispered _____ carried a sense of urgency and secrecy.

She found comfort in the _____ scent of freshly brewed coffee.

The firefighters worked tirelessly in their heroic _____ of the trapped family.

His words were like a slow-spreading _____, charming yet dangerous.

Discussion Questions

How does Marcus feel about whisky, and why does he choose not to drink it?

What kind of environment does the bar create for Marcus in the story?

Why do you think the barman doesn't make eye contact with Marcus?

What role does the sponsor play in Marcus' life? Why is he important?

How does Marcus manage his temptation to drink throughout the story?

Why do you think Marcus has come to the bar even though he knows he's trying to stay sober?

How does the barman's behaviour reflect his attitude toward customers like Marcus?

What might Marcus feel when he hears the barman's comments about the quietness of the bar on Tuesdays?

Do you think Marcus' internal struggle is common for people who are trying to overcome an addiction? Why or why not?

If you were Marcus, would you have called your sponsor? Why or why not?

How does the barman's offer of a free drink affect the situation? What would you do if you were the barman?

What does the time of night (around 11 pm) represent in the context of Marcus' struggles?

Why do you think Marcus has such vivid memories of his past experiences in bars, but not the details of what happened after?

What do you think Marcus means when he talks about wanting a "normal, stable life"?

If you were Marcus, how would you feel when your sponsor arrives to help you?

Do you think Marcus' internal dialogue ("Why can't you save yourself?") is self-critical? Why?

What do you think about the barman's possible feelings toward Marcus? Does he seem sympathetic or indifferent?

Why does Marcus pay for the drink even though he didn't touch it? What does this tell you about his character?

How do you think Marcus' actions at the bar compare to his past behaviour with alcohol?

What do you think will happen to Marcus after he leaves the bar? Do you think he will stay sober?

Role Play

This is a role play activity.

There are two characters in this role play:

Marcus

Marcus' Sponsor

Choose a partner to work with and in pairs prepare your role play.

Read the instructions below.

Role Play Scenario

Marcus has just left the bar with his sponsor after a moment of intense temptation to drink. They are walking outside, and Marcus feels conflicted about his addiction. His sponsor is there to support him, offering guidance and encouragement. They talk about Marcus's struggles with drinking, and Marcus opens up about the internal battle he faces.

One of you will play Marcus, and the other will play his sponsor. You should use the following lines and create a conversation based on the context. The conversation can take place on the street outside the bar as they walk together.

Three Lines to Use in the Role Play

You must use the following lines in your role play!

Marcus: *"I don't know how I ended up there, but it felt like everything was pulling me back to the drink."*

Sponsor: *"You're not alone in this, Marcus. You've made it this far, and we can work through it together."*

Marcus: *"Sometimes I wonder if I can really keep going like this without falling back into old habits."*

When you are ready, show your role play to the class.

Take it in turns to show all your role plays. Give feedback at the end of the class.

Debate

This is a debate activity.

Topic: Is it better to face addiction alone or with the support of others?

Context

Based on Marcus's struggle with alcohol addiction and his reliance on his sponsor, you will debate whether it's more effective to deal with addiction by oneself or with external support.

The debate will allow you to explore different perspectives on recovery, self-reliance, and the importance of a support network.

Instructions for The Debate

Divide your class into two groups.

One group will argue that facing addiction alone (self-reliance) is the best way to overcome it, while the other will argue that having the support of others (sponsors, groups, or family) is essential for recovery.

Preparation Time

Take 10 minutes to prepare your arguments and discuss them within your group. You can use examples from the story or your own knowledge to support your points.

Debate Rules

- Each of your groups will present your arguments.
- The debate should follow a structured format:
- First, each side gives a 2-minute opening statement.
- Then, students can ask questions or challenge points made by the opposing side (1-2 minutes for each student).
- Finally, each group will give a 1-minute closing statement.

Encourage respectful dialogue

You should listen to the opposing side and respond

thoughtfully, using polite language.

Sample Debate Prompts

For the "Self-Reliance" side:

"If you can't find the strength within yourself to overcome addiction, then you'll always be dependent on others. Recovery should be something you do alone, for yourself."

For the "Support Network" side:

"Dealing with addiction is too difficult to do alone. Having someone there to guide and support you, like Marcus's sponsor, is what makes recovery possible."

Post-Debate Reflection

After the debate, the class should reflect on the arguments made by both sides and discuss which points you agree with more and why. This will encourage critical thinking and allow you to practice expressing your opinions in English.

Writing

This is a writing exercise.

Prompt

Choose one of the following scenarios to continue Marcus's story. Write a short story (300-400 words) in which Marcus either relapses into his addiction or overcomes his struggle and becomes a sponsor himself.

Scenario 1: Marcus Relapses

After his night at the bar, Marcus feels proud of himself for resisting temptation, but the pull of alcohol never quite leaves him. Over the next few weeks, he finds himself in situations where the temptation grows stronger. One evening, after a stressful day, Marcus walks into a bar again, telling himself that "just one drink won't hurt." Write a story about Marcus's internal battle as he tries to resist, and eventually, he gives in. How does he feel afterwards? What does he do next?

Scenario 2: Marcus Overcomes His Struggle and Becomes

a Sponsor

Marcus continues his recovery journey with the support of his sponsor. Over time, he becomes more confident in his ability to stay sober and begins to believe in his own strength. He attends meetings, reflects on his past struggles, and uses his experience to help others. Write a story about how Marcus becomes a sponsor himself. How does he feel when he helps someone new? How does his life change after taking on the role of a sponsor?

Guidelines for Writing

1. **Character Development:** Focus on Marcus's emotional state and his internal conflict (for both scenarios). Whether he relapses or becomes a sponsor, show how his experiences and feelings shape his actions.

2. **Use Dialogue:** Include at least two lines of dialogue between Marcus and another character (his sponsor, someone at a meeting, or even his own inner voice). This will help develop the scene and Marcus's relationships.

3. **Theme of Struggle:** Whether Marcus relapses or succeeds, make sure the theme of addiction and personal

growth is clear. Show the challenge he faces and how it affects his life.

4. Reflective Ending: Conclude with a reflective moment for Marcus. Whether it's regret after a relapse or a sense of achievement as a sponsor, let the ending convey the impact of his journey.

This exercise encourages students to practice writing about personal conflict, character development, and emotional expression while integrating vocabulary related to addiction, recovery, and support.

True or False — Answers

These are the correct answers.

How many did you get right?

Marcus had been sober for eight years before entering the bar.

True

The whisky in the glass had five ice cubes in it.

False

Corrected: *The whisky in the glass had four ice cubes in it.*

Marcus immediately took a sip of the whisky after it was placed in front of him.

False

Corrected: *Marcus did not touch the whisky after it was placed in front of him.*

The barman was unaware of Marcus's struggle with alcohol.

True

Marcus made a phone call to his therapist while sitting in the bar.

False

Corrected: *Marcus made a phone call to his sponsor while*

sitting in the bar.

There was a clock hanging on the wall of the bar.

False

Corrected: *There was no clock in the bar.*

Marcus had been to this bar before, but he couldn't remember leaving the last time.

True

The barman offered Marcus a free drink after noticing he hadn't touched his whisky.

True

Marcus gripped his hands between his thighs to stop himself from touching the glass.

True

Marcus calculated that it would take his sponsor exactly one hour to arrive.

False

Corrected: *Marcus calculated it would take at least forty-five minutes for his sponsor to arrive.*

The bar was busy, with many customers enjoying drinks late into the night.

False

Corrected: *Marcus was the only customer in the bar.*

Marcus lied to the barman, claiming it was his first time there.

True

A woman walked into the bar and sat next to Marcus before his sponsor arrived.

False

Corrected: *No woman walked into the bar and sat next to Marcus before his sponsor arrived.*

Marcus's sponsor arrived and immediately told him to leave the bar.

True

Marcus paid for the drink before leaving the bar, even though he hadn't touched it.

True

What is the Correct Synonym — Answers

These are the correct answers below.

How successful were you?

Word	Synonym
Amber	Resin
Sophisticated	Cultured
Familiar	Recognizable
Packed	Crowded
Refined	Polished
Healing	Recuperating
Chaos	Disorder
Conversation	Dialogue
Rescue	Save
Anxious	Nervous

What is the Correct Antonym — Answers

These are the correct answers below.

Did you win?

Word	Antonym
Liquid	Solid
Crystalline	Opaque
Blacked	Illuminated
Stable	Unsteady
Oblivious	Aware
Alarm	Calm
Poison	Antidote
Inviting	Repelling
Gripped	Released
Paranoid	Trusting

Words and Meanings — Answers

These are the correct answers below.

Time to celebrate?

Amber: A hard, translucent, fossilized resin, typically yellowish in colour, used in jewellery and decoration.

Crystalline: Having the structure and form of a crystal; composed of or resembling crystals.

Sophisticated: Having refined knowledge, manners, or taste; complex or intricate in design or nature.

Temptation: The desire to do something, especially something wrong or unwise.

Chaos: Complete disorder and confusion; a state of utter disorganization.

Sponsor: A person or organization that provides support or funding for a project, event, or activity.

Paranoid: Exhibiting or characterized by irrational suspicion or distrust of others.

Anxious: Experiencing worry, unease, or nervousness,

typically about an impending event or something with an uncertain outcome.

Gesture: A movement of the body, especially of the hands or head, that expresses an idea or feeling.

Rescue: To save someone or something from a dangerous or distressing situation.

What is the Missing Word — Answers

These are the correct answers below.

How many did you get right?

The sunset bathed the room in an **amber** glow, casting long, golden shadows on the walls.

The icicles hung from the roof, catching the light in a dazzling **crystalline** display.

She found comfort in the **familiar** scent of freshly brewed coffee.

His words were like a slow-spreading **poison**, charming yet dangerous.

The aroma of freshly baked bread was **inviting**, pulling passers-by into the small bakery.

The horse stood calm and **stable**, even as the wind howled through the barn.

Despite the apparent **chaos**, she managed to keep her focus and finish the task.

Their whispered **conversation** carried a sense of urgency

and secrecy.

Feeling **anxious**, he took a deep breath before stepping onto the stage.

The firefighters worked tirelessly in their heroic **rescue** of the trapped family.

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