

The Most Clever Thief in the World

Taken from Ann Landers column some years again:

Dear Ann: Ten years ago, you published an essay, "The most clever thief in the World". That essay changed my life. The next day, I went to my first meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous. I haven't had a drink since.

I clipped out that column and carried it in my wallet for many years. I often showed it to people I thought it might help. Unfortunately, I lost the clipping a few days ago and am asking you to reprint it. - Living Sober, Columbia, MO.

Dear Living Sober: Here's the column. Bless you for asking.

Dear Readers: I received at my office today a most unusual gift - an empty half-gallon whiskey jug. Taped to the bottle was an unsigned essay, which I have altered to fit this space. I hope the jug was merely an attention-getting gimmick and that the author poured the contents down the kitchen sink. Here it is:

The Most Clever Thief in the World

I invited her into our home for special occasions. We'd become good friends, I thought. And then I began to look forward to our meeting at the end of each day. After a while, we became so friendly I had to see her every evening.

People began to think of us as a couple. Even the police knew our names. Our identities were too closely linked, I thought, so I began to see her on the sly.

At first, she stole small change from my pocket. I wasn't concerned. Before long, she crept into my billfold. I wasn't happy about that, but I enjoyed her company too much to complain.

Friends said I was seeing too much of her and that she had made changes in me they didn't like. I resented their interference and said so. They dropped me.

My wife and children complained about the time I took from them to spend with her. I said, "If you insist that I make a choice, I will choose her." And I did. She began to demand so much of my money I could no longer afford new clothes. I heard people at work whisper about my shabby appearance. They blamed her. I was annoyed and distanced myself from my colleagues.

She started to visit me at the office. My boss became upset. He said my friend was interfering with my work. After several warnings, I lost my job. We had some heavy arguments after that. I told her to stay away for a while, so I could think. She said, "So long, buddy. You'll come back to me before long." She knew me better than I knew myself. Within three days, I was seeing her again.

Our affair became more intense than ever. We spent every day and night together. I lost my wife, my family and my job. The next thing to go was my health.

When I became so sick I couldn't eat or sleep, I realized she had taken everything in my life that had meaning. Although I was not religious, I decided to turn to God. He wrapped His loving arms around me and gave me strength I cannot describe to this day. He made me feel whole. My sense of self-worth and sanity began to return. I knew I would never again let my friend back into my life.

Today I am on my way back. With God at my side, I know I will make it. My old friend will always be around the corner, waiting for me to weaken and stumble and come back to her, but I am determined to keep her out of my life forever. I have found a magnificent replacement.