

A glass of whiskey with a large ice cube sits on a dark, polished wooden table. The glass is partially filled with a golden-brown liquid, and the ice cube is melting, creating a small pool of water at the base of the glass. The background is dark and out of focus.

# *the Sign*

*a short story*

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# *the sign*

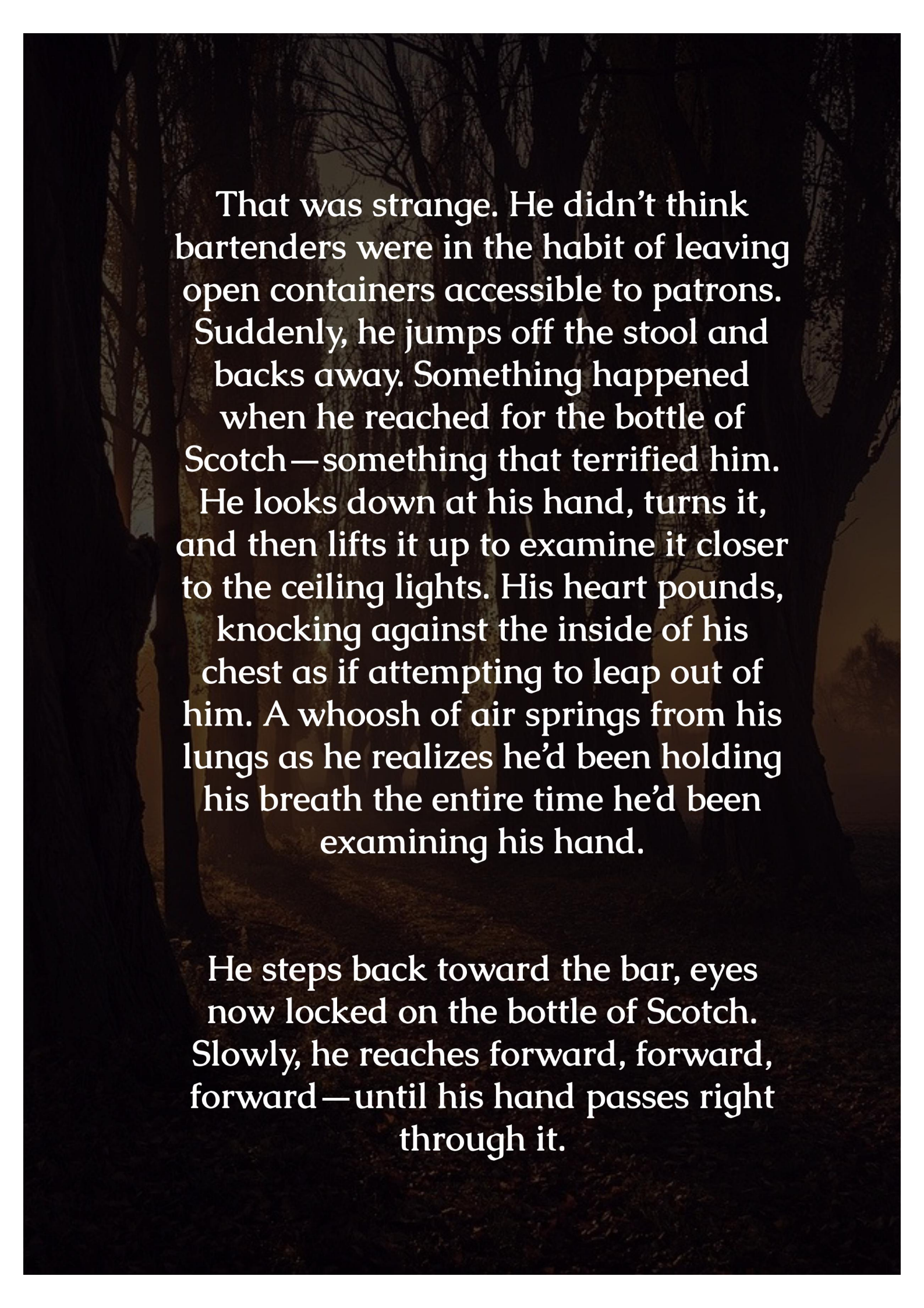
*Dean traced a finger around the edge of his fourth Scotch. If only the universe would give him a sign.*

*Something...anything that would let him know which path to take his life.*

*Taking a sip, he looked across the restaurant and noticed he was completely alone. Even the bartender had stepped out—maybe to get more supplies from storage? He didn't know.*

*What he did know was that, in a room that was full only minutes before, he was now its sole occupant. He downed the Scotch in one swift tilt of the head, slammed the glass onto the polished bar-top, and reached for the bottle.*



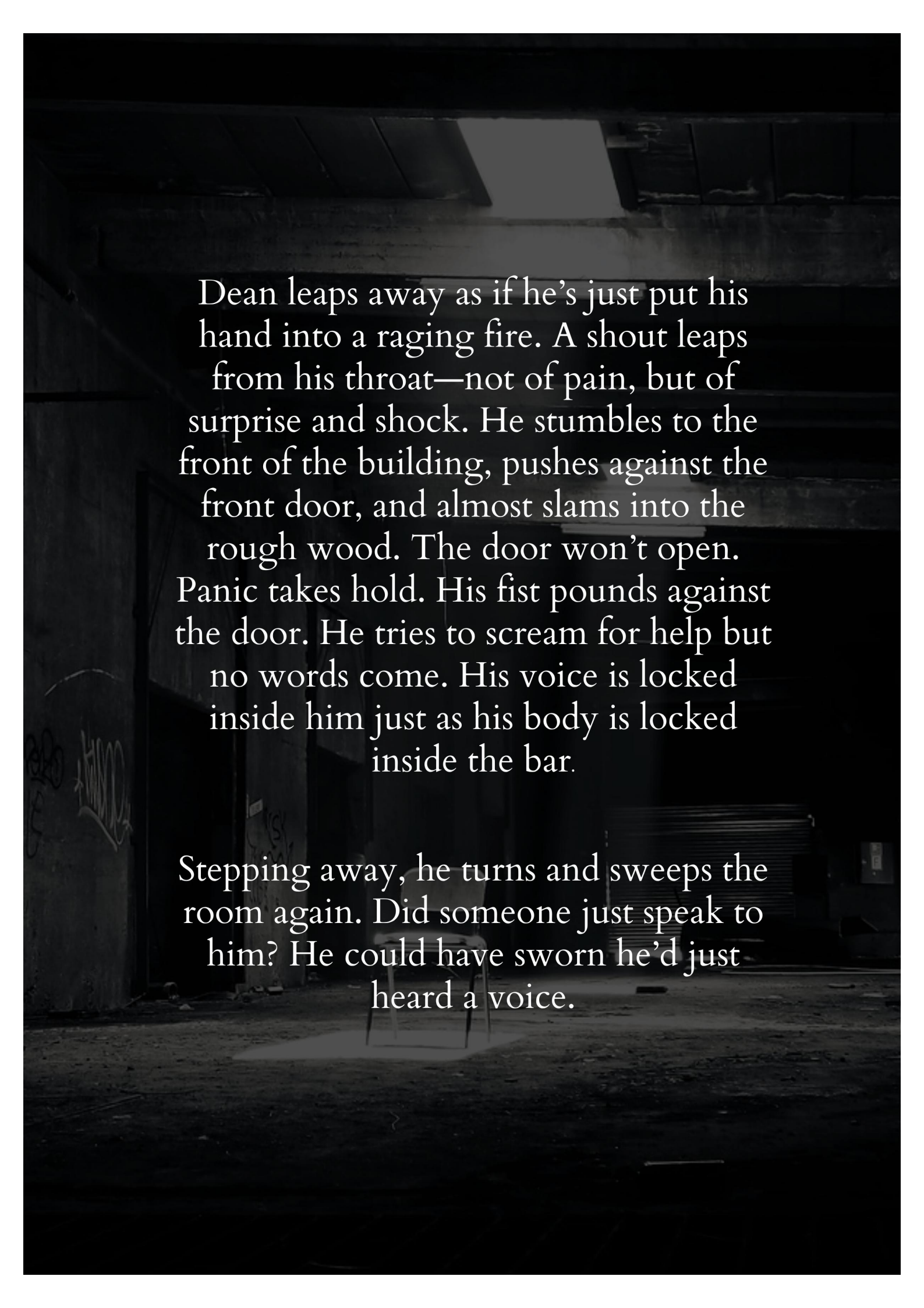


That was strange. He didn't think bartenders were in the habit of leaving open containers accessible to patrons. Suddenly, he jumps off the stool and backs away. Something happened when he reached for the bottle of Scotch—something that terrified him.

He looks down at his hand, turns it, and then lifts it up to examine it closer to the ceiling lights. His heart pounds, knocking against the inside of his chest as if attempting to leap out of him. A whoosh of air springs from his lungs as he realizes he'd been holding his breath the entire time he'd been examining his hand.

He steps back toward the bar, eyes now locked on the bottle of Scotch. Slowly, he reaches forward, forward, forward—until his hand passes right through it.





Dean leaps away as if he's just put his hand into a raging fire. A shout leaps from his throat—not of pain, but of surprise and shock. He stumbles to the front of the building, pushes against the front door, and almost slams into the rough wood. The door won't open. Panic takes hold. His fist pounds against the door. He tries to scream for help but no words come. His voice is locked inside him just as his body is locked inside the bar.

Stepping away, he turns and sweeps the room again. Did someone just speak to him? He could have sworn he'd just heard a voice.

“Hey buddy...”

There it was again.

His eyes open. He’s face-down on the bar.  
Somebody shakes his shoulder.

The bartender says, “Hey buddy...it’s time  
to go.

fourth glass of Scotch—still sitting there,  
untouched

“Okay, universe...I hear you.” He drops a  
fifty on the bar and stumbles outside, never  
to return again.

*Thankyou*