

Just One Sip

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One thing I had a hard time understanding is why people are dead against drinking while driving. They say it makes car crashes much more likely, and I get it, driving with a single hand is no easy task. I was a firm believer that this was a mere exaggeration, as most modern cars have cup holders that allow you to have both hands on the wheel throughout most of the ride, but the truth is that I learned my lesson the hard way.

I developed this habit of mine in my younger days. Naturally, I did not know how to drive, so I always served the role of the copilot: a role in which drinking does not pose any problem. Nowadays, however, my parents no longer drive me anywhere, and, since the distance between the city and my home is so great, driving has become my only option. I don't know whether this makes it any better, but I only drive under the influence at night, when there are fewer people on the streets. Now that I think about it, it clearly makes it worse, since the darkness only heightens the drowsiness I feel.

In this particular case, this winter night was gloomy and rather misty, one of those nights when you'd rather stay in bed. In order to fight drowsiness and shake off sleep, I opened the window and let the wind hit my face. I reached the metal container in the cup holder, and let go of the wheel in order to open it. The pungent smell immediately invaded my nostrils, and I took the first sip of this dark and bitter drink. My body shivered as I felt the burning aftertaste it left in my throat. I understand that not everyone likes it: some people think it is too strong and opt for drinks that are sweeter or milder, even at this time of the day. I don't think there is any scientific consensus on this, but I really feel that its properties perk me up. Something we can all agree on, though, is that this is no time to be drinking just water.

I decided to play some music, as it helps me stay awake. I felt more and more energetic with every sip I took, and started to sing along to the blasting songs. I must admit that I got a bit carried away. My attention drifted away from the road, and it took a heavy toll on me.

I had already got off the highway and was navigating this maze-like city. These are the best hours to drive around, as the streets are quite empty. With no cars in sight, I could reach the speed limit with ease, something that doesn't usually happen. I was enjoying it way too much, so much that it turned to imprudence. Some parts of this city are in an almost derelict state, and the pinkish tones right at the horizon weren't helping me either. The light turned green, I hit the gas while taking another sip, and, all of a sudden, the car jumped into the air and shook me violently. When it landed back on the road, my drink flew out of its container and spilled all over my shirt. I shrieked in agony, but the pain I felt wasn't because of the impact. A burning sensation covered the entirety of my chest, my skin was melting under my clothes and I feared that this sensation would reach my inner organs.

I stopped the car, I had to relax. After some minutes my suffering had already gone, but the throbbing on my skin was still going. This clearly wasn't okay, so I headed to the hospital. I had to wait for almost an hour and a half before someone came to check on me, even though I'd told them it was an emergency. The consultation itself lasted less than five minutes, and, as I got out of the hospital, I found myself back in my car in broad daylight with an aloe vera cream in hand and a bunch of missed calls and messages from my boss asking where I was.

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I had to get to the office as soon as possible, and when I finally arrived, I was in a state of utter embarrassment. The moment I entered, everybody stared at me. I didn't know how I would explain it all to my boss. It wasn't only the fact that I was late, but also the reason *why* I was late. I could make no excuses, the coffee stain on my shirt was the laughing stock that triggered the inevitable questions and also the evidence of this anecdote.