

# STRAIGHT, NO CHASER

Randall Stephens, Class of 2018

A 25-year-old male presents to an AA Meeting complaining of an ache in his heart and a weight on his shoulders. After all, what better way to get in the mindset of someone dealing with an addiction than getting your now traditional gut punch this morning over coffee (*with a side of tears, hold the tissues*), a punch that even the strongest whiskey sour the night prior couldn't lessen (*you hypocrite, add this failed relationship attempt to the proverbial frequent-buyer punch card. Two more and my next emotional breakdown is free!*). People of all types begin to walk through the doors of the meeting hall, excited to be around other people "Living Sober," the official name of this AA group (*yet the only type that's on my mind, was how I wasn't hers*). Only 4 out of 13 lights try their best to brighten a fellowship hall full of couches, chairs, and tables—each looking like they had been worn out, beaten up, but recovered by people who needed them more than they would know (*one empathizes*). A beautiful mid-morning sun does its best to peek in through the pollen-covered windows that keep this meeting private. The dust dancing in the sunrays that do get through begins to settle down and take its seat as the meeting begins.

Sundays on Monday Road (*the irony is not lost on me*) are for discussion. I sit on a beat-up blue couch, seeped with the tears of women giving up their children because of "the drink and the drug" (*to think, I had only signed up for this meeting out of others because it had a free breakfast, as if that was going to keep me from breaking down*). "Are there any visitors that would like to make themselves known?" I sheepishly raise my hand first and bleat out my name with the confidence of a hundred ants (*perhaps next time I'll ask the Wizard for courage*). More hands slowly go up as names are spoken aloud with a courage not worthy of my typing fingers. Each with the same last name, "...and I'm an alcoholic." They begin an open discussion on procrastination and a shiver goes down my spine as I realize the pathology lectures piling up on my desk (*how exactly did I become a second year medical student again?*). Across from me, someone who's been sober for more years than I've been alive (*twice the amount of time I've been alive but who's counting*) begins to talk about their own struggles but also of their own resolve to get through each day. I can feel my eyes begin to water up (*side of tears, order up!*) as this person says they want their grandchildren and great-grandchildren to know their elder died sober. I look away



## VISION NYC

Daniel Farinas Lugo

*Daniel Farinas Lugo is a first year medical student who enjoys walking around and getting lost in new strange places in search of inspiration.*

## STRAIGHT, NO CHASER (CONTINUED)

to wipe a tear and I make eye contact with someone, a slight smile showing on their face gave me more comfort than I had anticipated (*or thought I deserved*).

As I begin to leave, the person next to me buys me a copy of Alcoholics Anonymous (*the latest edition I might add, I haven't purchased the newest edition of any textbook in my life*). "Now you'll definitely get an A on your paper," they exclaim. They remind me that, as a future doctor, I can never truly diagnosis someone as an alcoholic; that is something the patient needs to discover for themselves. The only thing I could provide is my guidance in getting them to a meeting. As I flip through the pages of this book, I see doctors have known this since the 30's: "Faced with this problem, if a doctor is honest with himself, he must sometimes feel his own inadequacy. Although he gives all that is in him, it often is not enough" (*If that ain't just the gospel truth*).

If character traits could only be described through word association games, it wouldn't come as a surprise to me if my name is synonymous with "beer snobbery" (*I'd rather it be associated with witty, but writers can't be choosers*). After all, at any social gathering the statistical odds of me getting asked, "Hey, what beer are you drinking?" or, "Hey, you drink a lot of beer, what do you recommend?" are so good I should go to Vegas with them (*adios student loans*). None of that will ever make me a good doctor. I want to be able to get people the help they deserve. To recommend meetings like "Living Sober" because people jokingly calling me an alcoholic isn't funny once you've cried in your car after realizing your gut-punches don't amount to a hill of beans in this crazy world (*Here's looking at you, kid*). Because joking around with your colleagues about going to these meetings as a fictional *Fight Club* character isn't funny when a recovering alcoholic stares you in the eyes and thanks you for being a doctor that cares for people like them. The general welfare of our future patients rely on the notion that we understand their pains, and I'll always remember sitting on that beat-up blue couch Sunday morning on Monday Road (*hold the tissues*). ■

More hands  
slowly go up  
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Each with  
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last name,  
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