

The man got up from his chair and walked over to his only window. It was nearly dark outside, and he could see the silhouettes of the neighbors against the blinds. They were fighting, but not throwing anything this time, just yelling. He watched for a second then went back to his kitchen table, pushing aside the stack of letters marked NOTICE in bright red. He almost sat down again.

“Wait,” he thought, “maybe I should tidy up a bit, in case someone were to stop by.”

Scanning the studio apartment, he mentally noted “beer cans on the bedside table, ashtray should probably be dumped, floors need to be swept, dishes are dirty, fold laundry on the couch...”

The heater started making heavy, dull sounds as it fired to life. It smelled of burnt dust.

“I’ll start with the cans,” he decided.

Before cradling them in his arm, the man gave each one a small shake to make sure they were empty. He hated the idea of wasting anything. Turning with the cans he rediscovered the towering pile of trash.

“Shit,” he might’ve said aloud, “I’ll do that tomorrow.”

He set the empty cans on the shelf next to the bin and stood there for a moment, unsure of what to do. A soft ping from the phone saved him.

*Today’s top story. A young boy dying from cancer is visited by his heroes at the hospital.*

The man sauntered over to the couch, fell onto the laundry and craned his neck over the tiny phone.

*Today’s top story. St. Marie’s burns down, fire reportedly starting in the pediatric oncology unit.*

Sometimes it hurt to focus on such a small screen. “Maybe it was time for glasses,” he thought as he rubbed his neck. The heater continued its flat drumming.

*Today’s top story. How Make A Wish makes children’s dreams come true.*

“Just horrible,” he acknowledged before reading the next headline, then the next, then the next. The man barely noticed the sound of his molars grinding against each other as his thumb’s nail rhythmically clicked against the tiny screen. He had forgotten what he picked up his phone for.

“I just need to relax for a bit.”

He set the phone down. Releasing his eyes, they began to focus again on the empty cans across the room. The man thought back to how he had promised Sarah to be sober for their anniversary. They had a good thing going, him and Sarah, but that was years ago. Everything was different, she had kids now and he had, well, his own things.

“Still, I should call—” he declared aloud before stopping abruptly, embarrassed by what he had just done.

The man sat still, silently fingering the phone. A cat yowled in the distance and the heater switched off again.

“I’ll sweep tomorrow,” he thought as he got up and paced towards the window. It was dark and the streetlights had come on. He couldn’t see the couple anymore.