

Imparting Shots

by Joey Delgado

He knows why I'm here, so he stalls, talking about the coffee, about how it's a new dark blend from a little shop in The Village, about how he loves the flavor, so rich, but just because a coffee is dark doesn't mean it's stronger, that it's the lighter blends that have the most caffeine, and did I know there is an Indonesian coffee made from the beans blown out a skunk's ass.

"You told me," I say and hold out my empty mug for him to take. He uses the tips of his fingers, grabs the mug from the bottom, and places it by the sink. I try not to read into the careful handling, the spot by the sink miles away from the dirty dishes in the basin and the clean dishes in the strainer. I've been overanalyzing a lot lately, but actions, man, they scream in the void made by words unspoken; that empty space between talk of skunk-shit coffee and, "I'm going through with it, Dad."

He stands on the other side of the counter, directly across from me, and his eyes drop from mine to the Batman logo on my shirt.

"You've loved Batman since you were a kid. So much has changed, but not that. It's kind of cool."

"Dad."

"Why do you do this?"

"Do what?"

"Put me in conversations where I have to say something awful."

"You don't have to, you want to."

"It's selfish, son. I'm sorry, but it is."

"How is it selfish? I'll be a great father."

"Holy Jesus, I don't know what to say." He reaches over the counter and grabs my arm. He has tears in his eyes. *Again.* I made him cry twice this week. "I mean, what do I say?"

"That you support me."

"Hear me out. Say you get a kid, if that's possible. Will they even let you? Say you get a son, and he has moments like this, and believe me, he will. They won't be the same as yours, but he'll have 'em. So

he comes to you for help and you're there, always right there, to give him coffee and advice. It's so hard, but it's also an incredible privilege. So he grows up having you around until what, the meds stop working? He'll need you and you won't be there."

"That's always true."

"Sure, but you don't know if it's true for a kid who's thirteen or thirty."

Or three, I think.

I look past my dad, past his strong shoulder, and see the coffee cup, the one he handled like a crate of unstable dynamite, the one he put far away from the other dishes in case my new, microscopic friends decide to go airborne and leap onto his chipped Faberware.

This is how it's going to be. People hear things, read things, learn things, right or wrong, and behave accordingly. I remember when a car was backing out of a parking space and almost clipped my dad's Toyota. The driver looked so embarrassed, so apologetic, almost scared, but my dad comically dragged his hand across his forehead, the classic 'close-call' gesture, and the driver smiled and drove away relieved. I asked him why he did that and he said, "Because what good's giving him the finger gonna do?"

What a great thing.

What a fucking great thing.

"So," he says. "What are you gonna do?"

