

Bash

by Joey Delgado

“Shit fucker.”

The man on the bed cried out when I slid the needle into his antecubital vein, a thick blue cord contrasting sharply with his jaundiced skin. The stick wasn't as perfect as I'd liked, the man's exclamation a testament to my imperfect I.V. insertion.

But the words, his words, “Shit fucker”, were familiar to me. My hands began to shake, my body. I went into the hospital room bathroom and splashed cold water on my face. With a trembling finger I traced a scar that ran from my lower lip to the bottom of my chin.

Shit fucker.

The words were the same, the voice, weaker now, but still the same. I looked at the sick man more closely. He was older, but then he would be. He lost most of his hair and he gained weight, a lot of weight, mostly due to his disease.

I looked at him again. His yellowing skin, slimy, slick with sweat, an amphibian that crawled from between mossy rocks on the shores of dirty rivers.

I knew this man.

We left hand in hand, my idea. Luke was apprehensive because he saw some new guys hanging around, he was always so paranoid of new guys. I told him things were fine now, lighten up, times they are a-changing.

I was wrong.

The men came from nowhere.

I was hit in the face with a crowbar or lead pipe, one of those weapons seen in cheesy eighties movies about street life in the big city. I went down to my knees and saw my blood, black in the night, falling on the sidewalk. I was kicked in the back and I fell face first on the ground. But that's when my beating stopped. That's when my story ended.

Luke was in the gutter, his face in stagnant water littered with cigarette butts, condom wrappers, and green shards of glass from broken beer bottles. A man was kicking him in the face with a boot the size of a U-boat, over and over and over again. Blood oozed from his lips like molten lava, carrying with it bits of his teeth, his beautiful white teeth. Luke's smile was the first thing I noticed about him. Now his teeth and his warm blood was in the gutter and would stay there until a merciful rain washed it away.

"Fucking shit fuckers."

"Here," said a voice from behind me, my attacker.

He threw his weapon to the other man and he caught it with an efficient clang.

I tried to yell. I tried to scream. I tried to get my useless body off the ground, but I was being held down.

"Suck on this, shit fucker."

Then the blows came, one after another, and I watched my boyfriend's body convulse and then still. He was gone. That's where his story ended.

The men were never caught.

But here he was, on his death bed, end stage liver disease. A pathetic end to a pathetic life. His chart said booze was the cause of his medical problems. After he murdered my love he spent the rest of his life partying. Or, maybe he used alcohol to try and quell his guilt.

It didn't matter. What mattered was that he once was powerful and I was weak. But that wasn't the case anymore, was it? The power was mine. I could be merciful and make him comfortable until he passed. Or...

I filled a 10 mL syringe with stale hospital air and sat at his bedside waiting for him to talk, waiting for him to look at me. But he never did.

I put the syringe in the pocket of my scrubs and left the hospital room to attend to my other patients, the ones who actually deserved

care, the ones who actually deserved dignity in either death or recovery.

But every time I passed the man's room I put my hand in my pocket and fingered the syringe. On one of my rounds I thought I heard him say, "Shit fucker." I was pretty sure he said it, and I was even more sure he said it to me.

It was then that I walked into his room and pulled the curtain around his hospital bed and removed the syringe from my scrub pocket.

That's when his story ended.

