

Category: Fiction

Smoked

The chair squeaked as he leaned forward, reaching to take a hit.

“Them little cigarettes, my boy. They’s for pussies. A real man’s blunt is a cigar, see’s here?”

He points to the smokey, crumpled mess of a Cuban in his mouth, chewed till it was flat, like a clarinet’s filament. You’d think he was playing it too, when he blew and the end turned orange. He coughed after doing this, though. An old man’s cough, raspy and water-logged, though not so much water as it was blood from the crispy membranes of his lung.

“You’re blowin’ hot air, pops. I’m no boy.” I retorted. His grayed eyebrows furrowed, narrowing to look me in my eyes.

“You’s just as much a boy as I am.”

“Those Cubans, pops. They’ll kill you one day.” His laugh brought with it a few spots of blood on the carpet, Pops leaning back in his recliner, the leather worn from forty years of daily use. I’d sat in that chair, my grandfather’d sat in that chair. Course, Gramps hadn’t sat in it for long. Pops looked like he was saddling something, legs bowed like they was. Saddlin’ something big. Life, maybe. Maybe.

“You’re funny sometimes, Monty. Maybe that’s somethin’ your mother taught you. About the only thing she taught you, you know. I don’t appreciate what I put you through with her. I’m sorry for that.” He turned solemn all of a sudden, gesturing up to me when saying “I’m sorry”, hand extended, but not meant for shaking, just for looking. Exploring the air between us like a snake throu’s the grass.

“She’s a part a’ me, Dad. I’m never gonna be anything but half-her.”

As quickly as it had come, his mood returned to the normal, demeaning state I knew well.

“And that’s why I don’t really like you, Monty. Now get the hell out of the way a’ the TV.” The accompanying gesture here was a damn bit more clear, a quick swipe of the right hand to the side. My shoes clicked a little on the tile floor as I resigned to the liquor cabinet in the corner, and poured myself some whiskey. Besides that and some old scotch, Dad’d kept the rest locked up for important occasions, when he’d close the door and tell me to play with myself until I fell asleep. He used to say that when I was older than he was I’d get to drink the stuff on the inside, feel it in my nose, “bubblin’ up”. Not that I couldn’t handle it now, I’d say to Wilma. My father was an oaf, I’d say to Wilma. I’d also said I was sobering up, but she wasn’t here. Probably stalkin’ some mauled and merc-filled club uptown, a few drinks away from the gambling strip in Atlantic. Yeah; a few drinks. Had the audacity to tell me not to drink the devil’s piss when she was chuggin’ it by the shot glass.

Dad wasn’t much for hard alcohol but he kept it around for business, mostly. He’d pour himself a small bit before they came over, swing it around while they was there in the living

room, and ditch it in the can when he took a break. I think they noticed, but he kept pullin' the same stunt every meeting. Fido's habit of drinkin' from the toilet came as a result, I guess.

"Mont, pour me a glass a' that scotch."

"You don't drink this stuff, pops."

"I don't, you're right. Pour already." His voice was weak, for some reason. The recliner squeaked as he leaned back again, rocking himself slowly. He turned up the volume of the TV so damn loud I had to shout;

"Why you turnin' it so high, pops!?" He couldn't hear me. The cigar in his mouth was black at the end, burnt, dead. "The Sopranos" were so damned loud I swear I could hear the cameraman sniff as they zoomed in on a woman's face, smooth and light. Her eyes twinkled a bit.

I walked over to the chair and grabbed the remote out of his hands, and swift-like flipped off the TV. He took the scotch out of my hand when I was looking at the screen. I felt his grip shake when he snatched it, and his head when he slammed it onto the coffee table, the glass shattering, cutting his fingers. I knelt to look him in the eyes;

"Pa, what's wrong?! You're all outta wack!" His teeth gnashed the cigar to shreds, the butt dropping to the floor, singing the carpet. He raised a trembling finger to his lips, hushing me.

"Shut up Mont. Shut the hell up. Shut up."

"I'm shut, pops." He reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a key, small and fresh. He flicked his finger.

"Open the liquor cabinet, the back."

I walked back over again. I knew I was nervous, but I had control, I thought. My hands fidgeted when I tried to put the key to the lock, slippery 'neath my fingertips.

"Open it. Open it. Open it!" He shouted, blood and panic dripping from the corners of his lips.

"OPEN IT!"

The key snapped in and I twisted hard, the doors flitting open, bursting at the seams with packages wrapped in brown paper, tied with thin string. I turned back to him, my mouth wide, eyes wide open. His head was a void, a cavity filled by the clearing feathers and dust from the reclining chair. A man stood behind him, smoking gun in hand, tipped orange with after-shot heat. His hair was shaven and black, his eyes deep. I could not see them.

"Get away from the cabinet, gringo." My brain stuttered, swollen with fear.

"W-w-who are you?!" He walked over to me on my knees, settling above, looking down. His black leather jacket sagged at his shoulders as they crested forward, blocking out the light from a weak, flickering lantern in the corner of the room. All I could make out was his face.

"Just an amigo, little boy." His face loomed like death. Mine was paler than heaven's gates.

“An amigo from the south, over the blue seas. Little Havana. Maybe you know the place?” His gun was swiftly slipped back into it’s holster, replaced by a thin cigarette from his pocket.

He took a small puff after it was lit. In the lighter’s light, I finally saw the glint of his eyes as he chuckled.

“And I ain’t no pussy.”