

## Asshole Need Love Too ...

Gene finally opened the door, his ears humming from the doorbell's endless trill.

"Who are you?"

A hot pain lightning struck the length of Gene's nose while tears chilled the edge of his eyes. His hands sprung toward his face to catch the blood while his gaze caught the brown fist in front of him, retreating to its owner's side. Distracted while trying to recall if he did indeed hear a crunch, Gene gave way to the palm nudging the center of his chest, pushing him back into his apartment. He back pedaled until his calves spread against the front of his couch and then sat down.

"You're *lostinspace88*, right?" the stranger asked. "You read the Quest City Journal online? Leave comments every once in a while?"

Gene's fear rumbled throughout his body like a bicycle over train tracks, shaking everything from lower jaw to bowels. He then thought of his Huskie, *Nana*, sleeping in his bedroom, knocked out by the cancer medication. "I don't understand," Gene said, working the blood under his tongue so he could speak clearly. "I'm a peaceful man. Just take whatever you want."

The stranger looked down at Gene from his stance, half smiling, a single eyebrow raised. "You're adorable," he said. "Skinny jeans. Fat beard. Hair like soft grass. You look ... well, you look like someone who's easy to like."

Gene spat a wad of blood into his palm and rubbed the gummy fluid into his jeans. "Just don't hurt my dog in the bedroom, okay? I'm all she has, and she's dying, man. What do you want?" Gene asked, tilting his head back. "My face ... it's throbbing now."

"You read the Journal?"

"Yes! Fuck!" Gene answered. "What, are you a hacker? Did I troll you? I was probably drunk and bored. Take a joke for once, Jesus. Goddamn, it's gotta be broken."

With eyes closed, Gene rubbed the deformed lump on his face, now looking like chewed gum, and could only hear the stranger's voice.

"I just wanted to know what it would be like to hit you," he said. "But I'm not impressed with the outcome, honestly. You can go on being an asshole online, anonymous and cowardly. I won't come back. This would only be worth it if I fucked up everyone like you and, ironically, I'm too lazy for that shit."

"Is this a race thing?" Gene asked, eyes open, glaring at the stranger. "Did I offend you or something?"

"Yeah, you offended me. But not with your talk about blacks being lazy and making everything about race. You're full of shit and know nothing about people like me. It's that you're such a *confident* idiot. It's obnoxious. But maybe I'm just envious."

Gene noticed the stranger eyeing the picture on his table by the couch, a fishing trip from last summer with friends. "But you're not alone in your stupidity, are you? I guess that would make it hard to change."

Better to be a piece of shit with friends than a decent human being and all alone, especially since it can be dangerous being a decent human being.”

Gene surprised himself with his sense of outrage and almost stood up to speak in his defense.

“I was wrong,” the stranger said. “I never thought about how being an asshole may be the best thing you’ve got going for yourself. I could never beat that out of you.”

The stranger squeezed a new ache into Gene’s shoulder. “You ain’t shit, *lostinspace88*. And there’s no fixing stupid with fists. So I’ll just focus on living a good life despite people like you. And if a racist cop or asshole like yourself shoots me dead in the streets ... that will be sad. A stupid motherfucker like yourself shouldn’t have that kind of power. But if a poisonous spider bite can kill a lion I guess it falls in line with the way things are. Go call your friends or something, talk about how this was all so outrageous because you’re the least racist person you know, or whatever people like you say to validate your shortcomings.”

When the stranger turned his back, Gene realized that he had been crying but couldn’t decipher why. Gratitude that Nana would be safe and anger over the attack pooled in his heart. He craved the return of normalcy, an apartment full of air that wasn’t so polluted. His stomach rumbled as he licked at the caked blood on his upper lip, a coppery stain making his face stiff. “Intruder,” he muttered. His teeth squeaking like a rusty bear trap as he ground them. “Intruder!”

His best friend dying, his space invaded, Gene only knew the right to defend what he loved. He tried to shout but instead screeched as he rose from his seat, the blade he kept tucked in his sofa’s cushion now unfolded and ready.

One step, two step.

Gene’s chest was flush against the stranger’s back when the blade flew over the stranger’s shoulder and began to claw. Ear. Face. Neck. Chest.

“Fuck you! Fuck you! Fuck you! Fuck you!”

Gene’s arm flailed like he was trying to swim up from the ocean floor, craving fresh air, aching for the sun’s shine. And then he wheezed, like a tire losing air. “Fuck you,” he croaked, before hurling a final pair of thrusts. It wasn’t until the last attempt that he realized he had done no more damage than a pen tapping a desk.

The stranger turned around.

“When a baby shits his pants, people are generally patient because they know that he just needs to learn. When an adult shits his pants, people tend to laugh and mock. Maybe that’s because it’s hard to understand a man who can’t handle what seems so basic. ‘Don’t shit your pants. Don’t categorize people based on their skin color. These are silly things to do,’ someone might say.

“And a man who shits himself will likely hide because of the shame. Burn his shit-stained clothes. Fear intimacy because what if he shits himself during sex, or when he kneels down to propose? And yet, if a man like this was to find a group of people who also shit themselves, that behavior becomes easy to normalize. After a while, you won’t even notice the stink. And then, eventually, people even praise you.

“Way to go, Gene. That was awesome. You got it to slide all the way down into your shoes this time? You da man.”

Gene’s eyes bulged. The stranger’s shirt had frayed but there were no marks on his body. His mouth repeated a motion, as if he was trying to say a word that started with a *w*. But he couldn’t push past the first letter.

“I was immature, Gene, and I apologize. I should just let you shit yourself and live out your shitty days with your shitty friends and shitty family. So be it. For you, a life full of shit is a life well led. I won’t try to change you. But, when the time comes, I won’t hesitate to point out the stink clinging to your inner thighs.”

The stranger turned around again, opened the door, and exited the apartment. “It’s amazing - the things people are taught to think of as beautiful,” he said.

The stranger walked down the hall. Gene stood in his doorway, momentarily feeling the back of his pants before mouthing the word *allegory*.

“If you feel the need to call the cops,” the stranger shouted from the end of the hall, waiting in front of the elevator, “the name is Ethan Washington. They know where to find me.”

*(Based on characters from The Magnificent Adventures of QLuke. These stories are a continuation of the novel.)*