

Too Weak for the World

by Joey Delgado

There was a certain romanticism in it, the salty old man sidling up to me at a bar, rhapsodizing in a slurred stream of consciousness about the state of the world, the country, the state of his own heart. He didn't have an eye patch nor beard, nor was he particularly old, maybe just ten years--give or take--my elder. He didn't appear blue collar, exactly, with hands free of calluses and grease, and his shoes were a pair of lived in mid-tier trainers. There was no trace of the disenchanted executive; his watch would not wow prospective accounts flying in from New York, Chicago, or Omaha. He was the prototypical straight, white male, which, I suppose, gave him the impetus to approach a stranger—me, an obviously gay man waiting for a Grindr hookup—and unload all the grievances displaced from his gut by six or seven mircobrews. “You hear about all this?,” he asked me, lifting his chin to one of the flatscreen televisions. I looked up and saw a commercial for Hershey's Kisses, red and green foil wrapped candies arranged to look like a Christmas tree, jangling out a classic carol. “Yeah, they've been playing this one for years. Stick with what works, I guess.” He returned his attention to the television set and bowed his head, as if the TV let him down in a day, a life, full of letdowns.

Then he began to speak.

“No, man, no. The shooting over there in San Bernardino. Did you hear about them?”

“Yeah, actually I don't work too far from—

“Awful. Awful. Just fucking awful. I can't do it. I can't. There was one just like a week ago at a Planned Parenthood in, where was it, Wyoming?”

“Colorado, I think.”

“Wherever. I don't know what to think, or say. I can't form a coherent thought about any of it. People are saying, ‘Get rid of guns.’ Other people are saying, ‘Get rid of Muslims.’ Why do we have to get rid of any of it? Why can't we, just, you know, stop killing

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each other. It's all about strength, you know? It's about shows of strength, like we're fucking animals, fucking neanderthals. We have the best religion. *No*, we have the best religion. Ah, but we have these bombs to back up our argument, so we win. Now, wait a minute. You have the bombs, but we have the nerve and do not fear dying. Try fighting that. It's not just the big things like that, either. All through the day you run into bullshit on a micro fucking level. You lose a girl to the big man who can drag her to the cave and beat away the mammoths. Or you lose the girl to the guy who can buy the biggest cave with mammoth-proof fences. Those with the loudest voices get the best deals or refunds on things they shouldn't be getting refunds on. They're in the return line at a Target and you're listening to them spouting off nonsense, but because they are loud and confident, they get a full refund in cash. Me, I bring in a broken shower nozzle and need to talk to four different people to get store credit. You know why? Because nice isn't fucking rewarded."

He took a long pull from his beer. He was quiet, but in no way waiting for me to respond. He was recharging.

"I am too weak for this world. Some people are so good at everything, all the dirty little games we have to play to eek out a mediocre existence. I've seen true monsters do just okay in life with their few kids and taupe colored stucco mini mansions, at least a far fucking cry better than me. But it gets me thinking, how brutal does someone have to be to really make it to the top levels, in everything? All I see in my head are razor sharp claws dripping with blood."

He took another sip from the beer. I could tell he was beginning to slow down by the way he pushed the glass away from him, outside the circle of condensation on the bar.

"People like you and me, we were thrown at this world like billions of other people, and we, huh, we were the ones who didn't stick, and we're just sliding down, down, through the muck until we reach wherever we're going to reach, until we become whoever we were meant to become. I think the term is: inconsequential."

"Fuck off, I'm not like that."

He smiled at me, a smile filled with so much pity I thought I'd choke. He picked up my own glass of wine and drank the whole thing. He put the glass down on the bar and wiped his mouth with the back of his arm.

"I'm sorry, I was just thirsty," he said.

"Well you've been talking for the last twenty minutes, so that's no surprise. Want me to get you some water."

"That's what I thought," he said. "That's exactly what I would have done. I better get the hell out of here before my wife starts swiping through Tinder."

He flagged the bartender, closed his tab, paid for my wine plus one more glass.

"We are too weak for this world. Everything is a fight that we are not equipped to fight. Trust me."

My Grindr date arrived, but forgot his wallet. "No problem," I said. "Everything is my treat. You'll get me next time."

There never was a next time.

