

1 - MY OWN WORST ENEMY

Pro Tip for Humans #146: When being dragged across the floor by unknown assailants, you are probably about to die.

You know that dream you have where some unknown assailant grabs you by the legs and drags you forcefully from your bed, only for you to smash your head on the floor and force you to wake the fuck up?

Me either.

So for that actual thing to happen to me was a hell of a shock.

My day began with an explosion of agony in the back of my skull. It wasn't the usual type that was preceded by a night of heavy partying when someone else was paying the bill. No, this was a different type of pain completely. It was the type that would have rendered a person unconscious, but it kind of gets complicated when that person is *already* unconscious. So instead of getting knocked the fuck out, I was essentially knocked the fuck awake, pain spiking through my head, my ears ringing in a kind of *you just got a concussion* way.

Just to add to the insult and confusion, there was something over my head. Through the pain and fog that had become my brain, I realized that I should be freaking the fuck out. I couldn't see what was going on, but I could feel hands on both my legs and *holy shit I was being dragged across the floor!*

"Wait," I mumbled instead of yelling something utterly heroic and incomprehensible. In situations like this, what exactly is the appropriate thing to yell? Your choices usually come down to a variation of "*Hey, stop doing that, hey you, stop,*" or a lot of wordless yelling.

The dragging suddenly stopped. I didn't even have time to wonder what that meant before somebody punched me in the face, one, two, three times, adding to my ongoing head trauma.

"Ow," I managed, and then whatever was on my head was ripped away.

I slowly blinked at the two very pissed-off women who stared down at me, my brain trying and failing to connect the faces with names. I was also desperately trying not to think about how I was only wearing my Superman skivvies and that I had suddenly become a line from a Weezer song. Finally, something clicked--

“Tanya! Doreen!” I blustered as cheerfully as I could, which wasn’t much to be honest. The pain that was masquerading as my brain had come with the conclusion that this might all be a stupid prank. “You had me worried for a second there. I thought it was somebody who *actually* wanted to kill me.”

“Hi Bob,” Doreen smiled nervously. “Nice underwear,” she said, blushing. Doreen looked tough, the sides of her head shaved with the remaining hair at the top dyed blue and pulled back into a ponytail, but that was by design. Doreen had always been a sweetheart to me, and I was honestly surprised she had been roped into this mess, whatever it was. At least she was a little embarrassed by the sight of all my exposed brown skin. My naked chest probably did nothing for her since she was into chicks, but I was glad that my irregular workout routine had yielded some kind of muscle, and I wasn’t too scrawny-looking for my attackers.

I’d like to say that any other female assailants who were not lesbians would have at least been distracted by my manly looks, but who am I kidding? I’m an average height black-Mexican guy (my dad is from Barbados, my mom from Mexico), reasonably good-looking if I don’t let my scruff get too long. I’m not a hunka-hunka-burning man-meat, if that’s what you’re into, but my past girlfriends have always said that I had a particular mischievous look that made them weak in the knees. Since it’s hard to get that kind of a reaction in the middle of an assault, I was fucked, especially since one of said assailants (Tanya) had never really liked me.

“We’re going to kill you if you don’t tell us where they are,” Tanya snarled.

See what I mean?

Tanya was short and mean and worked out a lot, but you could tell she skipped leg day at the gym, with those spindly legs of hers and was all about the upper body. She was covered in tattoos, but only had one professionally-done on her left shoulder. She made a point of wearing shirts that displayed it well; it was of a giant eagle on a Canadian flag and was literally labelled “Pride and Joy” just to sell the cliché. The rest had been home-jobs, each exhibiting varying degrees of skill from bad to what-the-fuck.

“Can I call a timeout so we can start over, and you guys can tell me what the fuck it is that you want instead of playing the pronoun game?”

“Hit him again!” Tanya snarled. Doreen looked really apologetic, but she went ahead and punched me again, hard. My head rocked back and collided with the fake wood floor.

“Please stop hitting me!” I groaned, clutching my still unbroken nose. The back of my skull was in agony too, but I couldn’t decide which part of it needed the most attention since my brain was now throbbing.

“Sorry,” Doreen whispered and then looked embarrassed when Tanya glared at her.

“Tell us where the drugs are, Bob!” Tanya snapped at me.

A moment of clarity struck me. I looked from Doreen to Tanya and then back again, but there was no help from either of them. My brain had finally decided that this wasn’t a prank after all, and was now filling my body with a mixture of endorphins and adrenaline.

A panicked thought managed to break through, and I wracked my brain trying to remember if Jaime had spent the night or not. From the amount of light coming through the crack of the curtains in the living room, it looked to be around midday, so even if she had spent the night, she had already left for work, so there was no danger to her, right?

Right. One less thing to freak out about. Now about the other thing—

“Oh come on, you guys. Those aren’t my drugs,” I protested. “Those are *Julio’s* drugs. I’m just holding onto them for him, and you know what? I don’t even know if they *are* actually drugs so--”

“Cut the shit, and tell us where they are, dickwad.” Tanya growled. She reached into the back of her waistband and pulled out a nasty-looking handgun. From the way she held it, I could tell she knew what she was doing and not just posing. “Are you going to make me ask you again?”

Doreen mouthed something to me that looked like “Just tell her,” but it was hard to be sure.

The toilet flushed at that moment and we all froze while we each decided how to react to the sound, at the same time coming to terms with what the flush meant: *there was someone else in the house.*

“Who the fuck is that?” Tanya snarled. She motioned frantically to Doreen, who scurried over to the bathroom door and planted herself against the wall, lying in wait.

“JAIME! STAY IN THERE!” I yelled, and Tanya casually punched me in the nose.

Goddamit!

My yelling had been pointless. The bathroom door clicked and swung open after a moment. Jaime, my girlfriend and love of my life half-danced into the living room, her head lowered as she looked at something in her hands. All we saw of her was a mass of jet black curls that defied the best brushes and any attempts to tame them. There was a white cord running from the curls

to the phone in her hands, a definite sign that she was listening to her ongoing collection of favorite songs that I affectionately called *“Jaime’s Infinite Playlist.”*

She had no idea what was going on.

Jaime looked up and first saw me on the floor, then her eyes went to Tanya, and then they went to Tanya’s big fucking gun, which was pointed *right* at Jaime’s fucking face.

“Oh for fuck’s sake, Bob!” Jaime said.

“Bitch--” Tanya never got to finish what she was going to say. It might have been something along the lines of *“Bitch, you better sit your ass down before I shoot you in the face,”* or something equally charming. Jaime didn’t give her the chance to finish. What Tanya and a lot of people didn’t know was that my girlfriend kicks ass and the last thing you want to do is to stick a gun in her face.

Jaime had done a stint in the army, long before she met me, and she had absolutely loved it. We always joked about how she could beat me easily with her hands tied behind her back. I was the one in the relationship with zero fighting skills. Jaime on the other hand--

Let’s just say that she was fast. Tanya didn’t even begin to react as Jaime leaned out of the path of the gun, stepped forward, grabbed Tanya’s gun-hand and in a fluid motion, ripped the gun away in the most painful manner possible, almost breaking Tanya’s fingers and possibly taking some skin in the process.

“Fuck!” Tanya yelled in pain, pulling her injured hand away.

Jaime stepped back, bringing the gun to bear on Tanya. Or at least she tried to.

Two things happened at once: I scrambled backward, trying to get to my feet, but Tanya stumbled into me and we fell down in a tumble of limbs, and Doreen snuck up from behind Jaime and clapped her hands together hard with Jaime’s head in the middle, in a classic ear-clap. Jaime cried out, dropping the gun, her face twisted in agony,

Of course, Tanya chose that exact moment to sucker punch me, and I reeled backward, my head ringing not quite unlike a bell.

A moment later I was back to kneeling on the floor next to Jaime, a visibly pissed-off Tanya stalking back and forth with the gun in her uninjured hand. Doreen stood behind us, possibly to make sure that Jaime didn’t try anything. I snuck a look at Jaime, and she just looked stunned; there was a trickle of blood coming from one ear.

“Okay, we’re going back to basics Bobby, you feel me?” Tanya said. “Either you tell me where the drugs are, or I’m going to shoot your bitch in the face.”

Jaime turned to look at me, her face twisted with rage and disgust.

“How about you guys just let Jaime go, and I’ll get you anything you want?”

“Give us the drugs.”

“Julio will murder me.”

“Sounds like a ‘you problem’ to me, cuz I’m going to murder you. Drugs now.”

“Let her go and I’ll tell you where they are.”

“I’m going to put a bullet in her face at the count of three,” Tanya helpfully pointed out.

“One...”

“Cupboard above the fridge,” I muttered, not daring to look at Jaime. “There’s a false back. Just give it a nudge.”

“Keep an eye on them, sweetie,” Tanya said to Doreen, and backed away into the kitchen. She found the step-ladder next to the fridge and quickly set it up to rummage through the cupboard.

“Drugs Bob?” Jaime hissed at me. “*Fucking drugs?*”

“I can explain--”

“Can you really? Because two women in the apartment with guns looking for drugs is really fucking hard to *explain*.”

“You’re absolutely right,” I admitted. “This I can’t explain.”

I glanced over my shoulder at the well-muscled Doreen and she tried to glower at me but she really wasn’t very good at it.

“Psst! Doreen!” I hissed. “Give us a break here will ya?”

Doreen shook her head. I realized after a moment that Jaime was glaring at me.

“You *know* each other?” Jaime asked dumbfounded.

Doreen waved and smiled awkwardly. “You must be Jaime,” she said, “Bob talks about you all the time. I’d shake your hand, but you know: working! And besides you might punch me.”

I wanted to sink into the floor under the strength of Jaime’s laser glare. I thought I had seen her mad before but this was on another level, like I was fucking dead no matter what happened kind of level.

“Tanya and Doreen run drugs for Julio,” I mumbled.

That one caught Jaime by surprise.

“Wait, *Julio*? From upstairs? He’s a *drug dealer*?”

“It’s always the quiet ones,” I observed. “You never see it coming.”

Tanya climbed down from the ladder, holding the four plastic-wrapped bricks of heroin that Julio had left in my care about a week ago. Each block had been clearly labelled in black Sharpie “JULIO’S HEROIN,” to prevent any confusion. I had pointed out to him that it implicated the shit out of him if I got caught with them. He had, in turn, pointed out to me that he was going to murder me if I got caught, so I had more incentive to stay out of trouble.

Julio mostly sold some primo weed, better than the legal marijuana they were selling these days. Every now and again, Julio would come into something a little extra. The last place he wanted to keep his stash was where people would look, so he had a couple of guys on his payroll. It paid well enough, and he always provided a little taste of the product, and that suited me just fine. It was a simple arrangement: as long as we didn’t touch the actual product, Julio wouldn’t kill us. I had no problems with that. It wasn’t like I was a junkie or anything, just your average recreational heroin addict. And yes, such a thing existed: I was living proof of it. *Dammit*.

“We got them,” Doreen said in disbelief from behind us. “Can we go now?” Doreen brushed past us over to Tanya and took the bricks from her, doing a mini-celebration of joy.

“I hate to break up the party but Julio is going to lose his shit when he finds out about this,” I pointed out helpfully. I could see a painful future waiting for me and wasn’t liking it, not one bit.

“I’m already losing *my* shit, but don’t mind me, I’m just the girlfriend,” Jaime murmured from next to me. “That’s heroin! In our apartment!”

“That is no heroin--” I bluffed badly.

“Then why the fuck does it have ‘Julio’s Heroin’ written on the side?”

“Okay, you caught me. It’s heroin.”

“*Goddamit, Bob*,” Jaime hissed.

I tried to ignore her. Maybe I could at least appeal to Tanya’s better side. “Guys! Julio doesn’t like it when his people fuck with his supply.”

Tanya bent down in front of me and put the barrel of her gun under my chin. I met her gaze steadily and tried not to tremble. She had a stupid teardrop tattoo at the corner of her right eye that was very distracting. I wondered if I should tell her and then decided not to.

“You tell Julio a word of this,” Tanya threatened, “and I will come back for you. I will kill you and your pretty little girlfriend just to make a point.”

“Have you actually met Julio?” I asked in great confusion. “The man is a psychopath. I’m not going to have a choice.”

“I’ll fucking kill you right now--”

“I don’t think so,” came a man’s voice through the broken front door.

Tanya bolted to her feet and pointed the gun at the man. Doreen spun, fumbling the bricks of heroin and almost dropping them. I was just glad the weapon was out of my face. Sure it was now pointed at Claude but he had more experience with guns.

“Who the fuck are you supposed to be?” Tanya snarled.

“Is that *Claude*?” Jaime hissed, having recognized the voice.

“You can call me Smith,” Claude drawled as he sauntered into the kitchen. “It’s not my real name of course, but the *right* people know who I am.”

It was undeniable that Claude’s presence filled the room. It may have had something to do with the black knee-length topcoat that made him look like he had just stepped out of a gangster movie with very well-dressed gangsters, or it might have just been Claude himself. He was a hell of a lot more confident than any man had a right to be when he had a gun pointed at his head by a pissed-off drug dealer. At six-feet two-inches, Claude was taller than I was, and yes, dammit: he was handsome in the way that made women either want to find out all about his dirtiest secrets or give him some new ones. He was what I described as a big damn hero, and in all of the twenty years that I had known him, he had never let me down once. When Claude was around, I was instantly the sidekick, and I didn’t mind one bit.

Claude carried a brown McDonald’s bag that no doubt contained the breakfast sandwiches he usually brought with him when he dropped by.

“Who the *fuck* are you?” Tanya yelled, and Claude just raised his eyebrow. He made eye contact with me and winked, completely ignoring Tanya, just to send a message that she was no longer in charge, gun or not.

“You okay there, Bob? Jaime?” Claude asked.

I waved and glanced at Jaime who was shaking her head and rolling her eyes.

“Not good at all. I just got my ass kicked... and I think I just got dumped,” I grumbled.

“Oh you are so dumped,” Jaime agreed, glaring daggers at me.

“Well it is a Tuesday,” Claude reminded me. Tuesdays always sucked for me. I should have just stayed in bed--

“Mister, I’m going to shoot you in the face--” Tanya threatened, waving the gun for emphasis and reminding me that she was the reason I *wasn’t* still in bed. Doreen was frozen, eyes darting from Claude to Tanya and back again. I almost felt sorry for her. Almost.

“You really don’t want to point that gun at me,” Claude advised coolly. He smoothly produced a simple white card in his hand. It was like watching a magic trick. One minute his hand was empty and then, the card was there as if it always had been. “Take it. Everything you need to know is right there.”

Doreen inched forward and snatched the card as if Claude might bite. Her face lost all colour as she read it, and she literally began shaking.

“What’s the matter with you?” Tanya asked, still keeping her eyes on Claude.

“Leave the drugs,” Doreen said softly but forcefully. She gave the card to the curious Tanya, who read the card and nodded in agreement.

Tanya put the gun away. “We’re leaving the drugs.”

As the broken door valiantly tried to swing shut behind the women, it felt as if all air had been sucked out of the room. I was just about ready to give Claude a big round of applause for that performance, but then I caught the look on Jaime’s face and my smile slowly faded.

An exclamation of “*What the fuck just happened?*” would have been appropriate in the circumstances, but I could see from the set of Jaime’s lips and the way that she was making the clocking noise in her mouth the way she always did when she was thinking deeply, that she was way beyond that.

There are four stages of rage and Jaime paid a brief visit to each one in a matter of seconds. The first one was the standard “I’m going to fucking kill you”; the second was a more fitting “I’m going to murder you slowly and painfully”; the third was the macabre “I’m going to dance on your corpse after I’ve murdered you and eaten your eyeballs,”; and the fourth stage was the nuclear option of “I’m going to murder you so thoroughly there won’t be a corpse to dance on.” There was a moment as she reached a fifth rarely-seen stage: “*fuck your life*”.

She looked from me to Claude and then back again, then held out her hand.

“You scared two armed thugs into running away with a piece of paper? Let me see the card,” Jaime demanded.

“I can’t do that Jaime.”

“Can’t or won’t?”

“Won’t.”

“Fuck you, Claude. *Fuck* you.” Jaime wheeled on me. “Tell me something that is not a lie,” she demanded.

“I love you,” I said after too long a moment.

“And I love you, Bob,” Jaime whispered hoarsely, “more than you’ll ever know.”

“Jaime--” Claude began, and Jaime wheeled on him, directing all of her fury on him.

“You don’t get to talk to me Claude! I don’t even know who the fuck you are anymore!”

Claude’s face went white, and he stepped back, shaken. He had always been able to talk his way out of anything and it shook me to see him speechless in the face of Jaime’s wrath.

I stepped forward, imploring, knowing what was coming, knowing it was already done, but I had to try anyway.

“Jaime, don’t,” I pleaded. “I’m the one who fucked up. Claude wouldn’t have to save my ass if I hadn’t fucked up this badly. This is all *me*.”

She looked up at me and took a deep breath.

“I know it was,” she said, tears in her eyes. “Which is why I have to leave.”

Jaime spun and strode toward the door. Claude moved back to give her room to pass, but she didn’t even look at him. He glanced at me, pain in his eyes and I nodded slowly, my heart breaking with Jaime’s every step.

It was over.

My heart stopped a little when Jaime paused at the broken door.

“Bob?”

“Yes, Jaime?”

“You two deserve each other,” she said.

And then Jaime was gone.

There was silence for a long moment, then--

Claude dug into the paper bag, the crackling of the paper loud in the silence. After a moment, he produced two greasy yellow-paper-wrapped sandwiches and threw one to me. I immediately took it and threw it against the wall in a fit of pique.

“How can you eat at a time like this?” I asked as Claude tore into his sandwich, glaring angrily into the distance.

“As bad as things may seem, I’ve never had a breakfast sandwich let me down,” Claude observed.

“It is a tasty sandwich,” I agreed. I considered the sandwich on the floor, still mostly in its wrapper. My stomach growled at me, and I swore under my breath, then snatched it up.

If this was a romcom, I would have gotten the girl *and* the sandwich while making some droll remark about breakfast being the most important meal of the day. We would all laugh and life would be great and nobody would say a word about how Claude was a scary motherfucker who had just defeated two drug dealers with nothing but a business card, because that kind of shit doesn't happen.

But my life wasn't a romcom, and instead, I was reassembling my busted floor-sandwich and wondering how it had all gone wrong. To be honest, if it was a movie, it would be more of a buddy-comedy, maybe with less comedy at the moment.

I really want to say something pithy and snappy here, but I'm just gonna say fuck it.
Roll credits.

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