

The drive had not been long. The trunk opened and Brandon yanked him out. Ed looked around. He did not recognize the cemetery. They were deep in the heart of the park, dark night all around. The moon shone through the surrounding trees. He could see headstones, markers, mausoleums, memorials. Not too far away was a dark figure standing over an open grave.

“Oh, my God...” Ed muttered, bewildered.

“That’s your new home,” Brandon said as he dragged him to the gravesite.

Ed’s feet were lead, and he guessed his fate before he got to the plot.

“Where’s the body?” Brandon said to the gravedigger.

He pointed nearby. “I need to hurry up with this.”

“Take the body to the car, put it in the trunk. There’s another body inside. It needs to go in with him,” Brandon said, nodding to Ed.

“Payment?” the gravedigger asked.

Brandon reached in his jeans and pulled out an envelope. “Cash.”

The gravedigger counted it. “Let me get to work.”

How long will it take?”

“Ten minutes to fill a grave...if I’m slow.”

“You got help?”

“Another set of hands coming later. Thought you’d want some privacy.”

Ed watched the gravedigger wheel away the corpse, secure in a black body bag. He saw a yellow backhoe sitting nearby, ready to dump a pile of soil into the open grave. He and Brandon stood in silence. Ed looked into the earth, into the open casket there. He closed his eyes. He realized he was trembling. How many times had he thought he’d die like this in Vietnam? In some pit in the middle of nowhere. No family. No friends. An unceremonious death. Ed shook his head. He thought of Jake, a fun-loving teenaged boy who probably hadn’t had his first fuck.

The gravedigger returned and callously threw Jake’s body into the casket. Ed looked away, deeply hurt.

“Give us a minute,” Brandon said, and the gravedigger walked away quietly.

“Suppose you want me to get in now,” Ed said, shaky.

“You got 30 seconds to make peace.”

Ed looked at Brandon. His face was stoic. Baker shook his head, walked to the edge of the plot, looked down at his nephew’s lifeless body. Brandon walked up behind him and shoved Ed into the casket. Baker screamed out in pain. He scrambled to his feet.

*“I hope you burn in hell! I hope you all fucking burn in hell!”*

Brandon raised an eyebrow. “I take no pleasure in this, in killing a fellow soldier.”

Ed gasped in disbelief. “What have they done to you? To make you like this? To make you do this to me, to this boy? What did the Costello brothers promise you?”

“It’s a job. It’s the family business.”

Ed stood straight. “You’re one of them? You’re a Costello?”

Brandon said nothing. His eyes danced around the park.

“They’ve ruined you. Just like they ruin everything they touch.”

Brandon pulled his gun.

“And you’re a military man?”

“Yep,” Brandon said, shamefully avoiding Baker’s eyes. “Iraq. Afghanistan.”

Ed shook his head slowly. “You’re a disgrace to the Flag.”

Brandon looked up at the moon. He heard fireworks in the distance.

Ed Baker screamed. “If you’re going to shoot me, look me in the face...*soldier.*”

Brandon looked down in the coffin. He pointed his gun and said, “Thank you for your service.”

He pulled the trigger, putting a bullet through the center of Ed Baker’s skull. The grave was filled by the time Brandon was on a plane back to Rehoboth Beach to kill Adriana Esteban.