

So Jack was back, and I hurried down the hallway to say hello before starting my rounds.

“Hey, hey, there’s my little angel in disguise.” Jack grinned. “Come on in and set me straight. I been lookin’ forward to you fussin’ at me ’bout my cigars some more.” Raspy laughter rumbled from his throat.

“See there? It’s slowly sinking in.” I laughed. “Maybe by the time you see Jesus, you’ll have stopped smoking those nasty things.”

Looking horrifically shocked, Jack cried, “Jesus don’t smoke cigars?”

I stared at him.

“Well then, I postpone my departure even further,” he finished smugly. “How the hell are ya Cinderella?”

“I lost my slipper.”

“Oh good!” His eyes popped open wide. “I think that’s where your story gets good! You need a man to take care of you so you can stop workin’ yourself to the bone.”

“Jack.”

“Okay.” He raised both palms in the air, then flashed me a peace sign.

“The nurse take your IV site out today?”

“You know you always gone be the one to do things.” Jack began again, saying, “I see how things go.”

“Jack.”

“Okay.” He pouted like a lost puppy. “No, ma’am. I asked them to take it out two days ago. They ain’t using it, anyway.” He shrugged his massive shoulders. “But nobody has time. They say they gone take it out, but they never come back and do it.”

“Well, two days ago they were using it, Mr. Impatient.”

“I ain’t had no IV nothin’ since I left that hospital.”

I didn’t say a word as my mind began working in a fast motion.

“Uh oh.” Jack pointed at me. “Somebody done me wrong, and my angel is ’bout to flutter them wings all over they head!” He laughed so hard I had to administer a breathing treatment. “Go get ’em!” He punched the air, still laughing, fogging his nebulizer mask.

“You do entertain yourself.” I chuckled, shaking my head as I hurried out.

I discovered that Homer had re-admitted Jack, and per his never-failing sloppiness, Homer had never even ordered the IV antibiotic. I called the doctor, who wanted to add two more days now that three days had been missed, allowing time for opportunistic rebound. I told the doctor about Jack requiring a breathing treatment when he laughed, which wasn't Jack's norm. The doctor decided to redo the entire seven days. So I got it ordered, started a new IV site, gave the first dose, corrected the twenty-four-hour report, discontinued the old IV site, and grumbled to myself about Homer for the remainder of that shift.

Jack was silent as I started the new IV site after filling him in on the new orders. But later, when I disconnected the empty bag, Jack looked at me. “Hey.” He hesitated, glancing toward the window, then back to me. “Thanks.” He thrust his enormous fist out. I bumped it, winked, and left the room.

As I said, he shoots straight. He is the one who nicknamed the nurse “Homer.” I just kept it because it was so perfectly perfect. Jack told Homer the next day, “I'm not one to hold a grudge, boy, so I'ma let this thing go. But this ain't no game you playin' here. This ain't no cartoon, Homer. This is the real deal. People pay for your mistakes with their bodies, their health, and their lives. If you can't walk the walk, keep steppin' right on out that door. Go paint houses. If it's ugly, it's just ugly. Nobody dies.”

Homer made the mistake of laughing, thinking Jack was teasing.

“Boy, it takes a man to wear a man's shoes. If you can't fill 'em with a man's feet, step on out of 'em now. A man takes his responsibilities seriously. You keep that goofy, giggly outlook on this job you got here, and you gone kill somebody.”

Homer requested to be allowed to switch patients with somebody else, complaining that Jack had threatened him. I stood behind Jack and told the director what went down and how, what Jack said and why. Jack was moved from Homer's care. Jack later proved to be correct in his ominous predictions about Homer. But it was swept under the rug along with the rest of Homer's dirt.