

## BEST FRIENDS

by Ian Sutherland

A pale blue Caprice settles into a narrow alley. Miguel, the driver, pushes his thick, black hair out of his eyes and scowls into the rear view. He inspects his teeth, frowns, and licks across the top row.

“I think I’m gonna quit smoking after this.” Miguel says, nudging Telly with his forearm.

Telly is sunken in the passenger seat, folded into his own thin body. His leg bounces, foot tapping on the floor of the. He glances over his shoulder.

Miguel smirks.

“Maybe you should start.”

A metal door creaks open in the alley behind them. Yellow light spills out from the doorway, casting the shadow of a round man onto the pavement. The round man coughs from the doorway. The door creaks shut, finishing with a dull click.

Miguel signs the cross on his chest. He reaches under the dash, then swings out of the car. The trunk lid rises, blocking Telly’s view.

Miguel returns to the car and sets a black duffel bag onto the seat. Telly reaches in, shuffles through and pulls out a sawed-off shotgun. He inspects the weapon, assessing every inch. He clicks the barrel open. Empty.

Telly dives into the duffel bag again, this time producing four steel slugs. He loads the gun. He fishes into the bag one last time.

A box cutter.

Telly pushes the blade up and presses a finger onto it. A pearl of blood rolls down the first digit. Telly plugs the finger between his crooked teeth. He takes a deep breath in, and smears his tongue across his finger to the roof of his mouth. He pauses and savors the taste. A breeze cuts through the open windows across Telly's red hair. He smiles.

Miguel squats down next to the car. "Hey, Tel," he says, "You gonna - you gonna go?"

Telly nods and exits the car in a single swift turn.

Miguel stands up to meet him. Both men face the breeze. The night is oil.

A police siren whines in the distance. Miguel lights a cigarette. A thread of smoke oozes into the night. He holds the first drag deep in his lungs.

"The next job is always the last," says Miguel, through smoke. "but, this one - man -this one's really gonna be mine."

Telly nods along.

"Four jobs in two months is too much," says Miguel. "so - yeah - this one's my last."

Rats run between the dumpsters.

Miguel hoists the cigarette, "Before you go? Smoke *one* with me?"

Telly shakes his head and pops back into the car, to the duffel bag.

"Man," says Miguel, "what else do you need?"

Telly ducks out of view for a moment, rising again with a nylon stocking stretched across his face. His nose is mashed into a bulbous knob. His lips fold up in pink blobs. Miguel laughs through a puff of smoke.

"You look like fuckin' Quasimoto," he says.

Telly stares.

Miguel pulls the last drag from his cigarette. He spits the smoldering filter to the pavement and snuffs it with his heel. It sizzles. Telly hops out of the car, shotgun in hand.

The night has gone silent.

Telly takes a long breath, then strides to the door and taps it twice with the barrel of the gun. The door to budge open.

Yellow light again; the same silhouette.

Telly hoists the shotgun to eye level and pushes forward. Miguel, in the driver seat now, half-turns the key in the ignition. He settles into his seat as the bay doors close.

A rat drags a rotting bagel across the alley. Miguel makes a finger gun and shoots it.

The alley door slams open. Telly scrambles out. Miguel wrenches the key and the Caprice roars awake.

Telly scurries into the passenger seat. He is empty handed. His face and jacket are flecked with an abstract of blood.

Miguel is frozen.

“What the fuck happened, Tel?”

Telly yanks the nylon from his face and stuffs it into his jacket pocket.

“Tel! What the fuck? Where’s the painting?”

Telly plunges the box cutter into Miguel’s neck. Blood gurgles in erratic spurts from the ragged gash.

“He knew!”

Police sirens whine closer.

END