

Aviano Air Base, Italy  
Pathology

21 May 1999  
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I stepped in something a few weeks back and I've yet to get it fully off my boots. But I'm also quite pleased with how it all turned out. Yea, it's about our new Chief-select. She arrived last week and took over the senior enlisted function that was rotated between me and two other SNCO's since February.

Now about her: about 5'10, nicely proportioned, dark-hair and eyes. She isn't hard to look at but she sure is hard to listen to. Ever have one of those things when you meet someone and you hear fingernails scraping on chalkboard because you just know they're gonna be a pain in da ass? Well, I heard that scraping when she tried to squeeze my hand hard like she was a man. I laughed. No bueno.

She's a fast-burn and she reminds us each day. Her man works at the Wing. She reminds us of that too. Each day. Since new Command-blood arrived, she's made sure that we know she is the smartest, most experienced and therefore, we best listen up. If we want to get promoted. Further, she wants to re-energize the SNCO Corps morale and sent out an email for suggestions. None of us answered. We'd be in trouble if we sent what we'd all wanted to say. Her message said one thing but it read, 'The beatings will continue until unit morale improves.'

See, when I take over a new unit, I don't change shit for a month. I observe and listen. If things are running smoothly why change it because you can? Not me. People hate that shit. If I find excellence, I don't toy with it. Tao Te Ching #22. But not this fast-burn selectee Air Force goddess. We just call her Chief Late.

Last week, she'd suggested that instead of cooking hotdogs and hamburgers outside the base BX, that we should shine shoes and boots. That's right. We all should shine shoes outside the BX to improve morale. Then just to show me how

much she loves me, “Donnellan, I want you should run the shoeshine booth.”

There was about seven of us gathered in the executive conference room. None of the guys like her, it’s the arrogance thing. But when she said this, my friends patted my back, “Yea. Yea. D’s your guy.” They fed me to the she-wolf. This is my belief; I don’t shine shoes. Ever. Period. It’s insulting. I will not kneel to any man. But the selectee wants me to lead or shine or get out of the way.

How it turned out; this past Wednesday morning at 0800, I finished setting up the booth to the right of the BX door. Other SNCOs were prepping to cook burgers and hotdogs. Then the General’s staff car pulled to the front curb. All the chit-chat died. Chief Late whispered to me, “Here’s your chance to lead, D.”

So the General ambled over in his flight-suit and sat in the shoeshine booth. Ty, SNCO, my friend, took out a pair of kneepads for me. I wanted to say so much but Chief Late was in my ear going on about professionalism and duty, blah blah. Then she handed me the shoeshine brush and slapped my back. The General had propped his foot on the box. Then it was my turn because I’m not shining no shoes. I turned to her:

“Chief, I believe in lead by example. As our fearless leader, please, show us all the proper way to do this?” I handed her the brush back. The General smiled and waited. I got to say, if that woman was standing under a smoke detector, she’d have set it off. Only a woman is capable of keeping all her rage in one eye. It’s such a wonderful thing when they broil in their own broth. I just love it!

So the General said, “I am ready.” And she knelt. I knelt beside her, real close like because I’m into schadenfreude as part-time hobby. I was gleeful.

So she was shining and staring into me with that hot-coal eye. And I smiled through the whole thing and nodding and whispering, “Gosh, you are a natural.”

Just before Chief Late finished, I got out of there. That hot-coal eye was tearing up. First, I hit the bathroom in the BX and you shoulda seen my happy dance. I was clapping hands and spinning about. I felt like I was seven years old again. I was so darned pleased with it all.

At least now, the fast-burn, smartest, and the most experienced understands NCOs are not to be humiliated in the name of morale. Yea, she caught up with me before the end of the day. Man that woman could curse and that rage-eye, wow, it was kinda sexy. Little puffs of steam coming out of it. But she said she'd felt 'humiliated' in front of the enlisted corps.

And yet – she was unable to make the darn connection for herself. So I said to her, "Lead or shine, Chief." She hates my guts. I just love it. Thankfully she's not in my chain of command. I have no negative feelings over her. I do not surrender that kind of control to anyone.

Yes, it was a bridge I burned. Doesn't matter. I leave to RAF Lakenheath in June. They would not move the MAJCOM position to me, so they moved me to the MAJCOM position. That will be the end: I'm getting out in four years. They cannot sell me a Pentagon slot or Hawaii. I need to be free after serving freedom and get to some heavy writing and theory down. I have stacks of notebooks that need tending to and editing. May I never see another pathology-lab in this life!

Aviano Air Base, Italy

25 May 1999

The Wing needed some bodies for base beautification detail. Can you guess who her man at the Wing called for those bodies? Me. Reaching right into my shop and pulling a tech from Hematology for a week. No bueno. Games she play.

But I'm taking the holiday weekend in Bibionè to sit by the sea, write some poetry and then fall-in-love a few nights with a fine Italian woman, over my verse.