**Little Reed**

‘I’m going to have to put a cannula in,’ says the portly nurse.

A *cannula?* The sound of the word makes my stomach knot; anything with a name like that in a medical environment is going to hurt like hell, surely?

The nurse lifts into view what looks like a giant needle. ‘Best not to look,’ she says, seeing my expression. ‘Can I have your hand?’ It takes an act of will to lift it to her. She bends forward and grips my wrist to make the veins in the back of my hand stand proud, then shuffles her feet to ensure she has enough purchase and leans into driving the cannula in with the words, ‘Just a sharp scratch-’

 *‘Jesus!’* I say through gritted teeth as the cold thick needle penetrates my vein.

‘Sorry about that,’ says the nurse, covering where the needle remains inserted with a plaster. ‘There’s never an easy way to do it, so best to just do it quickly. Do you want me to raise or lower the gurney?’

‘The *gurney?’* I ask, sitting upright.

‘The gurney is the bed you’re on; it’s a bed with wheels.’

‘Oh, right.’ I breathe out. ‘It’s… it’s fine as it is. Thanks.’

‘Doctor Sheppard will be with you soon to discuss the operation. Do you need anything else?’

I shake my head. ‘No, thank you.’

Alone again, I sigh. What *is* a cannula, anyway? I reach for my phone:

*‘A* ***cannula*** *(from Latin “little reed”; plural cannulae or cannulas) is a tube that can be inserted into the body, often for the delivery or removal of fluid.’*

A *little reed* inserted into my body to extract my bodily essence. Good god. I’m not ready for this, that’s the long and short of it, and it’s not as though I haven’t had time to prepare either. It’s been weeks since the consultation with Sheppard, but things had gone so well there that I haven’t worried about it since.

I take a few slow, deep breaths and try not to think about it. It’s so hot in here. And that weird smell. And–

Wait! What’s that?! That noise? A mourning sound, like a soft wail or gentle groan, is it close by or far off? Christ. They’ve made this room so warm and still and clean, but those noises give it away. Shortly I’ll be wheeled through on the gurney to my fate, my gown raised and my iodine sponged skin opened up by the surgeon’s razor-edged scalpel… the flesh easing apart… the crimson ooze… *fucking hell!*

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