

The Shibboleth

Copyright © Bob Hurt, 6 September 2002. All rights reserved. <http://bobhurt.com>

The Italian woman stood in the doorway to the room like the sneak she was. The stark darkness in the room was pierced by the brilliant street light behind her, the light that revealed every curve through her clothing. I caught the blond highlights of her hair, even though her facial features were hidden. I had seen her before, and she was heart-achingly gorgeous.

As I watched from my protected niche on the far wall, I let my mind fill in the blanks of her ruby lips and ice-blue eyes. They were full, pouty lips that made a man beg God to let him kiss them. They were deep, wicked eyes that threatened to hold a man in a trance while his heart were ripped out. I knew those eyes were now penetrating the darkness in search of any hint of danger, and looking for me. If she only knew, she would not be here now, but the trap had been expertly lain. And now it was about to snap shut, if she could not pronounce the shibboleth.

She silhouetted diffidently at the entry to my lair. My eyes took in the fullness of her form. It was plush, buxom, and inviting. The light behind her shone through her intentionally skimpy shift and I could see every movement of the succulent flesh beneath. She wore no undergarments. I could even see the tuft of her pubis between her thighs, now spreading as she began to crouch offensively, sensing my presence in the room.

Even had it been pitch black, I would have sensed her. I glanced at the radium dial on my watch. The late summer night had been sultry even before the rain, and now, even at 10 PM, it was dank, torrid, and steamy. The waft of a slight breeze behind her stirred the hem of her dress, sending her scent in my direction. It smelled of a body that had been washed much earlier in the day, but now exuded pheromones and an earthy fragrance that begged to be fully inhaled. Half consciously, greedily, my nose sucked in her scent. The smell nearly sent the sex centers of my brain into a tailspin. I wished we had been able to face each other under different circumstances. I felt my body arouse of its own will to the woman-with-a-capital-W, and I knew then that she had also become aroused by my scent. She knew I was in the room, and now she knew where I was.

She faced in my direction and raised her weapon. Had she been able to see me, she would have leveled the sights on me. I had not expected her to be so wary.

She spoke the shibboleth sentence. I had written "See you next month" on her note. She said "See you next mounth". She failed the test. I knew now that Italian was her native language, and she had not spent her early years in America. That revealed her as the killer.

I squeezed the trigger of my modified Glock 19 in rapid-fire, as I had done so many times before. I unloaded a full magazine into her chest before the combined impact of the mushrooming 9mm bullets threw her body 10 feet backwards. The hallway was showered with her blood.

She was dead before she hit the floor. And with her died the enemy who had single-handedly murdered 12 of our best men. I moved from my niche and felt a stabbing pain in the ribs on my left side. I felt the surface of the Kevlar vest I was wearing. A 9mm slug had mushroomed into it from her gun. This time I was the lucky one.

###

shib-bo-leth *n.* - A word or pronunciation that distinguishes people of one group or class from those of another.

shibboleth river, or an ear of corn. The tribes living on the east of Jordan, separated from their brethren on the west by the deep ravines and the rapid river, gradually came to adopt peculiar customs, and from mixing largely with the Moabites, Ishmaelites, and Ammonites to pronounce certain letters in such a manner as to distinguish them from the other tribes. Thus when the Ephraimites from the west invaded Gilead, and were defeated by the Gileadites under the leadership of Jephthah, and tried to escape by the "passages of the Jordan," the Gileadites seized the fords and would allow none to pass who could not pronounce "shibboleth" with a strong aspirate. This the fugitives were unable to do. They said "sibboleth," as the word was pronounced by the tribes on the west, and thus they were detected (Judg. 12:1-6). Forty-two thousand were thus detected, and "Without reprieve, adjudged to death, For want of well-pronouncing shibboleth" (Milton).