

LOVE

R's (!) CRAMP

(OMG THE PAIN!)

By

*Jeff Blechle*

**WHY I LIKE IT:** *Fiction Editor JOEY CRUSE writes... On the surface, Jeff Blechle's, "Lover's Cramp," is one of those tales that will make you laugh out loud. Yet, from the opening lines of a man complaining about his ailment preventing him from going to his son's soccer game to the response his wife gives, you get the deeper sense of the distress going through the family.*

*I think that the ambiguity of disease in "Lover's Cramp" is what gives this piece its power. On the one hand, you can read this tale literally as a man whose intestinal issues make him not want to go anywhere as it leads him to be crass in front of anyone that he meets. On the other, the deeper metaphor at work is that there is a man dying on the page and the distress his disease is causing a rift between his family, friends, and even the general public who seem to dislike him.*

*At the end of this piece is hope – a theme that not only permeates throughout this story but throughout the entirety of Issue 12 – and hope is one of those tools that not only everyone needs but is also a feeling that keeps us going in times of strife, uncertainty, and difficulties of the times. Blechle has taken a small moment in one families' day and given us humor and hope – a feat that any reader should appreciate.*

*A truly ingenious read.*

*Enjoy.*

**QUALITY QUOTABLE** *(for the love of language...)*

In the grass parking lot, Cherry slammed her shiny hatch and marched off ahead of Porter carrying two lawn chairs and a cooler. Little Peter zipped between them with his shin guards and

headed for his teammates already in formation. “*Lover’s Cramp* my ass,” she hissed. “You don’t move around enough to get a cramp. Rigor mortis, maybe.

## **Lover’s Cramp**

Cherry rode a ray into their gloomy kitchen and discovered Porter snapping into his phone and smoking one of her long brown cigarettes, “Why wouldn’t I get it? I hear guys in the porn industry get it. Emerging science suggests too much pelvic thrusting is not natural. Yeah, well, *they* call it *Fucker’s Cramp*. Yes, David, I’m serious. It’s a major problem for me. I can’t even bend over without squealing. And I love my kid and Cherry but, my God, this affliction makes me allergic to the outdoors so, you know, no more sporting events. What? I *do* understand soccer!” Breakneck banjos twanged out of the living room, and as Porter began turning in his chair and yelling, “Turn that shit down, Peter Aloysius Baker or I’ll—!” he beheld his brick-faced wife.

“Just who were you talking to?”

Porter already had his phone off and in his pocket. “Where?”

“So, guys in the porn industry get it, huh?”

“It’s a real medical condition. Cherry, I can’t sit down half the time without shitting my pants. And you know how my hips lock up when I do the Floss.”

“Fucker’s Cramp?” She removed a steak knife from a drawer and admired its honest gleam. She turned to him, holding it like a hot dog. “Really?”

“Well, I call it Lover’s Cramp. Tryna keep it clean, and junk. For the kids.”

“Allergic to the outdoors, huh?”

He started to reply, then beheld an undulating shiver pass through his caffeinated wife, which usually presaged an unrealistic speech.

“Get dressed, Porter. You’re going to Peter’s soccer game and you’re going to act like a decent father and husband and maybe—and it’ll be a stretch—an actual human being. Then, after our productive Saturday is over, when the doors are locked and the curtains are drawn, when Peter is all tucked in and sweetly dreaming of a normal father, yes, when all the world’s no longer your stage . . . I am going to treat your real medical condition with this real goddamn steak knife!”

By ten a.m. the sun had rendered the sky silver and opaque, a fitting crown for a bleak sweaty diversion. In sweeping grass with painted lines parents and children and other oddballs teemed around the soccer field’s scrambling little players.

Someone cried, “He stole my Hot Pocket!”

A man in a Death Records t-shirt and a quilt on his lap told his friend, “Yup. That’s what Porter told me. Fucker’s Cramp.” He stabbed at a juice box, bent his straw. “Cherry must be a little slut.”

“Or a masochist,” his friend said, unfolding a lawn chair. “Remember how at Bing’s party he told everybody he hates kids’ soccer more than working? Well, now he’s invented this outrageous X-rated ailment to get out of both.”

“Well, Porter tells Peter he has stage-five cancer and makes him promise not to tell mommy dearest so she doesn’t make him get his affairs in order. And she’s bowlegged anyway.”

“Okay, none of that sounded weird.”

“I swear. One more rumor about that trio and I’m calling child services.”

“God. There they are.”

The two men gazed at the Baker’s minivan like two curious groundhogs.

“Well. She must have cured the fucker.”

In the grass parking lot, Cherry slammed her shiny hatch and marched off ahead of Porter carrying two lawn chairs and a cooler. Little Peter zipped between them with his shin guards and headed for his teammates already in formation. “Lover’s Cramp my ass,” she hissed. “You don’t move around enough to get a cramp. Rigor mortis, maybe. Now I don’t want to hear another word about it.”

Porter held back then wandered away from her and up to a lawn-chair clique of their neighbors. “Yeah, got that Lover’s Cramp.” He stretched and exhaled a groan that ended in a defeated raspberry. “Cherry made me come. Love the kids, but—”

“Watch it, Porter,” a raspy woman said. “Our children don’t need to ponder your filthy insinuations.”

Another woman snorted and glared up at him. “My Billy told me your Peter said you have stage five cancer. If you do, I’m sorry, but if you don’t, I hate you.”

Porter finished his protracted yawn. “Lover’s Cramp needs to be discussed, people. It’s a serious condition. So many suffer, so many live in fear.”

“Excuse me?” another woman said, twisting and squinting. “This is a potty-mouth-free zone, Baker. And if you think we won’t rally and eject you, think again.”

“This Lover’s Cramp is a bad mother—”

“Shut your mouth!”

“But I’m talking ‘bout Lover’s Cramp.”

Men giggled. Women helped Porter into a lawn chair and gave him a PG-rated scolding while the soccer game continued, somehow, without their tremendous gestures of support and camaraderie.

“What is that smell?”

Porter lifted a finger, grinned, shrugged. “Um, yeah, it’s a symptom of Lover’s Cramp. That’s why I was standing. Out of respect.”

“Oh. My. God. That is so gross.”

“I’m calling the police.”

Peter’s coach jogged into the uprising. “What’s all the commotion over here? Lucia, is there a problem?”

“Yes, and it’s Porter Baker. Him. He’s obnoxious and gross and we want him hauled away.”

Porter rolled his eyes and shook his head at the coach.

“You’re Pete’s dad, right?”

“That’s right.”

“Glad you could finally make a game. Sorry about your cancer. Stage five, huh? Damn it. Is there anything I can get you? Fruit cup? Granola bar?” He paused and crinkled his nose.

“Good God. Who shit? Anyway. Tell ya what, Baker. I’ve got a cushioned chair I can bring over between periods. Sit tight.”

“Believe me. I am.” He smirked and nodded at stunned faces.

The coach made a brief detour via Porter’s wife. “Mrs. Baker? You holding up all right?”

Cherry shook off her yoke and answered in a courageous sigh, “Yes, thank you.” And it seemed that nowhere on the field did her generosity go unnoticed.

The coach gave Porter’s tormentors a vilifying stare as he marched into a sprint along the field boundary line. Then the sun spotted him blowing his whistle and clapping his hands.

Disoriented in the last moments of a tied game, little Peter exploded out of a circle of coolers with blueberry lips, chugged the length of the field diagonally, shouted something about dinosaurs, and then headbutted the ball into his own goal.

No one squealed louder than Porter.

#### **AUTHOR'S NOTE:**

*Crackers! Witness Porter, a man driven to deception by his wife and son, neither of them with so much as a valid driver's license, and the oppression he endures because, well, he's just not that convincing (he'll make a wonderful ex-husband), except to the coach, played by the late Oswald "Clash" Davis as only a gullible dead man can. Let's say everyone believes Porter (as I do), then he suffers an identity crisis, and blurts, "What **is** the appropriate pronoun for meat?" and I never get a joke off. So what's the theme? Dude has issues. In the sequel, "Atrocities Against Certain Fish", Porter and Peter enter a fishing derby, with intolerable results, but that's another story, and certainly a better one.*

*"Lover's Rock" inspires this romance of sticking to one's tongue. I write it backward, literally, revise it forward, figuratively, then sideways the words and punctuation in a bobbling mishmash mishap reminiscent of Smash-Up on Interstate 5. I'm pretty sure that's how what's-his-face writes "They Ain't Human Like Us".*

**AUTHOR BIO:** Jeff Blechle, the Bobby Slam dunk Hooper of Granite City, begins his storied career at age seven after losing touch with fiction and does not stop beginning since. While his parents are separated, mechanically, he drops his true back and some old chick jumps on it. This fuels something in him, surely. Every body is after him. There he is, living on a township border confluence, and when he runs in place, he not only digs postholes, but he receives fines from three corporate powers for not having a permit.