

Jon looked on his dad's wall calendar and counted five days until the fair opened. The date, circled in red, gave him an anxious, sick feeling in his gut. He wondered if he had made enough inventory to justify the \$300 booth fee? It wasn't just that. He'd also underestimated how much it was cost to outfit a booth. He'd planned to borrow the folding tables and a tent canopy, but ended up putting them on his Home Depot card. He pulled his iphone from his shirt pocket and checked his bank account again. *Damn, he was cuttin' it close.* He leaned over his dad's workbench and scratched numbers on a yellow legal pad. He'd only painted 45 of the cedar cookies, but he could do more if he needed to. He planned to sell each one for thirty dollars. The math didn't look as good as he hoped—one thousand three hundred and fifty gross if he sold them all.

The garage door roared to life and his dad walked through with copper tube thrown over his shoulders like a deer. "What you figurin'?"

"How much I can make selling my dartboards. After expenses I'll probably clear about nine hundred. That's if I can sell them for thirty. Who knows how they'll go, but I got to have more for first, last and the deposit."

Bill threw the pipe in the corner. "Damn it's hot as hell." He pulled a rag from his back pocket and used it to wipe his face and head. "Runt's makin' you pay last too?"

"Yeah. Says that's the way they do it in Wichita. But said he'd throw in use of a washer and dryer for free."

"Yeah, I know Runt. Probably found them in some dumpster somewhere."

Bill picked up one of the boards and squeezed it like a melon. "I'd give thirty for it." He chuckled and pointed to the dartboard's one hundred-point center. "Course if Hillary's face was here, I'd give forty."

Jon chuckled, but didn't look up from his numbers.

"No, I mean it. Stick Hillary's mug on a few and see if it don't help. Look I'll show you." Bill went inside and came back holding the Odette Courier Post. There it was, her face on page two. He cut it out, taped it over the center circle, hung it on the wall, and stepped back.

"Now that's priceless," Bill laughed. As he did, foamy spittle shot from his mouth and dripped down his chin. He reached up and smeared it across his dirty cheek with the back of his hand. "Fact, I'll be your first customer." He pulled two twenties from his wallet and tossed them on the toolbox. "But you gotta fix it up for me with something better than tape."

His dad threw money around a lot these days. Business was good. His was about the only one that did better not worse in these times. No matter what he priced a piece, it flew off the shelf in hours not days. Within the last year he'd added another showroom on the back of the building and a new sign out front. Underneath *Second Amendment Armory*, he surprised Jon by adding his name *Bill and Jon Mitchell, proprietors*. Bill was used to Jon not saying anything, so he assumed he was thrilled to be a part of the cash cow.

"Remember what I said about splitting the fair booth? That'll help too. Did you ask Lurlene about selling a few twenty-twos?"

"Richard said you can't sell guns. It's against the rules."

Jon knew where the conversation was heading and didn't want any part of it. Whatever he said, his dad would bring some merchandise and then get caught. A mad

Lurlene wouldn't be good for business. She'd been calling the shots at the fair for as long as anyone could remember, and people knew just to do it her way.

“Whose rules? Fed rules? I'm just thinking the minis. Women'll eat them up.”

“No, fair rules, but I didn't ask to see them or nothing. Richard wouldn't make it up.”

“No big deal. Let's just put a sign directing folks out to the shop. I plan to keep open longer hours that weekend.” He walked over to the far wall and grabbed a dart from the plastic board he used to teach Jon to play when he was a kid. He turned and threw it at Hillary's smiling, grainy face. Instead of connecting with the soft wood, it struck the corrugated wall with a loud, metallic ring. “You find yourself short, I'll kick in, although I don't see why you need your own place.”

“Thanks, but I'll get it okay.”

“How bout this. How bout I still split the booth rental and do some sign-ups?” he said. “Course, I'll do a little campaigning too for our guy.”

Trump wasn't Jon's guy, but he didn't feel like making a big deal.

“Let's don't bring that in the booth, Dad.”

“Oh, hell, why not? Nobody will be talkin' about nothin' else anyway. Finally after eight years the constitution'll be safe and we can get back to business.”

Jon hesitated. “It'll piss off Lurlene that you didn't just get your own booth space. I heard Richard say they're really trying to get all the Odette businesses involved so it's not just Blaine. Especially this year 'cause it's the fiftieth. I think they are trying to beef up revenue.”

“They’re making enough money. God damn woman needs to know her place. She don’t own the world. Let’s just do it. She want to come by and say something, I’ll set her straight. More than likely she’d be too busy scootin’ around making a show than noticing what we got going.”

He bent over and picked the coil of pipe back up off the ground. “Her dad always had a NRA sticker on his truck. She’ll be fine with it.”

Bill motioned back towards the dartboard. “You know, you could think about addin’ pictures to all of them. Not just her. I could think of a lot of people who’d inspire a good game of darts. Wouldn’t you pay ten extra bucks to have a crack at Obama? Gotta throw those ISIS bastards in there, and those God damn French.”

“No, Mrs. Luzon plans to stop by my booth.”

“Well at least those North Korean sons-a-bitches. What’s that fat fuck’s name?”

“Maybe Osama Bin Laden?” Jon said as he threw the yellow pad back in his duffle bag and headed out the door towards his Chevy. “Gotta go. Doug needs me early.”

“Naw, he’s dead and buried. No need to bring him back,” Bill said following him out the door. “Remember I’ll need a table and chair. That’s it.”

Jon felt his jaw clench. His back was turned so Bill didn’t notice. Probably wouldn’t have anyway.

“See ya dad.”

All the way into town Jon tried to figure out why he didn’t want his dad in the booth. Was it the constant politics? The election was all anyone seemed to talk about. Jon voted the way he was supposed to and knew who was honest and who wasn’t, but he just

didn't care like everyone else did. Maybe his dad had a point. If putting Hillary or Obama's face on a board earned him an extra ten bucks, he'd do it.

The next day Jon worked a short shift at the plant. On the way home he stopped by the library to make copies of Hillary's photo and find a few others. He flipped through magazine pages until he found Obama, Kim Jong-un, and logos for ISIS and the Missouri Tigers. *This oughta do it.* He stood next to the Xerox holding a stack of warm copies, wondering if he'd done enough. *What else do people around here hate?* The obvious answer appeared in his mind in black, gothic letters. He sat down at the nearest computer, opened a new Word document, and inserted a three-inch circle. Then he typed A-B-O-R-T-I-O-N along the diameter. He copied the image until it filled the entire page. He repeated the process for G-U-N-C-O-N-T-R-O-L, but printed three sheets instead of one. It turned out so well, he was sure his dad would stock them in the shop.

"What you got going on today?" said a voice behind him. Jon turned and saw Brit Gonzalez standing inches away, hand on one hip. She wore cutoffs so short her pockets hung down below the fraying fabric. His cheeks burned, and he turned back to the screen. He didn't want her to see the effect she had on him, how with a word she could make the tips of his ears glow crimson. He thanked God he hadn't gotten around to trimming his shaggy, brown curls.

"Fair stuff," he said, but when he did, his voice came out scratchy, like he hadn't used it all day.

"What kinda fair stuff? You showing stock?"

“Naw, gotta booth selling dartboards. I figured your dad would have mentioned it. Richard is the one who talked me into it and helped me get squared away for the lottery.”

“Oh, you think we sit around and talk about you at the dinner table?”

He turned back towards her. She pushed a thick piece of brown hair behind her ear. Jon noticed the black birthmark over her left eye, a constant distraction to him during senior English. He remembered the last time he saw it up close. The memory made his throat feel dry and hard like a stone.

“You always wear jeans and belt buckles, even in summer when it’s this hot?”

Jon turned away. Of course she mentioned the belt buckle on purpose. Maybe she was just remembering, or maybe she was letting him know she knew what really happened. He wasn’t going to bite, and he wasn’t going to tell Brit that she was also the reason he wore jeans year-round, ever since she called him “stork legs” at that seventh grade pool party.

“Oh, so you’re gonna ignore me like usual?”

“I’m not ignoring you. I’m just busy.”

She reached out, pinched one of his shaggy curls and twirled it around her index finger. “So you coming to burnout?”

“Don’t I usually come out?”

“Who would know the way you keep to yourself?”

“I got a job. Don’t any of your group work?”

Brit dropped his hair and sat down. “So did you hear Lurlene’s lifting prohibition? Show an ID and buy a wristband at the door for ten bucks. Then you get to walk around with your drink.”

“What good’s that gonna do us?”

“I don’t know. Maybe it’ll keep some of the old creeps from showing up so early. Course they’ll all come over after the gates close, like always. You shouldn’t get to come to burnout if you’re over thirty. They got Corner Tap.”

Jon went every night of the fair since he was fourteen, same as most of the Odette kids. No one knew who owned the pecan grove across from the fairgrounds where everyone pitched their tents and partied from Friday night through Sunday. No one knew, and no one asked. Even the cops looked the other way. Figured it was better than having the kids driving drunk back and forth to the lake. Instead of drinking the boo-goo juice, he always brought along his own twelve-pack of PBR. He couldn’t have choked down the concoction of cheap wine, liquor and cough syrup if he’d wanted to. He preferred to set up camp on the fringe and watch. But every year that got farther away from the center fire-pit. If burnout got much bigger, they’d be pitching tents down the midway.

“Well, I guess I’ll see you there,” she said with a wink. “See ya Jon-Jon.”

She turned and walked towards the exit. As the automatic doors opened her hand appear over her right shoulder and waved back at him. Her head never turned. She knew his eyes would stay on her, and he hated being so damn predictable. But he couldn’t help it. He stared into the neon, geometric screensaver and remembered graduation night, the good part before he ruined everything. The good part when he first crawled into Brit’s two-man tent pitched feet away from the fire pit, just a smoldering pile of ashes and beer tabs by that time of night. It was too dark to see, but she found his hand and slid it up her t-shirt. His hand felt a soft, warm breast. She kissed him so hard his other arm buckled. She used her body to press him into the canvas floor. Gravel dug into his shoulder blade.

He thought about adjusting himself, but the way her nipple hardened in his hand made him forget the pain. She grabbed at his belt buckle and pulled, but the latch wouldn't give. At the moment it finally came, so did he. Brit didn't notice the tremor that surged through his arms and legs, or the way he squeezed his lips together to prevent any sound from betraying his humiliation.

He said he had to go because they didn't have protection. He said it was because he respected her too much. Maybe he'd finally get another chance under one of the pecan trees during fair. Funny, but the idea didn't excite him like he thought it would.

Jon put Brit out of his mind and drove home. If he hurried, he'd have about two hours in the garage to finish before his dad came home with the guns. Evenings always went like that—the two of them sitting on the torn, brown couch, eating off TV trays, cleaning riffles and pistols used at the shop's shooting range, watching Fox News or DVR recordings of Bill's favorite shows, Duck Dynasty, Gator Boys, or the Merton car auction. Same thing every night.

He found the cardboard box labeled "scrapbooking" shoved behind a pail of nails on the top shelf of the laundry room. The word was faded, but the black ink still swirled and danced like it was set to music. He loved his mother's writing. He thought of her letters carved in the dirt at Odette Lake Beach. When he was little, they'd each find a stick and use it to play Hangman, except his mom insisted they call the game "Apple Tree." They'd lie on their towels pretending the dirt was sand, pretending the lake was the French Riviera. The clues always began with the same two words: *I wish*. Whatever words followed would come true if you could guess in time, before each branch filled with apples. He'd sit beside her and trace the grooves with the tip of his finger. He found



himself doing the same thing now, following the curves of the capitol S as though it held a message for him after all these years.

The clock in the living room struck four, and he remembered his purpose. When he opened the box, the smell of paper and glue struck him, irritating his eyes. He loved and hated how smells could sneak up on you like that. He reached up and wiped away the memory with the back of his hand. He dug his hand under paper, ribbon and tubes of dried-up paint before he felt the soft, velvet Crown Royal bag where his mother kept her collection of metal paper punches. When he was young, the rich, velvet purple draw-string bag made the contents seem like treasure. He felt the same impulse now, removing the contents one-by-one. The last one was the largest, producing a circle with a three-inch diameter, perfect for covering the one-hundred-point center.

Jon got the idea to make dartboards from his mother. He was only about five or six, but he still remembered when she picked up one of the wood discs from the front yard after his dad and uncle felled that dying tree. He followed her into the garage and watched her stain circles on it starting at the outer edge and working her way in to a solid center. She dabbed a thin brush in black paint and wrote points on each band of color—10, 25, 50, 75, all the way to a 100-point bulls eye.

“For Granddad’s birthday,” she said holding it up in the air. After Granddad died, his mother took it off his wall and hung it in their small, blue kitchen. After she died, Jon moved it into his bedroom at the end of the dim, beige hallway.