

The Summer of '03

Adam Goes

Adrian was peculiar. A drifter, he said, only nineteen and had already lived in over ten different towns throughout America. He would only spend a couple of months at Last Chance, saving up enough money for the next leg of his journey. When I asked him where he was going he would say he didn't know yet. I asked if it was because the winds of fate hadn't directed him yet. He laughed and told me I'd been watching too many movies. He told me he didn't know because he hadn't received his next contract. That was the big joke.

You see, Adrian had tattoos all over his body, six or seven if I remember correctly. They were as varied as you could imagine, flowers, guns, skulls, crosses, black and white, color, monochrome. There didn't seem to be any rhyme or reason. He said they didn't make sense because they all told a story. Not about him, but about his contracts. Always with a crooked smile he would tell anyone who asked that he was a hit-man, and that each tattoo represented a successful kill. It was made all the more ridiculous because Adrian was a 5'9" 115 pound nineteen year old without an ounce of muscle on his body. This would get a laugh from the patrons, and he would laugh along with them.

It was the news report that did it. As I was sitting on the edge of the couch, leaning forward, I couldn't help but think about the summer of '03 and little diner that I worked in with Adrian. It had been and was, to my knowledge, still called Last Chance. The story the owner put out was that he named it such because it was the last chance for people to eat for almost eighty miles. My wife of four years was on the other side, legs curled beneath her, our two year old daughter's hand grasped tightly. My daughter didn't know what was going on, not really, but she knew we were upset and that was enough. The president had just been assassinated.

I remember he came in with a new tattoo a couple weeks after he started. It was the Gemini symbol, with some language overtop of it.

"What's that say?" I asked as were both scouring burnt pieces of food off the steel pans.

"It's Latin. Translates to 'the sword is mightier than the pen'."

I couldn't help but laugh a little at that. "Does that mean you completed another contract?"

He let loose a deep chuckle, and it sounded so unnatural coming from his skeleton-like frame. "You shouldn't take everything I say so seriously. It's just a birthday present to myself."

His birthday was that day, June 3rd. After the diner closed that night most of the guys from the kitchen went up to the roof and we set up lawn chairs to look out across the miles of desert. Scott, the head cook, had a cooler full of Budweiser and we all had a few.

"Hey, Adrian. Come on, it's your birthday. Beer's on me," Scott called out to Adrian, who was reclined and looking up at the constellation Libra. I only knew that's what it was after asking him. He told me it was a symbol of justice.

He turned his head and his normal smile replaced the pensive look, "Oh, no that's ok, Scott. I've got my own." And he held up a glass bottle of Corona.

"Corona!? Come on, drink some Bud like a real man."

The Budweiser fountaining from my mouth preceded an uproarious laugh. Once I got my breath I turned to Scott and asked, "What is it you do in your spare time again? Sew decorative pillows?" My comment solicited a chorus of laughter.

Scott turned red and grumbled, "It builds finger strength and dexterity."

In the middle of June me and some friends decided to attempt to beat the heat and the boredom of summer by hiding out in my basement and playing Dungeons and Dragons. Adrian joined in and played the perfect Lawful Good Paladin. It was such a transformation of character. He was always so serious when he was in character. Always righteous and off to protect the weak. It was such a change from the time he had painstakingly hidden the majority of the cooking utensils in the kitchen, or one of his other shenanigans. I thought it was odd. The way he lied to Scott when he was confronted about it. Never once did he drop his crooked smile, yet he was so convincing that Scott simply let it drop.

On August 6th I found him up on the roof after work, but this time looking north-east, out past the desert, instead of up at the sky.

"I'm leaving tomorrow," he said, after I came up to stand beside him.

"Oh, saved up enough money to move on?"

"After tomorrow I will have."

His comment puzzled me, as payday wasn't for another week and a half. "Where are you going anyway?"

"To Oregon."

"No, I mean, what are you looking for?"

His crooked smile disappeared and he just pointed, right up at the constellation of Libra. "Well I have to go now. Lots of packing to do." And he bumped past me and climbed down the ladder at the back of the diner.

After I returned home and started emptying my pockets I found a scrap of paper that read "Do you ever watch the news?" I didn't, but for the next couple days I made sure to watch both the eight o'clock and eleven o'clock broadcast. It was on August 8th that something finally caught my attention.

"Born May 29th, author Timothy Egerton was found stabbed to death in his hotel room earlier today. Mr. Egerton was on a book tour for his recent best-selling book *The Injustice of the Left* that discusses the supposed unconstitutionality of several of the Left's platforms. There are currently no suspects, but this is certainly a tragedy to the world of political writers." I slid off the couch, cracked open a bottle of Corona and went outside to look at the stars.