

## Luck

They strolled in chewing on haystacks, toothpicks, lookin around from the door like they were expecting to see something different. Another night at The Billy Goat Bar, grill parts been long closed. Same place at the bar, middle two stools next to Dobson whose bound to try and make some sort of bet sooner or later. Y'all pussies think them Tigers gonna make it to the state champs? And they roll their eyes and ignore the man wearin that same damn ol cowboy hat even though he never spent a full minute up on a damn ol horse- and they order beers from Marcy and get a nice look at that crease going up between two wrinkled tits speckled with age spots but hell, it don't matter. Marcy is one fine piece a-ass.

The clank of glass bottles on wood and the echoing wail of some young broke wanna-be no-body singing up on the small stage- Hey Dobson! Wanna dance? And Dobson mutters a fuck your mother under his breath and scrapes his bottle off the bar and walks his fake cowboy self down to the other side. Charlie slaps his leg, wheezing out laughs from between wet pink lips- that mother fucker Dobson!- and Felix shakes his head and bounces his shoulders because he doesn't find a goddamn thing funny but he pretends to do what he thinks people do when they laugh- Yeah, yeah! That mother-fucker!- and so the night goes on.

Guys come in according to their shifts. All wearing dirty blue jeans and a fresh shirt. Some have women, children, lives at home- But goddamnit a man needs a drink after hard work!- and so they come to The Billy Goat and they drink and dance with young skinny girls drunk on whatever's cheap, who are all lookin for a new daddy or at least a man to buy them things. And Billy the owner watches them all close, leaning on the back of the bar. He wipes a damp rag around a glass and keeps his hat pulled low so that he can tilt his head back and look

down at people. The gun under the bar has only been used once but Billy is just itchin for the time when he'll get to use it again. Sometimes folks need to learn the hard way. Hey Billy! Another Bud, tap! And the men shout out their orders and Billy takes his time wiping down the glass until he's through, and then he'll take his time getting a new glass, and take his time pouring the drink because this is his goddamn bar and aint nobody gonna tell him to hurry the fuck up. Marcy lolls around him keeping the men drinking and talking and filling up beers first for them and then for herself.

Then Marcy leans on the bar in front of Felix and Charlie and smiles, exposing her one gray tooth on the side. She snaps her gum and asks if they want to try a special drink-Yeah I've been aching to find out what you got in them jugs!-and the hand comes down and slaps the leg and Charlie is hunched in hysterics but Marcy just snaps and smiles and walks towards the whiskey.

Billy heads to his office in the back. He puts his feet up on the desk and leans back in the grisly red chair. He plucks the days newspaper off the floor and slaps it against the wall before he unfolds it-Gottya sucker!- and the dead fly smears brown on the white paint but Billy don't wipe it, so the crusty bug body just stays there stuck. He opens the paper and scans over the black words, nothing new, so he tosses the paper onto the desk and fishes a loose cigarette out of his shirt pocket and lights the tip. He leans back and blows smoke at the ceiling- What a goddamn night, just another goddamn night- he figures it's the kind of night where he will just have to make somethin happen if he wants any kind of fun.

There's a knock at the door and Billy heaves his feet off the desk and they stomp down on the tile but he don't make a move to stand. Who is it? It's Marcy! Goddamnit what in the hell is that woman doing leavin the bar unattended with a bunch a no good fucks millin around just

waitin to start trouble. He swings the door open and blows a plume of sour smoke in Marcy's face but she doesn't even squint, just keeps tappin that foot, hand on her hip, chewing that gum like he's a little boy in trouble. What the fuck you want? The chick that's been singin all night wants to split. Says the men are givin her too much goddamn trouble and she aint leavin until she gets paid- fifty bucks- and if you ask me your a goddamn fool to pay that much for a young skank like that to come in here and drink for free and pluck on a guitar like she know what in the hell good music sounds like. Billy lifts his belt buckle and pulls his shoulders back because no woman no matter how old is gonna call him any kind of fool. But Marcy just cocks a pencil thin eyebrow and he knows there's just no point in fighting with an old hag who's already soused and has a temper that's bigger than that saggy chest a-hers. Just send her back here- so Marcy goes to get the girl, just another female tryin to get hers as if she's somehow special.

Billy doesn't sit but waits with his arms crossed and his stance firm. A few minutes pass before the girl is walking towards him, head held high as if she's trying to prove something. She's got long yellow grease strings for hair and she sucks in her cheeks and tightens her lips like she's getting ready for a fight. Billy closes the door behind her because he can just tell he's in for some kind of talk. Give me my goddamn money- and she's off- sparing no room for small talk, sweet talk, or any kind of talk at all. Girl you been singing up there for about thirty minutes and you expect me to pay you for the whole night? Billy licks his lips and thinks that maybe if he draws this out he can come back as some sort of good guy and take this chick out back to where his truck is, ready and waiting to double as a bed. But this girl doesn't even give him the chance because before he can understand what's going on she's sweeping his desk clean of all the papers, pens, coffee cups, and magazines sending it all to the floor in an angry push with her skinny little arms. Then she turns around and walks towards the door, giving Billy a nice look at

the soft white pouches peeking out from the bottoms of her tight jean shorts, locks it, and comes walking back. At this point Billy isn't quite sure what to think. He's seen feisty bitches in his day but there is something about this girl that makes him twitch. She's trash alright but they're all trash around here. Except she's got this jaw that won't budge and she's got these eyes that are awake and on fire, like she's ready to run, whereas most these other girls look like they're half asleep or riding out some high that makes their eyes look lazy and dull.

He can hear the men getting louder outside and he knows that no one would be able to hear what's going on in the office if things got a little rowdy- but rowdy how?- Billy had his idea, but that involved this eighteen seventeen sixteen year old thing bending over and doing it his way, and something tells him that just isn't the way it'll go down. He watches her bony hands, each finger adorned with some rusty metal or plastic ring, as she reaches into the pocket of the oversized brown leather jacket she has on. Her hand whips back out fast but now it's holding an angry looking handgun, pointing it right at Billy's chest. Billy keeps his cool and doesn't flinch. You think you're tough? And she smiles like she was wicked, young and wicked, already mean like her momma and her daddy and all the men she's known. Now listen, I don't think I'm anything but— But nothing, I told you to give me my goddamn money and you try to pull a stunt. The rotating fan blows stale air around the windowless room. Billy is sweating and praying and hoping that he can handle this because he's a tough son of a bitch goddamnit but something about this chick tells him that he ought not to come off as that kinda man. Go to the safe. Are you fuckin kiddin me? And without a blink she cocks the gun just an inch to the side of his left cheek and fires a shot that busts through the drywall and makes a noise so loud he's sure Marcy'll be breaking down the door any second. But no one comes and Billy begins to think about his options. If you try to move, try to fight, I'll fuckin kill you and I dare you to test your

odds. Well that didn't seem like the best option and so Billy stands still and thinks some more. Goddamnit goddamnit goddamnit. There was over a grand in that safe and he'd be damned if this skinny bitch walked outta here with all that cash in her grubby bitch hands.

And then again- Go to the safe go to the safe goddamnit do you hear me go to the safe!- and Billy just stands still and quiet staring at this young thing, scratching his beard and trying to keep his breath steady. But then- click boom- another shot, another hole through the dry wall and another flush of rage taking over this girls face and making her mouth snarl, her eyes narrow, and her red cheeks puff. So Billy walks to the safe kept in the closet behind his desk- what choice did he have? With her free hand the girl points to a brown paper bag that had once held a forty ounce but now was just empty on the floor. Put it in that bag- and so Billy picks up the bag and starts stuffing in the cash. There was still about three or four hundred left in the safe but the bag was full so he hands it over and the girl snatches it up quick. He notices she's getting jittery, her eyes are darting and the tendons in her neck are screeching and thumping as if they were trying to break free of her throat.

She keeps the gun pointed at Billy and flicks her chin up at him and when she does this she flicks the gun too. Undress. That's all she says, and for a second Billy wonders if this was all some kind of joke, some kinky fetish shit that this girl has been dreaming of living out. He smiles and slowly unbuckles his belt, grinning and thinking about how easy it would be to pick this chick up, just move her however he damned please she was so tiny but then- FASTER GODDAMNIT!- and once again Billy's nerves jump because he really doesn't know what the fuck this bitch is gonna do next.

He's down to his boxers and socks now, staring at the girl, waiting for her to tell him what to do since apparently that's how this game was going. She looks towards the door-

Everything, take off everything- and Billy reels his head back because- You have got to be out your damn mind! But she just shakes her head and waits and so fuck it, he lets his blue boxers slide to his ankles, steps out of them and then peels off his socks. Now ball it all up and give it here, she motions her free arm. Billy bunches all the clothes into a big ball and puts it in the girls arm and she clutches it to her body and begins slowly backing away.

She left him there stark naked. No one noticed when she quickly left the bar, passing the drunks on her way out who were lined up on their stools trying to throw olives into Marcy's open mouth. The jukebox was blaring and the men were laughing and no one noticed a goddamn thing out of the ordinary.

When she's gone, Billy wastes no time. He calls the cops and lets them know what was up- I've been robbed, goddamnit! They say they'll be sending an officer over to take a full report- No, no, that's alright. I'm sorry sir, but we have to get an official report, an officer will be there shortly. Fine! I mean, alright, but listen . . . And here Billy explains that along with his money the girl took his clothes too. Do you hear me? I'm standing here stark naked! So the officer you send better have a pair of pants with him! Slamming the phone doesn't make him feel better and sitting down on the itchy chair only makes him feel worse. So Billy stands, both hands cupped in front of him, and waits.

The police stopped Pauleen trying to buy four cartons of cigarettes at a gas station right outside of Clintville with two hundred dollar bills. She didn't put up much of a fight, just screamed and cursed them and their mothers as the cold metal cuffs clinked shut around her wrists and she was pushed into the back of the cop car. She'd been running for five months straight- wanted in two states for robbery. She'd made it all this time by scoring different kinds

of gigs, some at dump dive bars, where she could sing a tune and get paid quick and in cash, and some in the shadowy bedrooms of strange men who usually tipped extra if she told them she was younger than she really was. Yeah, she had been riding high for a while, feeling like one lucky girl who could do what she pleased and get away with it. A bad girl- the best kind- the kind that made her own rules and could play as hard and rough as the boys. But you know what they say about luck. Well, there just aint no such thing.

—*Emily Schultze*