

PLOTS WITH GUNS

FALL 2011

ROADKILLERS BY PETE RISLEY

IT WAS REALLY MOTHERFUCKING HOT OUT. MUST HAVE BEEN NINETY OR WORSE. STAN AND FISH HAD BEEN WALKING ALONG THE ROAD OUT BY SOUTHLAND MALL NEAR ROUTE 23 FOR AN HOUR AT LEAST. TRYING TO THUMB A RIDE DOWN TO PORTSMOUTH.



It was really motherfucking hot out, must have been ninety or worse. Stan and Fish had been walking along the road out by Southland Mall near Route 23 for an hour at least, trying to thumb a ride down to Portsmouth. Toxic Shock, the old death metal band from the '90's, was going to play at the Scioto County Fair, and though they weren't very popular anymore – wouldn't be playing this shitty fair otherwise, of course – Fish was a big diehard fan of theirs. Stan was just going along for something to do over the weekend.

A lot of cars had been going by but they weren't getting rides, and what with the oppressive heat, Stan was starting to think it was a stupid idea to go in the first place, when this fucking weird guy came up, said, "Yo, dudes," and just stood there with them with his arms folded. He was tall and real wasted-away looking, not real young, like maybe even 40, but with a spiky orange haircut and a long amber King Tut beard that was so thin you could see through it. He was wearing raggedy cut-offs and thongs on his feet, no shirt, and had real crudely-drawn tattoos all over his chest, arms and legs. Some of them were superheroes from comic books; one was definitely Wolverine from X-Men and another might have been the Human Torch from Fantastic Four. It was someone on fire, anyway. The guy looked like a tweaker to Stan. A geek, anyway.

"Fuckin' hot out here, man," he said, like he'd been hanging with them all day, if not for years.

"No shit." Fish stepped out into the road with his arm stuck way out and thumb up, because a couple more cars were coming. They both whizzed by. "Jesus! Fuckers."

"Where you guys headed," said the geek. He didn't say it like it was a question.

"Goin' to Portsmouth," said Fish.

Stan was looking at Fish, smiling and shaking his head, like "who the fuck is this," but Fish didn't respond. He could be that way, real casual about whatever shit came up. But if Stan didn't know this guy, Fish didn't either, probably.

"Awesome," said the geek, "I'm going there too. You going to see Toxic Shock at the fair?"

"Yeah, how'd you know?"

"Your shirt." Fish was wearing his old Toxic Shock t-shirt. When he first got it, at a concert of theirs about 10 years before, it had been mostly black with red lettering surrounded by yellow flames, but now it was grey, pink and piss-white and had holes in it. "I'm going to see them too," the geek said.

“No shit,” said Fish. “How you getting’ down there?”

“I was gonna thumb.”

“That’s what we’re trying to do.”

“I figured,” said the geek.

“Not getting any fuckin’ rides though,” said Fish.

“We’ll get us a ride pretty soon. I get rides on this road all the time.” Great, thought Stan, now the geek was going with them!

“Yeah? We been out here a fuckin’ day already,” said Fish. “Hot as a motherfucker.” A truck came barreling up, and Fish started to step into the road to thumb, but the truck driver blasted his horn and swerved at them slightly, sending a shitload of gravel and dust flying into their faces, especially Fish's. “Jesus Fuck!” yelled Fish.

Stan wanted a chance to talk to Fish, say that if they couldn’t get rides for two people they sure as shit weren’t going get picked up when there’s three, but the geek kept moving up close to Fish every chance he got. He wasn’t paying much attention to Stan. Stan glanced over his tattoos, trying to figure whether he might have done them himself, because they were all so badly drawn. He had some on his shoulder blades, even, two bearded faces that were real distorted. One of them was Jesus, Stan guessed, because it had a halo. The other one had jagged lines like lightning around it, so it might have been Satan, though the face just looked like another hippie-Jesus face. Maybe they were all distorted because the geek had reached way back over his shoulders to ink them in.

The next vehicle that went by was a big-ass maroon Cadillac Escalade. Stan was pretty sure that another Escalade had gone by a while before, but maybe that earlier one wasn’t maroon. He was pretty sure it had been, though. The geek went out and put his thumb up, for the first time. The big car pulled over and stopped.

“Awright!” said Fish. Stan thought something was weird, no rides and then this creepy guy turns up and right away a big expensive car stops for him. Oh well, shit.

The geek scurried up and unlatched the back door, held it open and bowed, like he was saying “after you.” Stan was reluctant to get in, but Fish went right ahead and jounced into the back seat. The geek got in next, and then, with misgivings, Stan. The geek reached across Stan and pulled the door closed. The AC in the car was

delightfully cold and humming. There was a big old guy driving, and next to him a woman with long, fancily tangled hair of a very artificial blonde color.

“Welcome abroad, young men,” said the driver, who huffed as he turned halfway around in his seat, pinned sideways against the steering wheel. He looked huge in the light-blue suit he was wearing, along with a green tie with a marlin on it. His slicked-back wavy white hair had two fat streaks of gold on either side of the top of his head, and that along with his overgrown grey eyebrows gave him a mad-scientist look. His eyes were watery blue and sullen, but he grinned widely at Stan and Fish, showing teeth that looked like dentures. “Where you be headed this damn uncomfortable day?” The woman didn’t turn around or speak.

“We’re going down to Portsmouth,” said Fish. “You goin’ that way?”

“Happen to be,” said the driver. “You in luck. Goin’ right through there.”

“Awright,” said Fish, nodding.

“Goin’ to see a band down at the county fair,” said the geek. “By the way, my name’s Ryan.” He reached up to shake hands with the driver, who grinned wider and shook heartily. The geek, Ryan, turned to Stan and put his hand out with a solemn expression, so Stan had to shake too. Ryan's hand was damp.

“I’m Stan,” he said, giving in just a little to being sociable, “and that’s Fish.” “Fish,” said Ryan.

“S’up,” said Fish and reached over to shake with Ryan as well. Fish always shook hands in a crusher grip, but Ryan didn’t flinch or say anything. The driver had turned back around and started rolling again, and they got onto 23.

The woman, Stan noticed, was looking into the rear-view mirror. He could see a little of her reflection and that she had a lot of spidery eye-makeup on. He wasn’t sure if she was studying him and the other guys in the back seat or her own image, but then he noticed that she was holding a little golden tube, applying lipstick.

Whirling, she turned completely around in her seat and smiled widely with bright red lips. “They call me Shy Ay-unn,” she announced, in a flat, twangy drawl. She obviously wasn’t young but, except for a mild case of turkey-neck and some lines in her face, didn’t look too bad.

“Cheyenne, like the Indian tribe,” said the driver. “She’s part Indian.”

Cheyenne, her hands with purple-painted fingernails clutching the back of her seat, looked intently from Fish to Stan, fixing on Stan. She smiled until her cheeks widened with dimple, and pointed a long finger at him. “That one looks skeered.”

“What?” said Stan, embarrassed. “I don’t think so.” He glanced at Fish, who shrugged. The driver was going pretty fast, it seemed, though Stan couldn’t see the speedometer from where he was sitting, because the driver was so big himself.

“Damn,” said the driver, “just look at all these dead critters along this road.” Stan looked as they passed a furry pile by the side of the highway that had probably once been a possum, and a ways further, another larger one that might have been a dog. “Yes, it’s a tough world out there for the simple,” the driver added.

Cheyenne turned back and faced front. She was peering in the rear-view mirror again, definitely, this time, studying Stan and Fish. She didn’t seem to be interested in Ryan.

They drove for a while in silence. Ryan started to whistle. When Stan glanced at him after he’d continued for a minute or so, he said “I was just tryin’ to remember this one Toxic Shock song I like. I hope they play it.”

“What one?” asked Fish.

“I don’t remember. It used to be on the radio a lot.”

“Was it ‘Death Defiler’?”

“Maybe.”

Stan heard the two in the front seat murmuring to each other. It sounded like they were bickering. Cheyenne said “So when we gonna get us somethin’?”

“You wanna stop at a Waffle House?” asked the driver in a low voice.

“No, fuck you,” said Cheyenne, louder. “Hey – you wanna give me that shit—“

“Awright, I’s just funnin’,” he said.

“Hey – if you—“

The driver interrupted her in a booming voice. “Any of you young men back there interested in some nice tight pussy?”

There was an extended moment of surprised silence. Finally Fish chuckled and said, “Yeah, sure. Where?”

“Why, right here next to me.” Cheyenne turned her head and grinned, crinkling her eyes so that deep crow's feet appeared.

“You shittin’ me?” asked Fish. He looked at Stan, then at Cheyenne, staring as if seeing her for the first time. Stan knew that Fish got a whole lot of pussy back home, had since middle school, but not necessarily very high quality. He wasn't too particular.

“I wouldn’t shit you about a serious matter like that,” said the driver.

“I think the man means it,” said Ryan, calmly studying the backs of his hands, as if looking for dirt under his cuticles. In fact, he was grimy all over.

Cheyenne climbed over the seat, giggling. She was bosomy and wearing a colorful flower-patterned blouse tied above her slightly flabby midriff, and light purple hotpants of a towel-like material. Her bare legs were nicely shaped, but pockmarked, and the flesh on them wobbled a little as she moved. Stan caught a strong whiff of her rank, gin-laden breath. She glanced at him, then at Fish. Ryan just shook his head, still studying his nails. He didn’t seem too surprised by what was happening.

She fell drunkenly into the seat on top of Fish, throwing her arms about his neck, kissing him all over his face, and trying to wrap her legs around him before he could raise his back up. The two of them rolled out of the seat halfway onto the floorboards, then back up. “Make room,” said Ryan, shoving his hip against Stan, scooting over.

Cheyenne wiggled out of her hotpants, raising her knees to yank them down off her feet, as Fish struggled up on top of her, fumbling with his zipper. Cheyenne tore open her blouse and yanked up her bra, exposing flaccid breasts with enormous areolas, and spread her legs up and wide. Soon Fish had his pants down, his fat naked butt sticking out and his legs bent at the knees, shins straight up. He must have entered her, for she made a high-pitched whinnying sound, and they began to pump together in a frenzy.

At once, a nasty barnyard odor filled the car, despite the icy AC. It was almost as if they’d hit a skunk.

“There’s gotta be something she could do about that,” said Ryan softly, shaking his head.

“So, you boys gonna draw straws to see who gets to go next?” said the driver cheerfully. The car seemed to be speeding up even more.

“Not me,” said Ryan, “I’m a homosexual.”

“Is that so?”

“Yep. Ever since the joint.” He turned and stared at Stan, solemn and perhaps a little hostile. He kept staring. Stan looked away.

“That’ll do it to you sometimes, “ said the driver. He opened the glove compartment, pulled some dark object out, but Stan didn’t see what.

“You find shit out about yourself in there,” said Ryan. He was looking at his hands again, sighing, as if a bit bored. Fish and Cheyenne were still thrashing away, Cheyenne making a sound like a crow cawing, but in rhythm, and Fish, pumping faster and harder than before, laid his legs down across Ryan’s lap. “Please, please,” said Ryan, tapping Fish’s calves, but Fish just stretched out further, onto Stan’s lap as well, and eventually was kicking at his face. Stan leaned as far away as he could. Fish was making his own sound of passion, a hoarse repeating snore, oddly out of sync with Cheyenne’s raspy caws.

Cheyenne switched abruptly to a rising screech. “I think the big moment is coming,” said Ryan.

“That’s my cue,” said the driver. With the car still moving fast and his left hand on the wheel, he reached over the seat with a black automatic in his right, putting the barrel to the side of Fish’s head. “Look alive, donkey dick!” he screamed.

Fish bolted up, saw the gun and bellowed out a wordless protest, frantically trying to get away, with nowhere to get to. Cheyenne cackled, dug her nails into his shoulders and tightened her legs around him. The stench became worse.

Stan made an instant decision. He yanked the door latch and threw himself out of the car, hitting the graveled pavement and tumbling violently along the road. He heard distant screaming and two loud cracks just as he bumped to a stop in a shallow grassy ditch. Raising his head painfully, he saw the Escalade speeding away far down the road.

Don’t let them come back, he prayed, as his vision dimmed. He shriveled back down into the ditch and seized up in a fetal clump.

Stan must have tried to drag himself from the ditch while not fully conscious, and been laying flat on the side of the road for some time, because when the pain finally woke him up, one side of his face was sunburned, while the other was fried by the hot concrete. When he stood and tried to step forward, his back wrenched into agony. After a series of anguished attempts, he learned that he could move only with cautious baby steps. He also found he couldn't raise his right arm. It looked badly bruised and swollen, especially his hand. He couldn't move his fingers at all.

He staggered very slowly down the road, not knowing where he was, except that it was out in the country somewhere along 23. There was traffic going by, but no one stopped at the sight of him walking wounded. Dazed, it occurred to him he couldn't hitchhike because he couldn't put his thumb out.

When one car went by someone in it yelled at him, and with sudden rage, he tried to raise his right arm to give them the finger. He howled with pain.

He'd been struggling along for some time, the sun getting low but the heat persisting, when he heard somebody yell again, this time from a vehicle heading in the other direction on the opposite side of the road.

"Hey, Tumbles! Tumbles the Clown! What you doin', boy? Come on over here." It was the maroon Escalade, and the guy yelling was the fat driver.

Stan wanted to run but couldn't. He looked around, hoping another car would come by so he could call for help, but there were none in sight. The big SUV did a u-turn and pulled over into the other lane, right by him.

The driver rolled down his window. "Jesus wept! You looking the worse for wear, son. C'mon now, get in."

The back door opened, revealing an unsmiling Ryan, sitting alone in the back seat. "Hi," he said.

Stan figured they'd grab him and drag him in if he just stood there. With much pain and a sense of doom, in he climbed. Ryan scooted over to make room for him and reached across to pull the door closed. Cheyenne turned her head, gave him a dirty look and turned back. The AC felt wonderful but didn't make him glad. The engine purred as the car started moving, quickly gaining speed.

"Look Cheyenne, we got Tumbles the Clown back!" said the driver. Cheyenne muttered darkly.

"Where's Fish?" Stan asked. Might as well bring it out.

"Why, we dropped him off in Portsmouth," said the driver. "He's probably at that Green Floyd concert now at the county fair. Wasn't that what you were goin' to see, something like that?"

"Toxic Shock," said Ryan, sighing. "I decided not to go. Too hot out."

He was holding a container of MacDonald's french fries that were heavily doused in ketchup. He held the container out to Stan and raised an eyebrow. "That's okay," said Stan.

"We're on our way back now," the driver said. "Lookin' for a decent restaurant. I can't eat that McDonald's shit. Neither can Cheyenne. We tried to stop at a Waffle House, but you could see from the window there was a bunch o' niggers in there. Ryan here went to the McDonalds next to it."

"Faggots," said Cheyenne aloud and then muttered some more.

"What you say, hon?" said the driver.

"Goddamn faggots in this car," she said. "Ah hate 'em."

"See, Tumbles, you went and hurt Cheyenne's feelings."

"Shut up," said Cheyenne, getting loud. "Shut your fat ass up. You go to Hail, mister fag man."

"Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned," said the driver. "Now, Tumbles, you know what I'd do if I was you?" The big car was going faster again, jouncing as it went.

Stan didn't say anything. He thought he could hear a thumping noise behind the rear seat, something large rolling around. Then he noticed that there was some wetness on his thighs. Touching it with his left hand and looking at his fingers, he saw that the wet stuff was red. Maybe he'd cut himself when he jumped out of the car. But there was more of it on the seat. Still, that could have come from him. Maybe.

"I say, you know what I'd do if I was you?" repeated the driver.

"What," said Stan. He glanced over at Ryan, who was looking back at him sidelong, smiling now, with ketchup on his lips, putting a thick wad of sodden red french fries deep into his mouth. Instead of eating them, he pumped the wad in and out of his mouth as he closed and flexed his lips around them.

The red stuff on Stan's thighs and fingers definitely wasn't ketchup.

"You awake back there, boy? You know what I'd do if I was you?"

Except for the pain, it all seemed like a shitty bad dream, even Stan's own rapid thoughts. He thought of his father, who had never approved of Fish or his other friends and had long seemed disappointed in him. Not that poor old Dad was anything but a clerk in a plumbing shop and an old drunk. And of his mother, dead of cancer, suffering and terrified in the hospital in her last week of life, more scared than he was now, it seemed like. He was annoyed, to think of it, that this crazy old fucking whore Cheyenne had said he was scared.

"I said, what?" He wasn't scared.

"I'd prove her stinkin' ass wrong!" The driver and Ryan both broke out laughing, while Cheyenne shrieked incomprehensible curses and slapped fitfully with both hands at the driver's head. "Okay, okay, that's enough!" yelled the driver, tossing up his arm to protect his head, but Cheyenne only shrieked louder and flailed harder. The big car, still speeding, began to wobble violently.

As Stan threw open the door and hurled himself out once again, he surged as in a crazy dream with sorrow for the critters whose carcasses dotted the highway.