

Peter Brash was the type of friend who never let you down. Whatever choices you made he would be there to back you up. He was the friend you would call to help burry the bodies. And he had been my friend since before I could remember. Everybody should have a Peter in their life. He was crazier than a carnival but more loyal than any dog could ever be. Growing up with him was like growing up with an insane motivational coach.

“You want to sneak into college dorms and steal panties? Go for it!”

“You want to throw eggs at cop cars? Let’s do it!”

“You want to jump off a bridge...Cool!”

He never backed down from a challenge. He was the one who did all the stupid stunts: he once broke his arm trying to jump his bicycle over a pickup. He was the class clown that nobody wanted to be but everybody thought was cool. Throughout high school I lived in awe at his bravery and at his stupidity. It got him more girlfriends than any football player (even if they only stayed with him for a week) but I was never one of them.

But there was one thing even his stupidity wouldn’t let him do. When I told him I signed up he just stared at me. After graduation neither of us planned to go to college so I had found my alternative. I tried to get him to come with me. I knew he was planning on pumping gas all summer. This would be our chance to get out and see the world; to have real adventures. But when I pushed him he laughed at me. “You can’t think I’m that stupid,” he said. He actually called *me* stupid. So I went without him.

Four years in the army: a cushy position in Argentina. Lots of drills, a few security ops, and a ton of sitting on our asses. Four years over seas seeing the world from inside an army base and I returned home. Discharged for unrelated medical conditions. They didn’t want me anymore.

Home wasn’t the same place I left. Our small town felt even smaller now. After life over seas (even if it was on base) I couldn’t stand the sameness of everyday. I tried to get back into he rhythm of normal life: one without drills and guns and soldiers. I tried to leave those years behind me but I couldn’t. Everything that had happened over there had seeped into my very being. I was

no longer little Miss Liz from Nowhereville, USA. I was Second Lieutenant Beth Armstrong, dishonorably discharged but never able to return to civilian life.

So I found myself at a show. *The Stinky Petes* were playing in the basement of an old church. I was trying to lose myself in the alcohol, the grunge, and the music. In retrospect I knew he would be there. Peter never had the ambition to leave home. He was probably still living in his parents basement. And only he would think *The Stinky Petes* was a good name. But that night I was trying to forget.

The red and blue lights that lit the stage and dance floor did nothing to help with the ascetic. The basement looked like it hadn't been clean in a millennium. There were piles of flood-stained boxes in the corners and a drink laden punch table, already sticky from years of shows. The crowd milled around, too cool to talk to one another before the show. When *The Petes* finally took the stage it was to a bought of coughing rather than applause. I barely noticed them, too intent on the spiked drink in my hand. It wasn't until the lead singer started to speak that I recognized him.

"Uh...we're The Stinky Petes and we're here to rock your world." He raised a fist in the air and swung it down into an off-key power cord. He was always a rockstar in his own mind.

They sucked, if I'm being totally honest. *The Stinky Petes* had less musical talent than an empty beer bottle. They were loud, brash, and chaotic. The entire basement was filled with screaming and the sad shuffling of the desperate. I hung back by the punch table and continued to drink myself into oblivion. The only reason I didn't leave was because I didn't want to be alone with my memories.

When the band finally stopped Pete came out into the audience. He had recognized me instantly. "Liz," he shouted, deafened by his own music. "I didn't know you were home!"

"Hey Peter," I said with a drunken smile. "You guys were great."

He gave me one of those boyhood smiles, the type he had always used to

charm the ladies. "Yeah we are. We start touring this summer." He grabbed a drink off the table and chugged it in one. "So you just come to check me out?"

He was just as smarmy as ever but I realized that it was no longer a turn on. It never really was, his boyish charm worked when we were kids but now it was just sad. "You guys are going on tour?"

He drained another drink and moved a little closer. "Yeah, nothing too big. A couple places around town, heading out to Missoula for a week, and then over to Seattle. We'll be gone a month in total." He said it as if this was the crowning accomplishment of the decade, as if here were about to be inducted into the rock and roll hall of fame.

"Cool," I sipped at my drink and realized I no longer wanted it. This whole evening had been a waste.

Peter riddled a little closer, "Remember before you left? We had some good times."

"Yeah," I shrugged. "I guess we did." In truth they seemed stupid now. We were young and full of piss with nothing to do. Too drunk on our own spirits to really see the world around us.

"It's too bad you went away. You could have been a part of all this," he raised his hand as if surveying his kingdom. It was all I could do to keep from laughing. "We used to have a good thing," he said leaning in closer. "Maybe we should pick up where we left off."

His breathe was hot on my cheek. I could feel the room closing in on me. We were no longer in a stank basement surrounded by punked out adolescents. I was back in Argentina. I could feel his warm breathe on me as I lay in my bunk. I could feel the horror and shame grip me. I could feel every reason I had for leaving the army, leaving home, leaving everything.

My fist connected with Pete's face. There was blood and booze everywhere as he fell into the punch table. A couple kids screamed as everyone cleared a path to the door. It was only when the night air hit me that I realized where I was. I ran.

I ran as fast as I could, trying to outrun my past, my present, and my future.

Trying to outrun every demon man had created for me. Finally I collapsed. I had been crying: for me, for Liz the bright young girl who joined the army straight out of high school, for the second lieutenant who thought she was going places in the world, and for the crumpled boy who I had just left on the basement floor. The surprise in Peter's eyes. This had been a huge night for him. He was reveling in the glory of the stage until I showed him what this world was really like. I had crushed that little boy from high school and I wasn't even sorry.