

# Pheasant Hunt

*by* Gabriel Orgrease

On the day of their autumnal hunt they walked all mornin' in the rain on the lower east side of Johnson's Ridge with Osa Peafold's hunt dog, the elder bitch blue tick Pinkie. When they got a good pace away the pup Xerox yelped, caged in the back of Osa's truck. They were about to turn left and follow up above the stream bank to the side of the hedgerow below the tall white pine. You could hear Xerox's yelps mellow out behind as they moved. "Good fat birds like to hide at the end of them bramble," said Jeff.

It was a cold half-ass dribble from them bold black-swirl clouds, the kind that make the heart palpitate before the storm. Osa saw it, so did Jeff, and Pinkie must'a smelled it. Poor Pinkie should'a been left home on the rag rug before the cast-iron wood stove with Debbie, and she knew it. A piss-poor old hunt dog with arthritis had no business out in this weather. But there was no storm, leastways not any rain storm to speak of, and the hunt sucked. Four hours for two chuckers and one hen, two of them flown off past the farther hedgerow across the wide field without even so much as a wing clip. For Osa it was a waste of good shot.

"You got to take your safety off if you want to hit any barns," said Osa to Jeff, who habitually fumbled with the mechanism of his shotgun trigger as if it were a zipper on his pants with underwear caught in it.

"I can't remember if it goes in or out," was the reply.

"Don't lay your pervert troubles on me, bro. I got me own problems."

"You want to hunt or just be a sarcastic asshole, Osa?"



When the brothers built their annual bonfire, as they generally did on their farm in the late fall, it was always a blast. Even for long-bearded Dale Skinner the paraplegic rabbit hunter with his beagle Molly and his fiddle Denver would come out of the deep wood. Everyone knew the hermit would play real good all night, for three nights and days, as long as there was a fat joint kept stoked between his toothless smile. For days it was blues and nights cruise...

Varnish on old Victorian chair legs would melt as it turned carbon black then evaporated gas into the hot risen flames. Fire. Fire reached up orange and yellow to flicker and burst into the otherwise still blackness. Hard cider flowed into deep cups from the tapped oaken barrel. Brothers danced like half-crazed bohunks on speed, swung their life-weary arms to the wail of Denver. The ends of their seared hair stood out in tangles of impish invitation, little pricklers. Ladies pranced 'midst them with their haunches and bellies shakin' the almighty. Screech of a hoot owl. Bodies flailed legs akimbo. They all of them smelled like smoked compost, hog sweat and greasy burnt cock flesh.

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A male cock pheasant flew up in front of Osa in a line straight out. He let loose once, pumped then twice and blew the tail feathers and ass off the bird before it had a chance to get three yards out. Bloody hamburger meat.

"Hey, Quick Draw, not much to eat on that one. It ain't even worth soup."

Pinkie lazily fetched the carcass of head and wing.

"Is that dog on strike or just a dead walker?"

Osa bent down to gently wrestle what looked like a feather duster sewn by an unintelligent designer from Pinkie's wet mouth. "Good dog, Pinkie, good dog. Don't listen to the dickhead." He stuffed the mess into the pouch on the backside of his hunt vest. "And by the way, fuck you!" Osa said as he turned away from Jeff.

They walked on to follow Pinkie in her slow zags and sniffs and false points, their legs pulled down by the growth of the wet field as they pushed ahead, their pant legs and boots wet.

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Half the town of Chipfinn would be laid out in the alfalfa and fresh timothy come along sun up of the third day. The other half broke down in cluster of bunched gaggles of rusted pick-up trucks and flat-tired bicycles between the Peafolds' farm gate and the Help Wanted sign at the security and loan. Spread out across the quilted land in a spatter of bodies like the irregular spastic radiation of burst nuclear reactor containment. Only the tired old sterile mules knew the way to the end.

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"Goddamn, Pinkie. Find the bird, Pinkie." On occasion Osa blew the whistle that he kept on a lanyard around his neck. It hardly seemed to have any effect other than to disturb nature. "Goddamn it Pinkie, get your lazy dog-food snarfin' ass back over here before Jeff here shoots yo wiggly ass full'a buckshot!"

A body don't half mind goin' through hell if there is at least a goal to reach. Thin ice, thick ice, white ice over cold slow water in the stream bed. Not much there to separate them from flame. It helps to have a sign post here or there to explain the trail. No trespass hammered to tree trunks they see plenty of, but that is not the sign they look for. Without the right sign, the worst life is to be bored

with long empty stretches of unexplanation. The brothers burned through on their long walk as they looked for a goal. If there is no goal then one might as well be pissed off at the closest asshole. Thus, the love of brothers.

Jeff nearly jumped out of his oranges and his skin when Osa shot the apple tree behind him. He turned and fell to the ground in one motion. "Fuck shit, Osa! What the fuck?"

"I thought maybe you was hungry. If you can't get soup you can leastways get applesauce. How's your tongue workin' these days?"

Jeff laughed, the tension flown out. "You remember that time Roach tied his brother up in the apple tree and left him there?"

"How can anyone ever forget? Roach was a schizoid mother fucker! Used barbed wire and a leather belt. Only I guy I ever knew read the Good Book backwards. Twice."

"I heard he got it in Afghanistan."

"No shit, how?"

"Sniper. They say he never knew what hit him."

"So much for bible thumpers, but if I gotta' go, don't tell me."

"I promise I won't say nuthin'."

In this world we can have almost anything happen to the two brothers while they walk along in the low hills on a pheasant hunt. It is, of course, with bred birds planted out early in the day, a contrived affair something like a round of golf with firearms. They could be out to shoot pink-plastic flamingoes or newspaper cut-outs of the President taped to an oil drum. An F-16 can drop down low over the

ridge to hit the afterburners and blow a loud roar up over them as it passes out over beyond taller hills toward Ohio. They can stand there to wonder what the hell that was all about. They can stumble on a weed field booby trapped with explosives and blow their legs off. They can be charged by a white rhinoceros escaped from a local game farm, Jeff gored while Osa weeps over his brother's trampled body, "If only I had thought to kick the shit out of this cocksucker when he was alive!" They can find themselves surrounded and ambushed by a tribe of acid-laden nudists with machetes. They can be held hostage for an exorbitant ransom of golden eggplants. Forced into white slavery on a cabbage farm where they live on a diet of sauerkraut and raw soybeans. Osa's cell phone can suddenly play an acoustic tune from Nirvana, a desperate reach out.

Jeff drank water from a plastic bottle then blew his nose on a wad of paper towel he kept in his pants pocket. "You have been a lazy worthless fuckin' jackass all your life, Osa."

"I love you too, Jeff. Leastways I'm not a sissie-hippie scumbag. I tell you before you gotta quit those pills make you stare at the sun all the time."

When you walk around in the field all day with a shotgun it gets heavy and after a while you forget if it is you that is dazed and lost from the inside out, or is it the walk that does it, or drugs in the water?

For every man there has got to be a way to get to no place, to jump up quick and zoom over to that invisible place with no identity and a loose packet of cat tranqs. May not go there never, may never act on the need, but it is to know that the journey can be made that keeps the man sane.

Osa could see a shiny red pick-up truck parked in Bobby O'Laens Chipfinn auto lot on Route 79 and said to himself, "Hey, I'd like to

get that shiny red pick-up truck and drive. Drive and not stop. Never stop until the Spacific swallows me. Tell that goddamn salty bathtub I'm on the way. It better open up and yawn wide open. I'm gonna' drive that shiny red pick-up truck until it never quits. It gonna' swim an squish wipers an hump whales all the way to Toyota!"

It was like this that the two brothers in the mid afternoon did not know what direction they were faced. Some ways never change and some change so quick they come at you and are gone through before you even know. No turn back, no way to turn around in a slow world, no time to turn quick enough in a fast one.

Pinkie knew which way was home and returned to Osa's rusty piece of tired-old-junk late-model oil-burning spring-busted Chevy pick-up truck with the multi-colored body panels banged and dented where she slept dry beneath her fifth son Xerox. But Osa and Jeff, they had stopped lending attention to Pinkie. It was just them out there.

"Where the hell that lazy bitch go?" asked Jeff when he realized they had wandered around in three circles through dry corn. It was like they could have been kooks with multi-universal crop rotation.

"Don't know. Mind she might have dropped in a hole and died. You might have to kick the birds from here on out."

Jeff then stepped up on a mound of dirt where he rose up above the corn and that is when it happened. He saw Osa there in a damp spot of plushy ferns plain as could be imagined with his stumpy legs and a grin like a drunk bear with a black-n-red checkered coat beneath his orange hunt vest. Osa smiled wide, showed teeth, then gave Jeff the bird.

The large cock flew up between them clean. They could see the eyes like black magnets pulling in all the flickers of firelight to the center of the universe, a Great Attractor. All one-hundred and ten percent

of the Milky Way stopped dead right then and there. They raised their barrels at each other and a foot above then fired, pumped and fired. This time Jeff held his safety off and was gonna' go for it from the hip. Osa, quick as he was, never quite so quick to be faster this time than Jeff, they both got it. Right then, right together. No way in ice or fire to deny it.

Just like huntin' fancy chickens it was. They never said nuthin' about it then, hardly took more than an instant to see each other where they could have been. No place in a hurry. They never said nuthin' that night at the bonfire neither. They danced and jumped and howled and spun around. But I tell you between us that the bonfire has never been the same after.

