

Tuesday Night at The Shop and Shoot Damn, I look good,” Damian says as he checks himself out in the mirror in the locker

by Joann smith

Tuesday Night at *The Shop and Shoot*

Damn, I look good,” Damian says as he checks himself out in the mirror in the locker room. White pants and shirt. White tie. White jacket.

Mort kind of rolls his eyes the way he always does when Damian says this. But I nod and say, “You do,” because Damian does look good. He takes his appearance seriously and I respect that.

Then he turns and gives me a fake punch—a kind of hard fake punch—and says, “Someday, my man. Someday you’ll wear the jacket, too.”

I nod again. “You know it,” I say. I’m still a Buddy and the Buddies don’t get to wear the white jacket. It’s only when I get promoted to Master Buddy that I’ll get the jacket. “I’m with you tonight in orientation,” I tell Damian.

“Good. Watch and learn. Watch and learn.”

He always says this and Mort rolls his eyes again. Damian just shakes his head like there’s nothing to be said or done about Mort then he heads upstairs for a vanilla milk shake; he

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always has a shake before his shift. We're all allowed two free snacks a night. Of course, the Master Buddies' list of approved snacks is more extensive than the Buddies' list. But we're allowed shakes, too, only a smaller size.

"He's such a jerk," Mort says.

"Yeah, but he's good at his job," I say.

"He's still an asshole."

I like Mort. He's funny and he's a good Buddy but I don't think he'll ever make it to Master Buddy. He just doesn't have the drive. What can I do but shrug? Then I look in the mirror. I think I look good, too, but I don't say it because I don't want Mort thinking I'm an asshole, too. "Welcome to *The Shop and Shoot*," I say into the mirror.

"You going to practice the Guidelines, again? Mort asks. "You want me to listen?"

The Guidelines are the instructions for *The Shop and Shoot*, and it's the Master Buddies who get to take the customers into the orientation room and tell them the Guidelines. There's a script that the MBs have to memorize and they have to be really enthusiastic and dynamic and Damian is a Master at that.

"Nah," I decide looking at the clock. I like being on the floor early.

Upstairs Mort and I split off—he pulled *The Shop* tonight; I've got *The Shoot*.

The Greeters have already registered the new customers, charged them their membership fee and taken a photo for their I.D.s. I direct them to the orientation room and get them seated, then go back out and pick up their I.D. cards, which I'll give out once they've listened to the Guidelines.

Damian comes in like he's a rock star jumping onto the small 'stage,' all energetic and cool. He starts right off. "Welcome to *The Shop and Shoot*," he calls out, and then he applauds and the people start applauding. It's Tuesday so it's a quieter crowd than we get on the weekend but Damian stills get them going. "I want to get you good people out into the aisles and onto the range as soon as

possible, so if you'll just listen up, I'll go over a few Guidelines to make your time here as satisfying as possible. Now, the most important Guideline is that everyone must carry a gun." He claps a couple of times again. "That's right. Everyone three and older carries a gun at *The Shop and Shoot*. Even you folks who are planning on going to the Shop section . . ." The MBs don't say 'you women who are going to *The Shop* section' because Mr. Watson, the owner and my boss, says that would make the women feel that they were being stereotyped as shoppers. "You may think you don't require a gun. But, remember, just when you're bending down to get that 30-pack of Doritos from the bottom shelf, 'someone' may appear right in your face, blocking your way. Or maybe when you're on line, 'someone' jumps in front of you. Wouldn't you like to . . . well, shoot that 'someone?'" Damian smiles and nods and claps some more. "Come on. Admit it. There are plenty of times when I want to shoot people. And that why we have *The Shop and Shoot*."

I nod and clap to encourage people and they start to look at each other and nod, too. I can tell they're starting to get really excited, except for maybe one guy who looks a little unsure and won't meet anyone's eye. Sometimes we get people who come but then think they don't really want to be here. But deep down he knows why he came, just like everyone else knows why they came and that's the genius of this place. It gives people permission to admit what they really want.

"Now me, personally," Damian continues, "I think that sometimes *The Shop* is more challenging than *The Shoot*. That's where your targets are unexpected and you have to be alert.' Here a woman nudges her husband or boyfriend and says, "See."

"But you shoppers, you do what you want--shoot all the targets that pop up or ignore them all, and just shop. And there's plenty of shopping to be done—from cars to tomato paste, we have it all. Aisles 1-72. And there are plenty of restrooms and snack bars along the way, and plenty of Buddies to help you out with anything you need help with. We believe in service here. And we don't just say that; we mean it.'

That's another thing I admire about Mr. Watson. He knows people are sick and tired of snotty cashiers and serve-yourself-everything-stores. He knows people want service, and so he gives them service.

"Okay," Damian continues. "So you'll all get a directory and a map, and if you want to, you can stay here after the Guidelines and we'll give you a 3D virtual tour. Okay? Now, let me tell you how *The Shoot* works." Now people sit forward.

"When you go onto the range, you'll be directed to a booth. There you'll see a list of targets. The name of the target is printed there; there's also a picture for those of you who don't speak English. We don't discriminate here at *The Shop and Shoot*. You'll also notice that the targets are color-coded. The first grouping is coded a light pink. Now, these targets won't get you very many points, but they will get you some practice. Yes, we do keep track of points here at *The Shop and Shoot* and that's for your benefit because the more points you rack up, the closer you come to earning a free target. Okay, so the pink targets include paper targets, cans on stumps, the side of a barn, etc. Inanimate things--non-living. Okay? Then we move onto the light blue targets, and the points go up a bit. Here you have your raccoons, birds, rats, mice—all those annoying little critters who won't stay out of your yard or who crap on your car."

Laughs and nods.

"In the next group, you'll find dogs and cats. Now, I know you all love your pets, but hasn't there been a time when someone else's dog has torn up your yard, or barked all night and you wished you could . . ." Damian pauses here and puts his hand out inviting the audience to shout back, "Shoot it!"

"Well, now's your chance. And what about your boss? Let's talk about the green targets. Haven't we all wanted to kill our bosses?"

The truth is, I'd never want to kill Mr. Watson. I have too much respect for him, but I give him credit for knowing that

people often do hate their bosses, and I admire him for not being afraid to make himself a target, so to speak.

“And now forgive me, you teens out there, but hasn't there been a time when everyone has wanted to kill a teenager? The loud music, the bad attitudes. I know there were a few times when my mother wanted to kill me. On the other hand, you teens, come on, I know, believe me I know, I was a teenager up until a year ago, haven't you wanted to kill your mother? Or your father? Go ahead, admit it. And let's hear it for husbands and boyfriends. I know we're impossible. And sorry ladies, but guys . . . don't you just want to kill them sometimes?”

Now everyone except the quiet guy is riled up, smiling, laughing, pointing to one another, saying “I'm going to kill you tonight.”

“Okay, So, you can choose Generic Male or Generic Female or you can get really specific and move onto the red targets where you can choose people by race or religion: Chinese, Jewish, African, Catholic, Dominican, Indian, Irish, whatever. We put Gay in that category too because, well, where else would you put it? Okay? So, go for it. Express yourself.

“So, that about does it except for the Scenarios and the Taboos. The Scenarios cost a little more, actually, a lot more, but believe me they're worth it. You pick the place: a park, a movie theatre, a train, a school. We have a whole list you can choose from. You pick the place and we'll load it up with people. And then,” he pauses for effect, “shoot away. And as far as the Taboos go, well, I don't want to give too much away, but you smart people know what a taboo is, right?” Here, Damian is a real Master. He gives a definition for those who don't know but don't want to look stupid by asking. “It's something you're really not supposed to do. For example, some people think it's taboo to kill an infant. Others might think it's taboo to shoot at a crucifix. You see what I mean? Anyway, push the button under the word Taboos—that's the lever with the big black X--and see what comes up. You have to be a little daring, I'll admit, because you don't know what you'll be asked to shoot. All right. Let's get out

there.” Damian used to ask if people had any questions but there was almost always one woman who would ask too many and that would get the others impatient or hesitant. So, now he skips it and just reminds people that there are Buddies and Master Buddies on the floor to answer any questions.

I hand out the I.D. badges and tell people they have to wear them while they're here. I add, “We like to know that everyone at *The Shop and Shoot* belongs here.” The people like that. It makes them feel like they belong to a special group, which they do, and it makes them feel safe.

Damian shoots me a look then gives a slight nod toward the quiet guy. That's my signal that he wants me to follow him. Damian always gives me the ones who look like they're not sure about *The Shop and Shoot*. He likes to take the ones who seem like they'll spend big. I understand; the MB who signs up the most targets per month gets a bonus.

So, I introduce myself. “Hey, I'm Zed.” (That's not my real name; we all have names we use on the floor.

“Luke,” he says back.

“What kind of target are you interested in, Luke?”

“I guess it'd have to be Generic Male,” he says.

So, I set one up for him and he hits it, and I ask him if he wants to try something else. But he doesn't. He shoots another five GMs and that's it; he's done.

I don't know why but I think of him for the rest of the night. I not gay or anything; I wasn't thinking about him like that. But there was something about him.

* * *

Over the next few weeks, Luke comes in every Tuesday—same day, same time, same target. I feel like we're getting to be friends even though he never says much.

Most people like to tell you who they're shooting. We're not supposed to ask people about that; we don't want to make them feel self-conscious or guilty. But people like to tell. Last Friday, I got a girl in here maybe sixteen years old who said, ‘I'm going to

blow my boyfriend away,' right after I greeted her. 'He's Puerto Rican and Irish. You got a target like that,' she asked. We don't have one like that but I let her look at the Puerto Rican Male target and the Irish Male target, and she said the Puerto Rican target looked more like him than the Irish except that he had blue eyes. She shot 25 PRMs.

But not Luke. He doesn't come in angry and he doesn't say who his GM is and he isn't interested in any other target. I have to admit I find something pure in the way he sticks to the one target. Another thing I like about Luke is that he's what we Buddies call a Lone Shooter. We're of two minds here at *The Shop and Shoot*. Some of us like the weekend crowds; others prefer the weekday customers. Mort and I diverge on this issue. He's a weekend man. The weekend crowd is always primed. They come here knowing what they want—they want it all. They come in groups and on dates. Almost no one comes alone unless they're meeting someone here. Last Saturday we had a group of guys who kept yelling over to one another, 'This is you, dude,' as they shot at their targets. They were BitchKillers, too, as we call them. We always get a group of them on the weekend. 'Hasta la vista, bitch.' But I prefer the weekdays. People who come in during the week are more likely to be particular and thoughtful about their choices. Plus you get your regulars and your Lone Shooters like Luke, and it just seems more civilized to me.

Tonight, I start looking for him at regular his time-10:00—and there he is.

"Hey, Luke."

"Hey."

I think he lives alone; I just get that impression. He's also pretty thin, so maybe he jogs. He's about 35 or 40 but I'm not a good judge of age, and tonight he looks even older. He's starting to get dark circles under his eyes. Definitely not sleeping. "How's things?" I ask.

"Great."

"Want to do a Scenario tonight?" I feel like I have to try to persuade him even though I don't expect him to give in. "You

could do a Generic Male Scenario. We could arrange that." I'm starting to think that a change might do him good, so I add, "Shake up the routine a little bit."

"Nah," he says. "But thanks."

I walk him over to his booth, watch him push the button for Generic Male, pick up the gun, outstretch his arms, cup the heel of the left in the right hand—he's a leftie-- settle into his aim, pull the trigger, slowly draw his arms down. He looks at the target in the near distance for a moment, then puts the gun down, and pulls the cord to draw the target closer so he can see where he hit him. Over the left eye. Luke nods once, then turns to go.

"That's it?" I ask in surprise. He usually shoots at least five Generic Males.

"That's it," he says.

I think about Luke for the rest of the night. I've never seen anyone shoot just one target. Never.

After my shift, I'm allowed five targets on the range, categories pink through red--no Scenarios or Taboos until I become a Master Buddy. Tonight I pull Generic Male. I plan on doing just the one target like Luke did to see how it feels. But I'm just not satisfied after the one target. So, I press on Generic Male again and wonder why Luke doesn't choose a target of race or religion. Who is it that he shoots who has no race or religion? Is Luke gay, and is he shooting a lover who left him? But he doesn't strike me as gay, and he doesn't choose a gay target. I take another shot. Is it his father? But then why not The Father target? And why no nationality? I set up my third target, seeing Luke as he would set it up. Determined. Eyes narrowing. Face set. Thin face. Pale. I begin wondering what nationality Luke is. Something white. Irish? Maybe. Polish? Maybe. Nothing distinguishable. Just white. I take my shot and then it hits me. Generic Male. Luke *is* Generic Male. He's shooting himself. Every week, he's coming in here and shooting himself.

I think about running after him, but what could I say? It's against all the rules to make any comment on a customer's choice of target, even if the target is himself. No I just have to be

here for him when he comes in again next Tuesday, be here but say nothing about what I know because I can't risk making him self-conscious; he might stop coming to the Shop and Shoot. And if he can't shoot himself here, where can he shoot himself?

The following week, I'm really anxious to see him, but he doesn't come. 10:00. 10:30. 11:00. No Luke. Next Tuesday: No Luke. I try telling myself that he just got stuck at work, or that maybe he's catching up on some sleep. But in my gut, I know what happened. Luke shot himself.

I know it isn't my fault, but I start feeling a little guilty about it, like I should have done something, like I was Luke's friend and he was reaching out to me in the way people who are going to commit suicide do, even though no one knows they're reaching out until it's too late. Then I start thinking that maybe he never should have come to *The Shop and Shoot* in the first place and that if there was no *Shop and Shoot*, maybe he would never have gotten the idea to really shoot himself. I don't like thinking this way and when I tell Mort about it he sets me straight.

First, he says, "Hey, you don't know that he's dead. He could have just moved or got a girlfriend and he's busy getting laid."

"I don't think so."

Then he says, "Don't torture yourself. This guy's got to take responsibility for his own actions. You know that. You know the rules. Don't force anyone into a target they don't want to do. Did you force this guy?"

"No."

"Right. We suggest, but we don't force because Mr. Watsom says we're not doing anyone any favors if in the end they don't take responsibility for their own targets, right?"

I start to feel a little less guilty.

"He came in here knowing what he wanted. And he gave himself what he wanted. That's the whole point of *The Shop and Shoot*. Just keep practicing your Guidelines. I hear there may be an opening for a Master Buddy soon."

Maybe Mort understands *The Shop and Shoot* better than I do. Maybe he should start practicing the Guidelines. Anyway, I take Mort's advice. But Luke is still on my mind as I practice that night. I know he's on my mind because I do something I've never done before. It's right after I say, 'The most important Guideline is that everyone must carry a gun.' I hold my fingers like a gun and point it at the mirror, at my reflection. At me. That's when it comes to me.

* * *

My meeting with Mr. Watsom goes well. He likes the idea of a suicide target. He says he might even create a High Taboo category for it. I suggest that we use the I.D. photos. Those images could be blown up and applied to the body of the appropriate target—GM, Latin Female, whatever. Then, if a person went into the High Taboo category, up would come a target of him or her. What a rush, I told Mr. Watsom it would be, to see one's face come up on a target. 'It's the ultimate *Shop and Shoot* experience.'

I get so excited that my mind starts working really fast, and I suggest that we could even have self-targets appear in *The Shop* section, maybe in the dressing rooms when people are trying on things that don't fit. He laughs at that one, says it's brilliant. He says he loves a Buddy who is always thinking, and clearly, I am thinking. He tells me to brush up on my Guidelines because an opening for Master Buddy will be coming up, and he wants me to be ready. Ready, I'll be. 'Welcome to *The Shop and Shoot*.'

