Teenage Wasteland

by Oliver Hunt

Simms' mom's back porch- a square cement platform- was bare except for a grill in the corner next to an open bag of charcoal, a yellow bottle of lighter fluid, and two green lawn chairs leaning folded up against the family room window. The backyard, about a week unclipped, faced a stretch of woods that would soon be cleared out to build more houses. Two small oaks stood crookedly in the yard's center. Without saying anything, Simms ripped a page from our tenth grade yearbook and impaled it on a tiny branch jutting from the larger oak. He winked at me and said Let's get Harris and Klebold on these motherfuckers.

I knew he'd skip our school's reunion. We'd lost touch over the years, but in high school we hung out almost every day. We took up smoking together (I've since quit), got drunk in our high school's parking lot, tried picking up girls (sometimes even succeeding, though not with anyone we'd brag about), received beatings from the same jocks, and drove all over town in his rusty blue Pinto listening to Slayer, Metallica and Venom. So we didn't really do much.

He'd remained at his mom's after an aborted community college attempt. What can I say? He said. It wasn't different enough from high school to me. He worked as a night stocker at a nearby Price Chopper and did things around the house for his mom- cleaned the garage, fixed the rain gutter, drove her to her doctor's appointments- so it worked out. Yeah, you know, I know, he said. I live at home like a big loser, so those pricks from school were right. I just don't want them to know it, at least not yet.

A lot of people live at home now, I said. It's not really anything to be ashamed of. Besides, you can always go back to college, it'll always be there.

Maybe, he said. We'll see. He sighed and drank. Doesn't much matter, he said. That's not the reason I'm not going.

I know.

Available online at *«http://fictionaut.com/stories/oliver-hunt/teenage-wasteland»*
Copyright © 2014 Oliver Hunt. All rights reserved.

We took turns firing bottle rockets from our empty beer cans at yearbook pages. Simms had a steadier hand and better aim than I did, knew the rockets' trajectories. They popped about where he'd wanted them to. We both laughed as we'd pull the pages off of the tree, comparing who we'd hit, saying, Dude, you hit Stephanie Cornwall? I know she was bitchy but she was hot, or Dude, you missed douchebag Donald Morton and hit poor Tom Morris. Didn't that kid suffer enough?

Simms sounded like the Simms I knew in high school. I was relieved. I didn't know what I'd expected. We'd both cut our hair, his was growing thin, but other than that we didn't look much different. Ten years sounds a lot longer than it ends up being.

Simms threw the yearbook pages on the grill where we cooked hot dogs and hamburgers. He was short of bread and didn't feel like running to the store for more. Drunk as we were getting I didn't blame him. He had an unopened pack of tortillas in the fridge, so we ate hamburgers and hot dogs dressed up like usual on tortillas.

I wasn't as hardline about hating school as Simms was. I actually went to graduation. Simms didn't, our school mailed him his diploma. We got drunk together afterwards and he said I don't know why I even stuck around. I should've dropped out. I could've worked and been away from it this whole time. I took community college classes then went away to a state school. I just wanted out of the old neighborhood. Simms did too, I just pulled it off.

The yearbook pages burned through and I asked Up for another round? Simms said Sure, you choose the next victims. I flipped through our junior year yearbook. There were no signatures or notes in it. I asked Didn't I ever sign your yearbook? Simms swigged from his beer and shook his head. Nah, he said, I never even wanted those stupid things. Mom always bought them for some reason. I nodded while looking for a specific tormentor, a shitty jock cop's son named Johansen. My last name being Johnson, I was always loathe to share a yearbook page with the meathead. I dreaded seeing my own pictures (I was never photogenic) but figured it's just for giggles anyway.

Thing is, I flipped through every yearbook. Those pages were torn out already.