

Gun Safety Rules

by Tanaqui

Stanley taught Bonnie to use a shotgun when she was ten. She'd never seen him so serious as when he explained to her how to hold it and carry it, how to load it, how to never, *ever* point it at a person. Finally, he placed it into her hands, the first gun she'd handled. Before that, the rule was strictly *no touching*.

The shotgun was heavy, weighed down with Stanley's warnings as much as the cold metal of the barrel and the warm wood of the stock.

oOo

Stanley took her out hunting after that. Rabbits mostly, but turkeys and deer too, in season. Sometimes it was just the two of them; sometimes Jake came along as well, and Emily, and Emily's brother Chris.

Bonnie liked it best when it was just her and Stanley, and the others weren't around to take his attention. Even if she and Stanley didn't talk much, it was nice just to spend time together when they weren't busy with chores or schoolwork.

At first, if Stanley spotted some game, he'd let her take the shot—silently touching her arm and pointing—so she could get the practice. After a while, he learned to leave her take the shot because her aim was better.

oOo

On Sunday mornings in church, she'd pray for good hunting, and that it would be just her and Stanley.

When she was twelve, she started praying instead that nothing bad would happen to Stanley when he took out his gun. No one had ever told her exactly what had happened to Chris, except he'd been shot, and Stanley had insisted Jake hadn't been involved. (Even though he'd skipped town like he was guilty, and—reading lips from a distance—Bonnie knew the town gossips thought he was mixed up in it.)

After the bombs fell, after Ravenwood stole gas from their farm, after Stanley starting going out with the Rangers, and hunting became more than a Sunday afternoon hobby, she prayed harder. For good hunting, and for Stanley to be safe. And even, at last, for Mimi to be safe too.

oOo

She was half aware, as she reached for the shotgun, of Mimi heading into the pantry. While she thumbed in the first cartridges with practised ease, the almost forgotten memory of Stanley teaching her to shoot surfaced in her mind: the memory of his warning, signed and signed over again to impress it on her.

She remembered the warning, and ignored it. Because sometimes... sometimes you *had* to point a gun at someone.

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