

MATCHES AND GASOLINE

John Boston

It was Jenna's idea. It was all her doing. Macy and Jolene thought it was crazy. They shouldn't be doing this. Inviting Rob and Jay over was crazy enough. When her mom got wind of this, she wouldn't be allowed anywhere near these girls. Fooling around with a OUIJA Board was a big no-no as far as Roan's parents were concerned. Her parents had given her just enough leash to hang herself. That was all that was needed.

There were boys and alcohol at Macy's house. This was like being charged with two crimes instead of just one. She knew Jenna and Rob were having sex. Macy and Jay were ready to cross the line. Jolene seemed to show more interest in girls than boys and Roan was still in very much embracing her *purity*.

She had lost two boys because she made it abundantly clear that she would not be having sex before marriage. All kinds of red lines were crossed that weekend. Macy's parents decided to go away for the weekend to see a concert, leaving Macy all alone in this giant farmhouse. She told herself that being tested was fine. She knew her limits. She was not just going to meet some random guy and have sex with them. That was gross. *That's what dogs do, not self-respecting Christians*. She was clearly the minority in the room. It never ceased to amaze her. These girls sat next to her in Bible study and here they were sinning in more ways than one. They were supposed to know better and act better. She wasn't even sure why she hung around with them in the first place. Jenna was the cool one. The one with a very developed body and pretty face. She commanded attention everywhere she went. She could get any boy she wanted and for whatever reason, at the moment, she wanted that idiot, Rob. Macy and Jolene were her devoted followers. They all went to the same church, went to the same church functions, and had the same classes. They graduated a month ago. They were all going off to college in the fall, except Rob, who thought it was a good idea to join the Marines. Roan had church friends and non church friends. She even had a Muslim friend at school. She was fairly popular by rural Iowa standards and could get a boyfriend if she wanted one. She had no shortage of applicants, it always came back to the same roadblock of no sex until marriage. There could simply be no meeting in the middle for her. Unless she had a ring on her finger, the guy was not getting into her pants...*plain and simple*.

Jenna was fascinated by the OUIJA Board. She told everyone about the story of Patience Worth, the woman who wrote stories from the grave using a medium. Jenna was fascinated by the idea. Roan wasn't sold on it. She was no expert in the affairs of the afterlife, but she did know you did not want to go fooling around with something you didn't really understand, particularly when you were attempting to communicate with dead spirits. There was no telling who or what was going to be on the other end. Jenna was excited, so Rob was excited with her. If Jenna told him to dig up a dead body, he would have done it. This was his first girlfriend experience and he was already head over heels in love. Jenna planned on dumping him as soon as he left for boot camp.

Rob thought they were going to get married. There were definitely storm clouds in their future. The rest of the group had several beers and Jay brought some weed with him. Everybody was feeling good and having a good time. Roan knew she should just pull the emergency stop on this nonsense before they pulled something into this world they shouldn't, but as devout a Christian as she was, she did not want to be the only uncool one. Peer pressure is very real, even when your peers are a bunch of idiots.

"Come on gang, let's do this!" said Jenna as she moved the board and pieces in front of everyone.

"You really bought this thing from some old witch?" asked Jay

"Yup. She said that only real boards work. The chip is made out of some kind of weird stone."

"Isn't this how the Exorcist got started?" asked Macy.

"Come on. It'll be fun. Haven't you ever wanted to talk to a dead person?"

"If it's that easy, wouldn't dead people be talking to us all the time?" asked Roan.

"Okay, everyone sit in a circle and put their finger on the chip," said Jenna

The group did as she instructed. She turned off the lights and lit a few candles.

"We have to try and clear our minds first. We have to surrender to the power of the board. It calls the shots, we are just its witnesses."

"Do you even know how to use this thing?" asked Jay as he finished his beer. He took out a cigarette, only to have Macy smack it out of his hand.

"Einstein over here thinks he's going to smoke in my house. How am I going to explain that one to my parents? Smoke outside....like way outside." she said.

Jenna closed her eyes.

"WE seek the spirits of the dead. Hear our call. Come forth and show yourself. Tell us your name.....tell us your name!"

"Jen, this is weird. Can we just all play XBOX or something?" asked Jolene.

"Shut up, Jo."

"Come forth and tell us our name. Tell us who you are and when you died.

Everyone had their hand on the chip, but it didn't move. Jen asked the dead to reveal themselves, but they didn't. The chip did not move. They waited and waited, not wanting to incur the wrath of Jenna, but they got the same results.

"Jen....I have to pee," said Jay as he got up.

"Me too," said Jolene.

"Well, come back. It doesn't always work, that's why we have to keep trying."

The rest of the group went into Macy's Room to play XBOX. That just left Roan Jen and Rob with the board. Rob had way too many beers and could barely keep his eyes open.

"We ask that the dead reveal themselves to us tonight. COME FORTH AND REVEAL YOURSELF!" Jen shouted.

The chip on the board suddenly moved. It moved by itself. Jen and Roan were shocked.

"Holy shit! It moved," she said and sat down next to the board. Roan wasn't quite sure what she saw. She was hoping to watch her favorite podcast as soon as Jen calmed down.

She sat down in front of Jen. They both put a finger on the chip.

"Does the spirit have a name?" she asked

H-O-M-E-R. It read on the board.

"Homer. Is your name Homer?"

Y-E-S.

"Okay, Homer, what year did you die?"

1-9-2-5

"Holy shit, this is so awesome. I've never actually made contact with a spirit before." Jen said

Roan wasn't sure if Jen was moving the chip or not. The whole thing was freaking her out. She got up to tell the others. When they came back, Jen had put the board away.

"What happened?" asked Macy

"You missed it. We did it. We made contact with someone named Homer who died in 1925."

"Sure you did. Rob, did you see anything?"

"I kind of passed out."

"What? You had three beers.....and they were light beers too," said Jay

"I was in the sun today. It kind of caught up with me."

"Roan, tell them I'm not lying," said Jenna

"I don't know, it was weird. I think the board was telling us something, but I'm not really sure."

"Roan, you saw it, just like I did. I could tell by the look on your face."

"I don't know what I saw, Jen. I don't think we should be messing around with this kind of stuff anyway. Who knows what we are going to pull in?"

"They're dead, Roan. They can't do anything to us."

"Are you sure?"

"Ladies. How about we all go outside and relax? I've got just the thing to help us do it." he said and pulled out his bag of weed and his pot vapes.

"I'm in," said Rob

"Me too," said Macy.

Eventually, the whole group made its way out back to the barn. They sat down on some hay bales and opened another six-pack of beer.

"When do you leave for boot camp?" asked Roan

"Next month. Paris Island for 12 weeks. Just like my dad, my grandpa, and my great-grandpa. They were all Marines."

"Just try not to get your balls blown off," said Jenna as she took a hit.

"No way. I'm going in for electronics repair. I don't want to get my balls blown off either." said Rob.

"Roan..... I have to ask. You're a very attractive girl. Why don't you have a boyfriend?" asked Jay.

"There's no one worth dating around here. I'm leaving for Notre Dame in August. I'm sure I'll have a boyfriend in college."

"I know lots of guys around here worth dating. I heard you have a strict no-sex-until-marriage rule. Is that true?" he asked.

"Yeah. I want to wait until I'm at least engaged to be married before I have sex," she replied after taking a sip of her beer.

"That's a pretty hard sell for most guys. I mean if my girl doesn't put out, I'm dumping her," he said.

Macy hit him and caused him to drop his joint.

"Dammit girl, now look what you made me do."

Macy knew she could do much better than Jay, but she privately confided in Roan that she wanted to lose her virginity before she left for college. Roan tried to talk her out of it, but she wouldn't listen.

"Roan, I wish I was like you. You believe in it all. The church, the Bible, the Rapture, the whole thing. I don't know what I believe anymore. It's so easy to believe when you're young, but the older you get, the harder it is to keep the faith. I just want to know what it feels like to have a man inside of me. Just once. I'm not going to go out and become some kind of slut. I just want to know what it feels like. Is that so wrong?"

"Our bible tells us it is wrong. There's nothing wrong with saving yourself. You don't get a mulligan with your virginity."

"You really aren't going to have sex until you're married. Wow. I'm not sure I could wait that long." said Rob.

"Roan, don't listen to them. You have to listen to your heart. If that's what you believe, then that's what you should do. You know, you're not going to find someone who will wait that long, outside of the church. I'm not even sure the most devout would be able to resist you. You are kind of hot." said Jolene.

"Yeah, she is," said Rob.

Jenna gave him a dirty look and Roan knew the game was on. She knew how this was all going to play out. She was the one who would steal their boyfriends, even though she wasn't trying to. She didn't have the heart to tell Jenna that Rob and Jay were constantly hitting on her. Rob even spent the whole weekend trying to get her to hang out with them at a party. Roan didn't know what to think of him. He was very confused. He told her he loved Jenna and wanted to marry her, but he couldn't stop thinking about her. Roan never did reply back. She didn't know what to say. She and Jenna had never really been friends, they were just mutual friends of Macy. She was pretty much friends with everyone. Her father was a very successful farmer and ran a very large agricultural business. She was cool. Jolene was cool as well, but they both knew that Jenna ran the show. Not that it mattered. In just over a month, they would all go their separate ways and then just become Facebook friends.

"Roan, what do you have against the OUIJA Board?" asked Jen.

"Nothing, I just don't think it's something that a good Christian should be fooling around with. You know? It's kind of like playing with matches and gasoline. Someone's going to get burned." she said.

"Roan, you can't possibly think that thing is real, do you?" asked Macy

"How do I know it isn't?"

"People a hundred years ago used to use it for a party game. It's not real. Everyone knows you can't make contact with dead spirits. Once you're dead, you're dead."

"No, no that's not true. We both saw that chip move by itself on the board. Roan may not want to admit it to herself, but she saw it." said Jenna

"I don't know what I saw, Jen. It just felt weird. Like I was doing something I wasn't supposed to. Like I was pulling some kind of spiritual fire alarm."

"Well, it's not wrong to want to make contact with the dead. Maybe you can make contact with your dead relatives. What would be so wrong about that?" asked Jenna

"I guess I figure if Jesus wanted us to communicate with the dead, he would have done it in the bible," said Roan.

"Well, he raised Lazarus from the dead. Isn't that kind of the same thing?" asked Rob

"It's one thing to have Jesus do it. It's another thing altogether to have one of us do it." she replied.

"You really believe in all that stuff, don't you? Him dying on the cross, the miracles, heaven and hell? You actually believe all of it."

"Well, yeah, you have to. You just don't get to pick and choose the parts of the bible you want to believe in."

"Wait, you really think Moses parted the Dead Sea? Or that we are going to burn in hell for an eternity if we aren't saved? Asked Jay

"Yeah, if he loves us so much, why would he condemn us to an eternity of torture in hell if we don't follow him? Isn't that kind of like pointing a gun to your head, but telling you you have a choice?" asked Jenna

"I don't know. I'm not really sure of anything. I just think some of it is real and that we shouldn't go around fooling with stuff we don't understand."

"Oh, I understand it alright. I understand that it's all crap. If you have to believe in something for it to be real, then it isn't real." said Rob.

"Look, you can all judge me if you want, but I don't get on you guys for your beliefs," said Roan

"No one's judging you, Roan."

"Aren't you?"

"Come on ladies, smoke up. This talk is getting way too serious for old Jay here. Hey, can I see your dad's gun collection?" he asked

"Um, no. I don't even get to see it," said Macy.

"Roan, I'm not judging you. I just don't understand how you can believe in all that crap. I mean I have no choice. My parents are strict believers. I've had a bible in my hand since I could walk. I

just stopped believing in it, a while ago. I go to bible study, cause I would rather die than have to tell my parents the truth. It would break their hearts." said Jenna

"So, it's better to lie to them?"

"In this case, yes."

"I think the only one you're lying to is yourself. If that's how you feel, then you shouldn't hide it. I believe and I wear my cross."

"You don't know my parents. Believe me, what they don't know won't hurt them."

Roan watched a car pull into the driveway. She recognized the driver. It was Chris Seeger, a guy Jolene had been crushing on. He was older than the rest of the group, but she had never heard Jolene talk about a guy before. Her face lit up when she saw him. She ran over to him and hugged him. Roan quickly figured out that she was now in a four-sided triangle. She knew what was going to happen tonight and that she would certainly not be a part of it. She just had no idea why they invited her? What were they going to gain by her being here? They must have wanted something from her.

"Okay, We need food. I ordered it in town. Roan, since you can drive, could you go and pick it up?" asked Macy

And there it was. Right in front of her. These people weren't her friends. They never would be her friends. They were all people she went to church with. She had known all of them since grade school and yet, she didn't really know any of them. They thought one way and she thought the other way. She was a left-handed girl in a right-handed world. She was the only non sinner in the group. She knew exactly how this was going to end.

"How am I going to pay for it?" she asked

"My parents left me a whole ton of money. Put some gas in your car if you want," said Macy as she and Jay walked back to the house. She handed Roan a handful of cash and kissed her on the cheek.

"Look, you know what's going to happen here tonight. I just don't want it to be weird for you. I mean, you don't have to stay if you don't want to. I'll understand." she said.

"I'm a big girl Macy. I think I can handle it."

"Glad to hear. Wouldn't be the same without you," she said as she left.

Roan felt like she had just been seriously checkmated. She felt defeated, even though she had done nothing wrong. Being the good girl in the group is never easy. She had to stay true to her beliefs, even if it hurt. She had made her choices and she was going to stand by them.....*come hell or high water.*

Jenna stopped her on her way to use the lady's room. She seemed upset.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong."

Roan scowled at her.

"What do you care?"

"I know when Jenna ain't happy, ain't nobody happy."

"You promise you won't get all weird on me?"

"I'll do my very best not to be weird on you," said Roan

"Look, I know you saw that piece move by itself. I know you saw it."

"Wait.....isn't that piece called a planchette?"

"What? I don't know. See, this is what I mean."

"I know there's more to the story, so go ahead," said Roan

"I'm addicted to that thing. Sometimes I use it at home for hours by myself. No matter how often I use it, it always comes back to the same name....always."

"You mean, Homer?"

"Yeah.....it's like he's stalking me or something."

"Maybe he is. Maybe you should stop using that thing. Why do you want to talk to dead spirits all the time anyway?" asked Roan

"Ever since my grandma died. I never got to say goodbye to her. I just want to say goodbye to her. Is that so wrong? I've been trying for months and all I get is that Homer. He's the only one who wants to talk to me. I'm not sure I want to talk to him." said Jenna

"Jenna, I think you should stop using that thing. What would Pastor Maddux say if he knew you were using a OUIJA Board?"

"Don't be judgy."

"Jenna, you should just put that thing away and forget about it. You shouldn't fool around with things you don't understand."

"Easy for you to say. Your grandma is still alive."

She paid for the food at the Italian restaurant in town and had it put in her car. She filled up at the gas station. She was just about to pull out of the station when she heard her front tire blow out. She got out and looked at it. She went to the back of her trunk and looked for the jack and tire iron. She couldn't find the tire iron. She looked and looked all over the car, but it wasn't there. Someone had taken it. She called her big brother, James, and asked him to bail her out.

"Hey, little sis needs your help," she said on the phone.

It took James over an hour and a half to arrive. He actually bought her a new tire. Roan wanted to just give him the rest of the money Macy had given her, but it wouldn't be right. It wasn't her money. She hugged her brother and thanked him. It took her almost twenty minutes to drive back to Macy's house from town. As she approached the house, she saw the lights from the police cars and ambulance. She pulled into the driveway and ran up to the house. An officer stopped her at the door.

"You don't want to go in there, kid. Stay outside."

"What the hell is happening?" she asked

"They're all dead. All but one and he's hanging on for dear life right now. Her parents called and she didn't answer. They called a neighbor and asked them to check in on her. That's when they found the bodies and called us.

Roan was now in shock. She watched Jay's body being lifted onto a stretcher and being carried into the ambulance. Roan pushed the cop out of the way and ran inside. She could see blood on the stairs and blood coming from one of the bedrooms. She opened the door and saw two cops performing CPR on Chris and Jolene.

"Who the hell are you?" asked one of the cops

More cops arrived and ambulances. Roan ran from room to room, trying to make sense of the carnage.

Dear God, this can't be happening. This simply cannot be happening. Tell me they aren't dead.....TELL ME THEY AREN'T DEAD!

"Who are you?" asked one of the cops as he grabbed her

"Are they all dead? Tell me they aren't all dead.....please," she said sobbing

"Do you know what happened here tonight? Do you know who did this?" he asked as he led her into one of the bedrooms. She saw what was left of Jenna on the bed. She had been cut to pieces. She looked up at the wall and tried not to scream. There it was, as plain as day for all to see.

HOMER WAS HERE! HOMER WAS HERE. HOMER WAS HERE. MY LITTLE ROAN, AREN'T YOU LUCKY!

"Who the hell is Homer? Do you know who he is? Do you know who did this?" asked one of the officers.

Roan could barely speak. What few words she could muster, probably did not make much sense to the officers, but they made perfect sense to her.

"You should never play with matches and gasoline. Someone is likely to get burned.....someone is going to get burned. We never should have played with it.....we never should have played with it. I told her not to play with it, but she wouldn't listen, she just wouldn't listen to reason, and now look what happened."