

The Draft

George watched intently as his small satellite TV came to life at 7 P.M. sharp. The crowd in a stadium was roaring; helicopter camera drones buzzed around the field; the scoreboard erupted in fireworks as the announcer said "WELCOME!" Noise rose to a fever-pitch as drones jockeyed for position over the 50-yard line. High-powered speakers spewed: "WELCOME TO THE TWELFTH ANNUAL *ULTRABOWL!* PRESENTED BY ANNHEISER BUSCH AND PRODUCED BY...", and the crowd shouted in unison "*BUDWEISER DRAFT!*" "That's right, folks, The Twelfth Annual *ULTRABOWL* is brought to you by the folks at Budweiser Draft, who remind you to drink responsibly." The crowd laughed, and then the announcer asked "...*AND WHAT DO WE DO AT THE ULTRABOWL?*" 141,000 stood up and shouted in unison "*THE DRAFT!*" "That's right, folks, Budweiser Draft beer will announce the winner of *The Draft* tonight!" The crowd stamped and shouted. The National Anthem was finally done; two football teams ran onto the field in smoke-clouds of pink, green, yellow and red; cam-copters swooped around; the First Half began. George had worked hard this year, and he knew in his heart that he would be picked.

George remembered the cold Alabama nights when he was outside doing push-ups and sit-ups until midnight. And then he'd pull two old tires, hung by huge ropes, from the two live oak trees in his small back yard in the trailer park. Finally, he dragged around what he called his 'Special Weapon', which was a six-foot-square piece of recycled plywood that he'd loaded up with old bricks and rocks. He dragged his special weapon around for an hour, to improve his endurance and strength. The other residents of the trailer park thought 'Ol' GW' was entirely nuts, but he didn't care.

George Washington Carver Brown lived in a small trailer park in Madison County, Alabama. He dropped out of eighth-grade – because he couldn't read or write, but he could catch a football, and run like the wind, as the teachers used to say. He worked as a 'swamper' for a local trucking company. Every day he shoveled chicken poop out of 53-foot trailers, and then he sprayed them out with a power-washer. It paid enough for his trailer, his satellite TV, and a little more for food and an occasional bottle of 'Shine' that he got from his friend Buck.

'Old GW' only had one friend, a red-neck from the trailer park named Buck, who was mostly a troublemaker: they got along just fine. Once in a while Buck would sell 'Old GW' a pint of hooch, and sometimes he'd sell him something else: sometimes he'd sell him an injection of steroids. Buck knew how badly Old GW wanted to bulk-up for *The Draft*, so, after a particular Walgreens store was broken into, Buck came into possession of just what Old GW needed, and was willing to pay for.

Everyone knew the Rules: Enter as many times as you want – just fill out the form on the Web. If you got picked, you had a chance to try out with one of the teams for the next *ULTRABOWL*. If they liked you, then they would offer you a contract, and you could join the team as a new draftee. And at that point, you'd get a \$50,000 signing bonus. The *ULTRABOWL* was a reality-TV program! When the producer approached Budweiser with the idea, he was kicked out, but when they decided to try the insane idea, it was an instant success, and their sales of Bud Light skyrocketed. A lot of football *wanna be's* thought that by drinking Bud Light, they'd increase their chances of getting picked – it all worked out quite well, and the *ULTRABOWL* was the highest ranked show of the year, year-after-year.

Old GW watched, waiting for half-time – that's when they'd pick the winner. A year ago, he'd gone to the Huntsville Public Library and asked Tawana Johnston, a cute Black librarian for help on how to access the Web. He couldn't read or write, but she showed him, step-by-step, and he was able to imitate her.

Every day of the year, he'd entered at least 10 times. And every day she'd smile at him and say "*You're bound to win, George.*"

He didn't have a phone, because nobody would call him anyhow, but he entered the contest with Buck's phone number, and Buck assured him that if they called, he'd run over and tell him. George looked at the TV, and he reached over and felt the muscles in each arm – the steroids really worked for building bulk. Finally – Half-Time!

When the players left the field, the scoreboard exploded in fireworks and the crowd started chanting "THE DRAFT...THE DRAFT." The announcer held back for just a moment and then said "AND NOW, BROUGHT TO YOU BY BUD LIGHT – THE DRAFT!!" and the crowd went nuts. "AND THE WINNER OF THE DRAFT THIS YEAR IS FROM THE GREAT STATE OF ALABAMA!" ... a pause... "FROM MADISON COUNTY!" ... a pause... "FROM HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA. THE WINNER IS TODD JOHNSTON! We'll be giving Todd a call in a minute. Congratulations, Todd, and to all those who took the time to enter. Try again next year!"

Old GW stood bolt-upright – Todd Johnston was the librarian, Tawana's brother! "She made me enter her brother's name instead of mine!" Old GW had blood in his eye and hatred in his heart – which was pounding like crazy in absolute rage! *He'd get even!*

Buck came by just then, to needle Old GW about not getting picked. He heard a thud in the trailer; he heard the TV blasting and put 2 and 2 together – Old GW must have thrown a brick at the TV, and he was probably pissed-off – better come back tomorrow morning.

But Old GW was lying on the floor, gasping for breath – the steroids had caught up with him, and when he realized how he'd been cheated, his aortic artery shredded.

As he lay dying, the Second Half began.

NOTE: This story is in the format of "flash fiction," which allows a maximum of 1,000 words.