

One More Silver Dollar

by Jason W. Stuart

Culloden County, MS - 1989

All Janine knew was the idiot had a gun. As to why he would ever need one was beyond her. He couldn't look dumber holding it, either. He was too small for it, or at least he looked that way to her. Janine never noticed how small Keith was until after she married him.

"Why did you buy that?" Janine asked.

"Why wouldn't I?" he said and practiced loading it.

Janine didn't care much about guns one way or the other. Still, some people just shouldn't have them. Keith was one of those people. He was always burning money on things he had no business owning. Today it was the gun. Last month it was the motorcycle. That was her favorite. Knowing she needed a new alternator on her Ford.

"That's what you get for buying a Ford," He'd said and rode off with Nathan and Austin. That was the only time they'd all gone riding. Now it just sat in the yard except when Keith occasionally took it down the road and back.

"Go get me some ice cream," she said as Keith put the gun in his travel bag getting ready to leave on another load.

"Go yourself," He said. "Where's my shaving kit?"

"It's already in your truck. You never brought it in from the truck last night. And I can't go. The Ford's messed up. You told me you'd fix it last week."

"It's not that bad messed up. Are you sure I didn't bring it in?"

"Yes I'm sure and I can't even get it to crank anymore. What am I supposed to do if I need something while you're gone? What if something happened to Emily?"

"You could take the motorcycle."

"Sure, Keith. That's real practical. I'll just strap a baby to the back of a bike. That'll work fine. You're a fuck."

"Shut up, Janine. I don't have time for this. I've got to go."

"Will you be home tomorrow?"

"I don't know. Depends if I can get loaded out of Shreveport."

Janine sighed and slumped down on the couch. "You know I thought when I got married I'd have a husband."

"What the hell does that mean?"

"It means I like to have my someone to lie down next to at night and keep me warm."

"Yeah, what's stopping you?" Keith said and slammed the door.

The baby got to crying before Janine had time to. Janine picked Emily up and tried rocking her back and forth and singing to her a bit. In the past, she'd tried everything she knew of, but nothing seemed to work. Janine wasn't getting the hang of this mother thing. She'd thought when the baby came some sort of instinct would take over and she'd just know what to do, but that wasn't the case. She bumbled her way through, getting occasional help from Keith's mother and absolutely none from Keith himself.

Emily didn't need a new diaper, so Janine gave her a bottle and that shut her up. Janine didn't really know if it was good for her or not, but anything to stop the screaming was worth it. After Emily calmed down, Janine put her back in the crib and checked the fridge again for anything she might have missed before. Of course there was nothing.

Keith really was a bastard for leaving her alone with no way to go anywhere. *Take the bike*, he says. What a douche. She could feel her stomach rumbling. There were leftovers in the fridge, but all she wanted was ice cream, maybe some cake too.

Janine tried to remember what Keith told her about steering as she sat on the bike. Despite her feelings for it in general, she admitted it did look nice. It was one of those new Yamahas that

thought it was a Harley, with all the chrome and loud pipes and whatnot. Janine chided him for that, though.

"If you're gonna waste money, you could at least waste it on something American," she'd said.

"Harleys are too damn much and these are better bikes anyway," Keith argued.

Keith was probably just scared of a real bike, Janine figured. He only bought it to look cool in front of his friends, like a real man. Keith was half an inch shorter than Janine and it bugged him so much he never let her wear anything with heels when they went out. He made sure to wear boots to try and offset it. Janine didn't really care because she hated high heels anyway, but whenever Keith left on the rig she would wear her boots wherever she went.

It was a hair chilly outside, so Janine slid on Keith's leather riding jacket. She also tried on his chaps and found they were a decent fit, a bit short, but she could just hook her thumbs in the straps and low-ride them. She checked herself out in the mirror and of course she looked ridiculous. Better than Keith, though.

The controls weren't that much different than her old three-wheeler her dad bought her in junior high school. Keith wanted to dump the clutch too fast on the turns when he first got it and would let it die. Janine would watch him lurch his way up the driveway and go into a cussing fit turning onto the main road.

Janine didn't have nearly the trouble with it she thought she would. It was more powerful than she'd thought, too. A little harder to turn than the three-wheeler but not that much. The clutch and the gears were no problem and the wind didn't bother her, thanks to the jacket.

Janine wound it on out when she got onto 590. She screamed past Smith's, where she could have got her ice cream. She was in Lathan before she knew it. Then she turned southeast and dipped down just to the edge of Collierville and hit the backroads and back up.

Not all roads in Culloden County were fully paved yet and when Janine hit gravel doing fifty down Jerry Lee Road she felt her butt

pucker. The rear end of the Yamaha slid first one way and then the other. She tried pumping the brakes and saw the vivid image of her face eaten away by gravel, which was unappealing. She dropped her feet down as she slowed and finally got it stabilized.

“Shit,” she said to no one but herself. The bike finally stopped sideways in the middle of the road. She let the engine quit and felt the quiet around her. The crickets weren't even chirping and she wondered if it was because of her exhaust. She did see one or two fireflies flitting about. It was getting dark now and she decided she could use a beer instead of ice cream.

Culloden County was still dry and Jack's Landing was the closest place to get beer where she lived, except on Sundays when Keith and some of the other truckers sold Coors from their pickups outside the First Baptist Church of God of Liberty after the service because Hank Grady had used to do it and they all had to be just like him. But, it wasn't Sunday and Janine didn't like Coors and she didn't go to church, so that didn't do her much good.

Jack's was quiet enough and she liked it okay, but she hated that giant kid who worked there that everybody made such a fuss over. He wasn't working tonight, though. It was a Friday. She grabbed one of the side booths and drank her Pabst Blue Ribbon. It was that or Budweiser.

There weren't but three other customers there this early in the evening. Then a fourth walked in she thought she recognized as Charlie McCorry from high school. When he smiled at her and walked to her table she decided it was him.

“Janine Shanks, I ain't seen you since graduation,” he said presuming to sit down. Janine wondered how much he wanted to fuck her and how much she wanted to fuck him.

“I've been around. It's Bonner now, though.” See what he does with that one, she thought.

“Yeah, I heard you married old Keith Bonner. Heard you got a young 'un by him too.”

Emily. Janine hadn't thought about the baby once until now. She wondered if she was still asleep. Hopefully. Why did he have to bring that up? Now she really didn't want to sleep with him.

Charlie looked at his watch and swore to himself.

"Late for a big date or something?" Janine asked.

"About to be. I don't suppose you seen Hank Grady come crawling in or out of here have you?"

"I don't know Hank Grady," she said.

"Well there ain't much to know, but he's usually reliable. And I can't wait for him much longer."

Janine finished her beer and studied Charlie a moment. They were playing a little game. She could tell he was feeling her out, trying to decide how much she might know, how much he wanted her to know. She wasn't stupid. On the level, Charlie and his daddy, Charles McCory Sr., ran a salvage grocery warehouse outside of Lathan. Barely anyone actually bought from them, yet they always stayed in business and never seemed strapped for money. A lot of trucks came in and out of there. She'd heard Keith mention things a time or two. She had a pretty good idea what Charlie was into and she didn't know Hank Grady personally, but everybody knew about Hank. You didn't live in Culloden County for long and not hear the stories. Half bullshit, at least, she figured. The thought of him slinking about at this very joint hadn't been absent from her mind when she pulled up. It was odd, him not around.

"What are you running this time?" She asked.

Charlie smiled that Irish smile. "Nothing much in particular. You want to make fifty bucks?"

"Maybe. That what you offered Hank?" Janine tried to stay cool. She was still trying to decide how far she wanted to go with this. For only fifty bucks it couldn't be anything much. But, would it fit on the bike?

"That's what I'm offering you," Charlie said. "And the offer's about to close."

“Let me make a phone call,” she said, thinking again of the baby. Keith's mama better be home, the old bird. “Oh,” she added to McCory on her way to the bar. “How big is it?”

Outside, Charlie lifted two big octagonal steel cans out of his trunk. He opened one and Janine saw it held three old movie reels. *Wizard of Oz*. Charlie pulled a string of it out and Janine held it up to the light. It was the scene with the midgets.

“This legal?” she asked.

“Sure,” Charlie said. “Long as you don't get caught.”

Charlie lashed the two cans together and draped them over the back fender of the motorcycle. Janine got on, kicked it in neutral and rolled it back and forth to see how it felt with the extra weight. Those cans were damn heavy. Charlie handed her seventy-five

“You're doing me a big favor. I would just take it myself but I got to get down to town to meet another truck coming in. Don't guess I need to tell you where this is going?”

“Can't be but one place. How'd you come by something like this?”

“Old Mack comes to me and says what he wants. I find it if I can.”

“You get a lot of weird requests like this? What all kinds of stuff do you deal?” Janine asked looking down at the bike, thinking a black thought. She'd come to like it a whole lot, but it would never hold a car seat.

“You'd be surprised what people come looking for. Long as I can move it and I got a buyer, I can sell just about anything. Sold a yak last week.”

“No horseshit?”

“No horseshit,” he said. “You'll be all right with this? You know how to get there?”

“No problem,” Janine said and cranked the bike. Charlie got back in his car and left. Janine kicked it in first and gave it a little extra gas to get it rolling, then roared down the highway. The tins were pretty secure and didn't bother the handling too bad. But, she did let it die in a turn onto the Witch Creek Bridge.

"Shit," she said and cranked it up and let it die again. She felt like Keith making rookie mistakes and cursed herself even harder. She wondered if she was just nervous because of what she was doing. She got more nervous when she saw the patrol car creep up behind her.

The deputy got out and approached her. It was the fat one with the funny eye. Keep it together, she thought.

"You all right, ma'am?" he said.

Janine smiled a flustered smile. She felt like a hick. "Yeah, I'm just still getting used to it."

"Got to be careful on these things. Kill you faster than a bullet, you know."

"Yeah. I'll do that."

"What's this you got on the back here?" he asked fingering the tins.

Shit. "Oh, those?" Just tell the truth. Why not? "Those are movie tins," she said.

"Movie tins?"

"Yeah, there's a copy of *Wizard of Oz* in there."

"What you doing with that?"

"Taking it over to Mack's place."

"Oh yeah. That figures. That old coot loves this kind of stuff. He paying you?"

Walk softly. "Little bit," she said.

"This kind of thing legal?" he asked.

"I guess so. Hell, you're the cop."

"Yeah. Hell, I don't see why it wouldn't be. Just be careful on this thing now. Lot of drunks out this time of night, specially once the game's over."

The deputy touched his hat and got back in his car, flipped on his siren and wailed down the road. What a prick, she thought, and got her bike rolling again.

Mack George lived nearly at the other end of the county up past Jasperville and it took her about thirty minutes to get there, then

another five to creep down his driveway. Gravel. She didn't want to go through that again.

Everyone knew Mack was kind of crazy when he rebuilt his huge cabin to look like an old movie theater. He would invite all his friends over on the weekends to watch movies in his personal auditorium. Some said he'd spent half a million dollars on all the equipment he had. Well, if he can afford it, Janine supposed.

He'd definitely put in the work. The front wall was glass and Janine could see he'd decorated the inside to look like a real lobby, popcorn machine and all. She parked the bike next to Mack's Volvo. She tried carrying the tins up to the door, but they were so heavy she could barely budge them, so she put them back and rode them all the way up to the glass doors and beeped the bike's horn.

Nothing happened, so she hit it again. The horn sounded like something that ought to come from a Volkswagen or something. Then she tried laying on the throttle and let the exhaust do the talking. Finally, the old man showed up in the lobby holding a radio to his ear.

"Goddamn it, woman, don't you know the game's on? What the hell you want?" The radio blared with crowd noises and the announcer said something about a number forty-four. "Ha-ha got him. Atta boy."

"I got this heavy-ass movie for you, care of Charlie McCorry."

"You ain't Hank. What you doing with it?"

"I guess I'm Hank enough for tonight. Now, you want these damn tin cans or not?" Janine said getting irritated. "I can't lift the sons of bitches."

"Oh hold on a damn minute," Mack said setting the radio down and turning it up.

Together, they hoisted the tins up off the bike and Mack hauled them inside while Janine carried the radio and held it up where Mack could hear the game. Inside his lobby, he had tintypes from all the old classics hanging on the walls. *Casablanca*, *Gone with the Wind*, *Ben Hur*, *El Cid* and fifty others. There was also a gigantic stuffed tiger standing near the staircase.

"You want some candy? Popcorn?" he asked.

"No thanks," she said.

Janine followed Mack up the staircase into his attic-turned-projection booth. There was a big lamp housing with an exhaust pipe going into the ceiling. There was a stack of giant metal disks connected to a pole with all manner of little pulley rollers everywhere. Apparently, he would wind each individual reel together into one giant reel that lay flat on the disk, and through the elaborate pulley system fed into the projector and back out onto a take-up disk. He already had one movie sitting on the bottom platter, the new *Indiana Jones* movie that just came out. That must have cost him.

"Soon as the game's over I'm gone string it up. You want to stay and watch it?" he asked.

Janine almost said no straight out, but then thought about it. "Sure," she said.

She'd seen it before and watching it in Mack's auditorium wasn't all that special. The screen was big and all, but his stereo wasn't that great or maybe the print itself didn't even have a stereo track. She still thought the ending sucked.

She changed her mind about the candy on her way out and ate a crunch bar.

When she got back out on the bike headed for home, she really began to think. She didn't want to go home. There was something weird about being on the back of the machine. She was definitely taking it from Keith. He could drive the Ford, if he fixed it. He probably couldn't take care of Emily, though. She thought of Charlie McCory again. She wondered how much Mack paid him for the movie. When she'd thought about it long enough, she drove home, packed up some clothes, sold the baby and rode to Dallas

