

JESSE'S LUCKY KNIFE

Little Jesse only cared about two things: his girl Lorena, and a butterfly knife with the Ace of Spades printed on the outside. The knife was the one thing Jesse's pa had left him. The girl, well, Jesse got her all by himself. Jesse wasn't little everywhere.

One night out back of the butcher shop, Little Jesse was whooping it up with Sam and the boys, sucking back plenty of corn liquor. While Jesse was picking cards, he spied Sam doing something shifty under the table.

"What you got down there, Sam?"

Sam was a big man, sometimes went by the name of Barrelhouse. "What you saying, boy? You calling me a cheat?"

Jesse put his hand in his pocket, felt his knife. "I don't give a rat's ass what I call you. I just want your money, fair and square. Now what you hiding down there?"

Before Jesse or the others could move, Sam did what he did best: barrelled through the table, knocking Jesse to the ground.

Jesse whipped his knife out and flicked it open. Spun around and stuck it in Sam's neck. Plunged it in over and over, blood spurting on Jesse's clothes and face. Sam made short, wet sounds, like his mouth was full. Jesse laughed out loud, deep and harsh.

The boys jumped on top of Jesse, pulled him away, held his arms back and snatched the knife off him.

Jesse struggled in their grip, said, "If I don't get my knife back, someone else gonna die tonight."

Lorena was none too happy when Jesse walked in the door, drunk as a skunk and just as broke. So unhappy she rushed to the bedroom and flipped open a suitcase, started shoving all her dresses and underwear in.

“What the hell you think you doing?” Jesse said.

She didn't stop packing. “I be getting the hell away from you, that's what.”

He stumbled over, grabbed her arm, slapped her hard on the face. The sound echoed like the night stopped to hear it. Lorena gave Jesse a look he never seen before. Even in his drunken haze, Jesse knew he'd gone too far. He'd already lost his knife, now he was about to lose Lorena too.

With the suitcase half packed, Lorena slammed it shut, petticoats and such spilling out the sides. Holding her face so she wouldn't cry, she dragged the suitcase out of the room.

Jesse stared at the pattern on the rug, a fleur de something or other. He stood there until he heard the front door slam. The sound snapped him back into action.

He stomped over to the cupboard, rummaged around, found his .38 and some bullets in a shoebox. Jesse wasn't going to lose everything tonight, he'd make damn sure of that.

Lorena wasn't too far down the street, her suitcase bouncing on the road behind her.

“Lorena!” Jesse walked down the middle of the road, so drunk he found himself limping, almost dancing. “Come now, baby. Jesse says so.” He stopped, swaying, watched Lorena drag herself along like he wasn't even there.

Jesse screwed up his eyes, pointed the gun. Just at her legs. Didn't want to hurt her. That's when Jesse's shoulder flung back, sending the .38 skittering. The crack of gunfire came again and it hit him hard in the chest. This time Jesse fell.

There was shouting. Footsteps on the dark, wet street. Flashes of the boys, the cops. Lorena, yelling at them to stop shooting.

Jesse had trouble keeping his eyes open. Pain flowed like it was happening to someone else. Everything went cold.

Lorena crouched down next to Jesse, cradled his head. "Tell me what you want, baby."

"Lorena, where's Lorena?"

"Right here, Jess. You got to tell me something now, tell me what I supposed to do for you, after you're gone."

Jesse sputtered out the words. "Get my friend Willie. Get him to write me a song. About crapshooting, cards. And you."

"That it, Jess?"

"And get me back my knife."