



KATARINA BOUDREAUX

Banana Clip Heaven

BOUDREAUX

“It was real pretty like” Jaq says.

She looks at her diner date, and she doesn’t have much hope. He isn’t much to look at, which would be okay if he had some character.

Or some money, she thinks, and looks around at the diner.

The Circle Diner is brand new to town, and although Jaq is skeptical about it being a good first date setting, she doesn’t mind it really. As far as diner’s go, this one is first class, with all the pretty tiles and new counters just gleaming in the unnatural white lights.

“Must have had some good money or investors to build this up so nice” Jaq muses and looks at her date again.

This time she throws him an “I’m available” look, but he doesn’t respond. *He’s just not a talker*, she decides, and nods with him as he nods at her.

Desperate times, she thinks, and considers telling Rosie not to fix her up with any of her friends anymore.

She puts more salt on her bacon and cheesy grit omelet, and wonders how Rosie and her date are even friends. Rosie is so vivacious and dramatic; her date, Jaq thinks, is definitely not that.

Clearing her throat, Jaq says “so there we all are, at the station. Everything is like the Fourth of July; pretty banners, and lots of red, white, and blue just strewn up everywhere. I do like color.”

Jaq thinks about her yellow dress, and how maybe it isn’t great for the Circle Diner with its little straps and big bow, but she shrugs her shoulder. Rosie had done her

hair, and she told her she was looking like a summer day with a cloudless sky.

Now ain’t nothing could be wrong looking like a summer day, Jaq thinks, and squirms in her seat. Her date is staring at her, his fries and double cheeseburger getting cold on his plate.

“You gonna eat? Hate to eat with you just watching.”

Her date looks down at his plate and then at her. Obediently, he takes a french fry and puts it in his mouth, chews.

Well at least he ain’t no dimwit, she thinks, and takes a nice bite of omelet. Pretty smart putting everything up in one dish, she thinks; all the things a body needs in one omelet. *Little protein, little bacon, little grit -- genius idea*, she thinks.

“This is right good here” she says out loud, and then smiles.

Her date eats another french fry, and since he is chewing, Jaq fills the space with conversation.

“And so there we all are; mama and daddy, Lukey and his wife Beth, me, and Jimmy. That’s the whole family, see, and I was only I don’t know -- fifteen?”

She waits to see if he will ask her how old she is now. He doesn’t, and she is sort of disappointed, as she likes to say that she is ageless. It’s her saying, and it takes care of some of this nonsense about her having some miles on her.

Working at a beauty shop has its advantages, and Jaq knows how to puff up, slim down, and double gloss. By

the time she is done, doesn't matter how many miles she has on her; what matters is how many miles she's got to go.

She brushes her hair back behind her shoulder and continues. "Now it was hot. I mean, ain't it always hot?"

Her date nods at her, and she notices that he has eaten most of his french fries but hasn't touched the double cheese burger.

"What's wrong with that burger? Ain't you wantin' to taste on it?"

She takes another bite of omelet, and watches her date pick up his fork and knife and cut a bite out of the burger.

Now hold up, she thinks, and watches him put the cut out bite in his mouth. Jaq can put up with a one-sided conversation, that's for sure; she don't even mind carrying the conversation.

But a man ain't no kind of man if he gotta cut his burger up to eat it.

Her date smiles at her and Jaq gives him the stare down. She can't just up and leave in the middle of a dinner date, as she's got more class than that, but she takes a bigger bite of omelet so she can get things moving along to the ending.

Enough chit-chat, Jaq thinks, and takes another too-big bite.

She chews, and he is watching her, and she doesn't like being watched, so she sighs and starts in on some conver

sating again.

"Now Lukey was being shipped on out, and he just being nineteen, just being married and all that, we all thought it was a shame."

Her date nods, and then picks up his burger and takes a bite.

Well now, Jaq thinks; nothing wrong with a man testing the waters a bit before taking a bite. She thinks on it, then decides she likes that he's a cautious man.

Not the kind to go running off with some floozy, spur of the moment on a whim or nothing. *Kind of man who'd stay on home*, she thinks.

She smiles at her date, and he smiles at her. They both chew, and she notices that he has a little too much grease in his hair.

"Now you know I can't help myself, being a stylist and all that, so I'm just gonna say this. You don't need so much product; a little goes a long way, believe me honey, and you have nice thick hair."

Jaq takes a sip of her coffee, and wonders if she has that pack of mints in her purse still or if she left them at the shop.

"No offense" she says, but her date doesn't look offended. He just keeps looking at her like he ain't never seen a pretty girl.

Jaq feels a little awkward now, being all personal like, so she says, "Lukey going all the way to Iraq and just nineteen. Well, I told him then, that's sure one way to get on out of this popsicle stand."

She laughs at her own joke, and looks to see if her date laughs. He doesn't, but she thinks maybe he wants to, as he puts the burger down.

Maybe he has some indigestion or something, she thinks, and says "Well don't you know Beth is carrying on something terrible."

Her date reaches for the ketchup bottle and squeezes some on to his plate. He dips his burger into it, then takes another bite.

Jaq thinks this is a good sign; a man eats when he is happy, feeling comfortable in his surroundings.

"Now you won't guess what she was wearing."

Her date looks at her over the burger and shakes his head no.

Jaq puts her fork down and goes for the dramatic. "100 degrees and dripping for 101, and Beth wearing a sweat-shirt to her knees AND NO SHORTS."

Jaq sits back in the booth, plush leather welcoming her, and she pulls the front of her dress down a little bit.

Just enough to beckon, she thinks, and puffs out her chest.

Her date takes another bite of his burger and it looks like he doesn't even notice. Now Jaq knows she has a nice figure, and with it being all in yellow, this indifference sort of wounds her pride, so she rushes on.

"No shorts at all. Big sweatshirt of Lukey's with flip-flops. Now I was young, but I knew what was going on in the world even then, and the way she was pitching it left and right, you just knew they had done a

little business right before."

Jaq arches her right eyebrow suggestively, but her date is looking at his plate. It is empty, but he is staring at it like he doesn't remember eating anything at all.

Man's got an appetite, Jaq thinks, and says, "You want some more?"

Her date shakes his head no, and stares at her. His shirt collar isn't that crisp, she notices, and come to think of it, his shirt isn't that clean.

Maybe he's a working man, she decides, and says, "So we all tell Lukey take care, that we love him, all those things families do, and Mama's crying, but we all proud that our Lukey gonna serve the country."

Jaq smiles over the memory; Lukey looked so handsome all in uniform, and it was just like one of those made for TV movies the way everything was so pretty, and how they were all crying and loving on their soldier.

The waitress comes by, and Jaq says that everything was good, and when her date doesn't ask for the check, she does.

Hope he ain't gonna make me pay mine, she thinks, and smiles a nice smile at her date. He is wiping his forehead with a napkin, and Jaq decides to ignore this, as some people just sweat and that's a fact.

"Then Beth just up and throws her ring in his face. I mean right on up in there; I saw it bounce off his nose and in the sun, it sparkled up in the air and then bounced on the pavement like so many Christmas lights flashing."

The waitress folds the bill and puts it in the middle of

the table. Her date doesn't make any move to look at it, and Jaq gets a little nervous about it all, so she continues her story.

"She was yelling about not waiting or no man to come on back or die, and how he ain't no good in the sack anyway, and how she was filing for annulment right away." Jaq swirls her coffee and says, "Now they only been married for six weeks then, so I'm guessing she thought she could just wipe that marriage away."

Her date takes a sip of water, then looks around the diner.

Jaq stiffens, thinks maybe this isn't a good story for a first date what with the divorce bit and sack bit, but she plows on.

Finish what I start, she thinks. "Well Lukey being a soldier, just stoops down and picks up that ring. Mama really starts in on the cryin' now, and I'm crying a bit now too, of course, and we all looking at Lukey to see if he gonna crumble down or what's he going to do."

She waits to see if her date will look back at her, and he does. Jaq leans forward and tries to give him a nice view of cleavage.

"Well Lukey just slapped Beth right across the face. Scared us all, seeing our Lukey slapping on a woman, but Beth stopped her yelling. He put the ring back on her finger and he said something in her ear, and then turned around and got on the train 'cause you know it don't wait on nobody."

Her date is looking at her hair, and she sits back. A

man who doesn't look at cleavage ain't gonna be doing nothing to cleavage, she thinks, and wishes he would pick up the check and pay it.

She is quiet, and after a few minutes, Jaq sighs and says, "Don't you wanna know what he said to her?"

Her date nods yes, and Jaq sighs. "Well he said when you find someone else to marry you, bitch, you let me know."

Jaq nods her head. "She never did. Now he's back, and they gonna have a baby."

Jaq takes her last sip of coffee, and thinks up different ways to make Rosie sorry for setting her up on this date.

She puts the coffee cup down on the table and pushes back from it. "Well, I guess I'm gonna get to going now."

Hesitating, she waits to see if her date says anything, or makes like he gonna stand up, or what.

He doesn't, but he does nod to her, so Jaq puts out her hand.

"Nice to meet you. Good diner, glad we came." Jaq knows her words are sounding hollow, but she doesn't care. She wants out, and she doesn't want to pay.

Her date shakes her hand, but doesn't stand up.

Jaq feels anger like a big inner tube floating around her shoulders, and she turns, making sure her yellow dress flares out a bit, and walks to the front of the diner, and out the door.

Her car is right out front, and she holds the door open for another woman walking in. She mumbles a hello,

then moves to the driver's side door of her neat, sporty little white Ford Taurus.

Now her entire body is floating on this inner tube of indignation, and her knees are starting to tremble with the weight of it.

Unlocking the door, she flops down on the front seat, slams the car door, and makes a mental list of all the things about her that is superior, and all the things about him that were...

The waitress is knocking on her window. Jaq puts her keys in the ignition, turns it to give it power, then rolls the window down.

"You forgot to pay your part," the waitress says.

Jaq doesn't remember the last time she was mortified, but she is feeling it now as her inner tube becomes a straight jacket.

"Oh Lord, I forgot." Jaq pulls her handbag from the seat, and rummages through for a twenty. She is nervous, and so she babbles, "Well now, you know how it is, being a woman and all that; blind dates sometimes don't go so well, and I was so flustered after that one I just plumb forgot to come on in and..."

"Blind date?"

The waitress is looking at Jaq, and Jaq stammers on.

"Why yes. I don't think he's much of a talker, and that didn't look good from the..."

"Lady, that's Mr. L.J. He don't talk because he can't -- deaf and dumb. We all thought you was his niece."

Jaq feels something like warm molasses snake its way

through her intestines and settle in her colon. She hands the waitress twenty dollars through the window and laughs. "Ha, ha -- yes, call it my little blind date. Can't help but hope the man talks some day, God willing and all that. Lovely seeing him after all these years - just a dream come true really. My mama's brother."

The waitress stares a second, then turns and goes into the diner.

Jaq waits one, two, three, then backs up quick, shifts into drive, and hits the gas, not waiting for the change.

When she hits the next county, Jaq pulls off to the side of the road and looks at her phone.

Tuesday, October 22nd reads the date.

Jaq puts her head on the steering wheel and closes her eyes. Funny how 2's can sometimes look like 3's when you're writing with a hair dryer in one hand, and banana clips in the other.