

Boom Boom Boom Boom

by Steven Gowin

"You only just watch them damned cowboy shows and drink that cheap beer," Lydia crabbed at Little Jessie.

"Whyn't ya get out and do sumpin'? See a show that ain't *Rawhide*. Make a friend; don't be a worm no more."

Little Jessie'd spent 30 years taking orders in the Canal Zone with only brief visits home. He'd seen a fellow gamble away his life's savings, survived a near fatal explosion, and witnessed a man crushed and drowned in the Miraflores locks.

"You like guitar?" Lydia badgered Jessie, when all he really wanted was a cold PBR, *Gunsmoke*, and some peace. "I said, guitar what you like?" Jessie nodded and said, "Sure enough, and squeeze box and saxophone, why?"

"Why??? Why is cause I ain't standin' another night of you and them cowboys." Lydia was one of those ladies who wears a big hat to church on Sunday, every Sunday. She said, "I know you know I'm right."

Jessie didn't care about right. He only cared about meanness and bossing and lack thereof. But Lydia was worse and worse. He couldn't do anything, say anything, without her telling him what was wrong with him.

The next evening, holding the ticket Lydia'd bought him in hand, Jessie rode the 22 Fillmore across town to where the marquee flashed,

John Lee's Boom BOOM ROOM!!!

The red and blue neon cheered Jessie, he admitted, and he liked the folks headed in wearing furs and finery and jewels. He guessed this might just be alright, and he took a seat right up front.

Jessie ordered a PBR from a long legged waitress whose tight tight leopard print mini sheathed a curvy rear. "Can't beat a cold PBR. Not even with a stick," she remarked, "I'm La KeeSha, your server tonight, all yours baby."

The big act that evening, "LA Fats and His Rhythm Cats," had motored all the way up from, "Loz Anga Leezzz" and at nine PM, give or take, the Cats blasted loud and sweet into their first number, "Kokomo Blues," followed by a big brassy "Caledonia," then "Cry, Cry, Cry."

They covered Johnny Otis and Louis Jordan and Big Joe Turner. Jessie thought his favorite might have been Johnny Moore's twelve bar, "Driftin' and Driftin' Just Like a Ship Out On the Sea."

As La KeeSha, delivered another round, Jessie laughed, "Man, that Fats just nothin' but a powerhouse, nothin' but 'Jesus Rolled Away the Stone' and them Cats his apostles." La KeeSha replied, "Ya'll a real Blues Daddy now."

Jessie'd never heard of any of those R&B men before, but he had a good memory, and when he got home, he repeated everything back to Lydia... the titles of all they'd played, and most of the words. And he told her all about LA Fats.

"Boy stand six foot five, just black as coal. He a big man, but he don't sweat. Ever. Perspiration just bead on up on them Rhythm Cats; they sweat like pigs and'll mop it off with they kerchiefs. But not the fat man."

And you never see nothin' like them Rhythm Cats, dancin' and jivin' ever minute they up there. Swingin' them saxes and bones side to side, tippin' em up to the sky, tippin' em to Fats hisself. The man a god, a god damned guitar god."

Jessie said he'd be heading back to the Boom Boom that next night. But Lydia did not approve, and she did not like his crazy talk. She said, "You watch it Little Man. You real close to blaspheming. You on the edge, right on the edge."

A few days later, Lydia telephoned her sister and moaned that she, "never ever ever shoulda send Jessie down to that Boom Boom Room. He done already ordered on up more'n four hundred dollar worth'n blues music offin a bunch o' Russian w w webs. You ever hear of Memphis Minnie or Johnny Ace?"

Now, not only had Jessie invested in a blues library, he'd also bought a new wardrobe to make his nines at the Boom Boom. Got

him a sharkskin suit that “shimmer like a oil slick after rain,” black dress shirt, black Stetson, and he trimmed his mustache to a black pencil line.

His bolo sported a gold clasp and diamond tipped aglets. His Tony Lama alligators shined like Klondike gold. He pierced an ear for a pearl stud, and he began carrying pension cash in a gold money clip. He called the look his “dyin' crapshooter,” but Lydia called it “foolishness pure and simple.”

Lydia told her sister, “He think he puttin' sumpin' over, but I show him; I show him alright,” and she put a scheme in place. Soon after, of a Saturday night, as Jessie stood at the mirror splashing on English Leather and combing back his thin straightened hair, Lydia came up behind him smiling.

“*Rifleman* startin' up tonight, sugar pie; c'mon and lookie here.” She led Jessie back to the den where he'd watched so many *Death Valley Days* and *Wagon Trains* and *Cheyennes*; she'd spread his Lazy Boy with his favorite Afghan.

A cold PBR sweated on an end table beside the recliner, and a brand new 46 inch, high resolution, surround sound audio, super bright LCD, glared at him from the TV cabinet.

Jessie shuffled around the room. He lifted the Afghan and fumbled with the remote. He stared out the window, down the hall, anywhere to avoid looking Lydia in the eye, but finally, slowly, he began.

“Baby, you been a mean mean woman. I know you know you heart been hard and cold as ice. You can't do me no more thatta way you been doin'. That's all, darlin'. That is all.” He left the house then and closed the door gently behind him.

Jessie strode towards the the 22 Fillmore humming “Mojo Working,” and swinging his new ebony walking stick. He was headed for the Boom Boom Room again and sweet sweet La KeeSha.

