

The Ballad of Jayne

# The Ballad of Jayne

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The true story of a tortured teen who reached out to a desparate girl on the verge of ending her life.



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*Now it all seems funny, kinda like a dream,*

*Things ain't always what they seem, what a shame, what happened to Jayne* -LA Guns

Finally, I saw the flames through the trees and pulled into an opening between some other cars. Even with just the light from the fire, I could see the dust lifting up in the summer night. I just washed this car today. Oh well, some things have to be sacrificed if you're going to get to a good trash can punch party.

I got out of the car and straightened my jean jacket. Even though it was a late July night in East Texas I wasn't hot. I buttoned the bottom button. I had no shirt. These types of haute culture events had seen the loss of so many shirts that I didn't bother. Just the jacket.

Usually these gatherings were put on by the 21+ crowd who hadn't moved on and gotten a real job yet. Either that or they were just socially maladjusted and seemed to play better with those younger than their peer group and would be coming to these things until they were 30 or in prison. Of course, any self-respecting male who showed up either needed to bring something to put in the can or else provide cash. I had cash tonight.

I noticed my cousin's truck parked deeper in the woods across the clearing but I kept going anyway. I don't really remember how the situation between us had gotten so bad. Maybe it was all the drinking, drugs, violence or possibly just the fact that I thought he was a complete dumbass. I'm sure his opinion of me was even lower--but all that's a different story. Never mind, that's not why I was here tonight. I'm just here for some drinks.

There is a bonfire by the trash can, which, yes, really is a trash can with a giant punch bowl inside on ice, filled with whatever people had to bring. Big stack of SOLO cups--color was irrelevant. I can see Warren pouring himself a cup. Most of the people are away from the fire in the shadows on tailgates or the hoods of cars so it's hard to know exactly who is attending this redneck social. A radio was playing from one of the cars--80's pop music.

Some girl I didn't recognize came up to Warren before I got there. She was dressed pretty typical of an East Texas trash can punch party--bikini top and cut-off shorts. Her hair was down and limp as if it were drying from an earlier swim. I couldn't tell what she was asking him. As I walked into the range of the fire, Warren put on his widest grin and pointed her toward me, "You should ask him about that." This girl, who I could now tell had made a few too many trips to the can looked at me with tear streaked cheeks and desperate eyes and said, "Do you have a gun?"

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Well, this wasn't how I was hoping my conversation with the bikini top girl would start. Gunplay conversations weren't typically mentioned until allot more time and festivities had passed at these type of events. Of course I had a gun. Everyone who knew me knew that it was either tucked in the middle of my back or in my car. Certainly I wasn't going to tell her that. I didn't even know her. It was in the car.

â Why are you trying to find a gun?â Patience wasn't thin, just non-existent.

â Because,â she said, â I want to kill myself!â Definitely not going to be my night. I didn't even have anything to drink yet! Unfortunately for this poor kid, I was the last person she needed to be talking to. I was only 17 but in the middle of a mid-life crisis. Hell, if something didn't change soon, these could be my twilight years.

â Listen, if I give you a gun and you kill yourself, at a minimum, my gun will be collected as evidence and I'll be charged with willful endangerment if not manslaughter.â No drinks yet- still thinking pretty clearly. My heart and eyes like flint stone in the dark. She was really starting to sob now. I wasn't giving an inch, just the unfeeling stare.

I mean, come on, probably half the people at this place had thoughts of killing themselves at one time or another. I wasn't up for the drama. I still hadn't gotten a drink yet!

Any composure she had left in her fell away and she began to shake.

â I just want to die!â she wailed and then leaned forward with her face in her hands, barely able to stay upright she was crying so hard.

I can't describe exactly how I knew she was serious. Something about the way she cried out chipped at the darkness inside me. I knew she really *meant* it. Genuine desire for death wasn't a strange concept for me. That's something about teen angst. You are so familiar with all the crap that the real thing stands out. This pain was different. Like standing next to huge bell that has been struck. Now I had to do something.

â Come here kid,â New, different tone now. I took her gently by the upper arm and started leading her toward a girl I recognized between two cars. She seemed to be getting some air back but walking was still a challenge for her.

â Sharon, who's this girl with?â Suddenly I'm the camp guidance counselor. One thing I do know for sure, this girl didn't get this far back into Jerkwater, USA, by herself.

â She's here with your cousin,â Nope. Not my night. This was going from bad to really dangerous.

â Where is he?â Might as well get this over with.

â Last I saw him, he was chasing someone into the woods with a knife.â Just a matter-of-fact statement. People, please believe if I was making this up, surely I could do better. That's actually what happened and I can't seem to think of anything better to make up right now.

The sobbing girl beside me was again able to stand upright without too much support. I steadied her against the car where she could lean over on her elbows with her chin in her hands. I slid onto the hood backwards so that I could see her face.

â What's happening with you kiddo,â I said. No longer the totally annoyed jean jacket jerk guy.

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“I am not supposed to talk about it. None of us were.” Again the crying.

“You’ve already asked me for a gun to shoot yourself with. I am thinking now we can talk about almost anything.”

“It’s my turn. I have to die now.” A hitching sob stole up from within her and choked her off.

“What do you mean ‘your turn’?” I asked, really puzzled now.

Long shuddering sigh, “We all made a suicide pact and now I am the only one left.”

I’ve got to say in Deep East Texas, suicide is a very private undertaking. It’s a compilation of your own personal, seemingly insurmountable failures and of the certain disgrace that will be brought upon your whole, sorry family. If you do it, you don’t share it. Of course, if you give your word to do so then living with the cowardice and ridicule of not going through with it would likely lead you closer to the deed while all but eliminating avenues of escape. That’s why rednecks usually just keep it quiet until they get up one morning and just get it done.

Suicide pacts were about as real to me as any other urban legend-like waking up in a hotel bathtub with no kidneys.

“Who did you make a suicide pact with?”

“With my two best friends, Monica and Janey.” She let out a light groan at the end but her composure was better.

“Monica, she took too many pills and died over 3 months ago. It had been so long since we made that pact, I didn’t think we were really going to do it anymore!” She started to cry softly but she couldn’t keep the story inside anymore.

“And just today--today I found out about Janey. Her family had left together for summer vacation. She took her father’s gun and hid it in her purse. When they stopped at a gas station she took several big air gulps now she went into the bathroom and she shot herself!” She lost it again, her shoulders shaking as she sobbed. I put my arm around her as she cried. I could almost feel the pain pouring out of her. More than that, I couldn’t get the picture of that girl dying in a filthy gas station bathroom for absolutely no reason. A girl I had never met and would never know.

She finally collected herself and straightened up to look in my eyes. “You understand why I have to die now? They kept their word and now it’s my turn. I have to do this. I owe them that.”

What do I say now? My wheels were really turning but this was way out of my ordinary. This had to be way out of anybody’s ordinary. Does she have a religious reservation? I didn’t see that in her eyes. How do I convince her that she shouldn’t commit self-murder without condemning her friends to hell? She didn’t seem all that worried about being shot. When was my psycho cousin going to pop out of nowhere and join this party?

I threw out everything I could think of on the hood of that car but she wasn’t biting. She seemed totally set. I am getting no traction, making no headway. I don’t really remember the arguments that fell flat. Time seemed to stretch on. I lost all awareness of the surrounding music and passing people. The only thing on my mind was helping the girl leaned against this car. Strangely, I wasn’t even thinking about having a drink anymore.

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“What would it do to your mother if you killed yourself?”

“My Mom split when I was a baby. It’s just me and my Dad.” “OK, no Mom.” “Tell me about your dad.”

“He’s great. He’s done almost everything for me.” “Finally, this had to be the opening I was searching for.”

“Your friends are gone. There’s nothing you can do for them now but all the pain, emptiness and heartache your feeling – you’re going to put your father through this same pain and he won’t even know why.”

She looked up and I think really saw me for the first time. She was a lovely girl. I could see a change happening behind her eyes.

“You’re right! I can’t put my Dad through this! He’s got no one without me.”

“You need to tell him what’s going on.” “Boy was that the truth.”

“I have to go call him, now!” “How did we live without cell phones?”

“Sharon? Do you have my clothes? I’ve got to change and go!” “What a switch! It was honestly like seeing a person getting released from a death sentence and I guess it was. As bizarre as this night had been, her transformation from despondency to elation was one of the biggest turnarounds I’ve witnessed.”

Sharon brought her clothes. “Here, hold these” she said. She didn’t even seem drunk anymore. She was giddy! She completely undressed there between the cars and took her dry clothes from me a piece at a time and re-dressed. Then, she hugged me around the neck so tight I thought I was going to choke.

“What the hell is going on here!” “Crazy cousin, right on cue.”

“I need to go home” she turned and said without missing a beat.

“What is he doing here?” “I guess the run through the woods had confused him.”

“I’m just going home,” I said. And this time, it was true.

I wish I could remember that girl’s name but I can’t. She called me the next night. She had gotten my number from Sharon (yes, my parent’s home number-only one I had). She wanted to know if I wanted to go out. Honestly, the only part of my heart that wasn’t completely empty already belonged to someone else. But that’s an entirely different story. I declined and never heard from her again.

What I’ve never forgotten is the tragedy of Janey’s end that she told me about that night. I can’t help but imagine her parent’s original annoyance about how long she was gone. Eventually, their annoyance became concern and then worry when she wouldn’t answer the door. Some attendant had to get the second bathroom key, where ever that was kept.

What horror they must have felt upon getting into that room. I don’t know if they ever learned what happened to their little girl.

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Whatâs my take away? I have three children of my own now. Theyâre not that little anymore. I certainly havenât been a great parent, probably just âgoodâ on occasion. The one thing I try my best to stress to them is how much I love them. They think Iâm a good Dad but I tell them thatâs just because they donât know yet how bad Iâve messed it up. They can never say though, that they werenât truly loved.

*â You were always on my mind, childlike summer days in the sun*

*Slowly wishes turn to sadness, Time don't heal a broken gun*

*I wish I'd never let u go*

*Hear me now cause I want ya to know*

*That it all seems funny kinda like a dream, Things ain't always what they seem,*

*What a shame what happened to Jayneâs â LA Guns, The Ballad of Jayne*

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