

Fool In Search of a Country Song

By Andy Turner

No matter what you tried, you could bet your ass mud had your name on it in the parking lot of Hank's Gentleman's Club. It could have been bone dry for a month or more, but Hank's would still have deep, black holes filled to the tip-top with thick-ass mud, willing and waiting to claim your tires or your shoes. My truck landed in one of them holes when I missed Hank's entrance, flying instead over the curb and into the lot.

My foot splashed down in a mud puddle soon as I stepped out of my truck. I still had on my steel-toed work boots, so I didn't give a monkey's ass about getting mud all over them. For a second before going on, I stared at my breath in the air. It was a little after 11. I could hear the jukebox wailing as soon as I got near the door. Hank fired the DJ a few weeks back for trying to spy on the girls while they were changing. Hank said damn DJs cost too damn much when you got a perfectly good jukebox that makes money instead of damn costing money and trying to sneak a peek at the girls. Damn pervert.

About ten guys were inside, most of them sitting by themselves at tables. Two of the dancers were sitting together at a table, waiting to go on, sucking on Newports and talking about George Clooney's ass.

Ed Looney was sitting at the runway with his dollar bills clinched tight in his hands, eyes intent on the dancer as she was shakin' it every which a way. Ed was always at Hank's, always at the same seat, eyeballing the dancers, always wearing a black shirt and black jeans. I stared at the dancer while she was flopping around. The lights flashed against her shiny body. Red, purple, then pink. She was wearing two pink tassels across her nipples and had on a matching G-string. She was older than the rest. Heavy in the ass and big, fat lips. As I stared up at her lips, she licked them, first the top, then the bottom. I stopped staring.

Hank's was beer only. People turn mean on you when they get liquor in 'em, Hank said. Pain in the ass to get your liquor license back, Hank said. Just make sure the damn stall door is closed before you open the bottle, Hank said.

"Blue?"

"Yep," I told Hank, giving a buck and getting a frosty cold Pabst Blue Ribbon and a Mason jar to pour it in.

"What's the story?" he asked, wiping his hands on his shirt that read: *Every time I get my shit together, I step in it.*

"Not nothing. Just tickled as shit to be off for the weekend."

"Boy, you got a gravy job, what you complaining about? The shipyard ain't shit. You should try running this place. Horny, drunk bastards."

"You're full of it, Hank."

"Sheeit. Last night I caught some twisted son-of-a-bitch trying to squirt off right there at the runway. Tried to hide the shit with a copy of goddamned Solider of Fortune magazine. Beating off at the damned runway. People used to wouldn't even think about doing something like that. How would you like someone to come down to the shipyard and slap their pecker right where you were working?"

"Well, I ain't as attractive as you, Hank."

"You got that right, smartass."

I sipped on my beer and took in Hank's from my spot at the bar. A "Gentleman's Club." Horseshit. Hank calls it that, but you'd be hard pressed to find anyone in Hank's who calls himself a gentleman. Sure as shit ain't gonna find anyone out there calling us that.

"Another one?" Hank asked as I downed the rest of my Pabst.

"Sure. Cindy won't be home before three anyway."

It had been that way for six months or more. I worked until five at night, and she left at five and didn't get home until after three in the morning. I was normally either asleep or passed out by time she got home. I went to Hank's a few nights a week, always on Friday. Cindy and I might see each other for a little while in the morning, but normally I was doing stuff outside and she was inside cleaning or watching damned Judge Judy. The rest of the time? Hell, we'd just argue. We'd stopped screwing. I'd touch her and she'd kinda twitch up. Wouldn't even bother to tell me she had a headache. Just say, "Naw, my back's been acting up again." What was she doing to her back?

A young girl, couldn't have been a minute over 18, came on stage. She reminded me a little of Cindy when she was that age. Straight brown hair that just nibbled at her ears. Brown eyes the color of Moon Pies. I thought about Cindy as I watched her dance. I remembered when shit was better. That's what fools do instead of trying to change anything. When we were in high school, Cindy and I would spend whole afternoons at her parents' house with our tongues down each other's throat. One of those times we jumped in the shower with all of our clothes on, ripping them all off until we were both naked. That was our first time. I was so scared her dad was gonna bust in and shoot off my dick. I didn't know what I was doing. My hair was long then, and the water had caused all my hair to fall down on my face. I remember trying to push it back, trying to keep up with what was going on.

Blake Matthews, a 110-percent asshole I knew in high school, stumbled in while I was looking at the jukebox, trying to make up my mind as to whether I should play Merle Haggard or Willie Nelson. As "Pour Some Sugar on Me" played, I blew Blake a kiss, he gave me a dirty look. I picked Hag. I was in a Hag mood. I decided to play pool and pretend like the ball was Blake's head. I wrote my name on the board. No quarters on the table.

"Show me them titties," was how Blake introduced himself. Hank eyed him.

The game ended as the one guy sank in the eight ball. He had a smile that told me he was gonna kick my ass good in pool.

"Rack 'em up, Junior," he said, extending his slender hand for me to shake. "My name is Cooper, but you can call me Cooper."

Cooper was a skinny guy with long, greasy red hair that dripped out of a Rusty Wallace racing cap. The whole time he talked he rubbed his chest square in the center. He lit a cigarette and stuck it in his mouth before rubbing more chalk on his hands. Chalk was all over his shirts and pants.

"Don't think I've seen you in here before," I told him, chalking my stick.

"First time. I live in Carolina. Came up here cause my friend told me he was gonna hook me with up some action, you know. Shit fell through, so I came here to look at a couple few titties."

He moved around the table, knocking in three low balls without even looking up at me.

“Besides, this ain’t far from where I live. My house is right on the border. In fact, I can piss across my ditch into Virginia. Not that I do--necessarily.” Another high ball dropped in the corner pocket. And he just kept going.

“Damn. Looks like I’m screwed.”

“Don’t worry, Cap’n. I’ll use Vaseline,” he said, knocking in the last, lonesome solid but scratching in the process. He had gone on for so long that the cigarette that hung from his lips was half ash.

I knocked the cue ball off the table and it landed under a chair by the runway. Someone in the back yelled, “Another \$1 in the jukebox.” As I picked it up, I noticed a guy wearing a Dale “The Intimidator” Earnhardt jacket and snakeskin cowboys eyeballing me like I’d just banged his grandmother. Dale was a tall bastard with a Tom Selleck moustache growing above his lips, which turned to a smile when he noticed I was looking at him.

“I Think I’ll Just Stay Here and Drink” came on the jukebox, so I felt obliged to get another Pabst for me and Cooper after tossing the cue ball back on the table. Cooper thanked me for the beer, took a sip, nodded at the right corner pocket and knocked in the eight ball.

“Shit.”

“Play again?”

“Nah, I think I’m just gonna finish my beer and head home.”

“Suit yourself, ace.”

Melanie came on stage to dance. She ran her hands through her hair before walking up the steps to the runway. The little she had on was all black.

“*My mind ain’t nothin’ but a total blank,*” Merle sang, cutting through my insides like a honky tonk surgeon.

Blake was getting drunker and more obnoxious. Ed Looney sat beside him, not saying a word, looking up at Melanie. Blake kept jumping up and down in his seat, knocking into Ed and spilling his beer all over him. Nothing. Ed was quiet. John Lee Hooker came on the jukebox. *Boom, boom, boom.* Melanie grabbed hold of the pole, a confident smile sliding off her lips. She teased a young guy who had leaned in close to the runway, dipping those blond curls on his face, tickling his eyeballs.

“Hey, Melanie. You and me after you get off. What do you think? Sound good, honey?” Blake yelled at her, spilling more beer.

Nothing.

“You hear me?”

Still dancing. “C’mon, baby.” *Boom, boom, boom.*

“Don’t try to ignore me. I know you hear me. Slut.”

It was like something ripped. Ed rose from his seat, giving the meanest look to Blake I had ever seen one man give another.

“I’m trying to look at the titties,” was all he said.

“Fuck you, loser. Why don’t you just go home, fat fuck.”

Hank came over.

“You’re gonna have to leave,” he told Blake. “Carry your ass down the road.”

“I ain’t fucking leaving,” Blake said, taking a swing at Hank and landing his fist deep in Hank’s rib cage.

He caught Hank off-guard and Hank ended up flat on his ass. While Blake was looking down at Hank, Ed Looney chopped Blake dead in the neck. That son-of-a-bitch fell to the floor right next to Hank. Blake’s rat head bounced once on the floor like a scoop of mashed potatoes with gravy. He tried to talk and couldn’t. The back of his head was dripping blood on the floor. Couldn’t get his ass off the floor.

“That had to hurt, partner,” Cooper offered as he walked by on his way out, scratching his nuts.

Ed sat back down like nothing happened, with a look that resembled satisfaction, but it was Ed, so it also resembled not much at all. Someone tried to help Hank up, but he refused and got up on his own. Hank kicked Blake hard as he could in the stomach with his cowboy boot. Blake let out a pathetic whimper that was something like an acknowledgement he was a dumbass. Hank grabbed Blake by the seat of his pants and tossed him outside. “Don’t bring your ass back in here,” before adding, “at least not for a week or two.” Hank returned behind the bar and resumed beer slinging like nothing had happened.

Melanie had put on a black slip and was in the corner smoking. I asked her if she was OK, and she said, “That little shit ain’t worth worrying about” as she blew out smoke.

“Well, at least you have Ed protecting you.”

“Damn straight. You better act right, hun.”

“I’ll keep that in mind,” and tipped my hat toward her like a jackass.

Shaking my head, I walked over to Hank. “One more Pabst for the road, Hank.”

“Be careful on your way home, Billy. Cops sure enough will pull your ass over.”

“I know, Hank.” I put the beer in my coat pocket. “Have a good night.”

One of the strippers, Two-Ton Tammy, went out before me and got in someone’s passenger seat. She came up with that moniker herself and was known to add, “with two top-notch tits.” She was a big girl and damn proud of it. Boasting a pair of 40G’s, killer attitude and sex appeal to spare, Tammy could make a linebacker blush -- and cum in Hank’s parking lot for an extra 40 bucks. “Holy humdinger, here’s a lady with hellacious hooters, gentlemen” was how Little Bobby, the pervert DJ, once introduced her. Rumor had it that Tammy became a stripper soon after her mama drained a Liquid Plumr cocktail.

Dale was leaning against my truck when I got outside.

“What do you want, Dale?” I asked.

“My name ain’t Dale. It’s John, and I’m the man who’s fucking your wife.” He pulled his hand from his back and brought out a .38 special.

He pointed it at me and said, “Here’s how it’s gonna be. Cindy wants a divorce. You’re gonna give it to her. You ain’t gonna say shit about shit and I won’t beat the living shit out of you or shoot you.” He brought the revolver down. “I know you might think this is a bit overly forceful, but I like to get my point across.”

“Fuck you,” seemed like the appropriate thing to say, so that’s what I said.

Dale-John spit then said, “You ain’t fucking nobody. Cindy said you ain’t fucked in six months. That’s fine with me, because I prefer her pussy clean and to myself. But

she said you spent all your time chasing skanks at this rundown titty bar, playing that old, pity me, country shit. Shame, shame.”

A man who fucks your wife and points a gun at you can still have a point. But I didn't feel like agreeing with him.

“I'll fucking kill you. I've got guns, too.” I didn't. “But why don't you put the gun down and fight me like a man, you son-of-a-bitch.”

He kept the gun instead and stepped toward me and punched me in the gut. I swung at his head, missed and then felt like I was going to throw up. As I stumbled backward, I noticed Cooper coming up slowly behind him and he had a shotgun in his hands. He smiled at me. Buying him that beer had apparently been a smart purchase.

Cooper put the gun to Dale-John's head and said, “Hey asshole, why don't you cease and desist?”

Dale-John froze and said, “Who the fuck are you? This ain't none of your fuckin' business.”

“Well, my name is Cooper, and I'm from North Carolina. Drop the gun on the ground, son.” He cocked the shotgun for emphasis.

“Your ass is mine, faggot.” But he did what Cooper said.

“Hey, Billy, why don't you grab that gun and we'll call the cops on The Intimidator here. Have I mentioned how much I fuckin' hate Chevy's?”

I picked up the gun and started to walk inside and tell Hank to call the police. But with visions of his hands touching my wife and him smiling like Luke Cocksucker, I turned back around and smacked Dale-John in the mouth as hard as I could with his piece. The blood from his mouth raced him to the ground as he fell to his knees. He spit out a few teeth or parts of teeth and said something, but I wasn't listening.

Cooper stopped grinning for a second. Two-Ton Tammy ran out of Cooper's car and went to help Dale-John.

“I appreciate it. I owe you,” I told Cooper.

“Always here to help, man. Shit, thanks for making my Friday night interesting.” The smile returned.

Hank came running out the door and I knew I owed it to him to explain what happened. But my mind was swirling and I just got in my truck. I took the gun with me, figuring I would toss it in Lake Meade like real soon. I pictured Cindy and me in the bathtub together long ago, two horny teenagers, smiling and red-faced. I put the key in the ignition and a cassette playing Merle Haggard's “Emptiest Arms in the World” was turned up too loud. I left it that way.

“Empty arms won't ever hold you close again.”

I took the beer out from my coat and drank it as it foamed over. I reached down to get the bottle of Jim Beam I kept under my seat and put it between my legs, wondering which back road I would pick to throw a pity party. Old Myrtle Road would do. I hit reverse - way too hard - and my back end bucked wildly when my truck hit a mudhole.

She was standing in the wrong spot. I couldn't stop in time. Two-Ton Tammy screamed as Hag howled for the lonely.

Andy Turner, a native of Suffolk, Virginia, now lives in Milwaukee, where he hangs by a thread in the newspaper industry and curses his snow shovel. He has contributed non-fiction to No Depression, Harp,

Pop Culture Press, Country Standard Time and other publications. He has challenged fiction to a fight and fiction has accepted, with a sneer and a bitch slap greeting.