

A Story by Jack Sparacino

*"I got a girl name of Boney Maroney
She's as skinny as a stick of macaroni
Oughta see her rock and roll with her blue jeans on
She's not very fat just skin and bo-o-one*

*She's my one and only, she's my heart's desire
She's a real upsetter, she's a real live wire
Everybody turns when my baby goes by-y
She's something to see, she really catches the eye-eye-eye*

□□□□□□□□□□Sha NaNa

Carla "String Bean" D'Andrea had a plan alright. Phase 1 was called staying alive far below her bedroom trapdoor with her partners in crime, Sarah Fiedler and Joanna Ciampa. Phase 2 was simpler: catching the sniper threatening to grind them into sausage. Then repurposing him into fish food. The high protein snack the sharks in Charleston Harbor loved. The small bloody scraps would serve as a splendid entrée for the crabs skittering below. But *holy craps* she was getting ahead of herself. Where was the exit window she designed years ago?

She found it in, of all places, the very spot from the drawing. Ground floor with a Glock and plenty of ammo in a canvas bag nailed in three places to the sill. Crucifixion style. The Hornady One Shot gun oil smelled like perfume to her scraped nose. At least she still had a nose and it was still perfectly straight. More or less. The ding on the bridge would probably heal just fine.

First, though, they needed backup. Carla considered old Tom Trellis and Harley Newsome, both veterans of the Gulf War, both good shots and fairly reliable. When they weren't sharing a bottle of Wild Turkey. She really wanted someone younger and in better shape, though, which

led her straight back to her gun dealer, Don Lopez. The ladies jumped in an Uber to Lopez's home in Mount Pleasant, just north of Charleston. As luck would have it, he was kicked back on his porch again, boots on the railing with another putrid Pierogi cigar tucked into the corner of his mouth. "Jesus, how can anyone stand that godawful smell," Joanna groaned. "Mind if I puke on the azaleas?"

"You might watch your pretty little mouth, sweetheart." Don's model slender girlfriend Melody Danforth made a dramatic appearance. At 27 she was barely more than half his age with twice his formal education and a penchant for painting impressionistic scenes inspired by Degas and Monet. Her technique was advancing rapidly and she was a quick study. A pretty five feet six and 110 pounds with sleek brown shoulder length hair and a marathon runner's build, she reminded them of French hard blues guitarist Laura Cox. She looked like she could outrun a bullet. "My name's Melody and what the hell are you punks doing here?"

"Screw you, Melody," snorted Joanna, "before I shove a paintbrush..."

"Whoa, slow down, Jo," said Carla. "You can paint *sa portraiton* canvas sometime. We need backup now, and these guys are good. Or at least they used to be. Melody also started a blues band with Don on bass. They could give us some cover. Maybe a theme song too. Let's all relax a minute."

"Not so fast, boss," said Sarah. "We came in peace and this jerky bauble gives us lip. I'm gonna grab one of Jo's paintbrushes and help her stick..."

"Hold it right..." continued Carla but it was too late. Melody had ducked inside the house and returned with a Benelli M2 20 gage compact shotgun. She fired a blast to her visitors' left and half a foot over the porch railing. The explosion nearly vaporized everything within three feet of Carla and her team. They dropped to the floor nearly deaf in a hail of splinters and shards from a potted plant, a coffee table and two peace and love statuettes.

"Let it go, ladies, NOW," screamed Don. "This is my house and you're ruining my quiet time. Now settle down this *secondor* you'll all get keel hauled behind my Grady-White." He paused to listen to a chorus of gasps and curses. Even pretty Melody was left flattened, her face covered in debris from the blowback from her own gun. Next time she'd use a rifle, she figured. A little

less collateral damage.

“Listen up, everybody, and that means you too, Chico” Carla shouted as she sought out the cat’s withering gaze while he sheltered under a lounge chair. “We came here for backup. Some chicken shit sniper just tried to kill me, Sarah and Joanna. Damn near did it, too. First thing we need to know is, Don, do you know who could be behind this assault? Or maybe just the shooter’s identity? We didn’t get a look at him and didn’t have time to pry the bullets out of my wall.”

“Well la-di-da, ladies. You, too, String Bean.” Carla could have quietly garroted him to keep the noise down, but she resisted. Barely. “Maybe I know the shooter, maybe I don’t. Maybe we even worked together, you know, like buddies. What’s it worth to you?” he chuckled. I’m always open to collecting favors from such lovely, upstanding women, you know.” Lopez’s cigar ever smoldering, his words stank even worse than his malicious thoughts and cesspool brain.

“Look, Don, we just held up a bank recently so we can pay you cash and you can god damn forget any other stuff.”

“Oh, yeah, the one you nearly blew to kingdom come, putting four tellers, three customers, and the manager out of their misery. Not to mention destroying a landmark, \$20 million building. Do I have that right?”

Melody couldn’t keep quiet any longer, even though her shotgun stunt had nearly punctured everyone’s eardrums. Figuring one detonation deserved another, she stood by her boyfriend’s side and offered a deal. “We’ll track down your shooter and neutralize him. Then put you on his boss’s trail. He’ll be harder to track down since he works out of Brazil most of the time. My home country. I can get you some pictures of him and his complete bio. CIA style if you like, no tracers or backwash so no one will know you have the information or his ID.”

“For which we will owe you what, exactly?” asked Carla. Her fluorescent green eyes bored a hole in Lopez’s greasy face.

Lopez eyed Melody like a long lost daughter. “Go on, senorita, tell them what we want. Give them a 10% family discount.” He laughed so hard at his little joke that he felt a tightness in his chest and his heart pounding. She did excite him but not like this.

The pounding was no problem. Just a mortal distraction. The whoosh of an RPG caught them all by surprise for an instant before Lopez’s house exploded in flames and carnage. The air smelled like sulfur, concrete and death.

Carla heard Melody scream before they both blacked out.