



DRIVE-IN DATE by JOE R. LANSDALE
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THE SAVAGE KICK #2

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Drive-In Date

The line into the Starlite Drive-In that night was short. Monday nights were like that. Dave and Merle paid their money at the ticket house and Dave drove the Ford to a spot up near the front where there were only a few cars. He parked in a space with no one directly on either side. On the left, the first car was four speakers away, on the right, six speakers.

Dave said, "I like to be up close so it all looks bigger than life. You don't mind do you?"

"You ask me that every time," Merle said. "You don't never ask me that when we're driving in, you ask when we're parked."

"You don't like it, we can move."

"No, I like it. I'm just saying, you don't really care if I like it. You just ask."

"Politeness isn't a crime."

"No, but you ought to mean it."

"I said we can move."

"Hell no, stay where you are. I'm just saying when you ask me what I like, you could mean it."

"You're a testy motherfucker tonight. I thought coming to see a monster picture would cheer you up."

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“You’re the one likes ’em, and that’s why you come. It wasn’t for me, so don’t talk like it was. I don’t believe in monsters, so I can’t enjoy what I’m seeing. I like something that’s real. Cop movies. Things like that.”

“I tell you, Merle, there’s just no satisfying you, man. You’ll feel better when they cut the lot lights and the movie starts. We can get our date then.”

“I don’t know that makes me feel better.”

“You done quit liking pussy?”

“Watch your mouth. I didn’t say that. You know I like pussy. I like pussy fine.”

“Whoa. Aren’t we fussy? Way you talk, you’re trying to convince me. Maybe it’s butt holes you like.”

“Goddamnit, don’t start on the butt holes.”

Dave laughed and got out a cigarette and lipped it. “I know you did that one ole gal in the butt that night.” Dave reached up and tapped the rearview mirror. “I seen you in the mirror here.”

“You didn’t see nothing,” Merle said.

“I seen you get in her butt hole. I seen that much.”

“What the hell you doing watching? It ain’t good enough for you by yourself, so you got to watch someone else get theirs?”

“I don’t mind watching.”

“Yeah, well, I bet you don’t. You’re like one of those fucking perverts.”

Dave snickered, popped his lighter and lit his cigarette. The lot lights went out. The big lights at the top of the drive-in screen went black. Dave rolled down the window and pulled the speaker in and fastened it to the door. He slapped at a mosquito on his neck.

“Won’t be long now,” Dave said.

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“I don’t know if I feel up to it tonight.”

“You don’t like the first feature, the second’s some kind of mystery. It might be like a cop show.”

“I don’t mean the movies.”

“The girl?”

“Yeah. I’m in a funny mood.”

Dave smoked for a moment. “Merle, this is kind of a touchy subject, but you been having trouble, you know, getting a bone to keep, I’ll tell you, that happens. It’s happened to me. Once.”

“I’m not having trouble with my dick, okay?”

“If you are, it’s no disgrace. It’ll happen to a man from time to time.”

“My tool is all right. It works. No problem.”

“Then what’s the beef?”

“I don’t know. It’s a mood. I feel like I’m going through a kind of, I don’t know... mid-life crisis or something.”

“Mood, huh? Let me tell you, when she’s stretched out on that back seat, you’ll be all right, crisis or no crisis. Hell, get her butt hole if you want it, I don’t care.”

“Don’t start on me.”

“Who’s starting? I’m telling you, you want her butt hole, her ear, her goddamn nostril, that’s your business. Me, I’ll stick to the right hole, though.”

“Think I don’t know a snide remark when you make it?”

“I hope you do, or I wouldn’t make it. You don’t know I’m making one, what’s the fun of making it?” Dave reached over and slapped Merle playfully on the arm. “Lighten up, boy. Let’s see a movie, get some pussy. Hey, you feel better if I went and got us some corn and stuff ... That’d do you better, wouldn’t it?”

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Merle hesitated. "I guess."

"Back in a jiffy."

Dave got out of the car.

Fifteen minutes and Dave was back. He had a cardboard box that held two bags of popcorn and some tall drinks. He set the box on top of the car, opened the door, then got the box and slid inside. He put the box on the seat between them.

"How much I owe you?" Merle said.

"Not a thing. You get it next time ... Think how much more expensive this would be, we had to pay for her to eat too."

"A couple or three dollars. So what? That gonna break us?"

"No, but it's beer money. You think about it."

Merle sat and thought about it.

The big white drive-in screen was turned whiter by the projector light, then there was a flicker and images moved on the screen: Ads for the concession. Coming attractions.

Dave got his popcorn, started eating. He said, "I'm getting kind of horny thinking about her. You see the legs on that bitch?"

"Course I seen the legs. You don't know from legs. A woman's got legs is all you care, and you might not care about that. Couple of stumps would be all the same to you."

"No, I don't care for any stumps. Got to be feet on one end, pussy on the other. That's legs enough. But this one, she's got some good ones. Hell, you're bound to've noticed how good they were."

"I noticed. You saying I'm queer or something. I noticed. I noticed she's got an ankle bracelet on the right leg and she wears about a size ten shoe. Biggest goddamn feet I've ever seen on a woman."

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“Now, it comes out. You wanted to pick the date, not me?”

“I never did care for a woman with big feet. You got a good looking woman all over and you get down to them feet and they look like something goes on either side of a water plane ... Well, it ruins things.”

“She ain’t ruined. Way she looks, big feet or not, she ain’t ruined. Besides, you don’t fuck the feet ... Well, maybe you do. Right after the butt hole.”

“You gonna push one time too much, Dave. One time too much.”

“I’m just kidding, man. Lighten up. You don’t ever lighten up. Don’t we deserve some fun after working like niggers all day?”

Merle sighed. “You got to use that nigger stuff? I don’t like it. It makes you sound ignorant. Will, he’s colored and I like him. He’s done me all right. Man like that, he don’t deserve to be called nigger.”

“He’s all right at the plant, but you go by his house and ask for a loan.”

“I don’t want to borrow nothing from him. I’m just saying people ought to get their due, no matter what color they are. Nigger is an ugly word.”

“You like boogie better, Martin Luther? How about coon or shine? I was always kind of fond of burrhead or wooly, myself.”

“There’s just no talking to you, is there?”

“Hell, you like niggers so much, next date we set up, we’ll make it a nigger. Shit, I’d fuck a nigger. It’s all pink on the inside, ain’t that what you’ve heard.”

“You’re a bigot is what you are.”

“If that means I’m not wanting to buddy up to coons, then,

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yeah, that's what I am." Dave thumped his cigarette butt out the window. "You got to learn to lighten up, Merle. You don't, you'll die. My uncle, he couldn't never lighten up. Gave him a spastic colon, all that tension. He swelled up until he couldn't wear his pants. Had to get some stretch pants, one of those running suits, just so he could have on clothes. He eventually got so bad they had to go in and operate. You can bet he wished he didn't do all that worrying now. It didn't get him a thing but sick. He didn't get a better life on account of that worry, now did he? Still lives over in that apartment where he's been living, on account of he got so sick from worry he couldn't work. They're about to throw him out of there, and him a grown man and sixty years old. Lost his good job, his wife—which he ought to know is a good thing—and now he's doing little odd shit here and there to make ends meet. Going down to catch the day work truck with the winos and niggers—Excuse me. Afro-Americans, Colored Folks, whatever you prefer.

"Before he got to worrying over nothing, he had him some serious savings and was about ready to put some money down on a couple of acres and a good double wide.

"I was planning on buying me a double wide, that'd make me worry. Them old trailers ain't worth a shit. Comes a tornado, or just a good wind, and you can find those fuckers at the bottom of the Gulf of Mexico, next to the regular trailers. Tornado will take a double wide easy as any of the others."

Dave shook his head. "You go from one thing to the other, don't you? I know what a tornado can do. It can take a house, too. Your house. That don't matter. I'm not talking about mobile homes here, Merle. I'm talking about living. It's a thing you better attend to. You're forty goddamn years old. Your life's half over ... I know

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that's a cold thing to say, but there you have it. It's out of my mouth. I'm forty this next birthday, so I'm not just putting the doom on you. It's a thing every man's got to face. Getting over the hill. Before I die, I'd like to think I did something fun with my life. It's the little things that count. I want to enjoy things, not worry them away. Hear what I'm saying, Merle?"

"Hard not to, being in the goddamn car with you."

"Look here. Way we work, we deserve to lighten up a little. You haul your ashes first. That'll take some edge off."

"Well..."

"Naw, go on."

"All right ... But one thing."

"What?"

"Don't do me no more butt hole jokes, okay? One friend to another, Dave, no more butt hole jokes."

"It bothers you that bad, okay. Deal."

Merle climbed over the seat and got on his knees in the floorboard. He took hold of the back seat and pulled. It was rigged with a hinge. It folded down. He got on top of the folded down seat and bent and looked into the exposed trunk. The young woman's face was turned toward him, half of her cheek was hidden by the spare tire. There was a smudge of grease on her nose.

"We should have put a blanket back here," Merle said. "Wrapped her in that. I don't like 'em dirty."

"She's got pants on," Dave said. "You take them off, the part that counts won't be dirty."

"That part's always dirty. They pee and bleed out of it, don't they? Hell, hot as it is back here, she's already starting to smell."

"Oh, bullshit." Dave turned and looked over the seat at

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Merle. “You can’t get pleased, can you? She ain’t stinking. She didn’t even shit her pants when she checked out. And she ain’t been dead long enough to smell, and you know it. Quit being so goddamn contrary.” Dave turned back around and shook out a cigarette and lit it.

“Blow that out the window, damnit,” Merle said. “You know that smoke works my allergies.”

Dave shook his head and blew smoke out the window. He turned up the speaker. The ads and commercials were over. The movie was starting.

“And don’t be looking back here at me neither,” Merle said.

Merle rolled the woman out of the trunk, across the seat, onto the floorboard and up against him. He pushed the seat back into place and got hold of the woman and hoisted her onto the back seat. He pushed her T-shirt over her breasts. He fondled her breasts. They were big and firm and rubbery cold. He unfastened her shorts and pulled them over her shoes and ripped her panties apart at one side. He pushed one of her legs onto the floorboard and gripped her hips and pulled her ass down a little, got it cocked to a position he liked. He unfastened and pulled down his jeans and boxer shorts and got on her.

Dave roamed an eye to the rearview mirror, caught sight of Merle’s butt bobbing. He grinned and puffed at his cigarette. After a while, he turned his attention to the movie.

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