

## THE TRUCK STOP

The rumbling semi pulled to a stop with a squeal of brakes and a hiss of escaping smoke that rose up from the black ribbon of a road. I stood there for a moment in the fading light staring at the bright blue cab. Another night, another place, and another truck of midnight blue and a cheery voice.

“Climb aboard cowboy!”

Her straw blonde hair was the best thing I had seen in days. Roxanne was her name, a trucker from out of Illinois, running anything from car parts to sheep, not to mention the occasional load of dynamite.

“Headin’ West pardner?”

“California,” I replied as I settled into the seat and shut the door.

“Ah Californeauh,” she laughed, her voice had that distinctive Southern twang that brought back memories of hot nights down in the French Quarter.

“The land of fruits and nuts,” she grinned and let the clutch in.

“That’d be the one,” I replied wearily as I settled into the plush leather seat, she glanced over at me, a concerned look on her face as she pulled out onto the road.

“You look a little weary, cowboy.”

I nodded in reply as my mind flashed back to the rundown shack on the outskirts of Wichita. Right now Kansas seemed to be a million miles away from Casper, Wyoming. A screaming row in the middle of the night, hasty words that neither of us had meant at the time and I had been gone. Out into the cold November night where the icy Northerly blew cold against my soul.

“Been a long day I guess,” was my only reply, she nodded and glanced in the rear view mirror.

“Woman troubles huh?”

“It shows does it?” I glanced over at her; she smiled slyly and nodded sagely.

“Kind of, you ain’t the first who I’ve picked up like this,” she inclined her head in the direction of the sleeper.

“Why don’t you crawl back there and bed down awhile, I’ll wake you when we get to Idaho Falls, that’ll be the next stop by the way.”

I did as she asked, grateful for the chance to grab some much-needed sleep; the events of the past twenty-four hours had turned my already shaky world upside down, her words still ringing in my ears.

“Why don’t you face up to me like a man you bastard!”

She had come to me in the early hours of the morning around 3 am, I had barely stirred when she pulled into a truck stop on the outskirts of town. She had nudged me but I had been lost in my own fitful dreams; Dolores was on my mind and my lips. She told me later that I had called out the name of the woman I still loved. It was the moonlight shining on my face that awoke me as she crawled over and perched herself on the side of the bed. For some reason the face of my mother rose in my mind’s eye as she stared down at me.

“I was afraid to wake you,” she smiled as she adjusted the covers. “I thought you might start freaking out about Dolores or whoever she is.”

She studied me for a moment.

“That’s who you’re running from isn’t it? She’s your wife right?”

I started to tell her but she was barely listening as she hushed my silent scream with her lips. I fought back briefly before succumbing to her; it had been so long that I doubt I had any resistance. Dolores could have been standing right next to us and I couldn’t have cared. There was only Roxanne and the sigh as she eased herself onto

me. My hand fumbled at the buttons of her shirt and she grinned as she pulled the shirt free from her jeans.

“Relax cowboy, you ain’t got nothing to fear now.”

It had occurred to me later how bizarre the whole episode had been. Twenty-four hours earlier I had been on my knees before Dolores pleading for what little was left of our relationship. There had been too many lonely nights when neither of us had been able to reach for the other for fear the past would rear its ugly head again. And now here I was making love to a stranger on the side of the road. I couldn’t remember the last time Dolores and I had made love at all. The enthusiasm had long since gone; it had taken the efforts of a trucker from out of Illinois to bring the passion back into my life.

“Hey cowboy!”

I looked up startled out of my reverie by a woman’s voice and saw a smiling redhead beaming down at me from the confines of the bright blue cab.

“Y’all gonna’ jist stand there dreaming, or are you gonna’ climb aboard? I ain’t got all goddamn night you know!”

I grinned to myself as I climbed aboard, like I said, another time, another place, another truck ride to God knows where on the long lonely highways of Middle America.

Written by Alastair Rosie. Sunday, June 22, 1997 ©

Word Count: 860