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about 1250 words

The Drifter

by Jamal Rashad

"Where ya headed, buddy?"

"As far east as you'll take me, ma'am."

"Hop on in! I have a delivery to Kentucky and could use the company!"

The large, Bunyan-esque man grabbed the handle of the semi's passenger door as his petite brunette savior opened it for him. He threw his bag into her cab, nestled his weary body into the cushioned seat, and wiped a pool of sweat from his brow.

The cab of the truck had a homey décor. There were postcards posted on the wall above the small, neatly kept bed. It smelled of freshly picked peaches blowing in the wind as the air-conditioner cooled the heated core of its newest passenger. The desert day had been brutal to him, but the cab of the truck promised a better evening.

"Oh, I'm sorry. Where are my manners? My name is Lance. Lance Scavaneaux," he yawned.

"Well, isn't this cute? I'm Gueneviere, or 'Gwen' for short. Nice to meet ya."

"How's that cute?"

"You know," she extended her soft fingertips over to his rough hands for a shake, "like Sir LANCE-a-lot and Queen Gueneviere from the King Arthur stuff?"

"Oh," he chuckled. "I get it now."

"So, what brings you 'round these parts?"

"Oh, nothing much. Just on my way to the east coast to catch a ship for work." Lance reclined his seat a little and pulled his shabby baseball cap down while answering her question.

Gwen took the opportunity to give him a closer look than she previously could on the side of the dusty road. He was a muscular fellow--not anything like he worked out in a gym regularly but on a farm. It was definitely a farm because she

smelled the bouquet of wheat and hay with a faint but distinct scent of manure traveling through her nostrils. The dusky sky complimented his bronzed skin while highlighting the sternness of his jawline; Gwen was smitten. She smiled at him and bit her lip when she noticed he'd peaked at her from under the lid of his cap.

By the time the warm sky turned into a star-clustered evening, the two had become quite but awkwardly acquainted. Gwen spoke of her suburban childhood and her desire to become a truck driver to spite her overprotective and wealthy parents who wanted nothing more than for their "little girl to get into something a little more 'white collar.'" Lance mentioned his rural upbringing and how he'd been kicked off his family's farm for his shirking his responsibilities and not following the rules of the farm.

"Would you like something to drink or eat? I have to stop for gas in a little bit and, uh, stretch my legs," she said while glancing in his direction.

Lance smiled and nodded in affirmation.

Gwen exited the truck, leaving Lance inside, and entered the store to pay for food and gas. She returned ten minutes later with a smile on her face and passed him his share of food. "Eat up." The engine of the truck roared to life as Gwen turned the key to the ignition to continue their eastbound journey.

Lance placed the food to his side, his eyes squinting at Gwen with such tenacity that they almost appeared to be closed.

"You ain't gon' eat, hun?" Gwen's pseudo-sugared tone pushed Lance closer to his door.

"Um, not yet, hun. Why 'on't you go ahead and chow down though? Oh, lemme guess, they ain't have your 'preferred meat' in there?" Lance's pragmatism snatched Gwen's gaze towards him, and a chill filled the truck's cabin.

"The hell's that s'posed to mean?" Her sweet tone now sour.

"I think you know exactly what it means."

Silence echoed through the cabin for what seemed like forever to them, their strained stares drawing tighter with each passing second.

"You're that goddamned serial-killing truck driver I've been reading about in the news!"

"Like you ain't a serial killer yourself? I read about you, too, you serial-killing hitchhiker!"

"Least I ain't eatin' my victims you sicko!"

Gwen gasps, shocked. "You shut your mouth! Don't you dare judge me! You got kicked off your family farm for 'not following the rules'? What were the rules? To not keep the skin of the women and men you were killing?"

Silence echoed through the cabin a second time, bringing with it an even colder chill than its initial visit. This time,

however, that chill met with the tension in the air and a storm ensued. Lance and Gwen began throwing punches and anything they could get their hands on at each other. Lance, not driving the truck, had the upper hand.

"Stop kicking me you jerk! You're gonna make me wreck the truck!"

"Why? Because if I die in the crash, you won't eat me since I'd be roadkill?"

"Oh, I am going to so enjoy eating you!" Gwen swerves the truck right and then veers it hard back to the left to make Lance lean a little bit closer to her, and once he's in range, she head-butts him.

"Wh-where am I?"

"You're in Kentucky, hun!"

Gwen looks around the inside of the trailer of her truck and then at her restraints. "Oh, fuck me! How did you--"

"Lemme answer that for you darling. See, while you was digging up dirt on me, I guess you didn't read far enough to find out I got a metal plate in my head." Lance taps his forehead with a knife while pulling his hair back to show her his surgery scar. "So you when you head-butted me, you did me a favor by knocking yourself out. And I might not have been fully honest about being kicked off the family farm. I got this here metal plate on the account my paw bussin' my head wide open when

he found out I'd upgraded from skinning cattle to skinning people."

"Well, it ain't like you didn't deserve it."

"Yeah, whatever."

"So, what are you gonna do to me?" Even in distress, sass decorated her tone. "Lemme guess, skin me 'live like you do everybody else? Real original there Ed Gein."

"Shut up, Hannibal, and hear me out. I got a proposition for ya."

"What? You wanna go to into business together or something?"

"I mean..." Lance shrugged his shoulders with his palms upward and out to his side as if to be weighing the alternative.

"Hell no! You were gonna skin me!"

"'Cause you were gonna eat me!"

"No, I wasn't! I don't like lean meat." Her eyes rolled in disgust.

"Think about it. We both win in this. See, I have to hitchhike because my metal plate'll have me highlighted at airports and my records ain't exactly clean enough to be trying to boost cars and junk."

"And what do I get out of it?"

"We can kill people together and watch each other's backs, but more importantly, you get to live. So what do you say?"

Gwen thought about it for a moment and nodded in agreement.

Lance cut Gwen's restraints. "Now, there's gonna be rules in place. You know, we can't just be killing all willy-nilly. We gotta have a code, like, no more killing innocents. We gotta start killing people that are cancers to society." He finished freeing her, and she sat up on the table, massaging her wrists.

"Do I still get to eat people?"

"No. That shit's nasty. And to sweeten the deal, I'll stop skinning people."

"Fine," her exasperated tone made Lance chuckle. "But keep the skinning part. That's classy."

The End