

The First Date
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Earlene Ward polished the café counter as she'd done for the past forty years when the entrance doorbell rang. "Well Tommy Lee, aren't you a picture in a tie, nice pants and all. And who is this pretty young thing?"

"Hi Earlene, this is Sheryl Lynn Metzler." Tommy smiled with pride. Sheryl lifts her eyes briefly then continues her floor tile pattern observations.

"Tommy Lee, is this your date?" Earlene braced both hands on the counter to give Sheryl Lynn a once over.

"Yes ma'am, it's our first date. We came for something to eat before the movie."

"You kids take a table up front. What would you like to drink?"

"Coke ok?" Tommy asks. Sheryl nods agreement. "Two cokes, Earlene. I think we'll sit in the back." Tommy was less concerned about intimacy than being seen sitting with Sheryl Lynn through the large plate-glass windows by of one his chums that might pass by. Although full of himself at landing a date with the freshman class's prettiest girl, Tommy was fully aware of his classmates lack of social sophistication. Avoiding their attention was a strategic priority.

"I'm not sure that's a good idea Tommy, up front will be better." Seriousness painted Earlene's words.

"That's ok." Tommy hooked Sheryl Lynn's elbow and escorted her to the booth at the very back. But the booth table was set with tableware and had a reserved sign on it, so they sat at the adjacent table. The unusual absence of patronage did not escape Tommy as Earlene place the large Coca Cola glasses on their table.

"What can I get you kids?" Earlene stared at the booth as Tommy and Sheryl Lynn rattle off their order of burgers and fries - a generational delicacy.

Earlene checked her watch. "I sure wish you kids would sit up front with me. I'm all lonely up there you know."

"Thanks Earlene, but this is good for us." Tommy smiled at Sheryl Lynn who returned the smile and nodded to Earlene.

While Earlene grilled fresh ground beef patties, Tommy and Sheryl Lynn bantered with small talk, discussing their excitement about seeing the movie. After a few moments passed, Sheryl Lynn glanced at the booth. Her eyes widened and she slammed her hand

down onto Tommy's. Tommy sat up straighter, excited by what he interpreted as Cheryl Lynn's assertiveness. Looking at their intertwined hands, he gave a gentle squeeze. She responded by sinking her freshly manicured fingernails into the soft flesh of his hand. Tommy looked up to see her pointing toward the booth.

Mouth agape, Tommy stared at the two people sitting in the booth, animatedly talking. Nary a sound was heard as they gestured and laughed back and forth. The lady, dressed in a black outfit, wore a hat sitting slightly askew on her blondish hair. The man was dressed like a gangster from an old black and white Bogart movie Tommy watched as a boy. A wide brim hat sat back on his head. The man picked a sawed-off shotgun off the seat, laying it on the table. Tommy and Sheryl Lynn froze.

The woman in the booth turned, looking directly at Tommy. She hitched her chin up at him, but he remained solid granite. The woman said something to the man, pulled a pistol from her purse, cocked it, then, with a malicious smile, pointed it at Tommy.

Tommy blanched, pushed away from the table, causing the back chair legs to dig into the floor tiles, tipping the chair and Tommy over backwards. Tommy back rolled over onto his belly. Then, he crawled, GI style, toward the entrance, leaving Sheryl Lynn staring stone stiff at the booth.

Earlene, hearing the clatter, turned and leaned over the counter. "Good lord, Tommy Lee, what, for heavens sake, are you doing crawlin on the floor?"

Tommy looked up. "Call the cops. A woman in the booth pointed a gun at me."

"Don't be silly, Tommy, that's just an apparition." Earlene giggled.

"A what?"

"You know, ghosts. The ghosts of Bonnie and Clyde. They ate lunch in that booth before they robbed the Lucerne State Bank, there, across the street. Every year, on this day, they show up at about this time. I told you to sit up front with me."

Sheryl Lynn stepped over Tommy's prostrate body without a word, walking out the entrance in a catatonic daze.

Tommy muttered to the floor. "I guess the movies off."