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AN ODE TO VALENTINE'S DAY

by William C. Anderson

"Do you happen to know what day this is?"

I looked across the cockpit at the distaff, who was batting her long lashes at me.

"Yes. Today's Friday. The day I flush out the black-water holding tank."

I was skewered on a look of disdain. "Today happens to be Saint Valentine's Day."

"Oh? Valentine's Day. And just what, my little cupid, would you deign to do to commemorate this most auspicious occasion? Besides helping me flush out the holding tank?"

"Very simple. I'd like to have a candlelit dinner at a very expensive restaurant."

"Ah, so. Your slightest wish is my command, *mi amore*." I checked my watch. "We're nearing Fort Stockton. I'll check the CB Yellow Pages for a suitable rotisserie." I flicked on the CB. "Breaker 19," I said, thumbing the transmitter. "Anyone reading Red Writer? Come back."

"Hi, y'all, Red Ryder," returned a clear voice that had been dipped in hominy grits. Since my wife is a redhead and I doodle with a typewriter, we had picked Red Writer as our CB handle. It always came back "Red Ryder." "Lonesome Polecat's mah handle. Eastbound. You're comin' in loud and clear. Must be close by."

I looked up the road to see a blue semi laboring up a long hill in front of us. "Lonesome Polecat, are you a blue 18-wheeler poking up a long hill?"

"That's a 10-4, good buddy. You the motorhome comin' up on mah back porch?"

"That's a roger, Lonesome Polecat."

"Sorry to hold y'all up on this stretcha single-lane highway. Got an axle-bustin' load in this rig. But Ah'll sho 'nuff give y'all the signal when the road's cleah up ahead."

"Many thanks, Lonesome Polecat. Don't sweat it. We're enjoying the scenery."

He let out a belly laugh. "Some scenery, ain't it? Partsa Texas would gag a maggot."

I pulled up behind the laboring truck. "Lonesome Polecat, you know anything about Fort Stockton?"

I'm looking for a good place to eat."

"Old Fort Stockton town? Afraid I can't help ya, good buddy. Ah've only passed through."

"No problem. I'll check REACT on my CB when we get there."

"Way to go." There was a pause, then, "Ah can see ovah the rise now, Red Ryder. Clear sailin'. Put the hammer down."

I slammed into the passing gear and passed. Swinging back into the right lane, I transmitted my thanks.

"Mah pleasure, Red Ryder. Be seein' y'all soon. This rig don't bust no records goin' uphill, but it goes downhill like a roadrunner with a hotfoot."

Sure enough, five minutes later on a level stretch, the blue truck gave a blast of air horns and smoked by us like a roadrunner with a hotfoot. "Have a good one, Red Ryder," was his parting remark as he thundered down the road.

I no sooner acknowledged than a sultry female voice came over the speaker. "Breaker 19, this is Frisky Fox. Do I hear the voice of a lonely trucker?"

I started reaching for the transmitter when I felt a slap on my wrist. I looked over at the wife. "You ain't no lonely trucker," she snapped.

"No. Of course not, dear." I retrieved my hand. "I'm a happily married man."

But it was apparent that Lonesome Polecat was not likewise fettered. "Hey there, Frisky Fox. Lonesome Polecat, heah. How y'all, little lady?"

"Jes as fine as frog hair, Lonesome Polecat. Which way you headin'?"

"Eastbound on good ole Eye-10. Aimin' to peel off at ole Fort Stockton town for a cuppa motion lotion."

"Well, ain't that a coincidence, Lonesome Polecat. I was jes thinkin' of doin' the same thing."

"How about that! Shore would be a pleasure, little lady, to buy y'all a cup of java."

"There's a truck stop on the edge of town, first one on the right-hand side. Meet you there. What's

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