



Riddick, Jack... and Louise



By Ardath Rekha

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Synopsis: On Jack's 14th birthday, she and Riddick watch *Thelma & Louise*. Riddick discovers that this "chick flick" actually has bearing on his life and his feelings, and contemplates the difficult future ahead of him.

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Pairing: Riddick/Jack

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The birthday party, such as it was, had ended and the handful of kids Jack had invited from her school had gone home. Imam had cleared the dishes, smiled at Riddick and the Birthday Girl, and wished them good-night. Now it was just the two of them. The Escaped Convict and his “kid sister,” newly fourteen.

“Okay, which vid do you want to watch?” she asked, bouncing into the room with unrestrained exuberance.

Riddick chuckled and leaned back against the couch, the handful of new movie cards arrayed like a poker hand. *I was never this young*, he told himself. Of course he knew that wasn’t really true, even if sometimes it felt like it was.

“Your pick, they’re your vids. But we ain’t watching cartoons.” He set the card labeled *The Iron Giant* down on the coffee table, declaring it out of the running.

“Aww, come on, it’s a classic!”

“Pick again, kid.”

The couch shook as she landed next to him and leaned over, her shoulder pressed to his. He lifted his arm and looped it around her, his hand ruffling her short, fluffy blonde hair in passing.

“Okay... what do we have here? How about *Thelma and Louise*?”

“What’s it about?”

“Um...” Jack flipped the card over, reading the back. “Two women on a road-trip of self-discov—”

“Chick flick. Moving on.”

“It’s not a chick flick! Jeez! I’m never watching a buddy movie with you again, you sexist toad!”

Riddick glanced at Jack in horror, only to meet her smile. “Okay, okay, fine, we’ll watch *Thelma and Louise*. You sure you don’t wanna watch *The Terminator*? It’s a classic...”

“Bleah. Arnold Shwarzenegger. ‘Roid Muscle Man. If I wanna see muscles I can sneak into the bathroom when you’re showering and at least they’ll be natural—”

“*Holy shit, Jack!*” He had to resist the sudden urge to cross his legs.

The girl *laughed!* After a moment, Riddick felt his heart climb back into its proper spot and he managed to chuckle himself. The idea of Jack spying on him in the shower... *shit*.

“Okay, that’s it. You got your popcorn, kid? We’re starting this show.”

Grinning, Jack rattled the large bag of popcorn and set it on the coffee table in front of them. She settled back on the couch while he walked over to the vidscreen and slid the card into the entertainment console’s slot. The movie began as he sat back down beside the girl, putting his arm around her once more. Jack yawned.

“You sure you’re up to this? Been a busy day.”

“I’m good,” she managed through her yawn.

He chuckled silently to himself. He knew *exactly* what was going to happen, and Jack was going to be fast asleep in under ten minutes. He adjusted his position a little, so that when she did fall asleep he could hold her in comfort.

She’s never made it to the halfway mark in a movie yet with me, he thought in amusement. But the movie was only half the point, and the less important half at that. It was the sanctuary. Getting to be held by the one man in the universe she implicitly trusted. That was the real driving force, the real point.

Jack yawned again and Riddick had to stifle one of his own. *This is a chick flick. Kid, you owe me. I’m gonna make you watch a western as payback. Look out, little girl, you’re watching Shane.*

Another five minutes and she was fast asleep. He chuckled, grabbing another handful of popcorn and munching it quietly, careful not to get any in her hair. She’d settled halfway onto his lap and—

Holy shit, Riddick thought. His hand tightened on Jack’s shoulder just a little as he watched the scene unfolding on the vidscreen. *That man’s about to—*

He suddenly thought it was probably a good thing that Jack had dozed off. If this did turn into a rape sequence, she might find that a little traumatic to watch.

Excellent, Louise to the rescue. Good move, lady. Still, it might be a bit much for Jack. I dunno as much about her past as I’d like, but I know enough to know she’s been through some harrowing shit just like—

HOLY FUCK! *She shot him!*

This, Riddick suddenly decided, was no chick flick; this was *his* kind of movie. He watched, enrapt, as the scene unfolded, feeling his heart race. He felt *connected* to this woman, Louise. The horror in her eyes, the cold terror filling her veins as the realization hit her, *I just killed a man*— he knew it intimately.

He still remembered his own first kill vividly, with heart-twisting clarity. His insides still knotted when he thought about it. Fourteen years old. Jack's age. He'd been through a string of foster homes and detention centers, already, but his sense of powerlessness over his life had faded when he'd bought the gun.

It was some cheap-shit piece, but it had made him feel like he ruled the streets. The next time some big fuckhead had come at him, he'd pulled it, assuming he had the decisive edge.

The man had laughed.

Things got chaotic at that point. His recollections were a jumble. The man rushing him... a spike of fear through his heart followed by a hard jolt along his arm and then... the man's eyes had widened and glazed over as he collapsed to the ground. Terror, then. Pure terror. Fourteen-year-old Richard B. Riddick had fled five blocks before collapsing against a wall and puking his guts out, partly from exertion but mostly from fear and horror.

He watched as, on the screen, Louise did the same thing, staggering out of the car to throw up beside it.

Know what you're going through, there, lady, he thought.

Horrific as it had been, Riddick hadn't had it in him to confess. He'd fled. He'd hidden. He'd gotten some of his friends to alibi him. And he'd gotten away with it. The sick horror had slowly faded and been replaced by a strange detachment, a sense of invulnerability. He'd killed a man and nobody had cared. There had been no consequences.

The next time he pulled the trigger on a guy, he'd meant to. That time, he didn't get sick. It was frightening, in retrospect, how *easy* it had become. How addictive. Some of his friends had gotten into drugs, but for him nothing had compared to that power over life and death. It was the ultimate rush.

Finally there began to be consequences. At first, since he was still so young, prosecutors had a hard time getting **Murder** to stick. He did time for manslaughter. More than once. He came face to face with the bigger sharks. It put no fear into him, though — he just worked at outgrowing them so he could be the biggest, baddest shark in any tank.

And he learned to hate. Every time he pulled the trigger on someone, or drew his knife, he hated his victim. Their death threatened his freedom and he wanted them to suffer for putting him at such risk.

Pure sociopathic reasoning, he reflected now. The crash, and the ensuing year of peace in Imam's house, had changed him. He was *connected* again, to other people. Especially to the girl snoring quietly in his arms.

He smirked a little. He would *never* tell her she snored. She'd be way too embarrassed. Teenage girls — even “chronic disciplinary cases” like Jack — were extraordinarily self-conscious creatures, and she'd be mortified if she realized. The fact that he found it adorable wouldn't make any difference to her.

Turning his attention back to the movie, he listened wryly as Louise and Thelma argued over how to get to Mexico without going through Texas. *Maybe if I knew my Earth geography better, I'd know why this is supposed to be funny.* He'd have to dig out Imam's almanac later. Not now, though. Jack was sleeping too comfortably for him to move.

Louise, he decided, didn't just remind him of himself. She reminded him of Jack. That stuff about her past in Texas... yeah. There was Jack, peeking out of him through the actress's face. The same haunted knowledge of past pain. The same determination never to be exposed to it again.

And like the women in the film, it fueled her into acts of aggression and even violence at times.

She'd fought from the moment they settled on the planet, and that was part of why, initially, he hadn't left. When she woke in the middle of the night, screaming, from a nightmare either of the planet they'd met on or some other aspect of her unspoken past, he was the only one who could calm her and comfort her. He'd decided to stay until she began to learn to sleep again. By the time she did, though, he had new reasons for not leaving, which centered still around her.

The fights were the reasons he could admit to.

Kids in her new school had teased her about her haircut and her deliberately masculine mannerisms. New to the area, with no base of friends and too many things she wouldn't or couldn't confide in others, she'd been isolated and increasingly angry. The detention notices she began to bring home hadn't surprised Riddick,

although they'd upset Imam a great deal. At first she was just getting into bitch-slapping contests with the other girls. Then she began fighting the boys as well.

The day she came home with a black eye, a chipped tooth, and a suspension notice, Riddick had taken her aside and begun training her to box. It was something that had helped him find discipline and peace, after all; he hoped it would do the same to her. And maybe keep her from needing any more expensive dental work, which he'd quietly arranged and paid for.

Imam had been furious.

It was a subtle power struggle between them, but a growing one. Imam Abu al-Walid had very clear ideas about how a young woman should comport herself, most of which seemed silly to Riddick and irritated Jack. The Holy Man was *never* happy when Riddick took the girl's side.

"You are encouraging her delinquency, Richard," he would say with a frown.

Fuck that. Jack was no delinquent. She was a good kid. Hot-tempered at times, but what teenager wasn't? He'd seen a hell of a lot worse. Shit, he'd *done* a hell of a lot worse at her age.

Which, he conceded, was why his influence worried the Holy Man so much.

Of course, Riddick had no intention of allowing his history to repeat itself with the girl. He'd gotten pretty good, lately, at scoping her moods, learning how to defuse her anger, and getting her to react with a level head rather than a hot one. She *listened* to him, in a way she didn't with Imam, because both of them knew that he'd been there. Both of them also knew that, to butcher a line from another classic movie, his "teen angst bullshit" really *had* garnered a body count.

They'd had a screaming match over it, two months ago, when she was suspended from school for breaking Jason Greenleigh's nose. Imam hadn't gotten home yet to weigh in at that point.

"You know the rules, Jack," he'd shouted at her. It was one of the rare times he'd been angry enough to raise his voice. "You're training now, you can't just go around *hitting* people who can't match you!"

"Fuck that!" she'd screamed back, from the other side of the punching bag. "I'm supposed to just sit back and let some needle-dick call me a lesbian?"

"Yeah! You are! Who the hell *cares* what he thinks about you?" But he could see in her eyes that she did. That she cared a lot about what people thought and said.

A year, almost, had passed since they had left the planet. Her hair had grown out enough that people were no longer tagging her with nicknames like "Cue-ball" and "Baby Warbucks." She was, in fact, becoming an obvious beauty. She even had a small handful of friends she hung out with, most of them other misfits — the Loser Squad, she'd told him, was what the rest of their class called them. And as much as she liked to pretend that moniker didn't hurt, he knew that it cut deep.

"How about when he grabbed my tits? Was I supposed to let *that* happen?" She was angry enough now that his own fury didn't faze her, and she came out from behind the bag, stomping over and glaring up at him from inches away.

His rage changed directions fast in that moment and he felt like breaking the boy's nose himself. He could see it in his head, what had happened. Jack had probably been walking down the hall between classes, when Jason has passed her and made his grab. She'd have turned around and knocked his hands away from her. *Keep your fucking hands to yourself, dickhead!* He could hear her saying it. And things had gone downhill fast from there.

Like the guy in the movie, he reflected now, Jason hadn't known when he was outgunned, hadn't known when he should have shut up. Like the guy in the movie, he'd tried to reassert his power over the situation, as if he had any... and had been taken down.

"No," he'd answered her, his voice softening. "You weren't supposed to let that happen. But you ain't gonna change people's opinions by breaking their bones. Those assholes already have their image of you all worked out. Anyway, nothing wrong with lesbians—"

"*I'm not a lesbian!*" For a second he thought she was going to take a crack at *his* nose.

"Jack, honey, I didn't say you were—"

"How can I be a lesbian when—" She stopped suddenly, her mouth closing with a snap and her face paling. "Never mind."

Riddick took a deep breath, almost asking, but forced himself to shrug it off. He *knew* what she'd almost told him, after all. He knew it entirely too well. How could she be a lesbian when all of her sexual fantasies were about *him*?

It was a good thing she didn't say it aloud. He'd have been forced to say something he really did *not* want to in response if she had.

He'd have had to tell her that she was too young. He'd have had to say that that kind of talk made him uncomfortable. Both of those, at least, were true, but he'd have had to pretend, above all, that the attraction was *not* mutual.

She's thirteen years old, for god's sake! he'd told himself then, and now told himself yet again. *Fourteen today, but shit! Of all people... why the hell her?*

He knew why, though. He knew exactly why, every time he looked into her eyes.

He'd never believed in True Love. He'd never believed in Soul Mates. He sure as hell had never believed that he, of all people, had been searching for a special Someone. All of that romantic crap, he'd told himself, was for men whose pressing concerns didn't include dodging bullets.

But he *had* been searching for Someone, even if he hadn't known it. And he'd found her. She was right here, curled against him. He knew it again, with heart-wrenching certainty, every time he looked into her beautiful eyes.

And she was far too damned young.

The animal within didn't agree. It looked at her and saw Female. It knew exactly where she was in her fertility cycle on any given day, and seemed to consider that fertility all the logic it would need. And maybe, when he'd been younger and more callow — and less *human* — he would have listened. After all, what was one more broken rule when you were already condemned to life in prison on four worlds, and had an outstanding death sentence on a fifth?

Everything.

This was *love*, not just animal lust. So he had to stand back, pretend he didn't dream about her every night, keep the first real love he'd felt for anyone disguised. He had to — *had to* — let her finish growing up.

There was, after all, so much of the Child still within her. And that child needed to be respected, still. And comforted. And kept safe.

Even from me. Especially from me. He was the only one she had on her side, after all.

Imam had come home later that night, while he and Jack were pretending that she hadn't almost admitted her true feelings. They'd been sparring in the workout room when the Holy Man found the suspension notice, reading about the fight with Greenleigh and its outcome. His response, immediately barging into the room and taking Jack to task for her behavior, had been disastrous.

He'd tried to head the Holy man off, to tell him that Jack had already heard it all from him and was contrite, but it hadn't worked. Another argument over her violent outburst had hit, and this time, Jack didn't get a single bone thrown her way. She'd ultimately fled to her room, furious and upset. Riddick had gone after her, holding her while she cried. Someone, after all, had to be on her side, or at least acknowledge that her genuine pain had led up to her violent explosion. Someone had to give her comfort.

And there's only one person she'll accept it from, anyway, he thought with a wince. *Me.*

That was the worst part, in a way. He knew he could have whatever he wanted, any time he wanted it. She trusted him on a level that she trusted no other man, not even Imam. He saw it when they were out and about constantly. She shied away from physical contact with strangers to an almost pathological degree.

They'd been walking through a book store, browsing the shelves, when he'd noticed and identified it for the first time. Jack had wanted to look in the Arts and Entertainment section, but several people were already browsing in the aisle leading into it. She could have maneuvered around them, perhaps brushing up against them, but instead she'd changed course and headed for another part of the store altogether. Rather than risk contact, rather than whisper *excuse me* and pass between them... she'd avoided them altogether.

It was a pattern, one that the hunter within him had quickly picked out. He'd observed it many times since then and it was consistent. She went out of her way to avoid contact with strangers, especially strange men. Even men she knew, she avoided touching. Even Imam, who, he suspected, would have liked to lavish a greater degree of fatherly affection upon her.

He didn't know what, exactly, had happened to her to make her this way. She refused to talk about it, clamming up the same way *he* did when she asked him about his experiences in Slam. All he knew was what he deduced. She'd said, back on the planet, that she'd disguised herself as a boy so people would "leave me alone instead of always messing with me." Sometime in her past someone, or several someones, had done just that to her. She had been hurt, terribly, in a way that had left her unable to be at ease around men.

There was only one exception; him.

When he was near her, rather than tensing up the way she did when others approached, her body would visibly relax. If he stood beside her, she would subtly sway closer as if drawn by a gravitational pull. And if he put his arm around her, he could *feel* the tension *leaving* her body.

He had an “all access pass.” He was the only man in the universe she was actually comfortable with... and that made things harder than ever. If he made a move... she would *let* him.

He couldn't betray her like that. He couldn't. It would destroy her. It would destroy the woman she was becoming... the woman he was in love with.

He already knew that the woman she would one day become would hold him in complete awe. He caught glimpses of that woman-to-come on a regular basis, although the child was still alive and fiercely kicking within Jack as well.

And that was why he would *not* take advantage.

In prison he'd read a book about scientific observation, and about how no observer could truly be detached from their subjects because the mere act of observation *changed* the observed. It was kind of like that, he told himself.

The woman who held him enthralled did not yet exist. She *would*, but not if he tried to jump the gun. Any attempt to bring her into being prematurely would, in fact, block her way, leaving the *child* in place. And while he loved the child, it was the coming woman who held his heart in the one prison he *didn't* long to be freed from.

His own attempts, at a teen, to become a Man early were what had left him in a state of arrested development for years and years. In some ways he, himself, was only just finally becoming a true adult. Just as he didn't want Jack to do something that ruined her future... he didn't want to do anything *to* her that would do the same. She needed to grow up slowly, at her own pace, with no pressure on her. All he could give her was friendship and support. And that was all he could ask for in return.

I wish I could give you more, kid. Maybe someday...

He didn't know if he'd make it. She had four years until she was eighteen. At any time, a merc might come gunning for him. At any time, he might have to leave her. Part of him knew that he should leave her now, move on, not stay in one place. Part of him knew he should have left her long before now.

But he couldn't go. She needed him. Someday he might be forced to leave, but until then...

Until then, he'd give her what he could. Memories to hold on to, of being loved, in a way that didn't hurt her, that didn't demand anything of her, that might even heal her wounds. A way that he'd never known he was capable of loving or giving, until now. He owed it to her. To himself. To Carolyn. To the humanity he was trying to rejoin.

He couldn't turn away from her, even if staying with her was, at times, mortal agony.

Jack slept on in his arms. Richard B. Riddick — escaped convict, murderer, helplessly in love — sighed, and turned his attention back to the movie. He watched as, on the screen, Thelma and Louise linked hands one last time and rode their car over the edge of the Grand Canyon.

Four years. In four years, maybe, there would be a place for them to explore what they both seemed to want. If they made it there. Until then, all he could do was shelter her and give her as much of himself as he dared... and hope they made it to that time.

“Hold On to the Nights”
written by Richard Marx

from the CD *Richard Marx*



Just when I believed I couldn't ever want for more
This ever changing world pushes me through another door
I saw you smile
And my mind could not erase the beauty of your face
Just for awhile
Won't you let me shelter you

Chorus

Hold on to the nights
Hold on to the memories
I wish that I could give you something more
That I could be yours

How do we explain something that took us by surprise
Promises in vain, love that is real but in disguise
What happens now
Do we break another rule
Let our lovers play the fool
I don't know how
To stop feeling this way

Repeat chorus

Well, I think that I've been true to everybody else but me
And the way I feel about you makes my heart long to be free
Everytime I look into your eyes, I'm helplessly aware
That the someone I've been searching for is right there

Hold on to the nights