

The Hitchhiker
(An American Pastoral)
by James Douglas Morrison

THE SCREEN IS BLACK. We hear a young man's voice in casual conversation with friends.

No, this guy told me you can go down across the border and buy a girl and bring her back and that's what I'm goin' to do, I'm gonna go down there and buy one of them and bring her back and marry her. I am.

An older woman's voice

Billy, are you completely crazy?

We hear the good-natured laughter of the woman, a man and another friend as Billy's insistent voice rises through saying:

BILLY

No, it's true. Really. This guy told me. It's true. I'm really gonna do it.

The film changes to COLOR. A couple sit at a small table in a simulated border town nightclub. It is a CLOSE shot, reminding us possibly of Picasso's "Absinthe Drinkers." The atmosphere is suggested by peripheral sounds such as boisterous young voices, curses in a foreign language, the tinkling of glasses and music from a small rock band. Perhaps a dancer is visible in the background. Perhaps topless. An anonymous waitress could enter the frame and leave, serving drinks.

The HERO is drunk and he's trying to persuade an attractive Mexican girl, a waitress in the bar, a whore, to cross the border and marry him. The girl tolerates him. She is working, hustling drinks, and has to listen but also she likes him. In some way, he interests her.

BILLY

I bet only reason you won't come with me is because I ain't got any money. Well, listen. I'm tellin' you.

I'm gonna go back up there and get
me some money, lots of it, maybe
even ten thousand. And then I'm
comin' back for you. I'm comin'
back.

He weaves offscreen, determined, drunk, camera hold on
girl, smiling wistfully and ironically after him. Then she
grabs another young American and pulls him down beside
her.

THE GIRL

Hey, man, you want to buy me a
drink?

TITLE

THE HITCHHIKER
(An American Pastoral)

Film changes to BLACK and WHITE. It is dawn on the
American desert; it's cold, and he stands hunched in his
jacket, by the side of the highway. The sun is rising. We
hold on him as a few cars go by at long intervals. We hear
the car coming, watch his eyes watching, he sticks his thumb
out. CUT TO profile shot, as a car swishes by. The third
car stops and he runs, not too energetically and get inside.

INTERIOR car. Middle-aged man in a business suit. He asks
the hitchhiker where he is going.

BILLY
(mumbling)

L.A.

He is obviously reluctant to do any talking.

THE DRIVER

I can take you as far as Amarillo and
then you'll have to go on from there.

BILLY
(No reply. No recognition.)

DRIVER

What are you going to do when you

get to L.A.? Have you got a job lined up?

BILLY

(No answer. He is beginning to nod.)

The man drives on. We see glimpses of the American landscape out the window of the car. The man glances sideways occasionally at Billy who is sleeping.

CLOSE UP of the man's right hand moving snake-like towards the hiker's left leg. He hesitates and then touches it above the knee. Immediately, a .38 revolver appears from Billy jacket and points at the driver.

BILLY

Pull over.

Profile of car, left side, extremely long shot. We hear a shot. The hitchhiker comes around the rear of the car, opens the door, and pulls the driver toward camera, his corpse that is, to the gully, and, after stripping his wallet of all the cash, gets into the car and drives away.

The kid is standing beside the car with his thumb out. The hood is raised. The engine has failed. A State Patrolman (we learn this from his uniform, western hat, and badge) stops in his own unmarked car. Billy gets in the car. The sheriff is friendly. He talks a lot. He tells Billy that he's just getting back home after delivering two lunatics from his local jail to the state asylum.

SHERIFF

I had to put them both in straight-jackets and throw them in the back of the wagon. I had to. They were totally uninhibited. I mean, if I let 'em loose, they just start jerking off and playing with each other, so I had to keep them tied up.

The killer is trying to stay awake. He's strung out on ben-nies, and also just plain exhausted, and he's fighting to follow the man's conversation. The sheriff rambles on. Billy is in that weird state between what's being said in reality and what he hears in his dream. The sheriff asks a question. He an-

swers and then jerks up suddenly to realize that he's been inventing his own dialogue inside his head. Finally, he can take it no longer. He pulls the gun out and orders the sheriff to pull over to the side of the road. Then he forces him to unlock the trunk, orders him inside and slams the lid.

INTERIOR of car. The hitchhiker is driving on.

As the car slows down for an upgrade, the trunk flies open and the sheriff tumbles out into the dust. Billy sees it in the rearview mirror. He slams on the brakes, jumps out of the car and runs back to the spot. From off in the desert, we see the sheriff racing insanely toward the camera. He suddenly leaps and throws himself flat on the ground behind a sand dune, next to the camera. From this point of view, the sheriff crouched and breathing in heavy gasps, we watch the kid stand on the side of the road, stare out into the desert and finally get back into the car and drive away.

Billy is hitchhiking again. Obviously, he has ditched the sheriff's car somewhere along the way. A car pulls over. There is a young man driving and in the back seat are his wife and two small children, a boy and a girl. The driver is friendly, tells him he used to hitchhike a lot himself and volunteers the information that he has just returned home from two years in Viet Nam, where he was a pilot. Billy pulls out the gun and lets them know immediately that he wants them to take him anywhere he wants to go. Otherwise, he'll kill them.

It is NIGHT. They pull into a gas station. Billy is hungry, so are the kids. So he goes with the ex-aviator into a small country store that's part of the station. He warns the family to keep quiet or he'll kill everyone.

INSIDE the country store. A seedy old man behind the counter. They ask him for a bunch of ham sandwiches. In close-up, we watch him slice the meat, the knife hesitating minutely, deciding on the thickness of each slice. The two men stand there watching him. Suddenly, the husband wheels around and gets a grip on the hitchhiker from behind. They whirl madly around the store, the father screaming for the proprietor to call the police.

THE MAN

Stop him! He's got a gun!! He's

gonna kill us!!! Help me!!!!

Billy somehow manages to get his gun out and forces the man to the car. The store owner stares after him, mouth agape, then picks up the receiver to call the police.

MORNING. A young boy finds the car, pulled off on a side road, splattered with blood. He opens the door and sees the little girl's baby doll, the naked, flesh-colored rubber kind, and in close-up, we see blood on it.

The EXTERIOR of a run-down shack in the country. We hear the sounds from inside. INTERIOR of shack. Television and radio and newspaper reporters, including an attractive woman with a notebook, are interviewing the killer's father. He's a very old man, an alcoholic, who is slightly pleased to be thrust suddenly into the spotlight, but who treats the situation with a grave sense of public image and self-irony.

THE FATHER

He was always a pretty strange boy, specially after his mother passed away. Then he got real quiet. He didn't have many friends. Just his brothers and sisters.

GIRL REPORTER

Mr. Cooke, is there anything you'd like to tell your son?

FATHER

Yes, there is. Billy, if you can hear me, son, please turn yourself in. Cause what you're doin', it just ain't right. You're not doin' right, son. And you know it.

During this appeal, the camera has moved slowly into a CLOSE-UP of the old man's face.

INTERIOR. Car. Night. Rain. A car radio. The light glows yellow in the dark car. The radio is playing a country gospel hour. A revival meeting. The preacher and his flock. As Billy listens, we flash back into his past, over the rain and windshield wipers. We see an old man and a young boy in the woods. The man is Billy's father and the boy is Billy himself

at about age seven or eight. The father teaches his son how to shoot a gun. He tell him to aim at a rabbit.

THE FATHER

Don't be afraid, son. Don't be afraid.
Just squeeze one off.

We see a rabbit pinioned in a rifle's telescopic sight.

A small town high school, 3:30, bell rings, school is out. The kids gush from the building and flow like a human stream to the favorite drive-in restaurant.

INTERIOR of car. Billy is eating a cheeseburger and Coke. Through his windows he watches the movements of one of the carhops. She is wearing slacks and with him we watch her ass and thighs. When she comes to collect, he asks her to come for a ride with him. We hear him say this but the ensuing dialogue is shown in pantomime. The actual voices are drowned out by the sounds of radios, kids talking.

They are driving up a mountain road. The Rolling Stones' "I Can't Get No Satisfaction" comes on the radio. Billy sings along with the record with wild abandon and squirms in his seat like a toad.

The car is parked on a rocky view overlooking the ocean. He gets out of the car and dances around it, acting crazy, and howling like an Indian. He ducks up and down, appearing and reappearing in different windows. She laughs at his clowning.

The couple are in the back seat, vaguely we see their movements, hear them whispering, laughing, talking. CUT TO outside of car. They get out of the back of the car, hair and clothes disarranged and move side by side into a rough terrain behind some rocks. Camera holds on the rocks. A primeval rock formation. At a rhythm that is peculiarly excruciating, we hear three gunshots.

A rest room in an LA service station. EXTERIOR. Billy enters rest room.

INTERIOR rest room. Billy shaves with soap in rest room mirror, runs his wet hands through his hair.

EXTERIOR, downtown LA. Camera follows him from a car, as he wanders through the downtown crowds of Broadway and Main Street. Many times he is lost to our view. We see him in an arcade, where he plays a pinball machine.

CLOSE-UP of pinball game in progress.

Billy in photo booth. Flash of the lights.

CLOSE-UP of four automatic photos: flash flash flash flash. Four faces of Billy.

Billy in downtown hamburger stand. He is eating, seen from behind, Gun enters frame left. He turns and sees it, stares back blankly.

CUT TO EXTERIOR, street. In hand-held confused close-up sequence, we see him dragged and shoved into the back seat of a car (police car). He is kicked and beaten. During the struggle, we hear many men's voices, gloating righteous exclamations.

MEN

So you're the little bastard that
killed all those people! (Kick) You
had a good time, didn't you? (Kick)
You really killed 'em, didn't you?

Hands cuffed behind his back, he looks up with a confused expression and says:

BILLY

But I'm a good boy.

The men laugh.

Film switches to COLOR. A montage of extant photographs representing death. The body of Che Guevara, a northern Renaissance Dutch crucifixion, bullfight, slaughterhouse, mandalas and into abstraction. A nature film of a mongoose killing a cobra, a black dog runs free on the beach. FADE INTO BLACKNESS.

EXTERIOR night. On the steps of City Hall of Justice we see the hitchhiker descend dreamlike in slow motion, move languorously across a deserted city square toward the camera

until he covers the lens and seems to pass through it.

Seen now from behind, as he moves away from lens, he enters a desert outskirts region where he finds an automobile graveyard. He is wandering in Eternity. In the junkyard, three people squat around a small fire. They're cooking potatoes in the coals, an older man named DOC pokes the fire with a stick. There is an older woman, funky, glamorous, and the third person is a young boy, a mute, of indeterminate age. He is slightly made up with white makeup. They are hoboes in Eternity and are not surprised to see him. He nears the fire.

DOC

Well, how ya doin', kid? I see you did it again. Ya hungry? There's some food here if ya want it.

Billy doesn't speak. He stares at the moon. The woman has kept her head down, her hair covering her face.

DOC

Billy's back. Blue Lady, didja hear me? I said Billy's back.

She looks up for the first time.

BLUE LADY

Hi, Billy.

BILLY

Hello, Blue Lady.

He looks at the boy.

Hiya, Clown Boy.

CLOWN BOY claps his hands and nods, his face contorted grotesquely in greeting. They sit for a while like this, and stare at the fire. They eat the potatoes. Then Doc rises and says:

DOC

The sun's gonna be up in a while. I guess we'd better move on.

Slowly, one by one, the other two rise. Doc puts out the fire with dirt and says:

DOC

Ya comin' with us, Billy?

BILLY

(thinking hard)

I don't know, Doc, I just don't know.

Doc smiles.

DOC

Well, we'll see ya later, kid. The rest of the gang will be real glad to see ya. They sure will. Well...

Doc, Clown Boy and the Blue Lady start moving toward the rising sun into the mountain desert. Every now and then they turn and wave, Clown Boy leaping up and down madly and waving good-bye.

As they slowly disappear, camera changes focus to Billy, the hitchhiker, the kid, the killer, hunkered over the dead smoldering fire.