

6. GOD AND COCAINE

Jason is the son of a well-known country music star. A true legend. Jason is trying hard to push out of the shadows. He wants to avoid just a bad-boy image. That's too easy. He spends the morning watching a Flaming Lips concert video.

"I used to have a bit of a drug problem. That's why I get a little afraid hanging out with these cats. I'll still take a drink now and then. Nothing too spectacular."

Jason's band is called Line in Delphi.

Lana is hanging out at Jason's. Lana is a student at Vanderbilt. She is a giant fan of the Kings of Leon.

"I know Caleb pretty well."

I can't tell if she's just trying to impress me.

I ask Lana, "Where did you meet Jason?"

"I used to see him play. He's a really good acoustic guitar player. I love his songs."

Jason comes back from the kitchen with a drink for himself. "I could have got you both one."

"I'm OK," says Lana."

"Me too," I tell him.

Jason is a little angry at the world. He's a great buddy. Just don't get on his bad side. He and Lana are friends. They were never romantic. He keeps her on the pulse of Nashville. Lana is from a small town near the Kentucky border. When she was eleven, her parents moved to the Nashville suburbs. She retains her country charm. But the suburbs have taught her to assume privilege.

I can't help but compare her to Hattie. She has that adventurous side. She wants to try it all. But she's not an artist.

Some of Jason's buddies are still bitter. These cats are scary. They keep him in the game. They have their motorcycles parked outside his place. That means Harley, sucker. Serious times. A lot of his friends play in his band. They know how to enjoy themselves.

Jason always tells them, "It's all cool as long as you don't hurt each other." Jason admits that it's hard being in a band where the guys end up brawling more with each other than anyone else.

Jason takes me to a recording session. They've got a great sound. Jason is such a soulful singer. I make mental notes as I listen to them work. I want to learn the business. That's why Jason lets me hang around.

"If there's anything that you need, just tell me," Jason tells us. I don't know where to start.

They work until 2 in the morning. Then they come back to house for some real action. The house is built almost like a ski chalet. There is a big sunken living room with an adjoining dining room and kitchen. Then the bedrooms are up the stairs. Some of the guys are pretty wired. Jason is trying to taking it easy. His drummer Clark has a bottle in his hand. It's half full of Jack and coke.

"You like my glass," he says as he holds the bottle up.

Lana says, "Give me a swig." It drips off her chin. He licks it off. She smiles.

Lana Erickson is going out with a guy named Van. Van is in Colorado for a couple of weeks for work.

Lana turns and smiles at me. She is trying to get me going.

Barry is the guitar player. He's more sedate. Gin and tonic. He tries to act sophisticated. He has that continental style. He's a big fan of Oasis. Gene is the bass player. And he's a total wild man. When the trouble starts, look for Gene and Clark. At this moment, he's up to a little mischief in the bathroom.

Jason yells at him, "You're not doing meth again?"

He answers from inside the door, "Nothing so redneck."

They all laugh. These guys are trying to evoke the old country style of Cash and Williams. They also are your Rolling Stones type of rockers. Jason adds that brooding indie influence. It's the perfect mix.

Clark adds, "Of jack and coke."

Shelia's a dear friend of Barry. She has her own acoustic thing going. She wishes for more from Barry. But he embraces the freedom of the road.

Sheila and Lana are talking.

"I wish that we didn't need guys."

Lana gives her a seductive smile. "Sometimes we don't."

"That isn't what I meant." Sheila appreciates the sympathy. But she finds Lana is a little naive. She gives in too easily to her whims.

Sheila comes to sit by me. I think that Barry is a little jealous that she is talking to me. He resents her intellect. Just to talk to me is almost cheating for him.

"I want you to come hear me play sometime."

"I'd love to. Jason lent me your CD, Sheila. It's great"

I can tell that Lana has a crush on Barry. But there's only so much that she can do while Sheila is around.

Sheila tells me, "I think that the guys drink more when I'm here. Otherwise, they'd have more girls carousing. That's where they'd find their fun."

"Even Barry?" I ask.

"I can't really expect him to be faithful. I just expect him to be around."

Lana is trying to stay in the game. She's drinking along with the rest of them. I'm taking it light. Just a beer or two.

Jason is in one of those moods when he wants to talk about the meaning of life. "You come to all of our shows. You're a cool guy. What's really up with you. What are you looking for?"

"A girl that is pure of heart."

He laughs at me, "Repeat yourself. What are you talking about?"

"You know. A girl that won't disappoint you by sleeping with your friends."

"Oh, I know what you want. You want a convent girl. I bet you're into that long distance sex thing."

"Long distance."

"Where you don't actually touch her. No one does. You just keep her picture up in your room. And you communicate by the internet."

I ask him, "Jason, why are you making fun of me?"

"Because you sound so silly." He has this big grin on his face. I can't help but go along.

Lana is looking at me from the other side of the room. She is near the stairs. He sees that I'm looking at Lana.

"Don't you wish that you could keep it like this forever?."

"Sure," I tell him.

"Maybe we could build you the perfect girl. That's the only way you're ever going to get what you want."

"What are you saying, Jason?"

"If a hot girl came up to you and told you that she wasn't wearing any panties under her skirt, you'd be on that thing like white on rice."

"No way. That's just too vulgar."

He is clear, "Bull shit!"

"No, really."

Jason is reminding me how I don't feel comfortable with my nakedness. In the gym, I always cover myself. I don't feel comfortable with guys who walk around without anything on. I think that I feel that sex is dirty unless I'm really in love with a girl. That's why I'm so concerned with purity, her precious heart, my precious soul.

It's not just a sex thing. I feel the same way when I go to the toilet. I wash my hands well, sometimes all the way up to the elbows. And I use the edge of a finger to open the door. It's scary just thinking about all the guys that don't wash their hands after taking a really nasty shit. I've seen these same guys want to shake my hands when I come out of toilet.

It's more than a hygiene issue. It's an issue of honesty. These are people who can't be honest with themselves. They just stew in their own bull shit. Real phonies!

Lana walks over to stand by me. Jason has already gone upstairs. She brings her lips close to mine. "Are you having fun?" she asks.

"I'm having a great time?"

"I wish there was more privacy here." I can feel her breath against my face. She has been chewing spearmint gum. I do want to kiss her. Everyone else is either upstairs or outside. I still don't feel alone.

She hops up and down. "I wish that there was dancing here."

I do too. I really like her moves for what she's shown me so far.

"Don't you miss Van?," I ask her.

"Who told you about Van?"

"You did."

She tells me, "I don't miss him. He hasn't even called me in the last two days. He just takes me for granted."

She sits down on the couch. "Come over here, I want you to touch me. I want you to make out with me."

She sounds so strange as if she is reading from a sex manual.

"What if I kiss you too long. Won't Van be jealous.?"

"Don't say stupid things."

I sit down on the couch. It is so comfy that I get buried in the cushions. She is now on

top of me.

“That’s not so bad, is it.”

Her perfume is driving me nuts. It’s Chanel #5.

She kisses me deep. I put my hands on her hips and she moves them off. She can tell that I am ready to let them wander. She still wants to control the fun.

“I’m glad that you’re a friend of Jason’s.” She tells me. I suppose that she has already forgotten about Barry.

We make out for while. I love her mint kisses. Then she asks me to get her a glass of wine.

“Please, do it for me, dear.”

I get up and go over to get her drink. She tries to include me. “Get something for yourself too.”

Clark and Gene come in. They take one look at us and go upstairs. Barry and Sheila have gone upstairs long ago.

She sips her wine slowly. I try to kiss her again. She seems to have lost interest.

“I’m going to go to bed.” She puts her empty wine glass on the table. I am burning inside. I want her to invite me upstairs. I am too paralyzed to ask. She goes up to her bed. I can’t move. My eyes are feeling heavy. I just fall asleep down here. It’s about 3:30.

I am awakened at about 8. The guys are running down the stairs. It’s Barry, Gene, and Clark. Sheila and Jason are both still sleeping. I suppose that Lana is up there too.

“Where are you guys going?” I ask.

Clark replies “Where do you think we’re going? We’re off to church.

These are guys who were cutting lines of coke with serious Bowie knives last night. Now they’re going to get their high with the Lord. No joke.

Jason comes down about 10.

“I suppose that they are all being forgiven for their partying last night.”

“Is that how it goes?” I ask.

He is the consummate host, “How did you sleep?”

“Great. I slept well.”

“Where’s the little lady?”

I kid him, “Polly Purebred.”

“Exactly.”

I wonder, “Jason, where did you meet her?”

“She came to see me do acoustic. I think that she had a crush on me. Then it was on Barry. She’s a total college girl.”

“I like her.”

Jason notes, “I can tell.”

From this point on, Lana goes almost everywhere with me. She is my antidote for Hattie. Lana doesn’t get about until 11. By that point, Jason and Sheila have gone to the store for more groceries.

Before she leaves, Sheila tells us, “They’re going to want to eat when they come back from church. All that talk about God is going to make them hungry. At that church, they wind the minister up and he doesn’t stop. That’s what the boys need for their years of sinning.” She’s

getting a kick out of making fun of them. Her songs hardly communicate a Pollyanna sense of the world.

Lana complains of a headache. "I don't know what I'm going to do with myself today. I wish that someone had sex with me last night. I wouldn't feel so bad about things right now." She is so casual about it. She doesn't blink an eyelash. Her red hair makes her look so attractive in the morning light.

Lana is so obviously playing with me. As long as Van remains in the picture, she is totally in control of things. I feel as if I am really going to mess up with her.

Jason lets me know that his place is mine while I'm in Nashville. "Whatever you do, I don't want you staying in a hotel. I invited you down here. I want you to stay with me. I just don't want you going to a hotel."

Lana heads out early in the afternoon. She is really cool with me. Not even a hug. She claims that she has homework to do. Jason takes the guys back to studio. He lets me beg off as it is some really tedious overdubbing. I watch some TV and go for a walk. Even though the house is just outside of Nashville, it is almost like being in the country.

I get a frantic call from Lana about 9:30.

"I need you to come out here." She is in tears. I guess that she is upset with Van. She tells me where she is. It's in the city near Vandy. I have to make quite a drive to get in there. But it's all cool. I feel bad deserting Jason. But he'll understand. Besides, he may not be back until late. It's not like it's prime hanging out time.

Lana live in an apartment by herself. Her parents pay for it while she's in school. It's a really nice place. She meets me in only a robe. She has pulled it over her, but it has only been lightly belted and is already coming open. There are tears in her eyes. They are blood shot.

"I don't know when he's coming back. I want you to hold me."

She wraps her body around me. She pulls me tight. I head for her living room. The place is nicely furnished. It's pieces that she's found at antique sales and garage sales. They all state her personality.

"Do you want something to drink?" she asks me.

"I'm totally OK." I tell her.

She is sitting on the couch across from me. I am in a chair.

"He was supposed to come back this week. But now he doesn't know when he's suppose to come back. I really don't know why I'm with him. He treats me so badly."

I suggest, "Break up with him."

"I can't. I think that I still love him." I hardly know why she is involving me. Her bathrobe is starting to come open. She ignores it. She is still distraught. She gasps as she talks.

"He's a great guy. We've talked about moving in together. He's offered to pay for my apartment. But work requires him to be away so much."

"That really sucks."

Lana tells me to come sit next to her. "You're to far away. I feel as if I am screaming just talking to you."

I move so that I am closer to her. I can feel the heat of her body. She really turns me on. I want to do something about this. I feel like a complete cad.

She reminds me, "I'm still with Van. He's coming back. I don't want to do anything to

jeopardize that.” I come to sit by her.

I tell her, “Do what you want.” I feel as if I am just mumbling to myself. She is on home court, and she uses it perfectly to her advantage.

“I can get you some wine. I’ve been drinking some wine.” She stands up and her robe comes open. She fills her glass and comes to sit closer to me. She is resting her shoulder against mine. She has calmed down.

This appears so nerve-wracking to her. I am sure that I can help.

Her legs are so smooth and petite. She crosses one leg in front of her. She looks over at me and smiles.

Lana apologizes for today. “I’m really sorry for what happened. I felt as if I was cheating on him by making out with you yesterday. I didn’t want to lead you on. And now you’re here.”

“That’s right,” I tell her. “Now I’m here.”

“I feel that I can tell you anything. You like to listen. It’s not just a sexual thing. You really care about what I have to say.”

I look at her and smile. I don’t want to say too much at a moment like this.

“I wish that I could kiss you now. But I’d feel more guilty doing something here. This is the couch where we first had sex.”

“Really,” I smirk slightly. I feel as if she is giving me a tour of the White House. She is not holding back at the tawdry details.

Her robe is almost completely open. I can see the outline of her breast. The robe rides down her stomach until it just covers her below the waist.

She sees that I am looking at her. She passes her hand over the robe as if to close it, but it only comes open more. She smiles.

There is this awkward pause between us. Then she looks up at me and stares in my eyes. There is nothing at all to say. She kisses me. A slow gentle kiss. I run my lips along hers. She tries to guard her robe so that it doesn’t come open any more. Then she doesn’t care. She is sitting across me with her legs spread open and her knees in the air.

There is such a feeling of awe in the room. Pure silence. She holds in place. I am losing it.

“This is why I asked you to come. I want to be with you.”

“Do you have any condoms?” I ask her.

She points to her room, “They’re on the dresser.”

I head in there to get them. I see that she is all ready if her parents come for a quick visit.

She calls out, “Bring the box.”

I head back with the box. I am now all aroused.

She hasn’t changed positions. She is beckoning. I am just above her. I am ready to take off my clothes.

She asks me the theological question, “Do you believe in God?”

“I don’t know. Sort of. Not really. I going through this phase where I’m not sure. All the stuff with my Dad and my Mom. I don’t know.”

She points out, “You have to be sure. You have to have accepted Jesus as your personal savior.”

I’m not sure if I am supposed to pull off my pants at this point. I feel like telling her

whatever she wants to hear.

She looks up at me again, "Do you think I'm cute? I feel too fat."

"You look fantastic." My mouth is drooling. I feel embarrassed.

She sits up and smooths over her robe. "Those are his condoms."

"What do you mean?"

"He'll know if we had sex here."

"Really. We can get more condoms."

She is stubborn about it, "He will know."

I look at the box. I don't see any numbers on the condoms. "Has he copied down the serial numbers?"

"He will know."

It sounds as if she is talking about God. At this point, I am even doubting the existence of a personal Van, much less a personal God.

I ask, "What do you want to do?"

"I'm getting a little drowsy from all this wine. Maybe you should go. I'm just going to regret anything that I've done tomorrow. We can get together during the daytime. We can talk. The if things work out, we can try this again.

I wonder what she means. Is she going to give me the whole interrogation about God. I better buy some condoms if I come back. I don't want to use the condoms that were meant for his holiness.

I hate the idea of having to drive back to Jason's place. It is getting really late now. What is the alternative?

As I get ready to go, she pulls me close for a kiss. The robe again comes open. I put my hand on her neck. I gradually let it work its ways down so it is close to her breast.

"You know that we can't have sex without a condom. I could let you do anything else that you want."

I feel blessed. I just am worried about her second thoughts.

"Maybe I should go," I tell her.

"No, stay. I know how long the ride is back to Jason's. I have class in the morning. You can sleep in here."

I feel fortunate to be offered the sacred bed where they first consummated their relationship. I have been introduced into the sacred brotherhood.

She gets me a sheet and a pillow.

"I wish that you could sleep on the floor in my room. I don't feel safe being alone. But this should be good."

I thank her. I really dreaded the long drive back.

She goes to her room. Her light seems to be on for the longest time. Then she closes it without saying a thing. No doubt she was exorcizing the demons.

That morning she gets up early for class. I act as if I am still asleep. She walks naturally around the apartment naked. She thinks nothing of it. Then she makes it back to her room after her shower. She gets dressed. She makes a quick breakfast.

"I left the key on the table. Just let yourself out. Leave the key under the door." She heads off for class.

I don't get up for a couple of hours, around 9. I make myself some coffee and toast. I take a shower and then head out.

I go to Grimey's to look at records. I've heard about what a great place it is. I pick up a Shellac record. Then I call Jason. He invites me to come by the studio. He's cutting vocals.

He's very busy. I really can't talk to him about Lana. He's going to Exit In to see the Frames. I agree to meet him. I hang around for a little more of his session. His voice is so sweet. His new songs are truly haunting.

"We'll have a beer together tonight," he tells me. "If you want to head back to the house, I know that Gene is out there."

I take him up on the offer and drive back to the place.

Gene greets me, "Jason called to tell me that you were coming out. I guess some sparks flew between you and Lana last night."

"I think that she was missing her guy."

Gene gets a twinkle in his eye, "You know what they say: when the cat's away..."

We both laugh. I really can't go in the intricacies of Lana with him. I almost feel as if I am betraying her by talking about it so jovially.

Everyone is heading over to the Frames that evening. When Lana gets home from class, she has to rest and do some homework. She plans to meet us there after she has finished.

Jason is all smiles when I get there. The Frames are a great band from Ireland. They have based themselves out of Nashville. The singer is a totally involving guy.

"He's a personal inspiration," Jason tells me.

I tell him that I have to use the toilet. He warns me, "Watch that one stall. The water just shoots up when you flush it. Step back or you'll get all wet."

I laugh, "Thanks for the advice."

I head to the stall. I notice the graffiti, "For a great piece of Vanderbilt flesh, call Lana Erickson." Wow! The phone number is hers. What the hell!

When I flush, I am sure to step back. The water just surges in the air—Woo!

I keep my discovery to myself. I wonder why I didn't try to erase it. Lana shows up around 9:30. She hugs Jason and gives me a big kiss.

The Frames are fantastic. The singer is so involving. He has everyone in the place singing by the end of the night. Lana is insistent that I come back to her place.

When I get to her apartment, there are flowers in the living room. It reminds me that I have forgotten to get flowers.

"Where did you get the flowers?" I know already where she got them.

She tells me, "I got them from Van. They are really nice."

I agree with her, "Yes, they are." She goes in the kitchen, "Do you want some coffee?"

"It's a little late for coffee," I tell her.

"I'm going to have some wine."

I tell her, "I drank too much at Exit Inn. I'll just have some water."

She casually tells me, "I got some condoms if you were wondering." She sits across from me and drinks her wine. My water is on the table.

"I want to sleep with you, but there are some ground rules. There are certain places that you can't touch. They are meant for Van. I still love him. I just want to be with you now."

I am ready to memorize the manual. I just hope this doesn't interfere with my spontaneity.

She gives me the look. It seems almost like a high school thing. It says I am ready. I am trying to hypnotize you into wanting me. I have to smile.

"What is it?"

"Oh nothing. It's been a long day."

She stands up and seems to be posing. I pick up a magazine and start to flip through it. Anorexic models with eerie shadows highlighting their bodies.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" she asks. "Am I too fat?"

"I'm not even looking at you at this moment. I'm just flipping through the magazine. Do you want me to look at you?"

She is giving me a weird look.

"If you want me to leave, I'll go." I stand up. She stands next to me. I can smell the bouquet of the wine. I brace myself.

"Van really likes to have sex. All the time. When I see him, I get aroused. I come even before he is inside me."

Wow. I want to see a video of all this. That way I won't do something really stupid. I have to be sure where not to touch.

As I start to enter her world of sensuality, I feel like I am dodging all these phantoms. It is nothing but a wrestling match. But she is so attractive. And I just love how eager she is. She works her hands down my pants. And it has begun. I am going to meet my maker. I follow her lead. She tells me what to do, where to caress.

Her body is mesmerizing. Then she loses herself in the sex. She doesn't hold back. I am blown away. We lie together in her bed and listen to the stillness of the night. It is haunting. I have never known someone to be so involving. Even Hattie did not have this confidence. But it is completely artificial. It can fade like a flower.

The next morning she is a little tense. She wants to pretend that none of this happened. This will continue on for another few days. Before Van is to come back, she asks me over.

"Van is coming back in two days. We won't be able to see each other like we've been seeing each other."

I look at her, "Are you sure that you want to stay with him?"

"Van and I are meant to be together. It's like water and wine."

I'm not sure what she means. I pull her close. She resists slightly. Everything says that we have become one flesh. But there are many things that I can't do. Others that she will only allow after we have been together for hours. I am still part of her experiment.

She likes to go out to the house. She's not going to stop following Jason and his band.

Jason tells me, "She's a freak. There's a lot of them around here. Girls who are two people. One for their family, and another for the darkness. It's a real turn on. But it can also be a downer.

She is hanging out with Barry tonight. Sheila isn't here. The rest of the guys are off somewhere else. Jason and I are watching a movie. She is upstairs. I'm not sure if Barry is with her. But she comes down a little later with this weird look on her face.

"I want to go back home. Are you coming?"

The movie isn't quite over. Jason pauses it.

Jason tells me, "Sorry, that you have to head out. I'll look forward to seeing you soon."

In the car, she has a confession, "You know how I've always had a crush on Barry. I was upstairs with him. We were drinking bourbon. We were both having a good time. And he kissed me."

She continues, "I told you that I didn't want to have sex with anyone because Van was coming back. But Barry wouldn't let me say no."

I feel really strange. Angry at him. "Did he force himself on you?"

"Not at all. He's with Sheila. And I know that. I never felt any danger when I was with him. It was all an innocent crush. He didn't give me a chance to catch my breath. We were making out. And then he just got all weird. He started touching me really provocatively. I couldn't stop. I just couldn't stop."

There are tears in her eyes.

She keeps on, "I wanted to be good for you, for Van. I don't know. I don't know what I'm doing."

We're in her living room. We are again across from each other. There is nothing that I can say. I don't feel like even touching her at this moment. The betrayal makes me feel a little freaky. I don't know what I can do. I just don't know.

"I have class in the morning. I want you to sleep here on the couch."

She takes a shower and goes to bed. In the middle of the night, she comes to me like a phantom. It is as if she is sleep walking. She is so ferocious in bed. She almost draws blood with her kisses.

The next day she says nothing about us being together. Van can hardly avoid the fact that we have been together. My traces are everywhere around the apartment. She acts as if she says nothing that he will never know.

"He's been with women in Colorado. I'm sure of it."

I head out to see Jason one last time. Barry can't look me in the eye. Gene is up to some mischief

Gene tells me with this weird Southern accent, "Sometimes, I walk the hounds, other times I let them walk on their own." Then he starts to giggle like crazy.

Jason comments, "I wasn't sure if I'd see you again. Sorry about what happened."

"Did you know?"

Jason tells me, "I see everything. It's not Barry. I know for sure. I told you that girl is a freak. But it's not like he couldn't have acted more above board. Sheila's said as much to me. She's a great gal. But I've seen him peel a girl from the crowd when she's right there."

"She lets him do it?" I ask.

"What can she do?"

I tell him that I plan to drive back to Atlanta.

"Sheila's doing an acoustic set. You have to come see her before you leave."

"Won't Barry feel pissed?"

"I think that you have to show him up. No one really stands up to him."

I call Lana and don't get an answer. She knows that I am leaving. Sheila is really glad to see me. She puts on a great show. Barry is in the corner looking at me all the time. She sings

honest songs about betrayal and redemption. There's not a thing that he can do. She give me a big hug after the show. "You've got to come back. We can spend more time together," she tells me.

Jason walks me back to my car. "I want you to come back and stay. Don't worry about that shit with Barry. You're my man. It's not like there's anything that you did."

I plan to come back. I want to learn more about recording from Jason. I love his songs. I love his boys even if Barry is being a prick.

It's about 9:30 when I head out of Nashville. It's a long drive. I'm very tired. Once I cross the Georgia border, the cars start to move fast. I am on a raceway. I don't look back. I am heading home.

When I get home, I check my email. There is a note from Lana, "I'm sorry that I missed your call. I really enjoyed your company. My door is always open to you."

I am almost ready for bed. I know that she is sound asleep. I'm still not sure what I'm doing. I could never go back to Nashville to be with her. But I have a feeling that we will meet somewhere else along the way.

Hattie and Lana have seemed so much alike. I wanted them to be something. They started out like that and became the opposite. My desire makes my lovers into monsters. What is wrong with me?