

CHELSEA

“Are you coming back for a repeat performance?”

Chelsea dashed across the wooden floor in her platforms. Her legs were reaching out to touch the sky.

“You go, girl.”

She was going. She was making her way in the world. She was out to obliterate all the bull shit which had haunted her over the years. She didn’t want to think back to those years in school when people mocked her for making her own way.

She scooted another fifty feet, then she totally wiped out.

“What just happened to me.”

There, he was. Julius reached out and pulled Chelsea up.

“Mam, do you need some hlep.”

“You know I do.”

Julius peered just long enough to understand.

“Where were you going?”

“I was getting out of this shit hole. I just got a head of steam, and I tumbled over myself.”

“That is not a good thing to do.”

“Unfortunately, it what happened to me.”

“I am glad that I was able to help.”

“You are a true gentleman.”

“I think that this is the first time that I have been branded a gentleman in a long time.”

“You are gentle, and all man.”

Julius smiled. He didn’t mind the flattery.

“Why were you in a hurry?”

“I didn’t want to get tested out. I always feel as if I am getting tested out if you catch my drift.”

“That hardly seems fair to you.”

“We all have our tribulations.”

“I have seen a lifetime full.”

“Is there any way that I can help?”

“Not unless you have a million dollars.”

“I have barely a cent to my name. But I have my own talents.”

“I’m sure that you do.”

“When two people are down on their luck, if they band together, then teamwork has a way of making up for all the pitfalls of life.”

“That sounds like a positive recommendation. I could use a little positivity.”

“I can give you all the positivity that you need.”

“We both could use a little more than that.”

“I need to get out of this town.”

“Maybe my dear friend Lane could offer you the help that you need.”

“That sounds fair. Maybe I can use my talents in the pursuit of happiness.”

“I am down for that deal.”

Julius prepared Lane for the introductions.

“What do we need with another mouth to feed? I can’t do the miracle of the loaves and the fishes.”

“We may not need a miracle. Chelsea seems as if she has a way of making a few miracles of her own happen.”

Lane was resistant. But Julius was set on adding a new member to the group. In Tupelo, Lane counted out the money that was left after paying for the room.

“We are in trouble. And I am not giving a sermon for a couple of days.

“There is a convention of auto parts manufacturers. I am going to work my magic”.

Lane felt tense as he watched Chelsea stumble out of the room.

“If worse comes to worse, I am going to come back feeling a lot better.

Chelsea needed some courage to get one of the businessmen back to the room.

“What do you have in mind, my kind sir?”

“You could make me a drink if you have that in you.”

After a few drinks, Josh was looking at Chelsea differently.

“Maybe you could make me feel a little better.”

“I am a working woman if you know what I mean. I have trouble making ends meet.”

“Are you giving me a sociology lesson?”

“I am teaching you a reality.”

Josh chuckled.

He started to stroke Chelsea’s leg.

“Are you sure that you know what you are getting yourself in for?”

“I am very sure.”

“I wouldn’t mind a strong man lying next to me.”

Josh had his expectations. As Chelsea offered him pleasure, he felt as nothing could be more perfect. As they progressed, Josh wondered. Then he felt sick to his stomach.

“Where the hell is my gun?”

“What are you talking about?”

“I am going to fucking kill you. You are a guy.”

“I have guy parts. But it is not where my heart is.”

“It sure is where my heart isn’t. I want my money back.”

“I gave you everything that you wanted and more. Your rules may work in Mississippi, but they are hardly a standard for the rest of the nation.”

When she caught up to Lane and Julius, Chelsea didn’t want to get into the details of her transaction.

“I have loads of money. But we better clear out of here or we are going to die.”

The mark had no idea where they were staying, but it wouldn’t be long before he found them. Lane gathered his clothes. Julius took what little he had. Chelsea had an overnight bag and two large shopping bags stuffed with shoes and clothes. They clattered through the hall as they made their way to the Cadillac.

Lane was sure that there was a car in the rearview mirror. Josh may have been staking out the exit. They rushed out of there at a full clip. They didn’t stop until they reached Memphis.

“Is every day like this, Chelsea?”

“Some guys adjust to the reality. I try to chose wisely. But I look for the same thing in a guy that everyone else looks for.”

Lane commented, “That is a deadly combination.”

Julius was silent through most of the journey. He felt partially responsible for the melee.

Chelsea explained, “Men see what they want to see. I can’t help it if they get disappointed when they don’t get everything that they expect. That is all part of love and war.”

Chelsea claimed to be an expert at all out war. That was where this game was always headed.

“I have done what I can to change myself. Not everybody is so accommodating to the forces of the universe.”

Lane asked, “What do you mean by the forces of the universe?”

“We are all headed towards an apex in our existence. Not all of us can accept the transformation.”

Julius had his own dreams.

“I don’t want to spend all my years in con games.”

Only Lane had a plan for the future. But his vision was based on a fragile foundation. That was why he was such a potent speaker. He knew his enemy.

Chelsea maintained, “We all need to know our enemy.”

Chelsea added another flavor to their adventures. There were times when she would come back to the room loaded with cash.

“This is not Las Vegas.”

“I can’t get guys to roll the dice for me. That is why I have to be so good at what I do.”

“Does God want us to twist our identities so that they become something unrecognizable?”

“That is what we do all the time.”

“Chelsea, that seems almost perverse.”

“We all want something different. We can’t remain in permanence. The universe is in flux.”

“God teaches absolutes.”

“But we are interpreting them relatively.”

Julius smirked as the two of them argued. Lane needed someone to challenge him. It wasn’t as if he was going to keep his hands off the pastor’s wife.

“The pastor’s wife has been exchanging recipes with me.”

“Chelsea, does she really not know.”

“She knows everything. She is accepting of God’s creation.”

“God thinks that fooling with his laws is an abomination.”

“I enhance his creation.”

Julius added, “I saw the pastor winking at Chelsea.”

“I don’t want that kind of thing happening on my watch.”

“People want different things, Lane. You assume that everyone believes in the same way that you do. What you are doing is an abomination.”

Lane was trying to keep up. He held his copy of the Bible.

“There is a worldview in here. You cannot mess with the order of the world.”

“Lane, you do not always know what you think that you know.”

“Lane has been looking at Mrs. Calhoun’s cleavage. He really doesn’t have time to consider moral subtleties.”

“I am not like you, Julius.”

“You are worse.”

Chelsea asserted, “I can help you get done what you want to do.”

“What are you telling me, Chelsea.”

“You need to be more honest with who you are.”

“What are you telling me?”

“I can give you advice.”

“You don’t even know who you want to be. How can you give me advice?”

“You go through changes in your life. You are not always constant.”

“Are you doubting my moral standards?”

“I want you to be honest with yourself.”

“I don’t know if Lane can allow that much honesty in his work. He has to fall if he wants to rise to the top.”

“I am not cream.”

“You want to be the cream of the cream.”

Chelsea giggled.

“I hope that you take me seriously.”

“If you are right with yourself.”

“Can anyone ever be completely right with himself?”

Lane wondered if he had succeeded in his mission for this congregation. He was leaving with all the money. And there was no scandal to live down.

In the car, Julius explained. “You are making it harder for Lane to confront his sinful nature.”

“Have we heeded the warning offered to us by the Lord?”

Chelsea observed, “Lane, you are just as out of control as the rest of us.”

Lane seemed to be restraining himself. Chelsea was getting in his way.

Julius maintained, “There can only be one flamboyant one. Maybe, I need to assume the breach.”

Chelsea seemed to agree. Lane was disturbed by what had transpired.

“I am running this show.”

“Lane, you do that!”

Chelsea stayed silent. She did not want to take on Lane. Lane was not going to have his feathers ruffled.

“I am doing God’s work. I am preparing a sermon.”

“You do that. Chelsea is not stopping you.”

“But I am losing my focus.”

“Lane, you only want someone to blame.”

Julius could take easy pot shots. That only encouraged him to pursue further adventures on his own.

“Where did you get that money, Julius?”

“Poker. And Chelsea helped.”

Julius explained, “No one wants to lose their money. If it is on the up and up, they need to find someone to blame.”

“Did anyone pull guns?”

Chelsea stated, “No one dared.”

Julius had triumphed over Lane. Lane needed some kind of coup if he was going to recover.

Julius was asleep in the back of the car. Chelsea was riding shotgun.

“I’m sorry if I am crimping your style. Maybe, I could help with the ladies.”

“You really can do that.”

“I have a psychology. What is your problem, Lane?”

“You are a freak. You know it.”

“Are you all together? I know that kids made fun of you when you were a kid.”

“How do you know that?”

“I had to deal with a lot of ridicule.”

“Everyone respected me. I had memorized the Bible from age five. “

” I knew things that other people didn’t know.”

“Seriously. Kids loved the Bible whisperer.”

“That is bitchy!”

“Lane, I can’t play it any differently for you.”

Julius started muttering.

“What is it?”

“I was back with all the bodies at Ashby House.”

“What is he talking about?” Chelsea asked.

“He is having a recurring dream.”

“Don’t worry my man! We are all safe.”

When they arrived in Little Rock, Chelsea was slow to get out of the car.

“Do you have history here?”

“I lived here with my mama for a few years. I never really like this place.”

Chelsea hadn’t said much of anything. Both Julius and Lane didn’t ask any questions.

Lane didn’t feel all that comfortable about asking.

Julius asked Lane, “Are you afraid that you are going to be reminded about something in your life?”

“That sounds personal.”

“I heard you talking about being the child preacher. But there must have been something else in your world. Did you get your heart broken?”

“Nothing like that.”

“You realized from a young age that you could seduce girls if you told them that you could do miracles.”

“I was admired for my skills in the Church. I could play the organ. I could interpret the Bible. I had a million talents. I never wasted my time. I was always doing something.”

Lane and Julius headed into the building.

“This is Pastor Williams.”

Pastor Williams looked askance at Chelsea.

“I am not sure if I am comfortable with this kind of tom foolery.”

Lane came to the defense of Chelsea, “Chelsea is equally part of creation as the rest of us.”

From that point on, Lane resolved that he was going to seduce the pastor’s wife. Jane hardly seemed like Lane’s type. But there he was in the corner engaged in deep Bible study.

The visit was becoming more than a little precarious.

Chelsea did not waste words, “Pastor Williams, I have no doubt that you suffered quite a traumatic incident in your youth.”

Pastor Williams lowered his voice a whole octave, “What are you trying to tell me?”

“You look like you know what to do for fun.”

The pastor had been insulted. He wondered how he was going to seek his revenge.

Lane gave a rousing sermon. There was no way that Minister Williams could deny him his fee. But that was hardly how the pastor wanted things to end. The story only became more desperate when Pastor Williams was pulled aside by Chelsea.

“I could show you some things that would curl your hair.”

I ought to fuck you up.”

“The profanity had surprised Chelsea.

“Be honest, Minister. You have an affinity for cock!”

“What did you say?”

“You have been in the hen house. And you have a taste for cock.”

“I ought to rip you from limb to limb.”

“Wouldn’t you rather get your dick sucked?”

As Chelsea continued to push the pastor, Lane had free rein with the wife.

Julius told Chelsea, “If that man has any backbone, he is going to find a shotgun and plug you with it.”

“I am stimulating him in a way that turns him on. That is why I can get away with this shit.”

“I am loving it.”

“You haven’t seen the half of it.”

Lane was again recognizing the power which God had granted him. He wanted to share his vision. After caring for his wife, Lane went looking for Pastor Williams.

The good pastor had pulled out a knife from the kitchen.

“For this and all my sins, I am truly sorry.”

Lane continued, “You better add my sins to the list.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Go ask your wife.”

Julius was the only one who could claim any innocence. So he decided to finish off this tale once and for all!

“Why are you glaring at me?”

“This is Little Rock.”

“So what?”

“Weren’t you one of those banning my brothers from their rightful heritage.”

“How old are you: twenty five? You really have nothing to do with my history.”

“I want to know where you and the Grand Wizard hid the bodies.”

Chelsea intervened, “I think that the Minister showed them mercy if you know what I mean.”

“Pastor, I showed mercy to your wife.”

At that point, Pastor Williams tossed the knife in the general direction of the three men.

“You go the money?”

“I have all of it.” get to the hos

“The road awaits.”

Chelsea knocked the minister down. The three of them ran to the car.

Julius reminded them, “Did you see his face?”

“All these upright pastors have a dark side.”

Lane didn’t say a thing.

In Tyler, Texas, Chelsea realized that she would really need to be on her game. Lane could not defend her every second of the day.

“I wouldn’t mind going back to my hotel room with you.”

Billy was in for some real surprises. Once he woke up from his stupor, he started to cut Chelsea. It would have been much more serious if Julius had not seen what was happening. Chelsea was bleeding from the arm. She did her best to take care of herself. Julius started pounding on Billy. Even though Chelsea was cut, Billy was bleeding all over. Chelsea needed to get to the hospital.

Julius wrapped the wound and drove the car.

Later, Lane asked, “You didn’t get any blood on the car.”

“It was a bloody mess! But your car is clean”

Chelsea related, “I am lucky to have survived. Billy wanted blood.”

“Why do you do this?”

“I don’t realize that the guys don’t know.”

“Do you tell them?”

“The hook me. They are so drunk. They believe what they want to believe.”

“Then they find out. Aren’t you messing with their heads?”

“God is messing with my head. I want to be with guys. This is the body that I have. But it won’t be like that for long. I am going to get it all taken care of.”

“Even then, people will wonder.”

Julius was more live and let live.

“Have you ever been with a guy Julius?”

“I am all women!”

“But you have your own problems.”

Chelsea asked, “What is Lane talking about?”

“Lane is a peeper.”

“I knew that.”

“What do you mean?”

“You are a little like that too.”

Lane felt insulted.

"I never take what is not given."

"What about Minister Williams and his wife?"

Julius asserted, "We all took a little something from him."

They all started laughing.

Lane gunned the gas. The Cadillac bounded along. For once they all seemed on the same page.

"I am going to have a little trouble earning with a wounded wing."

Julius said, "There are only a few stitches."

"I feel that my pride has been damaged."

"You are going to come out of this with flying colors."

Lane was thinking about his sermon. Julius was scheming. He needed a plan.

"We are going to clean this church out."

"Lane is going to kill us."

"We are not going to let him know."

After Lane's sermon, the money was really flowing in. The pastor collected it, and he gave Lane his cut. Chelsea watched as he put the rest in the safe.

"How are you going to get in that safe?"

"That is what I do."

Chelsea ran interference. That gave Julius a lifetime with the safe. It was an old time safe. And he realized how to work the tumblers.

Julius then found a piece of paper. He wrote, "The Lord works in mysterious ways!"

The pastor would probably be more embarrassed when he figured out what had happened. He could hardly blame Lane. Lane was with his wife. And his wife was making sure that the preacher was above board.

"You are a sweet woman."

"You don't know the half of it. My husband has been sampling his congregation. He has had a running affair with his choir director. And all the women from the social are a little to social with him."

Pretty soon, Lane was massaging her neck. The pastor left them alone on the assumption that Lane was offering needed spiritual advice. The pastor got cocky and started coming on to one of the good women of God. That left Lane to his own devices. Meanwhile, Julius had pocketed all the money from the offering. So be it. He was punishing the pastor for his indiscretions.

"How is the arm, Chelsea?"

"I am good."

"I can't wait to see the look on the pastor's face when he reads the note."

Lane had not been told about the robbery. He was vaguely aware of what had transpired. But he preferred to stay in the dark. He had gotten everything that he needed.

"I think that we have gone way to far with our sinning. It is time to purge."

"How do you propose to do that?"

"I will take the lead."

The preacher was willing to ask himself deep questions about his belief. He felt that he

could turn his life around.

“You have to take that first step!”

“Lane, you are way ahead of yourself.”

“I know what are my limits. God has taught me lessons about the forgiveness of self.”

“You look as if you need a lot of forgiveness.”

“Julius, you don’t know the half of it.”

Chelsea offered her outlook, “I cannot live with so much guilt.”

Julius observed, “You are dealing with all the resistance in the world. That is enough in itself. Lane has to create trouble when it is not there.”

At a burger joint, Julius gave in to his ravenous appetite. The other two ate like birds. Julius had a crazy metabolism that allowed him to eat and eat without showing it.

“I am dealing with so much trouble in my life.”

Chelsea and Julius shared a similar view of the world. They face a constant push back. Lane created his own problems. He craved the madness. That only added to the insanity of the crew.

“Where to now?”

“Let’s go to the beach!” Chelsea suggested.

Lane maintained, “I am allergic to the water.”

“Live a little. We can eat cheap.”

They had so much money from the heist. They could hang out at the beach for weeks.

They found a suitable place in North Carolina. The weather wasn’t all that great, but the locale was liberating. They would walk in the rain. Chelsea could dress in her finery.

Julius told them. “I have people from around here.”

The sky teased the sea. And the rain cleansed them.

“We are now ready for real sinning.”

Chelsea was healed by the time that they left.

Lane was developing a reputation as a preacher. His sermons were even recorded for broadcast on radio. He had fans when he arrive at some of the fans.

“What does it feel like to hear the word of God first hand?”

“I am limited to the words of the Evangelists. But I am sure that we could get closer to the Lord.”

There were times when Lane wondered if he was really being taken seriously. He spent all his time studying the word of God. Others seem enthralled by the experience. He wondered if he was lacking something in his exposition.

He told Julius, “It is not easy getting to know the Lord. I feel as if everyone is leading me astray.”

“You can’t get an inflated sense of purpose.”

“I have only one purpose. That is what the Lord has shown me.”

“But you seem to rely on others for your awareness.”

Lane knew their were moments when he became intoxicated by his own success. Like any performer, he loved the adulation of the crowd. If he tasted a little of that excitement, he wanted much more.

“Do you think that you can show me anything about God’s journey?”

“You live this. I feel as if I am only a beginner.”

“If you are going to begin somewhere, this is a great place.”

Lane wanted to make sure that Julius was not going to raid the safe. He didn't want crime stories clouding his reputation.

Chelsea said, “I can help you guys out.”

Lane asked, “Why are you the way that you are? Did God make you that way?”

“Actually, Lane, he did.”

Chelsea developed his story, “I grew up in a small college town. I couldn't really be myself with all these people around from when I was younger. I felt as if there was watching my every move. I'd get away on the weekend. If anyone in my hometown knew I was gay, they would have freaked. And I would have felt so embarrassed.”

“I guess that they all knew. They never saw me with women. And there were these crazy rumors. But I did my best not to give in to any of them. I lived in my mother's house, and I kept to myself.”

Lane felt uncomfortable with the details of the story. He wanted life to stay in the lines. There was a certain resemblance between Chelsea and the women who attracted Lane. That only made him more uncomfortable about these stories.

“This is not for me.”

Julius asked, “What do you really want? Do you think that you are getting closer to salvation. You can't even trust yourself.”

“That is not our role. I make myself vulnerable. That only give God more of an opening.”

Lane expressed deep vulnerability before his admission of his humanity. Julius was much more philosophical about the possible ends of his journey. At times, he surrendered himself to the rational. But he believed that there was a place where he could achieve his dreams.

“Lane, I know all about you.”

“What are you talking about, Pastor.”

“I think that we have quite different views about the agency of God. If we fall as deeply as you credit, we could never make it back to the Lord.”

One of the woman of the congregation made a bee line for the preacher.

“Lane, I feel as if sin is an uncontrollable influence in my life. Is there nothing that I can do to change myself?”

The pastor would advise her not to give in to her temptations. Lane believed that surrendering was the first step to redemption.

“Sometime the devil is too strong. You have to put yourself in a place where you feel God's anointing.”

“Let me give you some of my spirit.”

“I know you all too well.”

“We need to get to know each other much better.”

Julius admitted, “When you are completely out of control, you make an effort to pretend!”

Chelsea realize what was happening. There are forces which shape our identity. And

these influences become more and more powerful. They require a total revision of who we are.

“Lane expects to be free when he is totally under the spell of an omnipresent evil. He views it as outside of him. But he participates completely. He grants evil its force.”

“Julius what are we going to do?”

“Let’s just go for burgers. That is the most temptation that I can deal with.”

Chelsea was primping on the cement bench in front of McDonald’s. She was drawing a crowd. Pretty soon, she was dancing on a table. There she was in heels and bobby socks. The whole place was jamming along with her. Julius jumped on the table and started to slap her butt. The manager wanted to stop it, but they had never sold this many burgers so he let it all continue.

Lane pulled the car around, “We need to clear out.”

“You are ruining our fun!”

“Another pastor caught me in the act.”

“You are incorrigible.”

“I hope that you didn’t take any money.”

“I only took what was due me.”

“Lane, what were you really like as a boy.”

“I told you.”

“He was the one who told everyone else to be good because the teacher was coming back.”

“I was the real troublemaker.”

Julius replied, “Don’t you know it!”