

THE LONG RIDE

Julius explained to Lane, "There are these millionaires. They earn all their money on the backs of the poor. They take the wealth of this country. But they never pay any taxes."

"We can't be like the other shmucks. We have to hold on to our money."

"How much money do we have?"

"Five bucks."

Lane was preaching to the faithful. One young woman gave him her soul: "You're the only one who can ever save me. You can give me everything that I need."

She didn't have to say a thing.

That wave would roll over Lane as if some possessed spirit had gotten a hold of him. It would just shake him all over. It worked wonders. She stared at him.

"I've had my eyes on you all night."

She could feel him looking up and down her body. It felt so dirty. But she wanted to tell herself the presence of the Lord was passing into her. She had been raised with a different system of belief. All that hokum about moving snakes was something foreign to her. However, she couldn't resist Lane. And he seemed to be getting closer by the minute. She wondered if she should simply get on her knees and give the Lord the praise that created her.

This was supposed to be a special night for her. She was celebrating with her girls. They were out to show her a good time. Whenever some of the guys would get rowdy, they would yell in unison. They were ready to do shots and get wild. But Rose seemed different. She had more of a purpose. And Lane was taking advantage of her.

He explained his plan, "In one year's time, I will be rich. In five years, I will be richer."

This was a pale imitation of the kind of guy that her parents wanted her to marry. A doctor or a lawyer. Someone who had learned the ways of this country.

Lane wanted to hear the words from her lips, "I can make you feel so good."

It wasn't going to work that way.

He looked deeply into her eyes, "Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ?"

She said the words to herself, "Jesus Christ."

He was a stranger to her. Her family had not traded in that myth. She had a completely different story.

"I can give you whatever you need.

Julius thought to himself, "That girl's going to sleep through history."

What had he meant?

He could hear himself saying, "Sweetpea, the bus is leaving. And you're not on it."

She was going wherever Lane was going."

"Hi, my name is Rose."

She sat in back among the bibles. When Julius stopped for a soda, Lane wasted no time. They were already naked in the back of the car as it was parked in the lot. Julius wisely went for a walk.

Once he came back, Lane was sitting in the front and reading his bible.

"Where did she go?"

"She had to rush back to do her homework."

“Let’s get out of here.”

“I say so. Her father is going to kill me once he finds out.”

They were on I-40 headed for Kansas City. Lane was blaring gospel radio and Julius was keeping time on the dashboard.

“Lane, have you ever thought about settling down in one place.”

“I really don’t think that it is in me.”

“You enjoy making trouble wherever you go.”

“There are fifty states and hundreds of cities. All of them are calling my name?”

“Don’t you think any of this is going to catch up with you?”

“I have a calling.”

“Sure, you do!”

Lane tried to convince him that he needed time to perfect his mission.

“You’re not in a band.”

“I listen to my own tune.”

No matter, Lane could play a mean organ.

“The Lord Saves Those Who Are Ready to Be Saved.”

“Are you making this up as you go along?”

Lane was looking for some souls who were indeed ready for the word.

“It is going to be a challenge. And you have to be ready for the moment.”

Lane was so committed to his mission.

“I need bodies. I need souls. I am looking for those who are ready for the blessing. They understand the urgency of his mission. We cannot remain complacent. Something must be done.”

Lane was trying to quake his followers to an understanding.

“It’s not funny.”

He needed to stare down Julius who was trying to disrupt his concentration.

“Don’t hurt me!”

The congregation rolled with the words of the preacher.

“You thought that God had abandoned you. Look at yourselves. God knows that you are sinners. And part of your sin is despair. God offers help.”

All the women flocked after Lane after the service.

“I can give you everything that you need!”

“Who are you?”

Lane left no doubt about his talent. And everyone wanted a part of that.

“Where did he go?” Julius was looking for Lane.

“He left with a woman.”

What was Julius supposed to do while he waited. He found a restaurant and ordered a grilled cheese. He drank a Dr. Pepper.

“Where did you go?”

“I needed to offer an extra lesson in salvation.”

“I have no idea what you are talking about. Just keep on with your thing.”

Julius felt that all that he could do was listen. Lane was enriching himself in his own bull shit.

“I do have a connection to God. This is an objective fact!”

“We are all connected in our own way.”

“Right, but I am connected ever so closely.”

He was developing an army of believers.

“What are your expectations?”

“There is no faith without good works.”

“Are you the recipient of these good works.”

“I take what I deserve.”

Julius felt that Lane was monopolizing his share of salvation. These were things which he was unwilling to share except for some Grand Bargain. Indeed, who was participating in this deal?

“Is our journey going to always be like this?”

“We are achieving success. What is your complaint?”

“At what price?”

“Do you resent me?”

“Why would you say that?”

“You give me that scornful look.”

“I wonder if we are doing the most efficient thing.”

“Tell me, Julius, what would you propose.”

“You have a captive audience. And what are you giving them?”

“I am bringing out the best in each and everyone one of them.”

“You are not teaching them how to know the Lord. You are inviting them to know you. And the one who gets the closest gets you as a prize. I find that mighty disappointing.”

“That I not my presentation.”

“So I am missing the point.”

“You need to pay more attention to my words.”

“You are speaking to people who have limited critical faculties.”

“Whose fault is that?”

“Look at yourself.”

“The Lord works in mysterious ways.”

“And you work in very obvious ways.

“I do what I can!”

“That may not be enough. If you are going to create confusion, you have to find a way to provide a way dissolve that confusion.”

“Look at that woman!”

“So?”

“She could dissolve all my confusions.”

“You can tell that by looking. That is what they teach in theology school.”

“That is how I make contact with the Lord. I am already in the world. I go about my business. And she takes me closer to my mission. One kiss will reveal the answer.”

“But you have received a thousand kisses.”

“And each one is bringing me closer.”

“That sounds like fun, but it is nonsense.”

“I may lack the full understanding to reveal the fullness of creation. But I am getting closer.”

“Can anyone take you closer to revelation?”

“The failure is the basis of temptation. I believe that I am going to make contact with eternity. I fail. In seeking forgiveness, I realize my true connection with the Lord. If I had not fallen, I would have never have risen up!”

“That is even greater nonsense.”

“She has returned to me, and she is giving me everything that I need.”

“That is not going to last.”

“That is why I need to return to the Lord for redemption. That is how the balance works.”

In the middle of the night, Julius heard Lane scream. He looked over at him in the other bed.

“What is wrong with you?”

“I was on the verge of revelation, but I could not cross over.”

“A bad dream no doubt!”

Lane was wandering in the wilderness.

“You shouldn’t be driving in this shape.”

“Let’s just sleep in the parking lot of Walmart.”

After a few beers, Julius passed out in the car. Lane went looking for trouble.

“I am getting the same feel about what is happening.”

“I cannot fall any more.”

“What did she expect?”

“The more that I talk about this, the more that I feel gratified by creation.”

“I work at the WalMart. I make this choice between buying diapers and buying gas to go to work. What kind of miracles can you perform?”

“Is that a serious question.”

“You say that you can make my life better. What can you really do?”

“I can make you feel better about yourself.”

“You are that preacher who tried to fuck me last time you were in town.”

“You are mistaking me with someone else.”

“Do you feel as if your shit is catching up with you?”

“I want to make the world a better place.”

“So do I. I just don't see God as lightening my burden.”

“You don't know if you haven't tried.”

“What is trying supposed to mean? I work more. I'm tired. I can't look after my kid.”

“God helps those who help themselves.”

“Is that ask that you have to offer?”

“There is nobility in making sacrifice for your family.”

“That is dishonest. I am denying my family what they need to survive. Why? For another golf course at your country club.”

“I live in my car and travel the country preaching the word of the Lord. Live and let live.”

“Live and let die. You're all too ready to let the non-deserving die on the side of the road.”

This is all too easy.”

“Do you want to give me a real life? Family cycles of abuse which limit my abilities to educate myself. So I can pretend that I belong with other people. I anesthetize myself enough so I no longer have the shakes.

“God can cure your ills.”

“Are you listening? If I'm not as cute as I was last time. God will refuse to visit me. Didn't he pass over the houses of the non-deserving poor?

“No one else is there to voice your plight. You might as well make up this shit.”

“Preacher, this is real.”

“Real? You are trying to embarrass me. You buy gas because you don't need diapers. You don't even have a kid. You were upset that you never took me up on my offer?”

“You are a creep.”

“I tell it like you need to hear it if you want to change your life.”

“And I make it up as you need to hear it so that you can feel guilty about all that shit of yours.”

“Where is this going?”

“In my car and all the way home.”

“I could teach you some things about creation.”

“Science is not simply a facet of the will.”

“Woman, what does that mean?”

“I am not going to gratify your wishes simply so that you can get off at my expense.”

“What does that have to do with science?”

“You are acting like you have something clever to teach me.”

“I can help you find yourself.”

“I have found myself in my poverty. I don't need your offers to help. They do little for me.”

“No one wants to hear about your troubles woman. They want to hear a story about an elegant socialite who finds her way to greater salvation.”

“That is hardly a story. That is your self-indulgence.”

“Are you afraid that there is nothing appealing in your plight?”

“What are you offering? Fallen woman gets redeemed by man of God.”

“What would you prefer: fallen man of God finds the nothing can provide him with liberation?”

“What's your definition of a freak of nature? Someone who is trying to make other people dependent on him.”

“That says nothing.”

“You don't want to hear my story. Because I am a total contrivance. Whether I have a kid makes no fucking difference. If you see me on the street, and you don't feel that you can redeem me with your charm, then you ignore me. You feel that there is some kind of liberation in your idealism. It is more bull shit.”

“I did not create beauty.”

“I know the argument. If we are damned, then God forms is to meet his view of justice. We are condemned for our desire for freedom. If we do not accept the hand dealt us, then God

has a suitable punishment awaiting us.”

“I am slipping deeper with you. child. Only I can offer you liberation.”

“Where is this going? You and I are both condemned to cells inside a Cancer Ward. We have both been sentenced for our excess of desire.”

“Woman, you do not believe. Otherwise despair would grip your spirit so severely. You would recognize the oasis where the Lord renews our spirit.”

“This is hell without escape. And you are the Grand Master of this terrible subjugation.”

“Speak but the word, and I will be healed.”

“No one is going to rescue. Accept the shit like all of us.”

“Let us go back to your place and get fucked up out of our minds, and let the chips fall where they may.”

“You want to be damned for me. That is cute Father Trite! This fish is not biting.”

“What am I smelling? You burning in your self-made hell.”

“No one is going to rescue you, honey.”

“That is why you are here.”

She drove off in her beat up Honda. Lane caught up to Julius.

“What is wrong, Lane?”

“I struck out with a hard ass in the Walmart parking lot. I thought that I had it made.”

“You are not as with it as you think.”

“I have it pure. She was sullied. I couldn't save her.”

“What happens if someone steals your heart from you?”

Lane decided to sleep in the car while Julius kept watch. It was already early morning.

“You know that women like to get naked. They just need an excuse.”

“What are you telling me, Julius?”

“I'm not the pervert that you make me out to be.”

“I have my eye on you.”

When Lane returned from washing up in the Walmart, the car was gone. He looked everywhere in the parking lot. He asked the guard if he had seen the Cadillac. He had noticed nothing.

“Where the fuck did you go? I am fucked. Fucked, fucked, fucked.”

Lane wandered around for a couple of hours. He kept expecting Julius to come back. Eventually, Lane found one of the local pastors to give him a ride.

“Let us check the police station.”

The Cadillac was parked in front of the station. Lane found out that Julius had been arrested. He paid to bail him out.

“It's not like you think.”

“What happened?”

“She said that I did something to her. Thank god she got my name wrong. And there was an accident on 44. So they never fingerprinted me. I am going to change my life for the better.”

“What happened?”

“I never did anything wrong.”

“You weren't charged.”

“They said it all depends on the woman.”

“Let us get out of here while we can.”

“I think that they want to hold on to the car.”

“Did you hit someone?”

“They caught me in the car.”

“You stole the car from me.”

“I had to get around.”

“I have another set of keys. We are going to get out of here.”

“We have no hope!”

“Shut up, Julius. You are letting it get to you.”

“We are making a mistake. They are going to charge me for sure.”

“Do you want me to leave you here and make you learn a lesson? I cannot help you out.”

“Let’s get the fuck out of here. This is going to destroy us!”

“Go give the cops some money, and let’s clear out.”

“I gave the woman all my money.”

“You did what? Julius, you are worse than I am.”

“I was depressed. I was angry. We were running out of money. We had nothing to show for it. And she was promising me something cool. And it was turning me on. I felt as if I had no choice.”

“Get in the car, and let’s get out of here for good.”

“They will be on us the minute that we run away.”

“I am going to take care of this.”

Lane went in and found the officer in charge of the case.

“This is my car. Julius took it without asking me.”

“We are still sorting out this complaint.”

“As you can see from the bibles in the back, I am a man of God. And Julius has been living a life of sin. And my effort are trying to return him to the righteous path. He is constantly straying. He needs my constant attention. But I will be forever responsible for him.”

The officer looked at the files.

“I should hold him until we clear this matter for good.”

“I have to be in San Antonio to deliver an important sermon. We need the money.”

“If you go to San Antonio, then how can I be sure that Julius is here when we need him?”

“You have to use your discretion. There is not enough evidence to hold him.”

“The woman told me some strange things about him.”

“She sounds like a very excitable woman. And Julius said that she tried to swindle our money. Do you think that you can even believe her? I don’t even think that she is a righteous Christian woman. And where is she now?”

The officer felt pressured to make a decision. He did not feel that the witness was reliable. But something bothered him about Julius.

“She said something about him not being safe around children.”

“There were no children in the house. She didn’t treat Julius well. There is not reason why you should believe her story. She is just trying to get money out of us. I am surprised that you have not seen this before.”

Lane was growing impatient with the town. He had the terrible encounter at Walmart.

Julius had been a little too rebellious. And now they were embroiled with a mystery woman.

Lane would have had an easier time if he had more money. The officer could have charged Julius with some misdemeanors. He could have paid the fines, and that would have been that. The officer was not responding well to Lane's arguments.

"I am doing God's work. I can't do anything more here. There are loads of God's people who are better than I am. But I am needed in San Antonio."

Lane wanted to assert that this place was God-forsaken, but he did not want to insult the community. He needed the sympathy of the officer.

Julius was mumbling to himself when Lane came out.

"I had to pay these ridiculous fines for you. And I had no money. You only made it worse."

"I did take some of the woman's jewelry. I was lucky that the police did not look in the vehicle. They were worried about the moral's charge."

"What did you do?"

"I watched her dressing. She invited me there for drinks. I thought that she was going to call the police so I needed to make it worth my while."

"Let's get out of here. If things work out, we are going to come out of this better. We have to be sure never to come here again."

"I can make that promise!"

"I hope watching her dress was worth it."

"I got the jewels."

"Who are you?"

"I am a normal man. I live by my desires."

"Make sure that you don't get caught!"

"I am doing my best not to get caught. But sometimes, I think that is part of my quest. I want to be found out. I want people to watch me watching them. It gives me a higher purpose."

"Julius who are you? Why are you this way?"

"Why are you the way that you are."

"I give in to my natural instincts! But I also realize that God expects more of me."

San Antonio proved to be a blessing for the crew. They were treated well by the pastor and his family. Neither man did anything strange. Julius realized how important it was to get more money.

"I really think that I am damned. I let things slip up. I can't keep on like this."

"Are you going to stop peeping?"

"I am going to make sure that I will not get caught."

"That is you only lesson. That seems a little hopeless."

"What do you want? A leopard cannot change his spots."

"A leopard is not going to get on well on the streets of San Antonio."

"You always have the smart ass answer."

Lane realized that he was using Julius as an excuse for his own wandering.

"Why should I ever trust a man of God?"

Lane had found a willing audience in a convenient store parking lot.

"I have always thought that there is something wrong with my life. And I was waiting for

a big event to change things. I never realized that it would be a man of God who would give me the guidance.”

“I can’t help you to change if you aren’t ready to make a change.”

Lane pulled a bible from the car.”

“Do you want to have a session?”

“I am ready.”

Lane drove her to a motel room. He sat by himself on the couch. He turned the lights down. And he instructed the woman to lie down.

Lane read slowly from scripture. The woman was lost in her reverie. She was on the verge of passing out.

“Give me your hand, woman. I am here to cast out evil.”

“What if I want to keep my evil? It is the only defense that I have.”

“Then I can share it with you. And after we have immersed ourselves in it, I will be more prepared to accept the healing power of the Lord!”

With that, the woman jumped on top of Lane. They kissed and kissed until Lane lost control. At that moment, he felt as if nothing in his life would ever rescue him from his darkness.

“Julius, I knew that God was ready to give himself to me. And I opened my soul. Even thought that woman wanted to pull me into the depths, I was able to free myself by asking for God’s help.”

“At least, you had no risk of being arrested.”

“Little do you know. We are driving fast out of this town.”

“You didn’t steal anything.”

“That will be left to be seen.”

Lane wondered if the two of them could finally achieve liberation from scene.

“We are meant to change our lives. God gave us this power.”

“Lane, once you give up preying on young women, I will give up my perversity. Is that a deal?”

“The man who shakes your hand imagines that he is a saint. But when temptation strikes, I will again be a sinner.”

They found themselves gratifying themselves in an underground strip clubs.

Julius reminded Lane: “There are no rule here.”

“God is always watching this.”

“If God was watching, how would he advise us to act.”

“What do you think?”

“With great reverence!”

“Then let me touch all these women with great reverence.”

Lane was receiving a lap dance.

“Julius, what am I supposed to do?”

“You could tell her that you have to go to the bathroom. But that would hardly absolve you from your sin.”

“I always like going through with the sin. Once I am deep in the feeling, then God is ready to grant me the full power available for my redemption.”

“Will you ever save me?”

“Will anyone?”

“This story is getting better.”

“Get me another drink.”

“How are we different than the worse sinners?”

“We know that there is a power which will liberate us from the depths of our agony.”

“Are we masochistic?”

“We both enjoy suffering.

Lane pulled the dancer close, and he whispered in her ear.

“I can help you, child.”

“I can assist you too, but you are going to have to pay me more money.”

Lane was digging this exchange. He wanted to be degraded. Only then could he be sure that some kind of redemption awaited.

“Why is that?”

“God does not come to those who do not need him. I am desperate.”

Both men dropped to their knees in the middle of the strip club. Three of the girls joined in on the prayer. Julius was smiling. Lane was totally committed to the devotion.

The two dancers pulled Lane away. His eyes opened wide open.

Lane was filled with sweat. The covers were twisted around him.

“Doesn’t the air-conditioning work in this place?”

The air conditioning was on full blast. Lane was burning up. He was alone in the room.

“Julius, is there any hope for me?”

“We have to get you to a church right away.”

Lane pulled out one of his bibles.

“I am a sinner!”

“Amen!”

“And I have no hope in myself. No hope.”

“No hope!”

“But I can read these words of the Lord. And I will be excited by the message of our savior. There is so much grace that all my offenses will be washed away. And I will again know the mercy of Jesus Christ.”

Later, Julius asked, “Aren’t you making a mockery of religion? You are a hypocrite!”

“My stomach is full. And I feel the blessings of the Lord. If I felt like this all the time, I would never sin. And I preach from that intent. But my comfort is temporary. And the desires of the flesh overcome me. And I am hopeless.”

“I feel that I am hopeless too.”

“You are not giving in to natural desires. You are adding a supplement to your mischief. And that supplement means that you are a sinner through and through.

“Why do you get off easy? I saw you with those strippers.”

“They wanted what I was giving them.”

Lane was trying to make Julius seem hopeless. Meanwhile, Julius was pulling small jobs that made sure that they had enough to eat and gas to get around.

“What would you do without me?”

“I would find a place where I could call home.”

“You could never satisfy your incredible appetites without getting caught.”

“I am smart. I am not going to do something crazy to jeopardize my livelihood.”

“You do every time. You are more dangerous than I am. They never know what I am doing. You are there in the open fucking the bishop’s wife.”

“That is not my nature!”

“Don’t lie to me, my friend!”

“Do I look like I am lying. I am trying to save one person at a time.”

“How? By damning their souls to eternity. You are no different than I am. You would make people lie and cheat just to satisfy your lifestyle. What kind of person are you Lane?”

“I am someone who can deal with my humanity. Jesus realized what this earth puts us through with its temptations. He was tempted, but he could resist. He realized that we were frail. We are not gods. We need God’s assistance in order to realize our true natures.”

“Your true nature is being a fool. And there is no forgiveness for your constant immorality.”

“I am the measure of the moral man. I know my weakness, but I realize that God is always there to assist me.”

“You push the envelope in the hopes that you can stimulate yourself in a more extreme way. That is your only interest.”

“I am a child of God.”

“A child who needs to be corrected for his iniquity.”

“If you didn’t have me assistance, you could never be so adventuresome in your own right. That is your new religion.”

“You are insulting me.”

“Accept the compliment!”