Changing Lane

A Short Story

By Maryanne Peters

Every second Thursday of the month I did the run into Johnsonville. I would start early and run down Route 45 past the farmhouses about 7 miles out. I would cover off all the deliveries in town and be out of there by just after midday, unless I was held up for some reason. I would prefer to get home to Brunner before lunch, but I never minded Johnsonville. It was a nice town – friendly people.

One Thursday some years back I was driving past those farmhouses, and I saw a kid running out and waving. He was not waving at me. It was the school bus in front. Whether the driver saw him or not, he was not stopping. The kid must have been barely a minute late, and he had missed the bus.

I slowed down early and came to a stop right beside him.

He looked much younger than he was, as I later found out – small for his age and undeveloped. He had soft blonde hair and blue eyes, and it looked like missing that bus was the end of the world.

“If you are headed for the High School in Johnsonville, I am headed that way,” I called out.

“I don’t ride with strangers,” he said.

“That’s very wise,” I said, putting my rig in gear. “But my name’s Harvey, just so we’re not strangers”.

I moved just a foot before he tapped on my door. “Ok Harvey,” he said. “As far as the school. That would be great.”

I remember that he smelled of soap when he got in the cab. I don’t think I have ever smelled somebody as clean as this boy.

“So what’s your name?” I asked. “Just so we’re not strangers”.

He said that his name was Lane and that he had just started high school that year aged about 14. As I said, he seemed younger. He asked me about the rig I was driving, but it seemed clear he knew nothing about heavy transport. He was just asking because he thought that he should.

He liked to talk, as if silence was an enemy he had to keep at bay. I listen to the radio on the road but talk over the radio sounds good to me. I suppose driving can get lonely. I turned down the volume.

We overtook the school bus not long after and we got to the school well before he was due. I pulled over and as he climbed down I said: “I come by your place every Thursday just a little later than I did today, so if you miss you bus on a Thursday, you can catch another ride.”

He smiled and said: “Thanks Harvey.”

I must have heard those words thousands of times in my life. I certainly hope that I have. But somehow the way he said them that day have stuck in my mind. It was the voice maybe, and the fact that it was the first time that he used my name.

I decided that I would not look out for him the following month, even though I started to think about him as my rig drew near to those farmhouses. What dumb kid would deliberately miss his bus? What if I didn’t turn up? But there he was.

He smiled at me when he hauled himself up into the cab, and then he just started talking as if only a day had gone by and not a month. It was like that the next month, and the next. He talked a lot about school. He said that since the first time we had met he had found a way to fit it. He had friends, but more of them were girls rather than boys. He said that he had never been into sports, and his father had given up trying to get him interested. He said that he was interested in art, and travel, and foreign languages.

I just laughed. To me art was a beautiful sunrise, travel was the road in front of me, and languages? “Hell Son, I am still working on learning English.”

I asked him about whether that meant college after high school, and he just shrugged.

“I just know that I will never live on a farm,” he said. “My chores may not seem like much, but they are dirty and sweaty. I don’t like dirt and sweat.”

I had to smile again. Those were two things I was close to – closer than my clothes. I made a promise to myself to have a morning shower on the first Thursday of every month.

Maybe it was a couple of months after that when I noticed small changes in Lane. His style of clothing changed. He started wearing brighter colors and patterned shirts, and it seemed to me that he had given up haircuts. He said that he had been wearing a bandana when he did his chores, but that his parents were not approving of his longer hair.

I told him that I thought it looked okay to me. The truth is that it looked like girl’s hair. In fact, when I looked at him side on in the cab I could see that hair tucked behind a delicate perfectly formed ear, it seemed to me that Lane looked like a girl, even then. Even without trying.

He asked me for a favor. He needed my ID and my address to receive a parcel that his parents would ask questions about. He had the money. He was paid a little for the chores he did and had saved up. He could order and pay online but in my name with the package sent to my address. I agreed to do it.

The way I figure it I was helping a young friend. It seemed to me that he had a tough life. He was no farmhand, but he was born into a farming family and expected to do what they did. In his own mind he was born for better things, in faraway places. What is wrong with that? When I first drove a truck, it seemed to me that the highways led to the ends of the earth. I did the long hauls for a while. I have been to all the corners of this nations – the oceans and the gulf, the mountains of the west and the east, the plains the deserts and the forests that go on forever. I could not do that forever. I needed my own place and a short haul operation. That suited me now.

But it seemed to me that Lane was entitled to live his dream, and whatever was in that package played a big part in it. I was happy to help. He was happy that I had. I could see it in his eyes.

The month after that he seemed energized. He fair burst into my cab. He said that his whole world had changed, but things were still tough at home.

As if to prove that, the following month he was there, but had some difficulty swinging himself up to my cab. I could see that he had a black eye, but he moved like he had suffered a body beating as well. I know what that looks like. I even know how it feels, but many years have passed since then.

“I don’t belong with my family,” he said, by way of explanation. “They don’t understand, and they never will.”

“Farming folk are simple folk,” I said. “The sun rises and so does the corn. It has always been that way as so it must be. Nothing should change.” It rolled off my tongue like I was some ancient philosopher. I had no idea where it came from, but Lane looked at me and forced a smile through his pain.

“I respect you,” he said. Honestly, the heart swelled right up. It was the nicest thing anybody had ever said to me.

“You know that if you need a refuge I can be called upon,” I said.

“You are my refuge,” he said. “Every month.”

I rolled up in my usual spot, close to school but not out front, and well ahead of the bus. He climbed down and limped off.

I dreaded that when I next picked him up he would show the signs of another beating, but instead he was standing waiting for me with a huge smile on his face. He was pulling his blonde hair back into a ponytail and had an elastic in his mouth. He wore his usual jeans and runners but had on a plaid shirt several sizes too big for him.

“I want to show you something,” he said, grinning.

I agreed, but he waited until I stopped at the first set of lights coming into Johnsonville before he unbuttoned his shirt a little and showed me what he was wearing underneath. It was a brassiere. It was I suppose apricot pink if that is a color, with white lace, and inside its cups were two small but perfectly forming breasts.

“Fuck,” I said.

“With your help, here they are,” he said pushing them up to show me that they were soft and ripening. “That package months ago was hormones. My body has responded. I am becoming who I was meant to be.”

The traffic light turned green, and I returned to what I know best. The engine roared and my rig rolled forward.

“So, you want to be a woman?” I said.

“More than anything in the world,” he said. “More than anything anybody has ever wanted their whole lives.” He was looking ahead now, determined like. I cast a glance. The ponytail bouncing, the soft line of the face, the voice and now the breasts.

“But it’s still a secret?”

“All my friends at school know,” he said. “All the girls I hang with anyway. They are my protection. The guys won’t take on the girls on my team. Most of them know what I am. The teachers too. And my family now. But officially, Lana has not stepped out. Not yet.”

I don’t know where it came from. I am not one for the ladies. But it was not like my passenger was that, or so it seemed. I knew this kid. We were friends. He was somebody who needed to step back and let somebody else come forward.”

“Next month I can pick you up and stay over in Johnsonville,” I said. “Maybe after school I could take you, I mean take Lana, out to dinner … or something?”

He looked across, opened faced.

“I would really like to do that, Harvey,” he said. “That’s a date.”

“Like not a date kind of date,” I stammered. “Just a chance to meet … the person you want to be.”

Our stop was just ahead so I pulled over. He buttoned up his shirt and took up his bag. “Thanks Harvey,” he grinned.

You think you know somebody and sometimes you think about them, just as you would anybody else. And then you learn something incredible, and everything is different. You think not about them, but about Lana. You dream about her and you wake up holding your cock and catching your cream in your hand.

It seemed like that month was the longest month of my life.

And then there was my regular rider, with his school bag but also another red tote bag.

“Where will you be staying tonight,” he asked.

“The Sunshine Motel on East Road,” I told him. “I don’t have a room number yet.”

“Can you take this bag? I will come there after school.”

The red bag sat in my cab like a sweet flower in a dung pit, with feminine smells wafting out of it. It seemed to me that this young woman Lana was inside this bag, and I had to restrain myself not to look inside. But I had work to do, and as I had the whole day I could take a little longer over my deliveries and chat to people. It seemed that I was ready to do that.

The Sunshine Motel gave me Room 20. I put the red bag in the room and told the desk that a young person would pick up a key. I told the lady at the desk that I was going to the bar around the corner. I was just going to have a cold beer as I did when I got home most days. I would be taking Lana to a diner, not a bar. She was too young.

I had a shower and put on a clean shirt. It was the least I could do.

I guess that I wanted to meet Lana without seeing her get changed, but I was not expecting her to walk into the bar. I suppose that leads to the question as to what exactly I was expecting, and I can’t answer. All I know is that I looked up and there she was.

It must have taken some time. The blond hair had some soft curls and was parted on one side and held by a clip with a flower on it. The makeup looked like a professional had done it – not overdone but skillfully bringing those best features – the big blue eyes and the delicate nose and lips. She wore a red patterned dress – feminine rather than sexy, except for the plunging neckline to show off those breasts of hers. And it had a shortish hem so that I could see for the first time those beautiful legs – smooth and shapely right down to the shoes with the wedge heels.

And she wore a smile too.

“You are starting early, Harvey,” she said. It was not the boy’s voice, but yet it was him. It was a girl’s voice. It was Lana. I felt that I should know her, but she was a mystery to me.

“Lana” I said, realizing that my mouth had been hanging open.

I stood up. She grasped me lightly by both arms and kissed me on one check. Her perfume almost made me swoon, as I suppose it should. It was like meeting Miss America. Some guys in the bar were staring in our direction, but not to look at me.

“I just needed to cool off,” I said. “I was going to suggest Hank’s Diner on the next block.”

“Whatever,” she said. “Tonight, I am yours.”

“Tonight, I want you to be you,” I whispered.

“Thanks Harvey,” she said. “What do you think? Will I make it?” She put an arm through mine as if I was leading her into a ball, instead of out of a shitty bar and down the street to less shitty diner.

It was her first night as Lana and I will always have that. But after that night it seemed that Lane was doomed. Within days it was Lana at school and Lana at home. She was just too strong and too beautiful to be resisted.

I would have loved to be more to her, but she is so young, and the truth is that I am not good enough for her. I know it, and while she might even swear that it is not true, she knows it too.

She has a future ahead of her. It was a future full of better things, in faraway places. For me the future is only the road ahead and the next stop.

I still picked up Lana every second Thursday for most of her final year until her boyfriend took over. He is not good enough for her either, but she knows it too.

People like me, and maybe him too, can only dream about a special girl and our small part in making her the women she is. It makes me smile every time that I think of her, and that is an awful lot, I have to admit.

The End

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*Erin’s seed: A medium distance trucker runs the same route three or four times a month and sometimes he picks up this kid and gives him a ride. But over the months, the kid is getting more and more girly*

*finally he asks her out and takes her to dinner.*