

Thanks for the ride

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Alice Munro

My cousin George and I were sitting in a restaurant called Pop's Cafe, in a little town close to the Lake. It was getting dark in there, and they had not turned the lights on, but you could still read the signs plastered against the mirror between the fly-speckled and slightly yellowed cutouts of strawberry sundaes and tomato sandwiches.

"Don't ask for information," George read. "If we knew anything we wouldn't be here" and "If you've got nothing to do, you picked a hell of a good place to do it in." George always read everything out loud – posters, billboards, Burma-Shave signs, "Mission Creek. Population 1700. Gateway to the Bruce. We love our children."

I was wondering whose sense of humour provided us with the signs. I thought it would be the man behind the cash register. Pop? Chewing on a match, looking out at the street, not watching for anything except for somebody to trip over a crack in the sidewalk or have a blowout or make a fool of himself in some way that Pop, rooted behind the cash register, huge and cynical and incurious, was never likely to do. Maybe not even that; maybe just by walking up and down, going places, the rest of the world proved its absurdity. You see that judgment on the faces of people looking out of windows, sitting on front steps in some little towns; so deeply, deeply uncaring they are, as if they had sources of disillusionment which they would keep, with some satisfaction, in the dark.

There was only the one waitress, a pudgy girl who leaned over the counter and scraped at the polish on her fingernails. When she had flaked most of the polish off her thumbnail she put the thumb against her teeth and rubbed the nail back and forth absorbedly. We asked her what her name was and she didn't answer. Two or three minutes later the thumb came out of her mouth and she said, inspecting it: "That's for me to know and you to find out."

"All right," George said. "Okay if I call you Mickey?"

"I don't care."

"Because you remind me of Mickey Rooney," George said. "Hey, where's everybody go in this town? Where's everybody go?" Mickey had turned her back and begun to drain out the coffee. It looked as if she didn't mean to talk any more, so George got a little jumpy, as he did when he was threatened with having to be quiet or be by himself. "Hey, aren't there any girls or dances or anything? We're strangers in town," he said. "Don't you want to help us out?"

"Dance hall down on the beach closed up Labour Day," Mickey said coldly.

"There any other dance halls?"

“There’s a dance tonight out at Wilson’s school,” Mickey said.

“That old time? No, no, I don’t go for that old-time. *All-a-man left* and that, used to have that down in the basement of the church. Yeah, *ever’body swing* – I don’t go for that. Inna basement of the *church*,” George said, obscurely angered. “You don’t remember that,” he said to me. “Too young.”

I was just out of high-school at this time, and George had been working for three years in the Men’s Shoes in a downtown department store, so there was that difference. But we had never bothered with each other back in the city. We were together now because we had met unexpectedly in a strange place and because I had a little money, while George was broke. Also I had my father’s car, and George was in one of his periods between cars, which made him always a little touchy and dissatisfied. But he would have to rearrange these facts a bit, they made him uneasy. I could feel him manufacturing a sufficiency of good feeling, old-pal feeling, and dressing me up as Old Dick, good kid, real character – which did not matter one way or the other, though I did not think, looking at his tender blond piggish handsomeness, the nudity of his pink mouth, and the surprised, angry creases that frequent puzzlement was beginning to put into his forehead, that I would be able to work up an Old George.

I had driven up to the Lake to bring my mother home from a beach resort for women, a place where they had fruit juice and cottage cheese for reducing, and early-morning swims in the Lake, and some religion, apparently, for there was a little chapel attached. My aunt, George’s mother, was staying there at the same time, and George arrived about an hour after I did, not to take his mother home, but to get some money out of her. He did not get along well with his father, and he did not make much money in the shoe department, so he was very often broke. His mother said he could have a loan if he would stay over with her and got to church with her the next day. George said he would. Then George and I got away and drove half a mile along the lake to this little town neither of us had seen before, which George said would be full of bootleggers and girls.

It was a town of unpaved, wide, sandy streets and bare yards. Only the hardy things like red and yellow nasturtiums, or a lilac bush with brown curled leaves, grew out of that cracked earth. The houses were set wide apart, with their own pumps and sheds and privies out behind; most of them were built of wood and painted green or grey or yellow. The trees that grew there were big willows or poplars, their fine leaves greyed with the dust. There were no trees along the main street, but spaces of tall grass and dandelions and blowing thistles – open country between the store buildings. The town hall was surprisingly large, with a great bell in a tower, the red brick rather glaring in the midst of the town’s walls of faded, pale-painted wood. The sign beside the door said that it was a memorial to the shoulders who had died in the First World War. We had a drink out of the fountain in front.

We drove up and down the main street for a while, with George saying: “What a dump! Jesus, what a dump!” and “Hey, look at that! Aw, not so good either.” The people on the street went home to supper, the shadows of the store buildings lay solid across the street, and we went into Pop’s.

“Hey,” George said, “is there any other restaurant in this town? Did you see any other restaurant?”

“No,” I said.

“Any other town I ever been,” George said, “pigs hangin’ out the windows, practically hangin’ off the trees. Not here. Jesus! I guess it’s late in the season,” he said.

“You want to go to a show?”

The door opened. A girl came in, walked up and sat on a stool, with most of her skirt bunched up underneath her. She had a long somnolent face, no bust, frizzy hair; she was pale, almost ugly, but she had that inexplicable aura of sexuality. George brightened, though not a great deal. “Never mind,” he said. “This’ll do. This’ll do in a pinch, eh? In a pinch.”

He went to the end of the counter and sat down beside her and started to talk. In about five minutes they came back to me, the girl drinking a bottle of orange pop.

“This is Adelaide,” George said. “Adelaide, Adeline – Sweet Adeline. I’m going to call her Sweet A, Sweet A.”

Adelaide sucked at her straw, paying not much attention.

“Doesn’t hear half what you say to her,” George said. “Adelaide, Sweet A, have you got any friends? Have you got any nice, young little girl friend to go out with Dickie? You and me and her and Dickie?”

“Depends,” said Adelaide. “Where do you want to go?”

“Anywhere you say. Go for a drive. Drive up to Owen Sound, maybe.”

“You got a car?”

“Yeah, yeah, we got a car. C’mon, you must have some nice little friend for Dickie.” He put his arm around this girl, spreading his fingers over her blouse. “C’mon out and I’ll show you the car.”

Adelaide said: “I know one girl might come. The guy she goes around with, he’s engaged, and his girl came up and she’s staying at his place up at the beach, his mother and dad’s place, and –“

“Well, that is certainly int-er-esting,” George said. “What’s her name? Come on, let’s go round and get her. You want to sit around drinking pop all night?”

“I’m finished,” Adelaide said. “She might not come. I don’t know.”

We went out and got into the car, George and Adelaide in the back. On the main street about a block from the cafe we passed a thin, fair-haired girl in slacks and Adelaide cried: “Hey stop! That’s her! That’s Lois!”

I pulled in and George stuck his head out the window, whistling. Adelaide yelled, and the girl came unhesitatingly, unhurriedly to the car. She smiled, rather coldly and politely, when Adelaide explained to her. All the time George kept saying: “Hurry up, come on, get in! We can talk in the

car.” The girl smiled, did not really look at any of us, and in a few moments, to my surprise, she opened the door and slid into the car.

“I don’t have anything to do,” she said. “My boy friend’s away.”

“That so?” said George, and I saw Adelaide, in the rear-vision mirror, make a cross warning face. Lois did not seem to have heard him.

“We better drive around to my house,” she said. “I was just going down to get some Cokes, that’s why I only have my slacks on. We better drive around to my house and I’ll put on something else.”

“Where are we going to go,” she said, “so I know what to put on?”

I said: “Where do you want to go?”

“Okay, okay,” George said. “First things first. We gotta get a bottle, then we’ll decide. You know where to get one?” Adelaide and Lois both said yes, and then Lois said to me: “You can come in the house and wait while I change, if you want to.” I glanced in the rear mirror and thought that there was probably some agreement she had with Adelaide.

Lois’s house had an old couch on the porch and some rugs hanging down over the railing. She walked ahead of me across the yard. She had her long pale hair tied at the back of her neck; her skin was dustily freckled, but not tanned; even her eyes were light-coloured. She was cold and narrow and pale. There was derision, and also great gravity, about her mouth. I thought she was about my age or a little older.

She opened the front door and said in a clear, stilted voice: “I would like you to meet my family.”

The little front room had linoleum on the floor and flowered paper curtains at the windows. There was a glossy chesterfield with a Niagara Falls and a To Mother cushion on it, and there was a little black stove with a screen around it for summer, and a big vase of paper apple blossoms. A tall, frail woman came into the room drying her hands on a dishtowel, which she flung into a chair. Her mouth was full of blue-white china teeth, the long cords trembled in her neck. I said how-do-you-do to her, embarrassed by Lois’s announcement, so suddenly and purposefully conventional. I wondered if she had any misconceptions about this date, engineered by George for such specific purposes. I did not think so. Her face had no innocence in it that I could see; it was knowledgeable, calm, and hostile. She might have done it then, to mock me, to make me into this caricature of The Date, the boy who grins and shuffles in the front hall and waits to be presented to the nice girl’s family. But that was a little far-fetched. Why should she want to embarrass me when she had agreed to go out with me without even looking at my face? Why should she care enough?

Lois’s mother and I sat down on the chesterfield. She began to make conversation, giving this the Date interpretation. I noticed the smell of stale small rooms, bedclothes, frying, washing, and medicated ointments. And dirt, though it did not look dirty. Lois’s mother said: “That’s a nice car you got out front. Is that your car?”

“My father’s.”

“Isn’t that lovely! Your father has such a nice car. I always think it’s lovely for people to have things. I’ve got no time for these people that’s just eaten up with malice ‘n envy. I say it’s lovely. I bet your mother, every time she wants anything, she just goes down to the store and buys it – new coat, bedspread, pots and pans. What does your father do? Is he a lawyer or doctor or something like that?”

“He’s a chartered accountant.”

“Oh. That’s in an office, is it?”

“Yes.”

“My brother, Lois’s uncle, he’s in the office of the CPR in London. He’s quite high up there, I understand.”

She began to tell me about how Lois’s father had been killed in an accident at the mill. I noticed an old woman, the grandmother probably, standing in the doorway of the room. She was not thin like the others, but as soft and shapeless as a collapsed pudding, pale brown spots melting together on her face and arms, bristles of hairs in the moisture around her mouth. Some of the smell in the house seemed to have come from her. It was a smell of hidden decay, such as there is when some obscure little animal has died under the verandah. The smell, the slovenly, confiding voice – something about this life I had not known, something about these people. I thought: my mother, George’s mother, they are innocent. Even George, George is innocent. But these others are born sly and sad and knowing.

I did not hear much about Lois’s father except that his head was cut off.

“Clean off, imagine, and rolled on the floor! Couldn’t open the coffin. It was June, the hot weather. And everybody in town just stripped their gardens, stripped them for the funeral. Stripped their spirea bushes and peenies and climbin’ clemantis. I guess it was the worst accident ever took place in this town.

“Lois had a nice boy friend this summer,” she said. “Used to take her out and sometimes stay here overnight when his folks weren’t up at the cottage and he didn’t feel like passin’ his time there all alone. He’d bring the kids candy and even me he’d bring presents. That china elephant up there, you can plant flowers in it, he brought me that. He fixed the radio for me and I never had to take it into the shop. Do your folks have a summer cottage up here?”

I said no, and Lois came in, wearing a dress of yellow-green stuff – stiff and shiny like Christmas wrappings – high-heeled shoes, rhinestones, and a lot of dark powder over her freckles. Her mother was excited.

“You like that dress?” she said. “She went all the way to London and brought that dress, didn’t get it anywhere round here!”

We had to pass by the old woman as we went out. She looked up at us with sudden recognition, a

steadying of her pale, jellied eyes. Her mouth trembled open, she stuck her face out at me.

“You can do what you like with my gran’ daughter,” she said in her old, strong voice, the rough voice of a country woman. “But you be careful. And you know what I mean!”

Lois’ mother pushed the old woman behind her, smiling tightly, eyebrows lifted, skin straining over her temples. “Never mind,” she mouthed at me, grimacing distractedly. “Never mind. Second childhood.” The smile stayed on her face; the skin pulled back from it. She seemed to be listening all the time to a perpetual din and racket in her head. She grabbed my hand as I followed Lois out. “Lois is a nice girl,” she whispered. “You have a nice time, don’t let her mope!” There was a quick, grotesque, and, I suppose, originally flirtatious, flickering of brows and lids. “Night!”

Lois walked stiffly ahead of me, rustling her papery skirt. I said: “Did you want to go to a dance or something?”

“No,” she said. “I don’t care.”

“Well you got all dressed up –“

“I always get dressed up on Saturday night,” Lois said, her voice floating back to me, low and scornful. Then she began to laugh, and I had a glimpse of her mother in her, that jaggedness and hysteria. “Oh, my God!” she whispered. I knew she meant what had happened in the house, and I laughed too, not knowing what else to do. So we went back to the car laughing as if we were friends, but we were not.

We drove out of town to a farmhouse where a woman sold us a whisky bottle full of muddy-looking homemade liquor, something George and I had never had before. Adelaide had said that this woman would probably let us use her front room, but it turned out she would not, and that was because of Lois. When the woman peered up at me from under the man’s cap she had on her head and said to Lois, “Change’s as good as a rest, eh?” Lois did not answer, kept a cold face. Then later the woman said if we were so stuck-up tonight her front room wouldn’t be good enough for us and we better go back to the bush. All the way back down the lane Adelaide kept saying: “Some people can’t take a joke, can they? Yeah, stuck-up is right-“ until I passed her the bottle to keep her quiet. I saw George did not mind, thinking this had taken her mind off driving to Owen Sound.

We parked at the end of the lane and sat in the car drinking. George and Adelaide drank more than we did. They did not talk, just reached for the bottle and then passed it back. This stuff was different from anything I had tasted before; it was heavy and sickening in my stomach. There was no other effect, and I began to have the depressing feeling that I was not going to get drunk. Each time Lois handed the bottle back to me she said “Thank you” in a mannerly and subtly contemptuous way. I put my arm around her, not much wanting to. I was wondering what was the matter. This girl lay against my arm, scornful, acquiescent, angry, inarticulate and out-of-reach. I wanted to talk to her then more than to touch her, and that was out of the question; talk was not so little a thing to her as touching. Meanwhile I was aware that I should be beyond this, beyond the first stage and well into the second (for I had a knowledge, though it was not very comprehensive, of the orderly progression of stages, the ritual of back- and front-seat seduction). Almost I wished

I was with Adelaide.

“Do you want to go for a walk?” I said.

“That’s the first bright idea you’ve had all night,” George told me from the back seat. “Don’t hurry,” he said as we got out. He and Adelaide were muffled and laughing together. “Don’t hurry back!”

Lois and I walked along a wagon track close to the bush. The fields were moonlit, chilly and blowing. Now I felt vengeful, and I said softly, “I had quite a talk with your mother.”

“I can imagine,” said Lois.

“She told me about that guy you went out with last summer.”

“This summer.”

“It’s last summer now. He was engaged or something, wasn’t he?”

“Yes.”

I was not going to let her go. “Did he like you better?” I said. “Was that it? Did he like you better?”

“No, I wouldn’t say he liked me,” Lois said. I thought, by some thickening of the sarcasm in her voice, that she was beginning to be drunk. “He liked Momma and the kids okay but he didn’t like me. *Like me*,” she said. “What’s that?”

“Well, he went out with you –“

“He just went around with me for the summer. That’s what those guys from up the beach always do. They come down here to the dances and get a girl to go around with. For the summer. They always do.

“How I know he didn’t *like* me,” she said, “he said I was always bitching. You have to act grateful to those guys, you know, or they say you’re bitching.”

I was a little startled at having loosed all this. I said: “Did you like him?”

“Oh, sure! I should, shouldn’t I? I should just get down on my knees and thank him. That’s what my mother does. He brings her a cheap old spotted elephant-“

“Was this guy the first?” I said.

“The first steady. Is that what you mean?”

It wasn’t. “How old are you?”

She considered. “I’m almost seventeen. I can pass for eighteen or nineteen. I can pass in a beer parlour. I did once.”

“What grade are you in school?”

She looked at me, rather amazed. “Did you think I still went to school? I quit that two years ago. I’ve got a job at the glove-works in town.”

“That must have been against the law. When you quit.”

“Oh, you can get a permit if your father’s dead or something.”

“What do you do at the glove-works?” I said.

“Oh, I run a machine. It’s like a sewing machine. I’ll be getting on piecework soon. You make more money.”

“Do you like it?”

“Oh, I wouldn’t say I loved it. It’s a job – you ask a lot of questions,” she said.

“Do you mind?”

“I don’t have to answer you,” she said, her voice flat and small again. “Only if I like.” She picked up her skirt and spread it out in her hands. “I’ve got burrs on my skirt,” she said. She bent over, pulling them one by one. “I’ve got burrs on my dress,” she said. “It’s my good dress. Will they leave a mark? If I pull them all – slowly – I won’t pull any threads.”

“You shouldn’t have worn that dress,” I said. “What’d you wear that dress for?”

She shook the skirt, tossing a burr loose. “I don’t know,” she said. She held it out, the stiff, shining stiff, with faintly drunken satisfaction. “I wanted to show you guys!” she said, with a sudden small explosion of viciousness. The drunken, nose-thumbing, toe-twirling satisfaction could not now be mistaken as she stood there foolishly, tauntingly, with her skirt spread out. “I’ve got an imitation cashmere sweater at home. It cost me twelve dollars,” she said. “I’ve got a fur coat I’m paying on, paying on for next winter. I’ve got a fur coat—“

“That’s nice,” I said. “I think it’s lovely for people to have things.”

She dropped the skirt and struck the flat of her hand on my face. This was a relief to me, to both of us. We felt a fight had been building in us all along. We faced each other as warily as we could, considering we were both a little drunk, she tensing to slap me again and I to grab her or slap her back. We would have it out, what we had against each other. But the moment of this keenness passed. We let out our breath; we had not moved in time. And the next moment, not bothering to shake off our enmity, not thinking how the one thing could give way to the other, we kissed. It was the first time, for me, that a kiss was accomplished without premeditation, or hesitancy, or over-haste, or the usual vague ensuing disappointment. And laughing shakily against me, she began to talk again, going back to the earlier part of our conversation as if nothing had come between.

“Isn’t it funny?” she said. “You know, all winter all those girls do is talk about last summer, talk and talk about those guys, and I bet those guys have forgotten even what their names were-“

But I did not want to talk any more, having discovered another force in her that lay side by side with her hostility, that was, in fact, just as enveloping and impersonal. After a while I whispered: “Isn’t there some place we can go?”

And she answered: “There’s a barn in the next field.”

She knew the countryside; she had been there before.

We drove back into town after midnight. George and Adelaide were asleep in the back seat. I did not think Lois was asleep, though she had kept her eyes closed and did not say anything. I had read somewhere about *Omne animal*, and I was going to tell her, but then I thought she would not know Latin words and would think I was being – oh, pretentious and superior. Afterwards I wished I had told her. She would have known what it meant.

Afterwards the lassitude of the body, and the cold; the separation. To brush away the bits of hay and tidy ourselves with heavy unconnected movements, to come out of the barn and find the moon gone down, but the flat stubble fields still there, and the poplar trees, and the stars. To find our same selves, chilled and shaken, who had gone that headlong journey and were here still. To go back to the car and find the others sprawled asleep. That is what it is: *triste. Triste est.*

That headlong journey. Was it like that because it was the first time, because I was a little, strangely drunk? No. It was because of Lois. There are some people who can go only a little way with the act of love, and some others who can go very far, who can make a great surrender, like the mystics. And Lois, this mystic of love, sat now on the far side of the car-seat, looking cold and rumpled, and utterly closed up in herself. All the things I wanted to say to her went clattering emptily through my head. *Come and see you again – Remember – Love –* I could not say any of these things. They would not even seem even half-true across the space that had come between us. I thought: I will say something to her before the next tree, the next telephone pole. But I did not. I only drove faster, too fast, making the town come nearer.

The street lights bloomed out of the dark streets ahead; there were stirrings in the back seat.

“What time is it?” George said.

“Twenty past twelve.”

“We musta finished that bottle. I don’t feel so good. Oh, Christ, I don’t feel so good. How do you feel?”

“Fine.”

“Fine, eh? Feel like you finished your education tonight, eh? That how you feel? Is yours asleep? Mine is.”

“I am not,” said Adelaide drowsily. “Where’s my belt? George – oh. Now where’s my other shoe? It’s early for Saturday night, isn’t it? We could go and get something to eat.”

“I don’t feel like food,” George said. “I gotta get some sleep. Gotta get up early tomorrow and go to church with my mother.”

“Yeah, I know,” said Adelaide, disbelieving, though not too ill-humoured. “You could’ve anyways bought me a hamburger!”

I had driven around to Lois’s house. Lois did not open her eyes until the car stopped. She sat still a moment, and then pressed her hands down over the skirt of her dress, flattening it out. She did not look at me. I moved to kiss her, but she seemed to draw slightly away, and I felt that there had after all been something fraudulent and theatrical about this final gesture. She was not like that.

George said to Adelaide: “Where do you live? You live near here?”

“Yeah. Half a block down.”

“Okay. How be you get out here too? We gotta get home sometime tonight.”

He kissed her and both the girls got out.

I started the car. We began to pull away, George settling down on the back seat to sleep. And then we heard the female voice calling after us, the loud, crude, female voice, abusive and forlorn:

“Thanks for the ride!”

It was not Adelaide calling; it was Lois.

"Thanks For The Ride". I washed chain grease and blood off of my hands in the ocean; I let the salt water rinse the dirt away. I stood calm in a room I hadn't been in in a decade. I felt dizzy, used to stand here everyday. Wait out the storm in a harbor town. Pretend I'll see you in fall. Wait out the storm in a harbor town. Whoa. Hey Hannah, don't go. "Thanks for the ride" means that you're thanking someone who "gave" you ride and drove you to a certain location. Like someone driving you home, for example. Saying "thanks for riding with me" could mean that you don't want to be alone and you want someone to ride with you on a rollercoaster, ferris wheel, car, bike, and any type of rides/vehicle. "Thanks for the ride" means that you're thanking someone who "gave" you ride and drove you to a certain location. "thanks for the ride" means your friend gave you a lift in his/her car. "Thanks for riding with me." can mean they went with you, but perhaps not in their car. Perhaps on the bus, a taxi, or something else. "thanks for the ride" means your friend gave you a lift in his/her car. About "Thanks for the Ride". Soupy explained this song to be about a friend who was in a car crash, fell into a coma and died after several years. Concerning the song's lyrics: I wanted to write a verse that imagined a realistic "if you had come out of the coma" [scenario]...It was the idea of us losing touch after college, and here you got married to some boy in California and have a baby on the way. I really like that idea of, "We probably still wouldn't talk, but you would be happy and that would be enough. Soupy said he wrote this song in a day in "weird and serendipitous ways". "Thanks for the Ride" Track Info. thanks for the ride. Thank you for driving me some place in your car. A: "Thanks for the ride, Mom." B: "No problem, honey. I'll be back at 8 to pick you up." "I told them I was proud of them, thanks for the ride, thanks for 11-2, remember to always finish and attack and there is no substitute for hard work," Aliotti said. Defense gives Aliotti proper farewell. Thanks for the ride. Chuffed to get his head in front for u both." Wayne Rooney scores first win at racecourse in fifth attempt. "We will take them to hospital where they jump out and say thanks for the ride because they only live around the corner." Time-wasters use up ambulance resources meant for seriously ill; Emergency services summoned for poorly cats and help with TV. Share this Rating. Title: Thanks for the Ride (2013). 6,7/10. Want to share IMDb's rating on your own site?