

*The Ninth
Acolyte Reader*



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Night Ride

by Jotham Lotring

The gods have no pity on the fifteen-year-old boy. They have given him this almost-man's body that doesn't yet have a man's meat on it, nor a man's motor-sensory control. His voice is barely in command of its new lower range. He spooks easily, upsetting tables, lamps, knocking over his milkshakes at drive-ins he cannot drive into. He barks when he should whisper, laughs suddenly and impulsively when everyone around him is serious, and gets upset when he ought to remain calm. He's terrified that his clothes aren't cool, his gym shoes out of style. He *knows* that his last haircut was a disaster. Is that new sensitive spot on his chin an incipient zit?

It was ten o'clock on the night bus to Denver and we'd just pulled out of some Iowa town. I saw him coming towards me down the aisle, clutching a green and purple gym bag and looking for a place to sit – a tall boy with lank blond hair reaching to the top of his shoulders, the obligatory denim pants and an NFL jacket which had once been brightly colored but was now badly faded through multiple washings and wear.

I hastily cleared the seat next to me of snack-bag detritus and caught the youngster's eye.

He stopped. "Um, is someone using this seat?" he asked.

"No," I said.

"Well, would you mind if I took it?"

I certainly wouldn't and I told him so. He threw his gym bag up onto the overhead rack and lowered himself down beside me.

"Going far?" I asked.

He gave a little start. "Oh, yeah, Denver."

"Me too. Long ride."

"You know it! But I'll probably sleep most of the way, 'cause I'm tired. Man, I've been waiting nine hours for this ride." He pulled out some magazines and spread them on his lap.

"Do you mind if I grab something off of the shelf?" I asked.

He shook his head, shuffling through his reading material, then, realizing he had to move, said, "Oh," and stood up. Immediately

everything slid off his lap onto the floor.

As I brought down my jacket from the rack, he fished around on his hands and knees gathering up *Motor Mechanic*, *True Science*, *Auto* and I don't know what else.

"Sorry," I said.

"I'm such a klutz." He stood up. He had gray-green eyes, lightly tanned skin as pure as a baby's butt and as innocent of hair, a kid's nose and firm mouth – an open, vulnerable face. As I bumped against him I noticed his smell, an all-teenage-boy smell, of clothes that hadn't been recently washed, hair that hadn't been shampooed, the sweetish scent of multiple layers of adolescent face-oil dried on cheeks and chin.

We settled down into our seats again, I at the window, he at the aisle into which he stretched out one lanky leg. I spread the jacket over my lap, retrieved a box of M&Ms from one of its pockets, made an offering and poured some into his slightly sweaty palm. "Thanks," he said, "I haven't had much to eat today. I plum ran out of money." He was becoming comfortable with me. He was beginning to open up. "My dad says I gotta learn to manage my budget, but sometimes I get carried away. That ever happen to you, Mister?"

"All the time." I told him my name.

"I'm Mike." He said it as though names were totally unimportant. "Take day before yesterday – no, it was the day before that – there was this rock concert and me and my buddy Fred figured we could just swim across the river and crawl up the bank and lie in the long grass and take it all in free of charge, only we got caught and they held Freddy and made me go back and get money to bail us both out – but then they were really nice to us and we ended up helping them back stage knock down the set and roll up the wires, and they gave us some beers and Freddy some smokes, but that's where the money went. Typical!"

It seemed this had been his first real summer away from home. "I had a job with a cousin of my dad's, down in Bloomington," he went on. "Nice town. Nice people. *Good looking* people."

I said. "You'd fit right in."

Mike turned to see if I was putting him on. His gray-green eyes locked on mine for an instant. Questions formed in his mind, I could see. What was I up to? Was I queer?

Then he shook his head. "I figured here I was, away from my old neighborhood, away from my old school, and I could cut loose – man, was I going to make out! I hadn't taken into account the other boys. They got mean. I still have a knee that aches when I bend it a certain way."

After his second fight he'd quit and just wandered around the Great Lakes area. "Benton Harbor, Michigan – I had a good time there. I met up with these kids that were living on the beach and sleeping back in the sand dunes. Every night we'd build a big driftwood fire on the shore and sit around it drinking beer."

"Boys and girls?" I asked.

"Just guys, so there was no trouble. One or two of them went out with chicks from the summer colony and came back all shagged out at dawn, but they didn't bring them down to our camp. It was better that way."

"And you?" I asked.

"Yeah..." He sighed. "I was the youngest. I didn't really make out much with girls over in Benton Harbor..."

I laughed. "So what'd you do?"

He sighed and, avoiding my eyes, gave a few desultory jerk-off motions with his right hand.

A signal, I wondered? "Well," I said, changing the subject, "your summer's over and school's beginning."

He would be a sophomore. Sophomore? "I'm a class ahead of myself," he explained. So, in spite of his fashionably drawled speech, he was a bright boy. "Only thing is, I didn't realize the ticket on this crazy bus was going to be so expensive. There was just enough cash left over for a cup of coffee and a doughnut, and I had to go out in the alley to piss."

He opened one of the magazines and started thumbing through it: sport cars, motorcycles, bikers' fashions... He paused at a full-page color advertisement displaying a male, probably a teenage male, crotch. Nobody could have called the photo pornographic, yet where the underlying organs mounded up the blue denim it was of a distinctly lighter hue, suggesting a long history of friction. Another signal? I caught him sliding his eyes sideways to see if I was looking.

The bus was now traveling smoothly through the night. Outside, I knew, was the gently rolling country of America's corn and hog belt, but all I could see of it were headlights streaking by.

I took out my book and read, or tried to read, as the boy leafed through his magazines, muttering, "Man!" and "Chill!" and "Look at this!" every time a picture of some shiny sport car or gleaming motorcycle heavily hung with pipes and chrome caught his fancy. We'd discuss, briefly, those objects of his love, then I would turn back to my book.

A little later he grew warm. I had a glimpse of strong shoulders hunching forward as he pulled the NFL jacket over his head and off.

Beneath was a University of Colorado sweat-shirt. Now his smell, sweet and musky and male, really permeated the air around us. The jacket went onto his lap, in imitation of mine.

"That's better," he mumbled.

Without announcement, the driver switched off the over-head lights. It was time, it seemed, for all of us to sleep. But Mike wasn't quite ready yet.

"You know any good ghost stories?" he asked, settling back in his seat.

"I'm afraid not," I laughed.

"That's what we used to do at night in Boy Scouts, tell ghost stories, or the counselors would. Once when we were camped up in the Front Range they told us about Frenchie, who'd had this gold mine that had fallen in on him right where we'd set up our tents. His ghost would come out at night and carry sleeping kids off into the abandoned mine and they'd never be seen again."

"Did you talk about what *might* have happened to the boys?" An opening; an opportunity.

"Yeah, we did."

"And?"

"Little kids have weird minds, let me tell you." He yawned. Mike wasn't going to bite.

"I know. I was a little kid once."

"That's hard to believe. I mean, here I am talking to you and you're a grown-up, and I *know* you were a kid once, but I just can't picture it. Same way with Mom and Dad. You look at photos of them when they were children and it's like a time-warp or something: that little ten-year-old was your dad? Come off it, he couldn't be."

We talked quietly for another fifteen minutes or so, with Mike's yawns coining more and more frequently. At last he said, "Well, I guess I'll go to sleep. What about you?"

"I never sleep very well on buses or trains or planes."

"I do. Once I lay back here, man, I'll be *out!*" The boy stretched, sighed – and turned his head slightly in my direction.

I wished him pleasant dreams.

"Yeah, I hope so," he said. There was just a trace of tease in his voice.

For the next half hour I sat quietly, intensely aware of the physical closeness of the boy, immersed in his aroma. The smell wasn't just of his body and his clothes but of his humid breath, too, which was surprisingly sweet for such a rumpled traveler. He never turned his head away. In

fact the only movement he made was to hunch even closer to me, shifting his weight a quarter of the way onto his side.

My jacket remained on my lap; his jacket remained on his lap. Under mine was a full erection. What was the state of things under his, I wondered. Would he be stiff? And if so, would that mean he was turning on to my presence, even in sleep? Fifteen-year-olds are always subject to stiff cocks; the only times when they aren't is when they're engaged in some kind of hard physical activity. An erection on Mike now would tell me nothing; a flaccid cock would put an end to all speculation.

I had to find out. I carefully worked my right hand under our jackets and touched his crotch. Just as in the magazine ad, the blue denim of his trousers was worn smooth and soft where the boy's genitals had mounded it. I gently ran my fingers over the area, both sides of the buttoned fly (boys today wouldn't be caught dead wearing blue jeans with a zipper), and finally located the penile form lying slightly athwart one hip. It was full if not rigid – definitely not slumbering.

I thought I detected at my touch a slight interruption in his steady breathing. There was no doubt, however, that the ridge beneath my fingers was altering – expanding, lengthening, growing harder. Asleep or awake, the boy was responding. I prayed that if he really had been out and had just woken up he wouldn't turn aggressive. The beauty of this kind of nighttime grope, however, is that you can simply lift away your hand and pretend nothing is happening if filings take an ugly turn.

I nudged the growing ridge of his penis from off of the hip until it lay more or less parallel with the fly and its imposing row of buttons. It would be comfortable there, and more vulnerable to my touch. I began running my fingernails up and down the overlying cloth.

The boy stirred. Time to make a partial retreat. I lifted my hand away and placed it on his stomach higher up.

Now was the crucial moment I waited. For five, ten seconds nothing happened, then I felt one of *his* hands slide against mine and push it gently back down to his crotch.

It *could* have been an accident of sleep, just as he *could* still have been asleep. I caressed the covered penis for a few more seconds, then once again moved my hand up to rest on his stomach. This time I had no doubts that he was awake, and about what he wanted. He picked up my hand and placed it purposefully back in place.

"Like that?" I whispered, grasping his penis through the cloth.

No reply.

"You want me to go on?"

Again no answer.

So, okay, this was to be a so-called sleeping seduction. I caressed the warm, now somewhat sweaty ridge for another minute. His breathing into my face became increasingly troubled. It was now time to release from those confining Levis the penis I'd stirred into life.

I started on the buttons. Or, rather, I started on one button, the top one, but found it surprisingly difficult to undo. Think about it for a moment; don't you always use two hands on buttons? It took me a long time using only my right. I couldn't blame the boy if, in the hot impatience of youth, he was silently cursing my ineptitude. But I persisted.

At last the fly was open, the denim parted and it only remained to deal with the boy's briefs. If he had been a few years younger I could have extracted his penis through its opening, but Mike was too old and his cock too large and stiff for that to succeed. Somehow I would have to shove the skivvies down. Would he help by unweighting himself? He didn't; rather he squirmed a bit, again as though making a perfectly natural movement in sleep, and the unders slipped out of the way.

Now Mike's boyish cock was totally free, rising warmly into my hand, velvety-soft on the outside and hard as a billy-club within. I gripped it and began a slow, firm stroke which drew that velvety outer skin back and forth over the swollen core. Touch told me it was a long penis rather than a fat one, and that it was circumcised.

"Nice?" I whispered. "Shall I stop?"

I felt his body tremble. He whispered one word, "Wet"

Now, did that mean he was approaching the end and was about to favor my hand with his ejaculation, or did he want me to use some kind of lubrication? I guessed the latter. I released his penis and brought my hand to my lips.

Now I caught a very different scent of him: the powerful odor of his penis – sweaty, musky, cheesy; the aroma of full-scale adolescent rut I covered my smelly fingers with a generous quantity of spittle and returned my hand. Now when I stroked him his penis slid through my grip like a piston slathered in oil.

It didn't take long. He couldn't hide his terminal shudder or stifle entirely a soft gasp in his throat and then my fingers were flooded with warm, sticky sperm. I had a handkerchief handy and a half minute later set about mopping up. And there was a lot to mop up. This teenager hadn't rid himself of his sexual sap for some days, it seemed. Either that or he was a formidable producer.

Around one o'clock in the morning we stopped at a town somewhere in western Nebraska. The lights came on in the bus but Mike seemed to be sleeping so soundly I decided not to disturb him – yet. I was amused to note that his fly was once again buttoned decently up, his jacket having fallen to the floor. I stepped over his legs, replaced the jacket on his lap, slipped out of the bus and joined a straggling group of passengers in what must have been the town's one all-night cafeteria.

I returned with a carton of chocolate milkshake and a hamburger wrapped in waxed paper, and gently shook Mike awake.

"What do you want?" he groused. Gone was that informal friendliness he had shown me earlier.

"I have something for you," I answered. "I remembered what you said about not eating."

For a moment he looked bewildered, then scowled. "I hoped I could just sleep," he said.

"Okay, I'll eat it if you don't."

He thought a moment, hunger obviously getting the better of him, then took the hamburger and shake, leaned forward and, continuing to avoid my eyes, started putting it away.

"Thanks," I said sarcastically.

"Yeah, okay, sure, thanks."

Oh, you gods that control the moods of fifteen-year-olds, I thought, what are you doing to us now? Is Mike, this long-haired summer vagabond of a fifteen-year-old Denver boy, really a sexual innocent? Am I in trouble? Is he, with his feelings? Homosexual panic is endemic in America. Will he get up and walk off the bus, and at the next stop three policemen and one policewoman will be coming down the aisle for me with handcuffs dangling at their belts?

"You mad?" I asked.

"No, why should I be? I been sleeping. I been sound asleep the whole time."

The whole time of what? The little liar! "I mean for waking you up to eat."

Caught out, he refused to say anything more.

No. I was obviously a problematic seat-mate, if not a dirty old man, but it seemed not to be as serious as that. He sucked up the last of his milkshake, crumpled the carton and put it, along with the hamburger wrappings, into the seat pouch in front of him and mumbled another grudging thanks. He was, if nothing else, a polite boy.

The bus started off; the lights went out. Mike seemed soon to be

back asleep, but this time with his head turned firmly away from me and his jacket bunched behind it as a pillow.

Perhaps it was the boy's shift to unfriendliness; perhaps it was the glass of milk and grilled cheese sandwich I'd eaten in the cafeteria; whatever, I found myself dozing – not really falling asleep but slipping into a state of quickly passing time and thoughts which turned all too readily into quasi-hallucinations. I saw a semi-naked Mike and his buddy slithering up the bank of a muddy Midwestern river, drawn by the heavy beat of some touring rock group warming up on the shore. I heard the man next to me at the counter in the cafeteria say, "Kids these days don't bother to wash. How can you stand it riding beside that hippie?" I felt Mike take hold of my wrist...

But that was no dream. He really did have a grip on my hand and was drawing it toward his crotch. He had already unbuttoned and parted his fly, pulled down his skivvies, done all of this himself. His penis rose stiff and hot just as it had before and was poking up into the jacket that once again was covering his lap. He placed my hand upon his cock and let go.

I was amazed, and relieved – and delighted, of course. This time he wouldn't be in such a hurry. I would let him savor the experience, build up the tension, let it subside, lead him by a more circuitous path to the final climb and plunge off the cliff.

So I began to tease him with my fingers, touching him here and there, from scrotum to dark-smelling perineum, up the well-rooted tree to its softish glans and back again, tangling my knuckles in his pubic hair, grazing oh so lightly the focal fold in his stretched frenulum with the very tip of my index finger.

But I'd forgotten how rushed even a second time could be when you are fifteen. It wasn't long before he was whispering, "Faster. And make it wet."

Once again when I brought my fingers to my lips I savored the sharp, pungent smell of his cock and crotch. I was still somewhat dry-mouth from sleep, but the little eye of his urethra was leaking lubricant, and then Mike supplied some saliva of his own.

"Now go!" he whispered between gritted teeth.

I pulled on his penis, hard, and was rewarded by a smaller, but still ample, flood of viscid sperm.

After cleaning him up once again with my handkerchief I sank into my seat (and, after he fell asleep again, I intended to relieve my own tumescent yearnings), but Mike grasped my retreating hand, pulled it back into

place with obvious irritation and wrapped it around his penis which showed no signs of softening. I wasn't going to get off so easily, it seemed. My hand belonged to his cock; that was where it was to stay, at his beck and command, for the rest of the night

Three more times, with pauses between for cat-naps, I brought him off and mopped him up. Then dawn began to quicken the world outside our windows and made it unsafe to continue. I let go of his penis. He rolled toward the aisle, buttoned up and really did go to sleep. And slept, or pretended to sleep, until we were parked in the Denver terminal and all the passengers were disembarking. Then I put my hand on his shoulder and shook him. He blinked, stood up, stretched, reached for his gym bag, all the time avoiding my eyes.

"Good-by, Mike," I said as he prepared to set off down the aisle. "All the best luck."

He gave a quick nod, eyes on the floor, slung the gym bag over his shoulder and left.

I lost sight of him for a while, climbing out of the bus and mingling with the crowd of people inside the terminal. I went to the men's room and peed and splashed some cold water on my face and combed my mussed hair. When I came out I saw Mike standing across the waiting room surrounded by a welcoming family – Mother and Dad and little Sis, and a tan cocker spaniel who jumped on him, ears flying, and ran around in circles whimpering with joy. There was Odysseus, ten feet tall, returning to Ithaca.

I picked up my suitcase, then put it down because I found myself sweating. It was hot in the terminal, and this was the moment of truth, the last time, ever, when the kid could point me out and bring the cops rushing in.

The dog's leash had now become wound around Mike's legs and he was in imminent danger of collapse, I realized. I reached into my jacket pocket and pulled out a handkerchief to mop my face. But I'd forgotten it was *that* handkerchief. Once again I breathed in the pungent odor of the boy's most intimate places and the multiple loads of his release.

And at just that moment our eyes met, Mike's and mine. "I'm such a klutz," he had confided to me, before all his confiding had stopped.

And I, with that handkerchief pressed over my nose and lips, inhaling all the vital scents of his boyish masculinity? Was I any less of a klutz? I wadded up the handkerchief guiltily and thrust it into a pocket, face ablaze with embarrassment.

Then I saw that, over the chatter of his family, Mike was reading me: he'd worked out why my face was lighting up like a rampant rash of poison

ivy.

The dog, now spotting a standing ashtray it evidently felt it its duty to mark, gave a jerk. Mike teetered, flailed, regained a precarious balance. When our eyes met again it was he who was the more embarrassed.

Fate, or the gods, did those things to one. It, or they, put sperm-laden handkerchiefs into your pockets for you to wipe your face on, wrapped dog leashes around your legs and tried to trip you at the most critical moment. Almost without thinking, holding his eyes, I shrugged, giving Mike what he would probably have called a shit-eating grin.

It was a gesture. It was an overture. It was a query, both of the boy and the gods. What, Mike, do you make, now, of the slightly over-weight middle-aged man who'd fondled you on the night bus to Denver? What had the gods of chance and romance been up to with us last night, atop their criminally deforested mountains? They weren't communicating these days (and who could blame them?).

And then the boy returned my shrug. He raised his shoulders and turned up his palms. He shot me a parting smile that was like sunlight breaking over his pure white teeth, and I knew that all was essentially well with him, and the gods, although silent, hadn't deserted us after all.