

## **Chris Saved Me**

*Douglas L McCue Jr*

I never enjoyed drinking, unless it meant I was going to get trashed. I suppose I had a harder try at life than Chris and needed a good escape. I often drank alone and stayed up late. Sometimes I would beg Chris to join me so I wouldn't feel so weird about it. I guess he could understand how strange it would be to drink alone night after night. So if I asked Chris to drink with me, he said, "What are friends for?"

Sometimes I enjoyed driving out to the middle of the country in the night and relax on my car. I liked being in new places, perhaps it was my need for rebellious activity.

"In the middle of a lightning storm, you're pretty much safe sitting on your car," Chris always had some strange information to hand out.

Chris and I were best friends since grade school, so when he saw that terrified look in my eyes and a fresh bulge under my left eye he knew what I really wanted to do.

Chris said he wanted to throw a handful of tennis balls full of match heads at my father. I persuaded him to drink a few and relax. He was a very kind and understanding person; perhaps one of the last real gentlemen on the planet.

Sitting in my room and reading a good book, I heard a knock on the door and it's my father. There was a stench of alcohol about him and he had those soulless eyes. I feared that. I suppose the lawn wasn't cut as perfect as I originally deduced.

I went to Chris' house and we decided to take a drive out of town. It was way past curfew, but that didn't matter.

"I'm going to be the greatest writer when I graduate and get out of this dead end town," Chris would often tell me. I always hoped he would. He had that certain spark that attracted people to him and he had the wit and knowledge to back it up. He would do great things.

The time was near eleven and we were driving to a new stretch of gravel road. The city lights were quite far away and we felt secure about our new surroundings. After a short search we found a small turnout by a corn field. The night sky always made me feel comfortable and at home.

Parking and turning off the headlights we sat on the hood of the car and listened to the local radio station hits. It was a warm night with a cool breeze blowing through. We cracked some beers and talked about future aspirations and past mistakes. We never talked about my father.

Storm clouds were rolling up and lightning could be seen not too far off. The unmistakable rumble of thunder chided our every effort to stay relaxed and comfortable. It is always my luck to have a great calm night wasted by Mother Nature.

Chris just smiled and I knew he didn't want to head home, neither did I. So we stayed and soon enough it started to rain. I decided I'd had enough and got in the car. Chris finally gave in and swayed around the car to the passenger door. He stopped short and looked up at me with a frown of annoyance. He mouthed what I already knew, we had a flat tire.

I guess we hadn't paid much attention to surrounding houses, though I vaguely remembered passing a farm house not too far back. Grumbling we trudged towards the house and hoped someone would help us out. The rain was unrelenting and getting heavier. That didn't bother me, water dries; it was the lightning getting closer that worried me. The house was further than I thought, but luck was with us and our invisible shield protected us from the wrath of Zeus.

“Hatred is the last love,” maybe Chris was a poet as well. My constant insomnia always led my mind from the important matters of life. At this point my life was a state of perpetual schizophrenia. I know I wasn’t crazy, but I wanted to be; maybe then I could be free from the hands of those who are supposed to help, but don’t.

It’s funny what people wish for. However helpful these things could be at the time, they always appear humorous later on. I always wished for some great talent or super intelligence so that I could have a ‘free ticket’ through college; have a future worth grasping at. Things are never as simple as you want them to be.

We decided that when we get to this house, I would wait by the road for a car to pass by and ask for help. Meanwhile, Chris would go tot the house and see what he could find out. Half a mile down the road we turned to the driveway of the rather large farm house embedded in a small forest. The lights were out, but we decided that we should try it anyways. There wouldn’t be another house for miles.

Chris briskly walked to the front door and rang the doorbell. No answer. Looking around he knocked and went around the house hoping for more luck on the other side. After a few moments a large man came to the door and opened it. Turning on the porch light and seeing no one he stepped back in.

“Sir, can we use your phone?” I rang out heading towards the door, but he couldn’t hear it over the storm. I was half the way to the yard when I saw Chris coming back around having noticed the porch light. He knocked again and I tried to tell him that the owner had come to the door. No luck. Chris was quite impatient that night.

He jerked his head to the right; I assume he heard the sound of footsteps. He jumped the porch and wandered back around the house again. I couldn’t tell if it was thunder, but a sound shot out that stopped me with shrills through my body.

People wish life was like a movie, they want things to be more real. It never hits you; it’s like some strange event happening in another universe. If this is a movie, then morals are a self-deception. At the end of the day all you have is your friends.

Coming around the corner I heard a shotgun cock and looking down I saw Chris lying on the ground. Dread filled me then and the man yanked the shotgun into the air. Suddenly realizing what happened, his eyes pleaded with me. I wanted to strangle him, but that gun kept me well at bay. It felt like my life had just flashed before me. I screamed the truth at him, he never flinched. I screamed some more, then I cried.

Turns out that the owner had several vehicles vandalized in the last couple of weeks and feared that the vandals had returned. This time he was prepared, donning his shotgun to strike fear in the hearts of those who would do him wrong. The bottle of scotch the man had just finished didn’t help the situation either. When Chris turned that fateful corner he greeted the end of a shotgun and the fear of a man who was ready to pounce.

He was found innocent because of the circumstances. Chris had a beautiful funeral service. My father even managed to show up and stay sober. Many of our friends showed up and many that weren’t. There was talk of gun laws and vengeance for the young man who needed help. It made me wonder who really needed the help.