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# LULA DEAN'S LITTLE LIBRARY *of* BANNED BOOKS



*A Novel*

**KIRSTEN MILLER**

*Author of The Change*

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LITTLE LIBRARY OF  
BANNED BOOKS**

*A Novel*



**KIRSTEN MILLER**

*WM*

WILLIAM MORROW

*An Imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers*



# Dedication

*For all the good people down south*

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## Chapter 1

# Food of the Gods

**R**onnie Childers was tripping his balls off in Jackson Square when an angel of the Lord appeared before him. She was a glorious vision, dressed in black gym leggings and a Bikini Kill T-shirt, her golden hair twisted into a messy knot on the top of her head. She looked a lot like a girl he used to get stoned with back in high school.

The angel hovered over his park bench, the streetlight casting a halo behind her head. "What the hell are you doing, Ronnie?" she asked.

"Am I that fucked up or is it really you?"

The angel snorted. "Both," she told him.

Tears of pure joy sprang to Ronnie's eyes. "Hallelujah," he said. The Lord sure did work in mysterious ways.

"You've been out in the cow pasture again, haven't you?"

Ronnie giggled. "You got me." He opened his hand and presented a little brown mushroom as an offering.

The angel plucked the mushroom out of his palm and slipped it into her bra for safekeeping. "You realize it's two o'clock in the morning?"

"Then the night is young." Ronnie patted a spot on the bench. When the angel didn't plop down beside him, he swept an arm across the square. "I ain't making a move. I'm just asking you to take a moment to appreciate all this fucking beauty."

Sometimes Ronnie wondered how he'd never noticed it before. He'd spent half his life in Troy's town square, under the branches of its giant oaks and magnolias. As his mama cleaned the floors at the DMV, he'd whiled away the hours turning the fountain's water bloodred with Rit dye or vandalizing the Confederate general's statue with beautifully drawn penises. Those days were long gone, but the square was still Ronnie's favorite spot. He'd discovered its true beauty on nights like this—when the world was quiet and peaceful and no one was arguing about book bans and butt plugs and all the other bullshit that got the people of Troy riled up these days.

"You know, this could be a pretty nice place." Ronnie sighed.

The angel, staring out across the darkness, seemed to see the same thing. "Yeah," she agreed. "Hey, if you're free right now I could use a hand. You think you can walk?"

Ronnie looked down at his ripped jeans and work boots. His right leg kicked out when he willed it to move. "Looks as if. Where we heading?" For the first time he noticed the giant suitcase she'd been wheeling behind her.

"To cause some trouble," the angel told him.

"Fuck yeah." Ronnie stood up and shook out his lanky limbs. "That's rule number one in the Ronnie Childers playbook—never turn your nose up at trouble."

It really didn't get any better than this, Ronnie thought. High as hell and traveling through the night with an angel on a mission. He'd have to be at work at the Piggly Wiggly in a few short hours, but that was just to pay the bills. This was the sort of experience that fed the soul. Ronnie was absolutely certain that the world would be a much better place if more folks stepped out of the boxes they'd come packed in and opened their minds to the mysteries of the universe.

It wasn't until the angel stopped in front of a house that reminded Ronnie of a prissy white wedding cake that he started his slow descent from the heavens.

"You know Lula Dean lives here." He figured the angel ought to know. Most people in their right minds did their best to avoid Lula.



The angel turned and lifted a finger to her lips. She wheeled the suitcase over to a little purple cabinet fixed to the top of a post just inside Lula's front yard. Shaped like a house and hand-painted with flowers, it held two short shelves crammed with books. *Lula's Little Library* was written in cursive below the front eave.

The angel opened the glass door. "Take everything out," she whispered. "Stack all the books in a pile."

Ronnie pulled a thick tome off the top shelf. "*The Southern Belle's Guide to Etiquette*. Where the hell does she find this stuff?"

The angel was too busy opening her suitcase to respond. Packed inside were at least two dozen books.

Ronnie whistled softly. "Those what I think they are?" he asked.

The angel looked up with narrowed eyes. "I thought you were high."

"I ain't so high that I can't recognize contraband," Ronnie told her, returning to the job she'd given him. "No worries, your holiness. I won't interfere with the Lord's work."

Once there were two stacks of books standing side by side, Ronnie stepped back.

"What now?" he asked.

"Switch the covers," the angel ordered. "Put Lula's dust jackets on the books I brought. Then put those books in her library. Lula's books will go into the suitcase."

Ronnie paused. "Just so you know, I'm not one hundred percent convinced of the legality of this operation," he told her. He'd had more than a few run-ins with the law during his two decades on earth. If he weren't a convicted felon, he might have made a good lawyer.

"That gonna be a problem?" the angel asked.

"No, ma'am." Ronnie shook his head.

When they finished swapping the books, the little library looked exactly as they'd found it.

"Good work," the angel told Ronnie. "Come on. I'll walk your stoned ass home."

**H**ow long had it been since they'd spent time together like this? At least two years, Ronnie figured. It felt just as right as it always had.

"So is that what counts for fun in Troy now? Eating shrooms and sitting in the square?" the angel asked as they strolled back through the park.

"Naw. Most folks round here prefer Oxy or meth."

The angel didn't laugh. "You're better than all this, you know."

"Yeah, well, still not good enough to come up with the cash for college," Ronnie said. "Plus, I got felony possession on my record now, so I reckon I'm fucked. I know this is gonna sound crazy, but if it weren't for the shrooms, I think I might have fallen down a deep, dark hole and never come out."

"It doesn't sound crazy at all. They've been using mushrooms to treat depression. Psilocybin may be schedule one here in Georgia, but it's considered medicine in other parts of the country."

"Maybe I should move to one of those parts," Ronnie said. "'Cause finding shrooms and using them are the only two things I've ever been really good at."

"That's bullshit and we both know it. But maybe you can find a use for those skills. Help people and make bank all at the same time—sounds like a good combination to me."

They stopped at Ronnie's front porch. He could still remember the first time they'd sat on the swing together—back in the days when neither of them knew that Lindsay was rich and Ronnie was poor, and they couldn't imagine a day when their paths would no longer run parallel.

"I love you," Ronnie told the angel. "I always have."

"And I love you right back," she said. "But as we both know, I'm pretty damn gay."

"Just my luck," Ronnie said with a shrug. "So how long you in town for?"

"I'm heading out tomorrow," she said.

Ronnie laughed. "You went to all that trouble tonight and you ain't gonna stay to watch the shit hit the fan? That fancy-ass school

hasn't changed you at all. You're one bad bitch, Lindsay Underwood."

"I came down to help my mom, but she doesn't want me to stay." Then a devilish grin spread across Lindsay's face. "Don't worry, though. I have a feeling I'll be back in town before long."