

Red Gorge, OAKVILLE

Tionna was sitting in her bedroom at the messy, wooden desk. All the lights were off. She used to sit here doing homework and dreaming about college. Or stressing herself out about fitting into this new town, making new friends. Now, it was just her and all those “new friends” were dead.

Now, she was trying to say goodbye before she joined them.

She smoothed it out, read it over and over, tracing the dark letters with her eyes.

I'm sorry, it started. I should've told you about everything. About Mike and my friends. What really happened at that barn.

She looked out the window as lightning split the sky in the distance. For a moment, the whole world turned blue, and she saw a dark figure across the street. It was the same one she'd seen at the barn — tall, strong, and wearing clothes that blended in with the night.

The police won't listen, the letter went on. I've tried and tried and they don't care. They think I'm crazy. Or a liar. Or both. But they'll pay attention, soon, because soon I'll be gone.

The figure outside was gone, but it didn't make her feel any better. Tionna took a deep breath and reached for a pen. Her hand was shaking badly. She squeezed the writing utensil so hard it hurt her fingers.

I don't know when or where. It might even be tonight. But I know he's coming back for me, because I saw him the other day. In town. Not wearing a mask, not hiding. I recognized his voice, you see. And I think he recognized me, too.

Something downstairs creaked and Tionna nearly fell out of her chair. She was struggling to go on. She wanted to jump up and run, but that's what he expected. That's what *he* wanted, too.

I'm sure he's coming back. I'm sure I won't make it out this time. I just wanted to say goodbye. And I love you. And I hope somebody catches him before he kills again.

Then she signed her name at the bottom with a heart scribbled beside it and stuffed the letter in a drawer. Somewhere only her mother would look.

Almost instantly, she heard a knock at the door. Slowly, the handle turned, and it creaked inward.

“I know what you did,” she said boldly without turning around. “I already told the cops.”

“Good,” he said from the doorway. “Now you know why you're next.”

“I won't go easy.” She pushed back her desk chair and turned around to face him. “I'll claw out your eyes. I'll—”

“Good,” he repeated. “After last time, I expected nothing else.”

Tionna's resolve fell to pieces and she doubled over. “Please... I won't say a word. Just let me go. I'll move away—”

“I’m sorry,” he said. “I don’t have a choice anymore.”

And then she saw the knife and heard thunder. The house shook and he was on her. The whole world flashed blue again. She closed her eyes, tried to scream, and fell forever in the dark.

One Week Before...

Part 1-- The Band

Chapter 1--Friday on the Road

When I was running steady with the band, it felt like a matter of time ‘til something went bad. Any day, any show, could be the beginning of the end. We’d never see it coming, I thought. One day, it would smack us down.

Another Friday night. A grimy, roadhouse bar, smelling of spilled beer and burnt-out cigarettes. The air was more smoke than oxygen, and dim lights behind the bar cast eerie shadows on the dancing crowd. Everything seemed to float when the band played those types of bars. Over and over, and the shows always went great. So did this one. So did the last one. They always saved the best for last.

Johnny was on stage, dripping with sweat, splashing the front row. Everybody drank it up — his performance, his vocals, and the wild mania behind his eyes. He always looked around, unfocused, like he was already drunk. But that was just his look — chaos and power in equal doses.

I was sitting off to the side, behind my mixing board, as the band rocked through another upbeat number. Beside Johnny, Echo held her guitar out from her body, thrashing her head with every note. Her hair flew around in a wild, hot tornado. Her dark jeans were painted tight on her legs. I couldn’t tear my eyes away.

“Yessir!” Johnny belted, finishing the tune. He held up both hands and the crowd erupted in applause. “That’s *right!*”

Behind him, River smiled wide — not even old enough to be inside the bar — and Pistol perched at his drum set, waving his sticks in the air. Those two completed the band; they made it whole.

If they ever leave the band, I thought, then the show’s over. Goodnight. All done.

“You all having a good night yet?” Johnny yelled out, pressing his face right up to the mic. I quickly reached for my soundboard and eased down the volume. “Hey, you will soon! We — Hey! Aids! Why the hell’d you turn me down?”

I gawked. He never called me out from the stage like that.

The crowd turned around to face me and a chorus of boos rained down on my modest little table.

“Turn it up, Aidan,” Johnny snapped. His eyes found me through the crowd. If looks could kill... “These people wanna *scream*, you hear? Let’s *get* it! And don’t you dare turn us down again.”

Everybody in the crowd stomped their feet and bounced on their toes as River played a little guitar riff off to the side. I turned the mic back up — not all the way — and sat back in my chair.

Let him blow out the speakers, then. If that’s what he wants. Asshole.

“You ready?” Johnny asked, and the whole bar shouted, “Yes!”

“I said are you *ready*?” Before they could respond, he yelled, “*Kill ‘em!*”

And the band erupted like I’d never heard before. The walls and lights were shaking; the floor was on fire. Echo ran up and grabbed the mic with both hands like she wanted to strangle it. She sang the lyrics to an AC/DC song like she was the one who wrote them. Like she could scream forever, so loud it might cut through the dark sky. I almost turned the mic down — almost — but then she eased back to a perfect level and the show went on.

I watched them cautiously, but my mind started to wander. It always did, seeing them play.

I always wished I could see them for the first time — with no history, no drama, no memories or nothing, just the music. But I’d known them too long, too well, and since way back as young kids. I’d seen their best and worst. I knew all their secrets — or so I thought.

Not Echo, though — Kate was her real name. I hadn’t known her ‘til later. But she still acted like she had some past, something she was running from. I guess we all did. Why else would five people spend all summer on the road? We all left something behind, even her. And I was dying to figure it out.

But the guys, we were longtime friends. Too long, some might say. And maybe that’s why I always loved her. ‘Cause she was different.

Back in June, they spent a few weeks in Chattanooga. With a decent crowd following, lots of friends around, and an electric live show, they made a good chunk of change. Moved on to Nashville, Knoxville, playing bars and dusty stages like they owned the whole state. And like every good band, they needed a good sound guy, so I’d drive over from my podunk little town — Clarksville, where my family had always lived — and help them out. I’d sleep on Johnny’s couch. Put up with his hazing. Make a good bit of money and pretend I was part of the band.

Then they got the idea to tour around. Well, Johnny did. He said for the rest of the summer, they should tour Appalachia, and we did. I think he was just running away from his mom, ‘cause she was getting out of prison soon. She’d probably try to talk to him.

But anyway, we hit the road, and did just how they wanted. Barely scraping by on money, booze, sex, and every other vice. Damn, though, they were having the best time.

I followed them, helped them — I was running east with them from the hottest heat wave Tennessee's ever seen. To get away from it, my hometown, and my family. I guess Johnny and I were similar in that way. Maybe we shared an identical crack in our soul until his split open and mine was mended with duct tape.

I would've given anything to see them with no baggage or history between us. See them for the first time, coming in blind, so they could blow me away.

When they played, it didn't matter who watched or what type of crowd. Even crossover to Kentucky, didn't matter. The most introverted person would dance until they died on the floor. The shy, ashy girl would ask out the hottest guy and get a "Hell, yeah!" The beer never stopped flowing. No one had ever been happier.

They all brought something unique to the band.

When Johnny played a late night show, he'd give so much energy, it got scary sometimes. Sweating all over the stage, shaggy hair, singing like his life depended on it. Didn't matter the song or genre. He gave it everything he had, and he had a *lot* pent up.

Who the hell is this guy? I would've thought, watching them with fresh eyes. *Where does he get that from?*

Bobby — stage name Pistol — was the best improvising drummer I ever saw live and he had to be, even just playing covers, 'cause Johnny was unpredictable as hell. Whenever the sun went down, Johnny turned wild as a bronco and Bobby had to keep up.

For a late-night set, it was good. For a normal evening, it was bad. Johnny had scared me for years, but I never thought it'd be a big issue. Never thought it'd cost me everything.

Bobby had known Johnny and me since us three were in diapers. He was the country one, real burly accent, big truck. Johnny was the slick kid. I was the sidekick. We'd known each other. Or at least thought we did.

River came around at the end of high school. Back then, we were seniors, getting ready to graduate, and he was a quiet little freshman with a rotating roster of fake IDs. When the band toured, he was only twenty — made the rest of us feel old — and not even *allowed* into bars yet.

Still, he played them like he owned them. I told everyone, "*I know* he's some type of prodigy." He had this wild, frantic, gelled-up hair and patchy, dark facial hair. When he grew out his mustache, he could've been a biker from the Sixties. I think Kate would've loved him, instead, but he was always a one-night-stand-type and all the townies wanted him. Just for a night. He was too hot to hold onto for much longer, burning bright, young, and out.

Great kid, though. Everyone said so. The moms all called him a "beautiful little boy" and I wish they still could.

While he stuck with the band, River was the glue guy. He made everything else work. Calm, level-headed, not afraid to put someone in their proper place. Downed beers and cigarettes and kept Johnny on track as best he could.

And Echo — sorry, Kate — she was the reason people came back for more. She was the most talented, always. The most beautiful, undoubtedly. She was the entire world: on stage, wide open, unkempt, unstoppable, and perfect as a summer evening.

I was the sound guy. I was always the weak link.

After the show wrapped up, the band split off and met their adoring fans. Some of these people had followed us from Tennessee. Some of them were first-timers. But Johnny shook hands and made like a celebrity while River and Bobby drifted toward the bar. They were always looking for some one-night action, and most of the time they found it — River did, anyway.

Kate came to me. She was smiling and beautiful as ever.

“You alright?” she asked, pushing through the crowd until she reached my little table.

I leaned back in my chair, elbows behind my head. “Doing fine.”

“Sorry he called you out like that.”

“Eh.” I shrugged. “I’ve heard worse.”

She grinned. “I bet. Hey, you want a drink? I’m buying.”

“For all of us?” I asked, raising my eyebrows.

“For you.” She gestured toward the bar. “To thank you. For putting up with Johnny.”

“I’ve known him longer than you,” I reminded her. “*I’m* used to it.”

“Well, still. I owe you one.”

So I followed her toward the bar, pushing through the sticky crowd. The air was still choked with smoke. Pale lights drifted around like they were moving.

“The hell are they smoking in here?” I asked, pinching the bridge of my nose. “Getting a head-high just from being around it.”

Kate laughed and took a seat. I settled onto the barstool beside hers.

“Did you like my song?” she asked. “I was nervous. I’ve never sang it before.”

“Which one?”

“Highway to Hell.”

“*Oh*, I didn’t know the title.”

Kate shook her head. “Come on, dude.”

“But yes. I loved it. You did so good.”

“Thanks, Aidan.” She leaned over and briefly touched her head to my shoulder. I tried to pause the moment — freeze frame, stay here, *don’t leave yet, please* — but then the bartender drifted over and she straightened up.

Somebody screamed, and I turned around to look. It was just a woman, dancing like she couldn't stop. But past her, I saw Johnny. He was by the stage still, and his eyes were narrowed, shooting flames. He looked straight at me. And he made a cutting motion across his throat.

Then he eased up and flashed a white smile. He winked, turned away, and I looked back at Kate.

"What's up?" she asked. "You okay?"

I nodded. "Doing fine."

"Having a good Friday night?"

I looked at her, and she was staring back, almost begging, so I said, "Yeah. Of course!"

When I was running steady with the band, it felt like a matter of time 'til the world burnt down around us. I never thought it'd be there — the hills of West Virginia. But I did always hope it'd be with her.

When I was with the band — with her — nothing else existed. I'd play the game, ignore reality as long as I could. Reality — back home, my town, my family, a Tennessee heatwave — would have to do a lot to get my attention. To tear me away from the band and from Kate.

It'd have to punch me dead in the face, fist closed, and throw me off a bridge into the rocky, white rapids turning red.

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And then we hit the road in Bobby's van, driving through the mountains. We were all getting tired. We had been for weeks.

Somewhere along the road, we settled into Oakville and found a little campsite where we could stay for basically free.

Saturday night. Our first night in Oakville. We had a camp going, steady fire in the middle. No shows to play yet, and we were exhausted anyway. Kate gave me a smile from across the hot logs and said, "Goodnight, boys," but I pretended it was just to me.

Kate stood up from her chair, groaning, and stretched her back. The firelight danced on her face. She turned into an angel. I watched from my dark side of the camp as she gave a little wave and then blew a kiss — to Johnny.

"Night, sweetheart," he called.

"Fuck you, Johnny," she yelled back.

Overhead, the leaves rustled. We all waited, awkward for a moment. Then little laughs broke out and everybody was chuckling.

It was their back-and-forth routine. Who knew what it meant, really. I was burning up with jealousy, either way, every time she cussed in his direction. Or when she'd punch his arm too hard and then say sorry, sorry, my bad.

You could punch me, I'd think. You could punch me so hard and I'd never say a damn word about it but "Again" and "I want you" and even "Need you." Laugh along.

"So Echo," asked River, "What you doing tomorrow?"

"Eh." Kate shrugged on the way to her tent. "Probably waking up early, going on a hike. Wanna join?"

"*Hell* no," he laughed. "Early? No ma'am."

"Kids," Johnny snorted.

"You've only got a couple years on me, old man."

"Sure, kid."

Kate turned away from their bickering and climbed into her tent. The inside was lit up by a lantern. I watched her silhouette undress, first pulling off her shirt, then slipping out of her shorts. She laid down to sleep and flicked the light off, but the image kept burning in my head.

"What about you, Aidan?" River asked, turning to me. He probably caught me looking. "What's your plans?"

"Probably gonna head into town," I said. "See what they've got."

Bobby raised his eyebrows. "Need a ride? Hope not. 'Cause I'm taking the van and I'm gonna find me something good tomorrow."

"What's that mean, Bobby?" River cackled. "You can't be looking for hookers on day one."

"Hey! Listen here, shitface. Not everybody can just *walk* in any bar and—"

"Enough, enough." Johnny waved a hand through the air and cut them off.

We set up camp in Oakville thinking it'd be a nice spot to rest. Just a few days. The band, they'd been pushing hard, running five shows in five nights. And although the crowds weren't huge, that takes a toll, even on me. I was just the sound guy. I never got paid as much as the band members, and sometimes I even had to buy my own beer. But goddamn, I wouldn't have traded it for anything.

When I traveled with the band, I slept in awful spots, and I'd wake up, bleary-eyed, hands smelling like smoke. A few parts always aching and I struggled to wake up just as much as fall asleep. But I always thought of her, *Kate*.

And I always got up quick to run away from him, *Johnny*.

He smirked at me from across the fire, something dangerous sparkling in his eyes.

"Stay outta trouble, eh?" he hissed. "In town tomorrow."

I could never predict him. What he might say or do. Not anymore. So better to avoid him altogether.

“Sure, Johnny. Whatever.”

I’d seen his temper a thousand times and the way he behaved at night. Once, I heard a dirty rat, critterin’ to the corner, and he crushed it with a heel. Over and over. Crunching, bloody mess.

He’d grip a stranger’s throat until they begged for mercy. Kick them in the groin and stroll away, laughing. And if he’d do it to a stranger, he’d do much worse to his friends.

I never would’ve guessed what Johnny — and don’t ever call him John — might do in Oakville. I’d been following them around for a month, and the band was always in trouble ‘cause of him but *never* like that. Never like what was coming.

Maybe if I’d known, I would’ve stayed away.

But most likely not.

I went for her, after all. And I would keep on going, again and again. She gave me dizzy spells. She lit a match and pressed it to my soul. And I’d keep burning for her — again and again, until the world caught fire, too. All our hopes and dreams and we were choking on the ash. Together, at least. Together.

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That same Saturday, a few hours before, we were on the way to Oakville, everyone hungry, looking for lunch. Hours before I sat around the fire with those guys and thought about the rapids running...

We stopped at a seedy little pub for lunch. Just outside of some town called Boomer. The whole way, we followed by this railroad. Below it, the gorge was full of fog. Couldn’t see a damn thing past, so I just watched the houses sliding by — Yards all uncut and tall, weedy. Trucks and cars on blocks, abandoned in the shade. A few little kids watched us go. Some waved. They were standing on the railroad tracks just by their house. Then they were gone.

Only thing I remember clear was seeing a big, white inn, overlooking the foggy valley. The road curved on, and I lost sight, but I remember thinking, *That’s the type of place I’d say is haunted.*

“What are we doing here?” I asked from the back of the van. “We’re in the middle of absolutely nowhere.”

Johnny snapped, “Shut up, Aids.”

“Yeah, Aids,” Bobby chuckled, throwing in his brash, southern accent. He always wore a cowboy hat while driving. He was on that day, as well. “Lemme do the drivin’, you hear?”

Kate was in the passenger seat up front. I saw her eyes in the rearview mirror, looking back at me. I turned away.

After a minute, but still in Boomer, Bobby pulled off the road and his tall, beat-up van rumbled to a stop. His van was a 1975 Ford E-150, faded white, with a strip of blue. Lots of rust. Lots of unpaid parking tickets littering the back floor. We didn't worry too much about those.

The whole van smelled like sweat, River's weed, and Bobby's air freshener, faintly drifting back from the vents. It did nothing except give me a headache.

When he pulled into the gravel lot, his tires kicked up a cloud of gray dust. I was in the very back with all the instruments and sound equipment — right where I belonged, Johnny would've said. I made sure nothing tipped over, 'cause that heavy shit could mess me up bad.

Bobby hopped out first, being the driver, and I had to wait for him to come around back. The back didn't open from the inside. He took his sweet time, whistling a tune, and then pulled open the double doors. Before I could climb out, River pushed over me. Then Johnny turned me around and put a hand into my chest.

Pressed against the window, I smelled his awful breath as he said, "Try not to embarrass us, okay?"

"I've never *embarrassed* you, Johnny."

He gave me a fake smile and then climbed out. I went, too, bumping into his shoulder. He slammed the van doors shut.

"How about this place, huh?" Bobby put both hands in the air and twisted his back. He was still wearing his big cowboy hat.

"Yeah, Bobby," Johnny teased. "You sure know how to pick 'em."

"Smells like gasoline," I said, wrinkling my nose. "Or tar or something."

"Well, did *you* see anywhere better?" Bobby snapped. "Nah. Didn't think you did."

"Maybe if someone else drove..."

River shrugged and kicked at the gravel. "Looks fine to me. I'll eat anywhere."

Johnny sneered and led us forward. "Yeah, 'cause you're a kid."

"Shut it, Johnny."

Kate shook her head like an annoyed older sister and we headed toward the bar.

It was a squat little building in the middle of a gravel lot. A couple of motorcycles were parked on one side and a pickup truck on the other. We walked inside to the low sound of an old metal band playing on the ancient speakers. The place smelled acrid and musty, fogged up with nicotine and cancer. I hung back to let the others do the talking, to "not embarrass them."

"You okay?" Kate asked quietly as we went up to the bar.

"Yeah." I gave a quick nod. "I'm fine."

"Don't let him get to you."

"It's been two months," I said. "I'm fine. He doesn't get to me."

"Okay, Aidan."

It was the strangest thing, going with them. They played a couple shows a week, surviving off free meals and beer. I'd started smoking again after working like hell to kick that habit. I'd lost a few pounds from all that. Still not as much as I wanted, and I couldn't see a difference yet.

And we'd been at it for nearly two months. No end in sight. But I knew it couldn't go on forever. It was getting near mid-August. Weather was cooling down, and so was the band, in a way. Eventually, at some point, we'd have to go home, go back to real life, and I didn't know what they'd possibly do then.

Or me either.

"Howdy, friend." Bobby reached for the brim of his cowboy hat and tipped it to the bartender. "How's it going?"

Behind the bartop, a big, surly woman with greasy hair and a strong, straight frown didn't blink. "Fine. Yourself?"

"Doing well." Bobby cleared his throat and glanced around. One television played the local news. The other showed a Marshall football game from last year. "These here, my friends, we're in a band."

"Okay." She scowled. "Take off your hat, boy. You're indoors. Didn't you bring any manners with you? Or just these silent, western friends?"

Bobby faltered. His voice — distinctly country, rough on the edges, like a rodeo star — was starting to shake. But he went on after placing down his hat.

"I was just wondering, ma'am, if you know any places 'round here that might be looking for live music. We don't need much. A place to stay. A meal. You know how it goes."

She didn't look amused. "Got nothing for you."

"You don't know *anywhere*? It's a Friday night, you know. Everyone's always looking for live bands. Maybe y'all here? This... place?"

Her eyebrows dropped even lower than before. "Can't help you."

Johnny stepped forward, dragging Kate with him. "Listen—"

"This here," Bobby interrupted, and I saw him throw a shiny smile at Johnny, "is Johnny and Echo. They're sort of like our band's mom and pop, you see?"

"If Pop had a drinking problem," River snorted, where only I could hear.

I offered him a laugh.

"And Mom was gonna leave us all soon for better things."

"But," Bobby raised his voice, so he must've heard River too, "we're just looking for a place to stay, you know?"

"What do you mean?" I asked, leaning toward River. "That she's gonna leave?"

He shooed me away.

“Listen.” The bartender rubbed her hands together and then cracked her knuckles loudly. “Your best bet’s in Oakville. That’s the only place worth staying close by. All we got here’s the old inn and ghost stories and trouble for people like you. So unless you’re here to patronize my business, get the hell outta town.”

“Let’s just eat, guys.” Kate stepped forward, laying a hand on Bobby’s shoulder. She pulled him back and smiled brightly at the woman. “Excuse my friend. We’re just here to eat.”

The woman nodded curtly and pulled a notepad from her back pocket. “In that case, what can I get you?”

Chapter 2--Sunday at Eagles Creek

Our first full day in Oakville, I couldn’t hardly sleep, plagued by X-rated dreams. It was another one of those mornings too hot to even sleep. Any future hours of rest became impossible; I couldn’t stay in the tent much longer. So I was up before ever. My back was sweaty and sticking to the mat. I peeled myself off.

Unzipping my tent flap and sticking my head through, I met a fresh sunrise. Friendly morning birds were singing in the soft, blue light. The air still prickled with energy and felt like a cold breeze, just by comparison to the hot and sticky tent.

More and more with them, I felt sticky as hell, sweating through the seams. Every hot morning and every time we smoked. Thick and heavy, burning up, trying just to keep up.

Another morning choking on my lungs and breath like burnt rubber.

I worked so hard to give up this habit.

But in the morning did it even matter?

I was humming to myself as I climbed out of the tent, smiling like a dunce, and then I saw Kate sitting on the log. She had perfect posture and running shorts that showed off her fit thighs. I stopped singing. She was tending to the meager fire, poking feebly with a stick. Then she turned around, bright as always, and I was stuck in place.

“Morning! Sleep well?” she asked.

Our flames from last night were barely more than embers, but she managed to kindle them quickly with her poking. While the fire purred, she stared around at the trees. She wore a long-sleeve shirt, cheap fabric, and twisted in a way so her shorts rode fully up her legs.

“Aidan?” she asked. “You’re not sleepwalking, right?”

“No. Sorry. Just tired.”

I looked around. I could sit next to her and share a log or across the fire in the camping chair Bobby brought. I tried not to bring my own stuff, because part of the fun — following the band — was leeching off of them. Feeding off their energy and lives and purpose. Going on with absolutely none of my own.

“Sit down.” She touched the log next to her. “It’s still early.” A pregnant pause. “You okay?”

I looked up from the dewy grass and she was staring into my eyes.

“Yeah, I’m fine.” I coughed. “Why?”

She shrugged.

“So how’d *you* sleep?” I countered, taking a seat with her. Our legs were almost touching. Hers were smooth, slender, perfect.

I wonder how it feels.

I hope she never knows how much I think about her thighs.

“Good enough.” Her eyes were slightly red and blurry, but it made her all the more attractive. “Those tents are awfully small and hot. I hate it, honestly. Getting *real* tired of the camping life.”

“That’s not great.”

She grinned. “It’s fine. Whatever. We’ll find a place tonight. A real place.”

With two beds and a couch and a carpet floor for me, I thought.

But the campsite wasn’t bad, all things considered. We all had a tent to ourselves. And compared to a carpet floor, sleeping under the stars is almost an upgrade.

Johnny had a small tent, too, though we’d find him sleeping at strange hours in strange places. Curled up next to a log at two in the afternoon or sitting up against a tree at four in the morning. He’d never been a deep sleeper. He told me once it was his mom’s fault. She’d spent too many nights yelling dusk-to-dawn until someone eventually called CPS on her and that was all. They took him away.

River had the biggest tent and he was the most likely to have company. More than a couple nights, he’d kept me up, entertaining one or two guests in his tent by candlelight. It’s a wonder they never burnt the damn thing down. All that squirming and writing and knocking around — I could picture the twisted mess of limbs and naked skin, but I tried not to.

Bobby — stage name: Pistol — on the other hand. He had a smaller tent than me and snored *way* more than he fucked.

“Let’s go into town,” said Kate after twenty minutes of watching the fire die. “I wanna get a feel for this place.”

“Why? We’ll be gone in a couple days, right?”

“Nah. Not this one.” She shook her head. “This one feels different.”