

I'll never forget that night Dylan drove me home.

It was a sticky-wet night in July, and we were coming home late from dinner at Dylan's parents' home, who lived a few hours from us. To this day, I regret pushing Dylan to drive us home that night. We should have stayed and waited for the safety of the morning.

But we didn't. We were out there on that desolate highway, deep into midnight. We had the windows rolled down and the stereo blaring. There was nothing between us and the night but a long flat expanse of desert. No other cars, no cell reception.

The road banked and curved. Dylan slowed to follow it. He was scoffing at something his dad said over dinner about some politician or another. The lights of the dashboard made his knuckles glow red.

I stopped listening. I couldn't help it. All my focus tunneled out the windshield.

There. Something lay there in the middle of the road, unmoving. It was huge and pale in the headlights.

My stomach crept up my throat. It looked big for roadkill. Maybe a deer that failed to outrace a truck. I stared at it in the abject fascination you only feel when you stumble across something suddenly, unexpectedly dead.

But Dylan didn't keep driving around it. The car winced to a stop, brakes whining.

I jammed the lock button on my door. "What's the matter with you?" I hissed through my teeth. "Drive around it."

"I think she's hurt."

"It's an animal, for god's sake."

Dylan looked at me like I was mad. "You should look again."

And as I looked, whatever it was moved.

What I had mistaken for deerskin was an ill-fitting brown dress. As she pushed herself up, I realized the thing in the road was not roadkill at all, but a woman. Her dark hair was wild and snared with leaves and sticks, as if it hadn't been washed for weeks.

But her eyes were empty black wells, staring at us. There was no fear in them. No hurt. Only hate and hunger.

I jammed the lock button of my door and rolled my window up. Huge boulders sat on the right shoulder of the road. I kept looking at them, imagining what could be behind them.

Dylan put the car into park.

"We need to go," I insisted, my voice rising. "Now."

"Are you kidding? Who knows when someone will come by again." Dylan threw open his door and began to step out. "We're not just abandoning someone out here."

I reached for his hand. "Wait," I started, my voice lodging in my throat.

But Dylan shook my hand off and gave me his easy, perfect smile. He was never good at ignoring someone in need. "Relax. I'll be right back."

I barely kept myself from yelling at him to come back. Part of me almost flung my door open and dragged him back myself.

But when I looked sideways, a face hovered outside my window. A man in black face paint crouched by my door, the whites of his eyes sharp in the dark. He grinned when he saw the fear dawn on my face. Then he rattled the handle.

"Dylan!" I shrieked. It was an ambush, and we had stumbled right into it.

Out the windshield, Dylan's head turned toward me. He was only a few feet away from the woman who stood there swaying, not answering him.

Behind him, another man in all-black crept up, the gleam of a knife in his hand.

Dylan turned to run, but it was too late. The man tackled him to the ground and pinned him there with the knife pressed to Dylan's jugular.

I threw myself into the driver's seat and slammed the open door shut. I rolled the window up just as the second man ran around the car to pull me out. The man kicked the locked door in rage when he realized what I had done.

Even through the shut windows, I could hear Dylan screaming at me to run, run now.

Tears streamed down my face, but I did what he told me to. I drove like a madwoman until my phone found reception. But by the time I led the police back to where it had all happened, Dylan and his kidnappers had vanished.

We only found the rubber streak of my tires on the empty road.

The police never could find any of them, Dylan or his kidnappers. And I've never been back out on that road.

Until today. Until I woke up to a letter on my kitchen counter. Someone had slipped in and left it in the night.

I opened it with trembling hands. Out tumbled a note and a picture of Dylan, bloody and scared but alive.

The note said only: *let's play hide and seek. Find him where you lost him.*

Then I knew I had to go back.

Which brings me to why I am writing this now.

I received a letter today.

I recognized the hand writing.