

9. ON THE RUN

“You can’t abstractly convey the fine points of a con. If someone is trying to shake you down for money, it sounds so easy to resist when you map it out on paper. But when you’re actually involved, you don’t see it that way.”

“That’s what I’ve been saying all along. She makes it happen physically.”

“But you can’t explain it to me so that I can understand.”

“It’s the way that she moves her body that says she’s available. For that moment, she’s speaking to you, because she’s already given you that signal that says she likes you. And everything that she does, from that point on, seems like a code, that she’s sending out to you. “

”That’s all plausible, but just telling me about it doesn’t get me excited. I have to see it when she does her tricks.”

“You see it in her eyes. She tells you something by that faraway glance. That she’s a poet. That she exists on an extra-terrestrial plane. And you try for the life of you, you’re a skeptic, but when she says she’s got something, you want it for yourself.”

He is making no sense to me. “I don’t get it, Nick.”

“She talks about these supernatural experiences that she has while having sex. All you’ve ever done is struggle just to keep your concentration. And you’re believing that one kiss is going to take you to paradise.”

“It sounds like romantic bull shit!”

“That’s what it sounds like. But when you think it’s real, it’s the most incredible thing.”

“I would have to be there to really feel it.”

The more that he talks on, the less that I believe about Alea. But I sense her tragedy. I want to take it on.

I meet her at an out of the way pizza joint.

“They really have good pizzas here.”

“Alea, don’t tell me that if it’s not true.”

And I’m looking for that special moment with the oregano just explodes with the sauce and the cheese is that right chewy consistency. I don’t want her to steer me wrong.

I listen to her narrate her story to me. I see the sadness in her eyes. I want to bear the brunt of her tragedy.

“I am working in a boutique. I have not given in to the slavery of a chain-store. I don’t have that much money left after I pay for rent and utilities. I can walk to work so that is nice. But my life doesn’t seem all that terrible.”

I didn’t want to interrupt her so I let her continue, “I think that I could manage if it wasn’t for things that happened to me when I was younger. I ran away from home when I was seventeen. I hated my step-dad. He never did anything weird to me or such. He just was this prick. So I up and left. I came in to the city. I got a job and an apartment first thing. Then I met this guy. He was everything that I wasn’t. He was daring. He was wild. I let him live with me.”

For the moment, I consider that this is another story that Nick has made up for her to tell to me. It is about to lose its plausibility. What could he do to her? He didn’t sound as if he was paying his share. She could just kick him out.

“I realized that I’d be alone if he left. Really alone. He said strange things that affected

me, 'You're lucky that I'm living here with you. You're cute. But when guys get to know you, they find out that your weird. No one would want to stay with you like I do.' And when he said these things, I believed them. He was really messing with my head. Not just in saying things to me. He'd get all abusive on me. He went to meet me at work, and he saw me talking to this guy who worked there. And I was looking at him while I was talking to him and my lover started accusing me of sleeping with the guy. That wasn't happening at all. He was just a friendly guy."

"Why didn't you just get rid of this guy? He doesn't sound like he was much good for you."

"Now that seems so logical. At the time, he had become everything in my life. I realized how much I hated myself. How much I hated my job. It was cool there, but I had no future. I was struggling to get by."

"So you stayed with him."

She is afraid to look at me while she tells the story. It makes it more effective. I need to open myself up to her just to make sense of what she is saying.

"It got worse. He started to hang out with these street toughs. I'm going through his things and I find a gun in his things."

"I really don't like guns in my place."

"Girl, those are mean streets. You need to be armed. What are you going to do if some guy breaks in and tries to attack you? You got to go for you pistol."

"Do you even have a license for this thing?"

"I don't need a license. Criminals don't have a license."

She looked up and spoke, "He was starting to scare me."

"He sounds like a loser."

"But I couldn't do anything about it."

"You couldn't?"

"I didn't have the will. I accepted his shit. It only made him seem like more of a man. I couldn't understand him. But I thought that's how things were supposed to be. Men were just different. They had their ways, and you just had to go along."

"He really had you in a spot."

"But I couldn't see how bad it was. We'd get drunk after work and he'd make all tender to me. I couldn't resist him."

"It just sounds bad."

"It was getting weird. Just as he was all nice to me, he could also be this mean son of a bitch. Only now he had a gun. And one night we were both drunk as hell, and he was getting really pissed with me. He had been all gentle but something set him off. And he was in one of his moods with me. And I slapped him. He was just being threatening and indecent with me. So he pulls his gun on me, and holds it to my head. 'If you ever lay a hand on me like that again, I will put a bullet in your skull. I'll just leave you here dead.' And I was pissing my pants. I have never been so scared in my life. No one, I mean no one does that kind of shit to me. And he realized what he was doing. He takes the gun away from my head. And I stand up and point to the door."

She has all the venom in her eyes from that night. "I tell him to get his lousy ass out of my apartment. If I see him again, I'm going to call the cops. They would have hauled his ass to

jail that night. But I still didn't have the nerve. So he left. He didn't take his things. But he left. And for that first week, I have never felt so free. But then I missed him. And I was walking around after work looking for a place to eat. I worked in this really funky neighborhood. And he was hanging there with some his buds. And he comes over to me and he give me a hug."

"It's over between us,' I tell him."

"Let me just come over and get my stuff."

She takes a sip of her coke and continues, "When he comes over, he's all cleaned up. He talks about getting a job. I start to see that thing that I'd seen in him before. The next thing you know, he's making out with me. Then he starts taking off my clothes. And I'm just getting in to this. I forget everything that's happened before."

"We have sex. It's the most fantastic sex. My body feels totally liberated. So he's smoking a cigarette afterwards. I tell him that I don't like him smoking in the apartment. He doesn't get mad at me or nothing. But that's it. I've grown totally tired of his shit."

"Baby, that was great. But you're going to have to get your shit and go."

"You weren't using me to feel good about yourself."

"I don't need your mind games. Just get your stuff, and go."

"I felt really confident at that moment. He had pissed me off. It wasn't just something that he did. He himself pissed me off."

She is really into telling the story. Our pizza comes. She keep talking as she is eating, "I hated what he was. His body, his hair, his smell. It all made me sick. So I tell him to get the fuck out. I am harsh.

One day while I am at work he breaks in and take everythig that I own:my clothes, my CD's my stereo, my TV. I don't have much, but he takes it all.

He doesn't even have a car. But he borrows a truck from one of his buddies. And he fills it up and drives off. Shit. That's all my stuff. And I come home that night and my apartment is practically empty. I talk to one of the girls at work. She tells me that I can stay with her for a few days. I don't want to go back to the apartment. And while I'm away, I tell myself that I can't go back. It was a great place. It was near work. But I can't live there anymore, not after what happened.

"So I find a new place. This one he knows nothing about. And a friend is giving me a ride one day an I see the little prick hanging in front of some convenience store. I'm not all that big. But I could have killed the jerk with my bare hands. I didn't mind losing some of the stuff. But I collected those CD's since I was a kid. Shit! But my friend told me to beg off."

"The past is the past. If you involved yourself with him in anyway, it's just an excuse to let him walk back in your life."

"She was right, I told myself. So I told her to just keep on driving. That night when I was alone in my room, I started to miss him again. I wanted to hit myself. After everything that he had done to me, I still missed him. He hadn't stolen my stuff. He had stolen my past. He gave me that feeling that the only way that I could get my past back was through him."

I am listening to her story and becoming part of it. I want to give her the past back on a dinner plate.

"That wasn't the worst of it. I couldn't go back to him. But the only way that I could get that really happy feeling back was to get messed up. I'd have a few drinks. and I'd be nostalgic

for what we had. For our miserable shit. And after a few drinks more, I'd get the feeling. This sense that things were right in the world. I was doing this every night. I'd still come to work. And I didn't get so slammed that I had a hangover every morning. But that's all that I had time for. I'd work, and then I'd go out. That was my life."

"The more that I hated it, the more I felt afraid about my future, the more that I just wanted to go out after work and have a good time. You know after a couple of drinks, I would already be hopping. It brought out this side of me that I didn't know was there. I was just so jovial. I was everyone's friend, and everyone liked me. No one had a bad thing to say about me. But it had to stop."

"So you just quit!"

"No, not at all. I said that it was going to get worse. One night I was feeling a little sluggish, 'I better go home. I can already feeling the early morning calling me.'"

"Don't let time catch up with you. Make your own rules"

She moves her fingers to guide me along in the story, "She takes me to the bathroom and right there cuts lines. I mean shit. What am I going to do? "Go ahead, take a rail." I'm thinking that this is a bad scene from *Scarface* or *Goodfellas*. The next thing I'm sucking up one of her lines. And it didn't seem all that special to me. It made me a little skittish for the rest of the night. But the next morning that was all that I could think about. I really wanted that kick. Just something to get me moving. I told you how I felt sluggish. I was feeling the world going in slow motion. The only thing that got me going was the thought that my girl friend was going to take me out that night. And when she came to get me, I just collapsed in her car."

"I was on the soul train. I wasn't going to get off."

She pauses to finish a piece of pizza and order another coke.

"When you're doing blow, you're looking for other souls like you. You even use the same lingo as they do. It's positively scary. But you think that they're the only ones who can understand. So you keep piling more bull shit onto more bull shit. And all the while you think that you're staring at the Taj Mahal."

"That's also why you like all that gangster shit. It makes your life seem to have more of a purpose. You feel like your part of that intrigue. Every one is throwing money at that White Goddess, and you feel that some paradise is going to head your way. I was one of those."

"You're working in a boutique, but you feel like you're an investment banker on Wall Street living on the upper West Side of Manhattan. All the time that mirror is trying to catch up to you. You're never too thin. You have to keep telling yourself that you look great. You can't pass a mirror without giving it a million dollar pose. You know the whole deal. That was me!"

"I was wondering what I was becoming. I didn't seem myself as a coke whore. And I just hated coming down from a binge. That was part of the appeal of the drug. You know how far down you were going to slide. But you could always take a little charley and pull yourself out of the dumps.

What was worse, I started to develop this whole mythology about the drug. I loved to hear other people's stories. I loved the secret words that we used to describe our lives. I really thought that I was part of something."

"Then it all crashed."

She gives me this weird look. She stops eating and just stares at me.

“What happened?”

“When you’re riding that high of success, you know it’s short lived. Something’s wrong. Things come to you too easily. I’m hanging out with the jet setters, moguls who have the touch of gold. Junior execs in their twenties swimming in barrels of money. But that’s never enough. They need a little touch just to tell them that they’re in control. And if they’re not doing lines, then they’re vanishing in the white dust.”

“I’m living in the penthouse with this kid who’s acting like gangster numero uno. And we get a knock on the door. He figures it’s one of his party dudes ready for a night of fun. It is one of his dudes, but he’s with two other heavies and they pull a gun on loverboy. I’ve seen all this before. It’s *deja vu* in the penthouse suite. They take all his cash, his stash, anything of value. So what does this clown do. He takes some of his muscle with him. He knows some really mean cats. They all head over to the house where they’ve absconded with his treasures. They not only show up at the house with their guns drawn. They hold these guys in the house at gunpoint for two days solid. Next thing these amateurs roll over on home boy and he’s heading to the pen for some serious time.”

“He needs money for lawyer’s fees. He needs money to pay off his creditors. He needs money to make sure some heavy shit don’t come down on him. There’s not a lot that I can do to help. I’m just some girl working in retail. And I’m wondering if it’s time for me to trade up on this Adonis. All good things must come to an end!”

“So I see myself graduating to better and brighter things. I’m still only nineteen. I’m not even in my prime. I realize that you got to spend money if you want to make money. And there’s no more money to be had in the penthouse suite. In fact there’s no penthouse suite for living the high life.”

“It’s not as if I’m going to be some war widow waiting for conjugal visits in my ratty apartment. I need to get on the market. Every time a prince goes down, another one comes up. And I have skills that are worth a lifetime of learning. So I get my resume ready, put on my most flattering outfit and head out into the cruel world.”

“I’m thinking yacht this time. But it ‘s going to be a leap going from the underworld to the country club set. I know it’s all part of the same ebb and flow. I just need to suck in my breath and let it rip!”

She is certainly coming alive as she tells me the story. Could Nick have coached her so well? I’m seeing academy award. The pizza is almost finished. She is still talking.

“Well, my adventures were getting me the skills that I needed to advance. I thought that I could already manage an investment house just based on the stock tips I’d get every night. I was feeling like one regular walking *Wall Street Journal*. So I discover the financial arrangement that I need. I can be the financial adviser for this stylish investment banker. I can already see the dollars rolling in.”

“Where’s your yacht?”

“I never actually said that I had a yacht. I did rent a nice boat for the day.”

“He has managed a serious deal. I am astounded. I don’t think it’s a regular rental if you know what I mean. I’m imagining us heading out to sea with a Coast Guard vessel catching up to us and asking to come aboard. Then we’re all in leg irons heading for the full send up at a Federal detention facility.”

“Just relax!”

“I get so tanked up that I pass out on his boat. I wake up with a hangover and to top it all off I’m sea sick.”

“He warns me, ‘Just don’t get sick on any of this interior. It’s a rental.’”

“Again he means that it’s more than a rental. His life is at stake. I’m riding the side of the boat all the way home. What an ordeal.”

“So you didn’t like how the other half lived.”

“I could take anything I could get. I wasn’t going back to the poverty wagon.”

“That’s a trip.”

She orders another coke and continues. She’s playing with her straw. “My seafaring days are not over—not by a long shot. Next time, I’ll just drink less and enjoy more. I try that. Except it’s a new arrangement. It seems that I come with the rental. I’m not complaining. I’m moving up in the world. And I’m not going to do anything that I don’t want to do.”

“This is where it gets really crazy.”

I’m wondering if I can still run with her. I’ve already spent my quarter of a million in start up costs, and she still hasn’t grabbed for the gold.

“He’s also sort of an investment banker. Except this time *he’s* the bank. So this character keeps massive amounts of money around the house. And it’s not all in a safe. Some of it is just lying around in duffle bags.”

“‘I don’t really trust the banks,’ he confides in me.”

“But he trusts me. After all my history, he’s trusting me sitting around his house. It’s spiraling. When I don’t feel like going in for work, I just call in from his place. I’m down to working two days a week. I hang around the house or I go the gym. Then I meet him for dinner. I’ve got a new career. To look great for him.”

“I feel like I’m living the life. The guys’ name is Jimmy. Jimmy is a super prick. But he had such a way of being charming that I just took it.”

I broke in, “You were telling me about all the money that he had. What about it?”

“You can’t let this much money lying around the house doing nothing. I thought that I could invest it, and bring back a return tenfold. I wouldn’t even be stealing it. He’d thank me for it. I just needed to calculate how much really was in the house.”

She continued, “I’d need a truck just to cart it all out. So I just couldn’t do it on the spur of the moment. This needed planning. Like any investment.”

“This sounds unbelievable.”

“I swear. I was able to find about half a million around the place. It wasn’t going to get any better than this. I just needed my truck.”

“So where are you going to get a truck?”

“That’s what I wondered. I didn’t have a credit card. I was nineteen years old.”

“Are you going to steal a truck?”

“No, but I needed a plan. I couldn’t get on the bus with all this money.”

“Where do you get a truck. I need to find a cowboy with a truck. It’s not like it’s going to be the hardest thing in the world.”

“Where do you find a cowboy?”

“At a cowboy bar. I know this guys already. And I see him at the local bar.”

“Are you still with that guy?”

“He went wacko on me. I got rid of him a while ago”

“I convince the cowboy that I need to move. He agrees to help. So I stuff the duffel bags with my clothes, and I get them over to my apartment. I’m thinking about this now. I’ve got half a million in duffel bags and the bags are in this rat-ass apartment.”

The story is turning even stranger than usual. If she stole a cool half a mil, what is she doing now working in a boutique?

“Alea, you have all this money for your investments so what happens?”

“I get caught. I’m sitting on all this money when I’m over at my local bar. And the cowboy comes in. Only someone has really messed him up.”

“Someone was asking me about where you were. And I wouldn’t give you up. They would have killed me, but I escaped.”

“I question whether I should even stay in town. Now that I’ve got all this money, I can buy my own car. So I buy a Honda. I load the rest of my money in there, and head for the hills.”

“I thought that you said that you got caught.”

“Let me finish.” She needs another coke. I get a beer.

The story is only getting more fantastic. Here she was leaving the city, and she’s being tracked by some mobster. I am only waiting for her to make up something more bizarre.

“I knew that I could hide out in the mountains. I changed my name. I found a place. I got away. I was going to make a life for myself. I laid low. I thought that I could hide forever. I paid cash. I hardly came into town. I kept to myself. It wasn’t the best life. But it would work.”

“I told you that I got caught. Even though I thought that I was free, the cowboy had already said enough to Jimmy. Jimmy wasn’t going to rest until he got his money back. He had these two guys working for him who could find a needle in a snowstorm.”

“I thought it was a needle in a haystack.”

“The haystack would be too simple for these guys. So they were sent up to the mountains to find me. What the hell was I going to save myself. There wasn’t a hole deep enough to hide me from these characters.”

“I felt like I was going to explode. I had held it all in all this time. Now Jimmy was going to take it out on me.”

“He still had to find you.”

“It would have only been a while before he succeeded.”

“You just waited for them to come to you.”

“I didn’t think that they had a chance. So I didn’t worry about it at first. But then I had someone check some things out for me. I realized how much of a shit hole I had dug for myself.”

“It didn’t look good.”

“But with all that money, I knew that I could buy my own army of country boys. Jimmy’s guys weren’t go to go down for nothing. So I really had to be smart with my money. But I knew that for the time being I could bide my time. Much as I hate to say it, I knew Jimmy hated the fact that some girl had weaseled him out of all that money. And I also knew that even if I could delay him, he would never give up. Even if he lost the first battle, he would never lose the war. I couldn’t win a war of attrition with him. I had money. But he had more where that came from.

And his resources were not running out.”

She took another sip of coke. “I needed to do something smart. My team could hold them off for a while, but I would eventually have to give them the money back. When the two toughs arrived in town, I had someone notify me. I made a deal with them. I’d give them the money if they left me alone.”

“Did they take the bait?”

“It wasn’t bait. I had to give them all the money back.”

Now it is starting to make sense.

“I made a deal with Jimmy. He’d let me go if I gave him all the money back.”

“He just let you go.”

“I was an embarrassment to him as long as I stayed in Georgia. So I had to leave.”

“He just let you leave?”

“I think that he like me.”

“You gave him all the money back?”

“I had to. All except the forty thousand that I had spent. I promised to get it back to him.”

“Is that all you need? Forty thousand?”

“I don’t need anything. Jimmy let me go. He said that I did him a service. He realized at that point that he needed security. He had been too trusting of the world.”

“Did he put his money in the bank?”

“I don’t think that he wanted it traced. He just needed security at his place. That was all.”

“That seems too simple.”

“The solution to life is sometimes the simplest thing.”

Her naivete is both refreshing and frightening. In the end she would drag anyone down with her to save her own skin. Her story adds this whole new dimension to her life. But I can’t figure out if I was only a liability for her.

She has more to tell, “I couldn’t go back to Atlanta. Jimmy had made me an offer. So I left for good. I came up here to DC with the idea that I would do the only thing I had ever done. I’d find work in a store.”

“You like it here?”

“I love it. Maybe some day I’ll manage. I’ll have my own store. For now, things are just OK.”

“You’ve had a wild life.”

“All through it. I’ve tried to be myself.”

I am impressed. She has certainly woken me up from my doldrums. She has shared her weakest moments with me. It is for a reason. She is offering me her trust. But that is enough for both of us. Neither wants to force the issue. There is a great deal of time left.

I think it is best to cut the evening short. I need time to digest everything that has gone on. I need to find out what is my part in her story. I drop her off after dinner. I am planning to meet Nick for drinks later on. The night is still young.

A new café has opened up the street from our normal haunt. Variety is the spice of life.

“I think that this will be a better spot to graze.”

“Nick, I hope we don’t spend all night watching thin blondes getting out of luxury convertibles.”

“Wallace, is life hitting a little too close to home.”

“I feel like I’ve heard a story for the centuries.”

“You really believe that pile of malarkey.”

“It sounded pretty incredible. I thought that you made it up. But it all rang true in the end.”

“Just a fantasy to compensate for another day of drudgery at the boutique.”

Nick is not budging an inch. His ultimate target is my own fantasy about our dream girl. He hones in with his argument, “You are only encouraging her not to deal with the consequence of no real plan for her life.”

“You were the one who paid her off to make up some kind of shit for me.”

“That was just a parlor game. She has now taken it to the next level. And you’re going along hook, line, and sinker.”

Surely she has learned some skill of use in the mountains of Georgia. Why is he reserving his worst disapprobation for me?

“You are being cruel to the poor creature. First, you take advantage of her situation to ensnare her in some silly game. Now you want me to persecute her under your diadem.”

“I’m not saying that at all. Don’t be so gullible.”

I do not want to go along with her story. But she has been so charming in the telling that I feel that deserves some credit. Perhaps an infinite draw at that.

Nick repeats his warning, “She’s setting you up for some bigger whopper. She didn’t ask you for money?”

“No, she didn’t.”

“But you did offer.”

“She didn’t need it.”

He is beaming, “You actually offered her money.”

I smiled. “It was all idle talk.”

But I would have covered her debt to Jimmy if it would make things easier for her. Nick looks me in the eye.

“You are getting desperate for affection.”

“I took her home after dinner.”

“What was your choice? A duel to the death on the National Mall.”

“I had considered it.”

It is a late spring night. There is this damp breeze wafting the café-goers. I move in my seat.

“Getting hot there, my friend. See how far we have strayed from our initial game. She is now the perfect suspect. You’re going to have to pay for mischief.

“I just listened to a story.”

“You believed her. You gave her your good intentions. It won’t stop there.”

He seems to be casting a curse over me.

He is piling on. “Even if the stories are true, she a bad risk.”

“You’re only adding insult to injury. I think that she would be the one challenging you to

a duel.”

“I hear that duels are still legal in Virginia. She’ll have to meet you in Arlington.”

“It doesn’t sound like a bad date.”

We are in rare form, but Nick is right. We have strayed from our game.

I decide to get together with her on Friday night. We eat Thai. We are slow to really saying anything.

“I was afraid that you wouldn’t want to see me once you knew the truth.”

“Nothing of the kind.” I am still sympathetic. But I am a little distant.

“I hope not. I really enjoy seeing you again.”

She gives me her tragic look again. She assumes the mask so well. I can’t take her sorrow. It is my new burden.

“I guess Washington is a shelter for you.”

“You might say that. But for me the past is past. It’s another life. That was years ago. I’m a different person. I just needed you to know.”

She is implying a new life for herself, one of solitude and shadows. She gives me the impression that she is doing penance for the sins of another life.

“You really have nothing to be ashamed of.”

“That’s the whole point. I don’t have anything to feel bad about. I just hope that you won’t hold that against me. Not after all this time.”

“I can only relate to what you told me. It’s all part of a story.”

“It really was my life.”

“I know. I know that’s how you’ve lived it.”

“It was real when it happened. Now there are only the traces. My capabilities. I’ve become smarter over the years. Even the things that I do at work. All the rest is water under the bridge.”

What does she mean by *all the rest*. I feel like the only way that I can really ask any questions is by condemning her. I need to know more just for my own peace of mind.

“Do you miss Atlanta.”

She is short with me, “That is my childhood. I’m an adult now.”

“Would you like to go back?”

“I could if I wanted to. For a visit. I just couldn’t live there.”

For the moment I feel as if I am running out of things to say. I need to keep her entertained to keep that lifeline between us.

“Washington is nice.”

“It’s great here. Except for the traffic. That’s why I’m glad I live close to here.”

I wonder how she can make it on her salary. Especially after years of the high life, this must seem like such a step down.

She looked up from her meal and spoke, “I don’t even miss my old life in the least. I’ve made peace with myself. I’ve made peace with the world. To go back to the way that I was would be self-destructive.”

I wish the best for her. She does not have to worry about the demons of the future. There are already enough from her past.

“I’ve always felt that it’s better in life not to look backwards. You can’t go back and

change things.”

“If I could, I wouldn’t know where to start. It’s just enough to think about what I’m going to do in the morning.”

I like her attitude. I want to be part of it. I only hear Nick taunting me.

“You can’t let her be. You need to find out more. What’s behind her tendency to weave these elaborate tales?”

I know his answer. It is the same for all of us. In narrative, the past always seems more fantastic, and the future more frightening. But each day has something in it that is constant. Something that makes it all the same.

My simplicity is scary. Why have I now adopted such a banal view of the world?. Alea’s vision has been conditioned by the things that have happened to her. Why do I seem so gloomy?

We go to another restaurant for dessert. I want to forget all the stories and begin anew. Nick has made me suspicious of everyone. If she is trusting of me, I want to be the same way with her. This is all happening too fast. I want her to slow it down for both of us.

It is the end of the night. She is staring up at me. I dissolve in a kiss.

I cannot move closer to her. I give her a friendly hug. I want to see her again.

“I’ll call you.”

I leave her at her door and dash away. I am not trying to escape. We will continue our journey at another time. I leave both of us to fate.