

# Out of Gas, Start Running

Danny Macias



“Happy birthday to you, happy birthday to you.

“Happy birthday, dear Mavis, happy birthday to you.”

Kat hums another verse just under her breath as I blow out eighteen candles.

“You look like a monkey, and you smell like one, too.”

I blow the candle smoke into her face, and she bursts into quiet giggles. I don’t bother with the plastic fork she hands me, instead plunging a hand into the middle of the store-bought cake, grabbing a fistful of frosting and filling, too. She laughs harder, covering her mouth, so I do it again.

Kat falls over, wheezing into the threads of my bedroom carpet.

“Stop! Stop- Mavis, you’ll get it everywhere,” she says, wiping her eyes.

I shove the handfuls of cake into my mouth anyways.

“Jesus,” Kat doesn’t follow my example. She grabs a fork and stabs out a sizable chunk of cake, barely fitting it all in her mouth.

“Godawful cake,” I say, spewing crumbs on purpose. I swallow a lump of cake so large it hurts my throat.

“Thanks, though. It’s good.”

She shoves my shoulder.

“It better be good.” she says, “Cost me ten whole bucks.”

The silence that falls over us feels sobering. I can see Kat’s old truck in the driveway through the window of my childhood bedroom, like an omen. We leave as soon as the cake is gone, and I can’t decide if I should savor it or wolf it down. Kat decides for me.

She takes another obnoxious bite of cake, swiping a finger across the cardboard bottom to get the last bits of frosting.

“Good to go?” she asks only as a formality, before packing up our trash and stuffing it all in the plastic bag she brought everything in. “Clean your hands, too. I don’t want your sticky baby fingers all over my dash.”

She hands me a paper towel. It’s only now I regret plunging my hands into the cake.

We're on the road for about an hour before memories resurface.

The highway is empty besides us, the old asphalt audibly tearing at the tires. The way ahead is lit only by the LED headlights Kat installed a year ago.

"It's a new moon," Kat points out.

"Dark as hell," I say.

"Darker than hell, probably," she snorts out a laugh, "You think if we pull over, we'll see the stars?"

"Don't pull over," I shift in my seat.

"I won't," the worn leather of the steering wheel squeaks under her grip, "Wasn't gonna. Just... thinking."

I turn to the passenger side window. Corn fields rush past, swiping at the exhaust Kat's truck leaves behind. The still-green stalks sway in the rearview mirror, bidding silent farewells. It doesn't feel like we're running away, but we might as well be. Ripping out of town as soon as the clock strikes twelve like trashy, small-town Cinderella wannabes.

"You remember when we ran away the first time?"

Kat sighs and drops her shoulders. I hadn't realized they were tense in the first place.

"I think, maybe. When was that? Third grade?" Kat looks ahead at the road, a grin tugging at the corners of her lips.

"Fourth."

"Right, yeah. I remember," She looks over at me for a moment, "I remember you cried as soon as we got to the park."

"I think we're remembering things differently." I cross my arms in feigned offense.

"I don't think so! I think I remember you didn't want to sleep on the floor because your legs hurt. You started crying and you wouldn't stop." Kat's smile wavers.

"I was all bruised up." I lean down in my seat, pretending to stretch. I run my fingertips over my shins, where the bruises used to be the brightest.

"All busted up. 'Cause of your dad, right?"

"Yeah."

"Sorry." Kat shifts in her seat.

"It's alright. We're leaving now." I lean back and criss-cross my legs in my seat. I know Kat hates when I scuff the leather, but she doesn't seem to care this time.

"Yeah. We're gone."



I don't remember when I fell asleep. I'm gently roused from whatever nothing-dream I was having by Kat jostling my shoulder.

"You hungry?" she asks.

I nod and go to unbuckle my seatbelt, but she shakes her head.

"I'll get you something." she says softly, "Stay here."

I stare after her while she grabs her wallet and heads into the gas station. Her shoulders have filled out considerably since our shared P.E. class in high school. I remember cowering behind her during team sports. I remember how it made me a bigger target.

To fight off the remnants of another nap, I wonder if she'll join a gym wherever we end up in the city. The thought sends a jolt through my spine. Neither of us have talked much about what we plan to do once we settle in to whatever shithole apartment we might be able to afford. Kat used to talk about settling down with a 'real' family once she has the funds for it.

I lean over to put my head between my knees. I feel sick.

A tiny voice in my head, a part of myself I'd thought I'd buried 300 miles ago, begs to hold on.

It's then that Kat finds me doubled over the car seat, pale and sweating.

"Mavis? Mavis, don't puke- oh my God if you puke in here, I'll kill you."



Kat all but hauls me into the station's restroom, waving an apologetic hand toward the clerk as we go. The restroom smells like cheap cleaner and the lingering odor of ammonia. Both do nothing to settle my unsteady insides.

Kat holds up my hair while I dry heave and retch whatever is left of the cake I gorged myself on earlier. My eyes burn from the strain, and from childish tears at having heaved up the last cake I'll have for a while. Kat rubs my back, mumbling words to soothe me out of whatever episode I'm going through.

"You okay?" she finally asks when I've finished with my theatrics.

I don't have the strength to do anything but nod. It's a good enough response for her. I lean most of my weight into Kat's side as she navigates the two of us outside and back into the truck. She doesn't ask about what brought on my barfing spell, and I'm too tired to tell her anything.

She starts the truck and pulls back onto the highway. We don't talk about anything for a long while. Not until Kat breaks the silence about half an hour back on the road.

"You know how I talked about starting a family? You know, a while back?" she spares a look my way.

I nod. She nods, too.

"I don't think that's what I need to focus on. I mean, when we get to the city," she shifts her grip on the steering wheel, "I have enough on my plate with you, anyway."

She means it as a joke, and I'm lucid enough to take it as one. But it's a temporary remedy. Kat knows me well enough to figure out what I'm thinking before I can even process it myself.

I'm not sure if what she says is what she means, not really, but it's enough to settle my head and my stomach. She nods again.

“We'll figure it all out when we get there. Both of us.”

I nod and curl into the seatbelt. She relaxes an elbow on the driver's side door.

The road blushes pink with the beginnings of sunrise, and the unripe corn fields silently wave us past.

