Stephen King - You Know They Got a Hell of a Band
You Know They Got a Hell of a Band
by Stephen King

When Mary woke up, they were lost. She knew it, and Clark knew it, too, although he didn't want to admit it at first; he was wearing his I'm Pissed So Don't F**k with Me look, where his mouth kept getting smaller and smaller until you thought it might disappear altogether. And "lost" wasn't how Clark would put it; Clark would say they had "taken a wrong turn somewhere," and it would just about kill him to go even that far.
They'd set off from Portland the day before. Clark worked for a computer company -- one of the giants -- and it had been his idea that they should see something of the Oregon, which lay outside the pleasant, but humdrum upper-middle-class suburb of Portland where they lived -- an area that was known to its inhabitants as Software City. "They say it's beautiful out there in the boonies," he had told her. "You want to go take a look? I've got a week, and the transfer rumors have already started. If we don't see some of the real Oregon, I think the last sixteen months are going to be nothing but a black hole in my memory."
She had agreed willingly enough (school had let out ten days before and she had no summer classes to teach), enjoying the pleasantly haphazard, catch-as-catch-can feel of the trip, forgetting that spur-of-the-moment vacations often ended up just like this, with the vacationers lost along some back road which blundered its way up the overgrown butt-crack of nowhere. It was an adventure, she supposed -- at least you could look at it that way if you wanted -- but she had turned thirty-two in January, and she thought thirty-two was maybe just a little too old for adventures. These days her idea of a really nice vacation was a motel with a clean pool, bathrobes on the beds, and a hair-dryer that worked in the bathroom.
Yesterday had been fine, though, the countryside so gorgeous that even Clark had several times been awed to an unaccustomed silence. They had spent the night at a nice country inn just west of Eugene, had made love not once but twice (something she was most definitely not too old to enjoy), and this morning had headed south, meaning to spend the night in Klamath Falls. They had begun the day on Oregon State Highway 58, and that was all right, but then, over lunch in the town of Oakridge, Clark had suggested they get off the main highway, which was pretty well clogged with RVs and logging trucks.
"Well, I don't know..." Mary spoke with the dubiousness of a woman who has heard many such proposals from her man, and endured the consequences of a few. "I'd hate to get lost out there, Clark. It looks pretty empty." She had tapped one neatly shaped nail on a spot of green marked Boulder Creek Wilderness Area. "That word is wilderness, as in no gas stations, no rest rooms, and no motels."
"Aw, come on," he said, pushing aside the remains of his chicken-fried steak. On the juke, Steve Earle and the Dukes were singing "Six Days On the Road," and outside the dirt-streaked windows, a bunch of bored-looking kids were doing turns and pop-outs on their skateboards. They looked as if they were just marking time out there, waiting to be old enough to blow this town for good, and Mary knew exactly how they felt. "Nothing to it, babe. We take 58 a few more miles east... then turn south on State Road 42... see it?"
"Uh huh." She also saw that, while Highway 58 was a fat red line, State Road 42 was only a squiggle of black thread. But she'd been full of meatloaf and mashed potatoes, and hadn't wanted to argue with Clark's pioneering instinct while she felt like a boa constrictor that has just swallowed a goat. What she'd wanted, in fact, was to tilt back the passenger seat of their lovely old Mercedes 'and take a snooze."
"Then," he pushed on, "there's this road here. It's not numbered, so it's probably only a county road, but it goes right down to Toketee Falls. And from there it's only a hop and a jump over to U.S. 97. So -- what do you think?"
"That you'll probably get us lost," she'd said -- a wisecrack she rather regretted later. "But I guess we'll be all right as long as you can find a place wide enough to turn the Princess around in."
"Sold American!" he said, beaming, and pulled his chicken-fried steak back in front of him. He began to eat again, congealed gravy and all. "Uck-a-doo," she said, holding one hand up in front of her face and wincing. "How can you?"
"It's good," Clark said in tones so muffled only a wife could have understood him. "Besides, when one is traveling, one should eat the native dishes."
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