

The River

by Renata Kell

The rolling hills of Idaho fade into the scarlet sunset as Jade and Jewel, sit in silence. The women begin their descent of a twenty-mile canyon to the Primeval Campground.

"Are you sure this is where Sapphire said she was?" asks Jewel. Jade's phone chimes and she picks it up to look at it.

"Was that her?" asks Jewel.

"No, Mom! It's just telling me I lost service. I told you, I clearly heard her say Primeval Campground and Idaho before she was disconnected."

The canyon swallows up the sunset into the darkness allowing the full moon to luminate the Clearwater River below as they wrap in and out of the switchbacks. The moonlight shining through the forest creates the illusion of shadow creatures lurking along-side the road.

"I just don't understand what happened. She has been clean for over a year. I don't understand why she would even talk to Luke, let alone follow him to this god-awful place." says Jewel.

"Watch out," screams Jade.

Jewel swerves the car just missing a deer in the middle of the road. Slowing the car to nearly a crawl, Jewel begins to cry.

"Mom, do you want me to drive for a while?" asks Jade.

"No, I'm fine. I'm just worried about your sister and these fucking roads are black. I feel like I'm driving into hell."

"Just slow down, were not going to do any good if we die before we get to her." says Jade.

The ground that had been sprinkled with snow near the top of the canyon is now bare and glittering with frost. Jade rolls down her window and lights a cigarette. "Really, its fucking cold enough in here." says Jewel.

"Hey, I have only had one cigarette in the last four hours of this trip. If you weren't with me, I would have smoked a pack by now," replies Jade.

"Well at least turn the heat up." Jewel demands.

"I can't believe where going through this shit with her again. I'm still recovering from the first time she disappeared. I don't even know why where here." Jade says.

"Why do you always assume the worst," Jewel says.

"That's the problem with you mom. You think that Sapphire can do no wrong," says Jade as she lights another cigarette.

Jewel reaches over to turn the heat up and starts to roll Jades window up. Jade quickly counters her mom's move rolling the window back down.

"I am not doing this with you right now. We've been down this road and you never listen to me anyways," says Jewel.

"You started it; besides I'm not assuming anything. You have proven time and time again that she can get away with anything. She drops out of school and you offer her a job working for you. She steals from your clients and you cover her lawyers fees. She gets on drugs and you sell your house to pay for her treatment. I'm pretty sure that if anyone's assuming anything it's you.

Your assuming that she has changed. This would never happen if dad was still here."

The women sit in silence as they near the bottom of the canyon. The switchbacks of the canyon road straighten and narrows. The sound of the raging river breaks the eerie silence.

"Where is this place?" asks Jewel.

"I don't know. I lost my map when I lost service, but it should be right here somewhere?"

Suddenly, the trees begin to flicker and dance with sporadic lights in the distance. Jewel reacts to the sight of the lights by slightly accelerating the car. As quickly as she accelerates, she brings the car to a screeching halt.

"What the hell." says Jade.

A welcome sign reads "Primeval Campground" with the words, "*where people go who don't want to be found*," spray painted in red.

The car is greeted by a stretch of more shadow creature's as they turn onto the gravel road. The car creeps into the campground filled with dilapidated RV's and camp trailers. Several of the RV's are covered in torn tarps or makeshift structures made from whatever could be scrounged up at the local dumping grounds. A rundown building sits at the edge of the campground with a beer sign flickering in the window and a wooden sign that reads, *Macs Bar and Grill and Community Store*.

One by one the lights in the campers go black as the car slithers along the gravel road that follows the river. A man steps out of a camper and grabs a can of beer out of a refrigerator sitting outside with a piece of plastic covering it. His makeshift dwelling is no more than a truck camper sitting in the bed of a truck that has no cab, motor or tires. The headlights of the car reflect off the balding portion of the man's head that slides down to the greasy, tangled hair that has, unfortunately, survived the balding process. The shirtless man turns to face the car revealing a holster strapped cockeyed around his midsection.

"Should we ask him if he has seen Sapphire?" asks Jewel.

"Oh yeah, that sounds like a good idea. Let's just ask the obvious serial killer if he has seen a pretty blonde running around here." says Jade.

"Well how the hell are we going to find her then?" says Jewel.

"I don't fucking know. This is your bright idea," says Jade, as she lights another cigarette.

"Look for Luke's truck," says Jewel.

"Mom, we haven't seen him in over a year. How the hell am I supposed to know what he's driving now?"

The greasy haired man abruptly stops watching the car and disappears into his camper.

The dark sky fills with flashing red and blue lights. The lights on the campers begin lighting up one by one as three Sheriff trucks pull into the campground. Jewel pulls into an empty campsite to allow one of the trucks to pass. The women jump out of the car and notice people curiously slinking out into the night from their campers and RV's. One by one people gather into groups of three or four. Most of them with visible firearms strapped to their waists. Some of them drinking beers and others smoking pipes in clear sight.

"Oh my god. What is happening?" asks Jewel.

"I don't know but were going to find out right now."

Jade marches up to one of the Sheriff that has stopped while the other two trucks flash spot lights onto each camper.

"Did you call us about a woman screaming?" asks the Sheriff.

"No, my mom and I pulled in just before you, exclaims Jade. We're looking for my sister."

"I can't tell you any more than that, says the Sheriff. All we know is that we received five calls from this campsite about a woman screaming." Jewel makes her way to Jade and the Sheriff. "Jade, what's happening?" asks Jewel.

"I don't know. The Sherriff says that they received five calls from this campsite about a woman screaming."

"Fuck this, I am going to talk to someone," says Jewel.

Jewel leaves in the direction of a group people standing outside of a nearby camper. "Mam, I wouldn't do that if I were you," says the Sheriff, stepping out of his truck. The people in this place don't take kindly to strangers asking questions. You need to let us handle this. What's your daughter doing in a place like this anyway?"

"We think she's here to see her ex-boyfriend, Luke, says Jade. "Luke the Puke?" asks the Sherriff.

"So, he is here," says Jewel.

"Yeah, he's here but I hate to tell you ladies, if she's here to see him she's in trouble. He's the supplier for all the drugs in this place." says the sheriff.

"We know," chimes both ladies.

"You ladies stay right here!" says the Sheriff.

The Sheriff walks to his truck and gets on his radio. Seconds later the two other Sheriff proceed in their direction.

The Sheriff huddle together and whisper, pointing to a RV situated at the end of the campsite occasionally looking back at Jewel and Jade. Finally, one of the men approaches them.

"We are going to go speak with Luke, but we need you to stay out of the way. This could get dangerous for everyone and we do not need you getting hurt too."

"What do you mean too?" screeches Jewel. "Just stay here!"

He quickly joins his fellow Sheriff as they surround the trailer. "Open up Luke, it's the Sheriff's department!"

"Get down on your hands and knees and put your hands behind your head," screams one of the men.

Jade and Jewel both take off running around the side of the trailer. The three Sherriff have Luke in handcuffs at gunpoint.

"I told you to stay put," says the Sheriff. "Where is Sapphire?" screams Jewel.

Luke looks up at the women through nearly invisible pupils. The frigid cold doesn't even phase the shirtless man. The rubber tube tied onto his left arm trickles a stream of fresh blood.

"Well howdy, ladies. Not surprised to see you here." says Luke. "Where is my sister you fuck!" says Jade.

"I don't know what you're talking about," says Luke.

Luke laughs a wicked laugh and flops himself down in the dirt. A crowd has begun to gather around Luke and the commotion. The Sheriff all move in position behind Luke and aim their guns at the crowd. Just as one of the men assist Luke into a standing position from the ground, Jade charges Luke and punches him in the face.

"Where is my sister?"

Jade knees Luke in the growing causing the crowd to buzz with angry voices. "You gonna just stand there, arrest her," says a voice from the crowd. "Luke, you okay?" says another voice.

"Everybody calm down. We just need to know if anyone has seen a new woman around here, or if anyone can tell me about the woman reported screaming earlier tonight." says the Sherriff.

"Aint nobody seen nothing," responds a burly bearded man. Luke who has stopped laughing, stands up straight.

"I told you she aint here," says Luke. "She was, but the river took her." "What do you mean the river took her?" asks Jewel.

He looks towards the river in silence. Jewel begins crying hysterically and Jade attempts to lunge at Luke with no luck. The Sheriff pulls Luke back and pushes Jade away.

"You killed her didn't you." says Jade.

"I fucking told you; she aint here." Luke repeats. "She was here one minute, and the river just reached up and took her away."

Luke turns his attention back to the crowd moving closer.

"Back down, there's nothing here for them to find," Luke demands.

The crowd backs up in one unified motion. Jade joins her mother and wraps her arms around her in the attempt to calm her.

"Well are you going to arrest him?" she asks. "Arrest him for what?" asks the Sherriff.

"For what? You heard him he killed her. He threw her in the river!"

"That's not what he said. He said she's not here and we've got no proof that she ever was."

"Are you fucking kidding me," screams Jade, as she charges Luke again.

This time Luke ducks out of the way just as a rustling commotion comes over the crowd.

"Hey there's something on the other side of the river. Right over there," says a woman standing near the back of the crowd.

The Sheriff shines his flashlight, fanning it up and down the riverbank. Sapphire emerges from the bushes. She is soaking wet and her cloths are tattered and torn. She moves slow as she wades through the shallow swift current of the river. Jade and Jewel run to the riverside to greet her. Jade removes her coat and throws it around Sapphires shoulders and the women make their way towards the Sherriff.

The Sherriff meets the women halfway back with blankets he has grabbed from his truck.

Once they reach the truck the Sherriff wastes no time getting to the bottom of what happened. "Mam, can you tell us what happened. Did Luke do this to you?" asks the Sherriff.

Pausing for a minute Sapphire looks at Luke, who is still handcuffed. "No," she says.

"Why are you protecting him?" screams Jade. "Your high, aren't you?"

"No, I'm not high and, I'm not protecting him," says Sapphire. "He didn't do this, well not directly."

"What are you rambling about?" asks Jade. Sapphire walks towards Luke.

"Oh, this is his fault, but he didn't get to hurt me," says Sapphire.

Sapphire clinches the blankets tight around her body as she whips around to face Jade and her mother.

"I received a call a couple days ago from Luke saying he wanted to get sober and he needed my help. Of course, I didn't believe him at first. Then I thought, if it hadn't been for my mom and my sister, I would never have gotten sober. So, against my better judgment I drove over here. At first when I got here things were as they should be. Luke was clearly not using and going through withdrawals. That all changed this morning when I woke up to Luke cooking breakfast and perfectly healthy. I knew from my own experiences that he had used again. When I confronted him, he admitted it, so I tried leaving.

Sapphire turns around and approaches Luke. Only a couple feet from Luke, Sapphire begins shivering violently. Jewel runs to her side grabs her hand to pull her back, but Sapphire pulls away.

"Honey, let's just get you warm. We can finish this in the truck," says Jade. "No, I'm fine," she says.

Sapphire locks eyes with Luke and continues speaking.

"I was trying to leave but Luke hid my keys from me. It turned into a knockdown screaming match. He promised me that if I just calmed down and listened to him, he would let me go when he was done. He told me to go sit at his favorite spot by the river and he would be right there. I figured at this point I had no choice, so I did."

Luke attempted to back away from Sapphire as she walked closer to him. The feel of someone grasping the back of her arm stopped Sapphire in her tracks. Jade with tears in her eyes turned Sapphire around to face her.

"He's not worth it," says Jade.

"I sat on the side of the river for what seemed like hours. It began to get dark and cold. I was contemplating walking out of here but knew I would never make it in this cold. I had just decided that I was going to figure it out tomorrow, when Luke showed up and sat down next to me. I sat there listening to his bullshit lies, as he tried to tell me that it was just because he loved me, and he needed me. I was so tired of hearing him lie to me that I stood up to leave, he grabbed my arm and pulled me down. I began to scream but nobody came to help as he held me down and tied a tube around my arm. None of these cowards would even open their curtains."

Sapphire turned back to Luke who had a single tear rolling down his face.

"He told me that he was doing this for us, and I would soon realize how much I loved him. I fought him got away, but he had me trapped between him and the river. He grabbed me again and wrapped his arms around me pinning my arms to my side. Just as he went to stick me with the

needle...

Sapphire's voice trailed off and both her and Luke turned to stare at the river.

"It was like a giant hand reached out of the water and grabbed me. The next thing I knew I was being swept down the river. I couldn't stand up or swim . All I could think of is how I let down my family once again. Especially my sister Jade. I stopped fighting the river and prepared to join dad, when I was thrown out of the water onto the shore."

Jade and Jewel ran to hold Sapphire as she crumbled to the ground in tears.

"You haven't let me down. I'm so sorry that I have been so hard on you," says Jade.

"I am so glad that you're okay. I can't imagine losing you and your father to the river,"

Jewel says.

"You don't understand, dad's the reason I'm still here."

The women turn to take one last look at the river before heading out. "The river wasn't trying to hurt me. It was saving my life," says Sapphire.

The End