

Miles

Miles and Felix continue their journey north, the hum of the truck filling the silence as the road stretches endlessly ahead of them. Felix, always eager to share his experiences, describes in detail his recent trip to Whispering River, California, where Cassidy resides. He paints a vivid picture of the town's eccentric New Age culture, where residents embrace unconventional lifestyles, from forgoing clothing to indulging in the tranquil embrace of the hot springs. As he talks, Miles listens with a mix of curiosity and amusement, momentarily distracted from the thoughts that have been weighing on him. The conversation takes a sudden shift when Miles glances at the gas gauge and realizes they are running dangerously low on fuel. Felix, ever the dramatist, immediately spirals into a mild panic, joking about how this is the setup for a classic horror movie, where two unsuspecting travelers run out of gas in the middle of nowhere, only to be pursued by something sinister.

Miles smirks at Felix's theatrics but reassures him that they still have enough fuel to make it to the next town, at least for now. He suggests they keep an eye out for a ranch or farm where they might be able to get some extra gas if needed. As they drive through the empty highway, their conversation turns more introspective, shifting from lighthearted jokes to deeper topics. Miles begins reflecting on the parts of his life he has let slip away—the sports teams he quit, the friendships he let fade, and his struggles at school. The weight of past trauma looms over him, particularly the incident involving his brother Wynton that changed everything. He admits that ever since that moment, he hasn't quite felt like himself, as if a part of him had been lost in the chaos of it all.

Felix listens intently before sharing his own experiences, particularly about his friend Eddie, who has been struggling with depression for years. He speaks about the difficulty of watching someone battle their own mind, trying to find happiness in a

world that often feels unforgiving. His words resonate deeply with Miles, sparking a philosophical conversation about the nature of happiness, purpose, and whether either of them truly understands what it means to be content. The more they talk, the more Miles finds himself drawn to Felix—not just because of his humor and charm but because of his ability to see through the masks people wear.

As the conversation deepens, Miles hesitates before finally admitting to Felix that he has always felt like an outsider, never quite fitting into the expectations placed upon him. He speaks of his father's sudden disappearance and how his mother, despite her resilience, has always held onto the hope that he would return. Felix, sensing the vulnerability in Miles' voice, doesn't rush to respond but instead lets the words settle between them. Their connection grows in the quiet of the night, an unspoken understanding forming between them. They begin discussing their personal identities, their fears, and their desires, leading Felix to casually reveal his bisexuality. This revelation feels significant, though neither of them lingers on it too long, instead allowing the moment to simply exist.

Just as they reach an easy rhythm in their conversation, the truck sputters and slows to a halt—the gas tank is empty. A heavy silence falls between them as they realize they are stranded on an isolated stretch of road, miles away from the nearest town. Miles lets out a sigh, rubbing his temples as Felix chuckles nervously, trying to lighten the situation. The sky above them is scattered with stars, the vast openness of the desert surrounding them with an eerie stillness. With nothing else to do, Felix leans back and decides to tell a story—one about Miles' own family history, an unexpected tale of Alonso Fall and the hidden love he had for another man.

The tension in the air shifts as Felix delves into the story, weaving a narrative that feels both distant and eerily close to home. Just as Miles is becoming fully engrossed in the story, a sudden noise startles them. Turning around, they see Dizzy standing there, her arms crossed and an exasperated look on her face. Her unexpected arrival interrupts the moment, forcing them back into reality. The chapter closes on an unresolved note, leaving the audience with a sense of anticipation, as relationships,

personal revelations, and familial history continue to intertwine, shaping Miles' journey of self-discovery.

