

Toni:

You can't help but notice that this is not a concert hall. In fact, it isn't even a dive bar that gives you a fraction of the door and all the cheap booze you can drink. This is not where you were supposed to be tonight. This is the one-year anniversary of the day you ruined your life. You're not going to let it get you down though. Not you. You're too big for this, and you're going to get ahead again.

Four years ago, you were nobody. You graduated from high school, and went out into the world, determined to make it in the music business. You knew you were talented and you were willing to work. You had performed a bit in high school with your band, but when you graduated it was time to go solo. You took whatever gigs you could get and worked your way up. It was really hard at first because many of the bars wouldn't let you play there if you were under 21.

Over time, you started to get gigs and even a few fans. You recorded a CD in your parents' basement and sold it at concerts and in local stores. You sent your CD around to radio stations and agents too, and a small-time agent decided you were worth trying out. That was Jesse. Jesse took you on and started doing pretty well by you. You started to get gigs opening for big names and managed to get some studio time to record a proper CD. You even had a few real concerts where you were the headliner.

You were grateful to Jesse, and you started to get closer. A year ago, you started dating. That was your big mistake. At first with Jesse it was all fun, bright lights and big names. Jesse represented several minor local stars and you got to meet them. Sometimes you even got into backroom jams at exclusive clubs. You were going somewhere.

At one of those backroom jams, you met one of your heroes, Backlash Rogers, the lead guitarist and singer from the band Backsnap. Backlash was every bit as amazing in person as you had imagined, and, within a few months you were sleeping together. In the glare of Backlash's stardom, Jesse didn't seem so interesting anymore. Soon enough Jesse found out what was going on, and dumped you.

The problem was that Jesse didn't stop there. Jesse stopped representing you and blackened your name among all the local agents and producers. The month before you had been a headliner at a hot local club, but suddenly you couldn't get a gig in a dive bar. Backlash dropped you for fear of getting contaminated by your newfound notoriety. You were alone with no prospects to speak of.

Well, you're a musician. Musicians travel. You packed up your guitar, your suitcase, and a big box of CDs and moved here. The problem is that you don't have any contacts here. You had been planning on staying with a friend, but her new boyfriend moved in and she didn't want you there. You don't have money for a deposit. You have been shacking up in a cheap flophouse and busking on the streets.

One day you struck up a conversation with Rich, a homeless man who used to be a construction worker before his arm got mangled. He liked your music and put you in touch with a few bars. It isn't much, but it's a place to start. You had a gig this past weekend, and did alright. Rich also told you about this fire. He said that people hang out down here, and tell stories, and that if you bring some food you can share the soup.

You have been down here once before and you decided to come back. You came back partially because good stories can be turned into songs, partially because you might want to sing a song or two tonight, but mostly because you didn't want to be alone on the one-year anniversary of when you and Jesse started dating. Plus, who knows: Rich had

connections for you. Maybe one of his friends will, too. You also need to find out who deals around here. You had to do your last show nearly sober. If you can't get some decent uppers you're not sure you can make it through another grubby bar show.

Who you know:

Rich: Rich got you some connections that have landed you one gig so far. Hopefully this is a place to get started.

Alfred: One of Rich's buddies. Alfred is awful crazy to be hanging around Rich. Rich reeks of stability and reliability. Alfred reeks of insanity and cheap booze.

Manny: Another one of Rich's buddies. Manny is no more stable than Alfred, although at least Manny tends to be quiet. That is, unless Manny gets drunk. Then you'll hear more grisly war stories than you ever wanted to.

Flash: The last time you were at this fire, Flash promised to get you a gig.