

A Silent Glow Over Rural Kansas

Douglas C. Youvan

doug@youvan.com

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In the quiet expanse of rural Kansas, where the plains stretch endlessly under star-filled skies, the nighttime stillness is a way of life. But one night, that tranquility is broken by a faint, red glow on the horizon—an eerie, otherworldly light that illuminates the clouds without sound or warning. It isn't the flicker of a fire or the comforting glow of city lights. It's something far stranger, far more unsettling. The story follows a lone driver returning home on dark, empty roads. The glow lingers in their mind, gnawing at the edges of their thoughts as they grapple with its meaning. When they arrive, the lifeless house offers no comfort—no power, no internet, no connection to the outside world. The silence is oppressive, the questions unanswered: What caused the glow? How far away is it? Is this the end of something—or the beginning? As the night deepens, the glow becomes a harbinger of change, a symbol of uncertainty. The world feels different, fractured. And in the vast darkness, the only certainty is fear of what comes next.



I. Prologue: A Quiet Horizon

Opening Scene:

The night is heavy and still, a suffocating quiet blanketing the rural plains of Kansas. A lone driver navigates the dark, empty roads, the car's headlights cutting narrow tunnels of light through the blackness. There are no streetlights out here, no distant glow of urban life. The only companions are the rolling waves of dry grass lining the road, their outlines barely visible against the horizon.

The air outside is cool, carrying the faint scent of earth and vegetation. The tires hum steadily against the asphalt, a rhythm that almost lulls the driver into a false sense of calm. But something about the night feels *off*. It's not just the isolation, though that's part of it—it's the way the stars seem unusually dim, their light dulled as if obscured by an invisible shroud. The road stretches endlessly ahead, a ribbon of darkness disappearing into the unknown.

The driver tries to shake the unease, turning the radio on for company, but the familiar static from earlier remains. No music, no talk shows, no emergency broadcasts—just an empty hiss that seems to mock the stillness. They switch it off again, letting the silence of the car and the muted drone of the engine fill the void. But even that feels inadequate, like a thin barrier against something looming just out of reach.

The Glow:

And then it appears—a faint, unnatural glow on the horizon, so subtle at first that it could be mistaken for the afterglow of sunset. But it's too late for that. The sun has long since disappeared, and this light is different. It pulses faintly, irregularly, like a heartbeat slowed to an unnatural rhythm. As the driver crests a small hill, the glow intensifies, painting the underside of the clouds in hues of deep red and orange.

The sight is mesmerizing, but not beautiful. It's unsettling, alien. The light doesn't flicker like a fire or scatter like the warm glow of a city—it spreads evenly, almost methodically, casting a uniform radiance that seems to seep into the night. The driver's foot instinctively eases off the gas pedal, the car slowing as if in deference to the scene ahead. They lean forward, gripping the wheel tighter, trying to make sense of what they're seeing.

The glow sits low on the horizon, distant but unnervingly vivid. Its source is obscured by the curve of the earth and a thin line of trees, but the way it spreads upward, illuminating the clouds in fiery streaks, gives it an immense, unnatural quality. The silence is deafening—no sound accompanies the light. No roar of fire, no distant rumble of machinery or thunder. Just the eerie, oppressive quiet of the plains.

A chill runs down the driver's spine. They've heard the news, the whispers of escalating conflict, the growing tension that had crept into conversations and headlines. Could this be related? The thought is half-formed, lingering at the edge of consciousness. But for now, they can't think about that. They can only watch, transfixed and helpless, as the glow bathes the horizon in its silent, ominous light.

The road curves again, and the glow dips out of sight behind a rise. The driver presses the accelerator, eager to reach home, eager to be surrounded by familiar walls and the illusion of safety. But the glow has already burned itself into their mind, a haunting image that won't fade. As the car speeds through the night, the questions begin to multiply. *What caused it? How far away is it? What could it mean?* For now, there are no answers—only the unsettling certainty that the world feels different.

II. The Drive Home

The Silence:

The road stretches on, a narrow ribbon of asphalt cutting through the endless Kansas plains. The darkness is so complete it feels like a presence, wrapping around the car and pressing in on the windows. The headlights slice through it, illuminating fleeting glimpses of dry grass, wooden fence posts, and the occasional skeletal tree. The car's engine hums steadily, the only sound in a world that seems otherwise mute.

It's the quiet that gets under the driver's skin. Normally, there would be something—a distant barking dog, the soft rustle of the wind through the fields, or the far-off rumble of a tractor trailer on another road. But tonight, there's nothing. Even the nocturnal creatures seem to have fallen silent. The absence of sound is oppressive, as though the world has gone into hiding, bracing for something it cannot stop.

The driver's thoughts wander, trying to escape the weight of the silence. But they keep circling back to the glow. It had lingered on the horizon like an open wound, vivid and unnatural, before disappearing behind the rolling hills. It wasn't just strange—it was wrong. And now, without it in sight, the unease has only deepened. Their mind sifts through the fragments of news and warnings from the

past few weeks: escalating tensions, military buildups, veiled threats exchanged by world leaders. The kind of talk that everyone hears but no one believes will lead to the unthinkable.

But what if it had? What if the unthinkable had arrived, and the glow was its herald?

The driver grips the wheel tighter, their knuckles whitening in the dim light of the dashboard. They shake their head, trying to dismiss the thought. *It's too far away*, they tell themselves. *It's just a fire or some industrial accident*. Yet the silence keeps eating away at them, making the plausible explanations feel hollow, inadequate. The stillness of the night feels alive now, as if it's waiting for something to happen.

Building Suspicion:

The glow lingers in their mind, its image burned into their thoughts like the afterimage of a camera flash. Its steady, unyielding quality didn't seem random, didn't seem natural. Fires flicker and dance; city lights shimmer and scatter. But this glow was uniform, deliberate. It spread across the clouds like a painter's brushstroke, even and precise, as if some immense force had placed it there with intent.

The driver's heart beats faster as questions begin to surface. Could it have been a city? Kansas City, maybe? The thought is plausible at first, comforting in its simplicity. Cities have lights, after all, and sometimes accidents. But the more they think about it, the less it makes sense. There were no signs of life—no sparkling lights in the distance, no faint hints of movement on the horizon. Just that eerie, silent radiance.

And then a darker thought creeps in, unbidden and unwelcome: *What if it wasn't an accident? What if it wasn't a city? What if it was something worse?* The word forms in their mind before they can stop it: nuclear. The glow's intensity, its vastness, its sheer otherworldly quality—it fits the descriptions they've read, the documentaries they've seen. A nuclear detonation far enough away might look just like that: a distant light with no sound, the blast wave yet to come—or already dissipated, if it was far enough.

The fear grows with every passing mile. They can't help but imagine the scenarios: an attack, retaliation, the chain reaction of events that could follow. The warnings from the news don't feel like distant abstractions anymore. They feel real, immediate. Their mind races with questions they don't want to answer: *How far away was it? How much time do I have? Am I already too close?*

The car feels like a fragile cocoon, hurtling through a vast and indifferent world. The headlights illuminate the road ahead, but they bring no comfort. Each shadow, each dip in the terrain, feels like it's hiding something terrible. The driver glances in the rearview mirror, half-expecting to see the glow creeping closer, chasing them. But the mirror reflects only darkness, as if the light and the fear it brings are confined to their own memory.

With every mile, the distance to home grows shorter, but the sense of safety feels further away. The glow's image persists, vivid and haunting. It's not just light; it's a message, a warning. And the more the driver thinks about it, the more certain they become: whatever caused it wasn't natural. It was deliberate. It was calculated. And it was far bigger than anything they could hope to understand.

III. Arrival in Darkness

Home is Lifeless:

The car crunches onto the gravel driveway, its headlights casting long shadows against the familiar silhouette of the house. Yet, something feels profoundly wrong. The house is completely dark—no porch light, no faint glow from the windows. Normally, even at this late hour, there would be some sign of life: the hum of an appliance, the warm flicker of a lamp, the soft, comforting glow of the Wi-Fi router. But now, the house stands as a blackened husk, devoid of all energy.

The driver kills the engine and sits in the car for a moment, staring at the darkened structure. The stillness of the night presses in, and without the comforting white noise of the car's interior, the silence feels absolute. They step out into the cool night air, the crunch of gravel underfoot startlingly loud in the oppressive quiet. The faint rustle of the breeze through the trees does little to calm their nerves—it feels hollow, disconnected, as though the world is performing a shallow imitation of normalcy.

They fumble for their keys, the metal jangling loudly in the quiet as they unlock the front door. The house greets them with a wall of darkness. Reaching instinctively for the light switch, they flip it up and down a few times, hoping for a spark of life. Nothing. Not even the faintest flicker. The power is out.

The driver moves cautiously into the house, using their phone's flashlight to navigate. The beam slices through the dark, revealing all the familiar details of home, but something about it feels...wrong. The silence isn't just quiet—it's oppressive. There's no comforting hum of the refrigerator, no soft electronic buzz from the appliances. Even the faint tick of the wall clock is absent; its hands have frozen in place, a lifeless monument to the sudden halt of normalcy.

They glance at their phone, half-expecting a notification or an alert to explain what's happening. The screen remains black, unresponsive. A pit forms in their stomach as they realize the device is dead, not just drained of power but completely unresponsive, as if the battery has been wiped clean. A chill creeps up their spine. Whatever this is, it's bigger than a simple power outage.

Radio Silence:

Seeking answers, they head back to the car, their breath visible in the cold air. Sliding into the driver's seat, they turn the key. The engine hums to life, its sound a momentary reassurance. They reach for the radio, twisting the knob to scan for a signal. Static. Channel after channel, the same monotonous hiss greets them, its emptiness more unnerving than the silence of the house.

They press the "seek" button, letting the radio search automatically for any signal, any broadcast, any shred of information. But the result is the same: static, occasionally punctuated by faint, garbled crackles. No music, no emergency alert system, not even the faint echo of a distant station clinging to life. Just the hollow void of nothingness.

Panic begins to take hold as they realize how isolated they are. No power. No internet. No phone. No radio. It's as if every connection to the outside world has been severed, leaving them stranded in a bubble of darkness and silence. They sit in the car, gripping the steering wheel, the static from the radio filling the cabin like a mocking whisper.

The driver looks out the windshield toward the horizon, as if expecting to see the faint red glow again. But the hills and trees obscure it now, leaving only the black void of the night sky. The memory of that light lingers, though—its steady, otherworldly presence burned into their mind. It wasn't just an accident. It wasn't something benign. It was a warning, a message that the world they left behind on that dark road no longer exists.

Turning off the radio, the driver leans back in the seat, their breath coming in shallow gasps. The realization sinks in: whatever caused the glow, whatever cut the power, whatever silenced the world—it's not just a localized event. This is something far-reaching, something catastrophic. And they are completely, utterly alone.

IV. The World Unravels

Reflection on the Glow:

The driveway feels cold underfoot, the gravel uneven and unforgiving as the driver stands staring into the dark horizon. The flashlight lies forgotten in their hand, its beam casting shaky streaks of light across the ground. But their eyes are fixed eastward, toward where they last saw the glow. It had been so vivid, so unnatural, painting the sky in hues of red and orange that seemed alive. Now, that part of the sky is hidden, shrouded by hills and trees, but its presence is etched in their mind.

They can't shake the thought: *Was it Kansas City?* The distance felt right, the scale of the light suggesting something immense. But Kansas City wasn't the only possibility—there were other towns, other hubs. The glow could have been anywhere. Or, worse, it could have been *everywhere*.

The driver replays the sight in their mind, trying to find meaning in the way the clouds glowed from below, the way the light spread evenly, ominously, like a wound slowly bleeding out into the night. They wonder if what they saw was the aftermath of an attack, the quiet death of a city reduced to ash. But another, darker possibility nags at them: *What if it wasn't the end of something, but the beginning? What if that glow was the first flash in a chain of events that would consume everything?*

The thought sends a chill through their body, one that even the crisp night air can't explain.

The Silence of Disaster:

The silence is the most unnerving part. The driver knows what they've been taught to expect in a disaster. They remember hearing about the roar of nuclear detonations, the sound waves ripping through the air, the shockwaves flattening everything in their path. But here, there is nothing. No rumble, no tremor, not even the faintest whisper of what might have caused that terrible glow. Just the vast, empty stillness of the Kansas plains.

The absence of noise feels surreal, as if the world is holding its breath. Even nature seems subdued. The fields are motionless, the trees barely rustling in the breeze, and not a single animal stirs. It's as though the disaster has reached out and silenced more than just human life. The driver feels a growing sense that this silence isn't normal—it's unnatural, an aftereffect of something that has fractured the world itself.

Their thoughts turn to the possibility of an EMP. They've read about electromagnetic pulses before, the way they could knock out power grids, fry electronics, and plunge entire regions into darkness. It would explain the lifeless phone, the dead radio, the absence of even the hum of appliances in their home. But would it explain the glow? The eerie light that lingered like a stain on the sky? Could an EMP and a nuclear strike have gone hand in hand?

Or could it be something far worse, something they hadn't even considered? The glow wasn't just a physical phenomenon—it felt *deliberate*, like it carried with it an intention. As if the world hadn't just broken—it had been *broken*.

Questions of Survival:

The warnings replay in their mind, fragments of conversations and news reports that suddenly feel sharper, more vivid than they had at the time. The growing tensions between nations, the cryptic statements from officials, the whispers of evacuation protocols that never felt fully real. It had all seemed distant,

hypothetical. Something that might happen *somewhere*, but not here. Not to them.

Now, standing alone in the dark, the driver realizes how fragile that sense of safety was. How much of it depended on the thin thread of communication and infrastructure that had been severed so abruptly. They glance at their home, at the darkened windows that once promised security, and feel no comfort. This isn't a shelter—it's a relic of a world that might already be gone.

The questions come faster now, each one heavier than the last. *Am I far enough away? Is this place safe? What if it isn't? Should I leave? Go where?* The answers don't come, only more uncertainty. The isolation is suffocating, but the fear of what might lie beyond the horizon is worse. They think about food, water, fuel. How long would those last if the glow meant what they feared? How long could they stay here before the silence gave way to something more terrifying?

The reality settles in like a stone in their chest: the world they knew might have changed irreversibly. The glow wasn't just a light—it was a fracture line, a fault splitting the familiar from the unknown. And standing there, bathed in the quiet darkness of the Kansas plains, the driver feels that the ground beneath their feet is slipping away, pulling them toward an uncertain, unforgiving future.

V. The Glow's Unanswered Questions

Symbol of Catastrophe:

The glow lingers in the driver's mind, refusing to fade like an afterimage burned onto their retinas. It becomes more than just light—it becomes a harbinger, an undeniable symbol of catastrophe. Every time they close their eyes, they see it again: the steady, unwavering red illuminating the clouds, the way it spread with an almost supernatural precision. It felt alive, deliberate, and the silence that accompanied it made it all the more haunting.

The glow was no accident. It wasn't a natural phenomenon or some mundane incident. It was too vast, too ominous, and too controlled. Its presence demanded attention, forcing the driver to confront the reality of what it could mean. It was destruction made visible, a wordless warning from the universe, a question

seared into their consciousness: *What has happened? What could create such a thing?*

And then, more chillingly: *What comes next?*

The weight of those questions presses down on the driver, gnawing at the edges of their thoughts. The glow wasn't just a light—it was an event, a message that something catastrophic had unfolded far beyond their reach, and its consequences were marching closer with each passing moment. It wasn't just about what the glow was, but what it signified. The world had changed, and whatever had caused that light was the new center of its gravity. The driver feels the pull of its implications, even from this distance, as if the glow had somehow marked them, tethered them to its unrelenting presence.

Fear of What's to Come:

The driver begins to sense something deeper, something more terrifying: the glow might not represent the end of something, but the beginning. Its steady, silent presence feels like a quiet declaration, an announcement that the world had shifted into an unknowable and darker reality. The glow isn't just an echo of destruction—it's a promise that this is only the first act in a much larger, more harrowing story.

The silence surrounding the event amplifies the fear. No news, no radio broadcasts, no distant sounds of sirens or commotion. Just the suffocating stillness of the rural plains. This lack of response makes the glow feel even more ominous, as though the rest of the world had simply disappeared. What could extinguish the noise of an entire civilization? What kind of event could force everything into silence?

The driver starts to suspect that this might be the precursor to something even greater, a shockwave of change that hasn't yet reached them. The glow felt intentional, deliberate, as if some unseen force was rewriting the rules of the world. It was as though the horizon itself had been transformed into a boundary line between the familiar and the unknown, and the glow was daring them to cross it.

Their thoughts spiral into darker places. They imagine the glow spreading, consuming the sky, creeping closer until it overtakes the entire landscape. They imagine other cities, other towns, each casting their own ominous light into the night until the whole world is illuminated by destruction. The fear is paralyzing, a cold weight in their chest that grows heavier with every minute.

Yet, amidst the fear, there's a growing realization: whatever this is, it's already in motion. The world has shifted irreversibly, and the glow is proof that there's no going back. The driver feels caught in the space between before and after, unsure of where they stand or what they should do. The glow's unanswered questions loom over them like an unyielding specter, reminding them that the world they thought they knew is gone, replaced by something darker, more uncertain, and far more dangerous.

VI. Epilogue: Alone in the Darkness

Waiting for the Unknown:

The driver stands in the driveway, the crunch of gravel beneath their boots the last sound they made. Now, there is nothing. The vast Kansas sky stretches above, but tonight it feels void of its usual grandeur. The stars, faint and scattered, seem too distant to provide any solace, their light weak against the impenetrable blackness that surrounds the world.

The glow is gone now, hidden behind the rolling hills and trees that block the eastern horizon. Yet, it remains seared into the driver's memory. They can still see it in their mind's eye, its fiery radiance spreading across the clouds, a strange and terrible beacon. Without it visible, the night feels emptier, darker—as though the absence of its light has pulled something vital from the world.

They hug their arms to their chest, though the cold isn't what makes them shiver. It's the waiting. The not knowing. The glow was a question, but one that refuses to be answered. They glance at their silent home, its darkened windows reflecting nothing but their own dim flashlight beam. The house, once a place of comfort and security, feels lifeless, foreign, as though it too has been unmoored by whatever happened beyond the horizon.

The Silent Question:

The silence is maddening. It's not just the absence of sound—it's the oppressive weight of it, pressing in from all sides. No hum of electricity, no buzz of distant power lines, no faint rustling of the usual nocturnal life. It's a silence that seems to swallow the world whole, leaving the driver isolated, suspended in a void.

They glance back toward the road, hoping—absurdly—that someone might drive by, that they might see headlights cutting through the dark. But the road is as lifeless as the house, as empty as the sky above. The driver realizes with a sinking heart that they are truly alone, with no connection to anything or anyone beyond the small patch of land where they now stand.

The glow's unanswered questions loom in their thoughts, louder than any sound could ever be. *What caused it? How far away was it? What does it mean?* But one question rises above the rest, a silent specter that refuses to leave: *What comes next?* The uncertainty is crushing, its weight settling in their chest and refusing to let go. The world feels frozen in this moment of not knowing, a liminal space where time seems to stretch and twist, offering no relief.

The driver's mind races through every possibility. They imagine the glow growing brighter, spreading, consuming the horizon until it's no longer distant but here, pressing down on them. They imagine more glows appearing in every direction, an unspoken message that the catastrophe wasn't isolated. And then they imagine nothing at all—a future so empty and uncertain that it can't even be visualized.

They look to the sky, searching for answers, but the heavens offer no guidance. The stars remain cold, indifferent, their faint twinkle a cruel reminder of how small and insignificant everything feels now. The driver lowers their gaze, staring into the dark expanse of the fields that surround their home. There's no escape from this silence, no escape from the waiting.

The only certainty is uncertainty itself. The glow may have faded from sight, but its implications remain, a silent promise that the world has shifted, irreversibly and unknowably. The driver, caught between disbelief and dread, can do nothing but wait—for the dawn, for answers, for whatever comes next. But as the night

stretches on, one truth becomes inescapable: the world will never be the same again.