



SIX HUNDRED ACRES

The songs that wrote Blackthorn Ridge.

I don't write in silence.

Every scene in this book got written on a loop — one song, over and over, until the thing on the page felt like the thing in my chest. Some of them I can't hear anymore without seeing the exact room I wrote them in.

So this isn't a vibes playlist. It's closer to a map. Each track sat under a specific scene, and I've written down what it was doing to me while I worked — where it lands in the book, and why it had to be that one.

Warning: the [notes](#) have [spoilers](#).



01

How Could You

Jessie Murph

THE SCENE

The prologue. All of it.

WHY

This is the hardest kind of scene to write. You know it's necessary and it wrecks you anyway. The only thing that got me through it was knowing where she ends up — that the whole point of the dark is the redemption waiting on the other side of it.

Sometimes you have to get through the bad to earn the good. This song is that scene. It carried me the whole way down.

02

Lifetime

Three Days Grace

THE SCENE

The prologue. Felicity's death. The semi on the wet Tuesday road. The one real mother Sage ever had, gone.

WHY

ThThis one's a gut-punch straight to the soul. After everything, after all of it, Sage finally got someone like Felicity. Unconditional, real, "that's my daughter" to strangers. And then it got taken. She thought she had a lifetime coming. Instead she got just enough time to start feeling human again before it was ripped away. That's the cruelty of it — not the loss itself, but how close she'd gotten to believing she was safe. The song is that exact ache: thinking you have forever with someone, and finding out you had a fraction. Fuck death.

03

Wish It Was True

The White Buffalo

THE SCENE

Meeting Cal — the diner, and the flashback to Afghanistan, the two girls he pulled out.

WHY

This is the hardest kind of scene to write. You know it's necessary and it wThis one isn't about the rescue. It's about what the rescue cost him. The flashback shows you what his hands can do; the song is the man those hands left behind — the soldier who did what was asked, did it right, and got thrown away when the country was through with him. That last verse guts me every time. It's Cal before Sage ever gave him a reason to come back.

04

Street Spirit

Radiohead

THE SCENE

Sage walking into the diner. Sick, freezing, out of money, out of road — ready to trade the last thing she had left for a plate of food. And then Cal ordered it for her instead, called her his friend, and prayed for her before he even knew her name.

WHY

This is her at the absolute bottom. One more try, and if it's nothing, she's done. The song is what was playing in her head walking through that door — that circling, hollowed-out dread of a person who's run all the way out. And then a stranger met her there with a fork and a prayer and no price tag. That's the whole book, right there in one booth. The dark, and the first hand that reached into it.

05

If I Go, I'm Goin

Gregory Alan Isakov

THE SCENE

Cal carrying Sage out of the diner and home through the blizzard — the truck, the corner with the knife, the moment he lowers himself to her level and promises she's safe.

WHY

This is Cal deciding, while his heart is breaking, in real time, to be the wall. Everything in him wanted to go hunt down the person who taught her to fold up small, but she needed steady hands and a quiet voice instead, so that's what he became. The song is warm and rooted the way he is: a man who doesn't do anything halfway, saying if I'm in, I'm all the way in. That's the whole vow. He'd known her less than an hour and he'd already decided. That's who he is. It's who I wish we all were.

06

Work Song

Hozier

THE SCENE

The first night at the cabin. Cal sitting up in the chair while the fever burns through her — the thermometer every ninety minutes, the medicine at dawn, the watch he keeps because he decided she was his to look after.

WHY

Cal doesn't love with grand gestures. He loves with labor — the quiet, unglamorous work of tending something back to life. This whole night is him doing that: sitting up, keeping watch, doing the small steady things over and over because that's what she needed and grand didn't come into it. The song is a man whose devotion is his hands, and that's him exactly. By the time the fever broke he already knew. This one was his to tend.

07

Carry You

Novo Amor

THE SCENE

Sage's first day in town — Hallie's shop, Dr. Rowan, the diner. Getting clothes that fit, a doctor who says "whenever you're ready" instead of "what happened," Mary Sue saying "call me Mama," and Cal laughing for the first time in his whole adult life over a lollipop and a bad grace pun.

WHY

This is the chapter where she comes home to a home she didn't know was waiting. Not one big rescue — a whole town quietly deciding she's theirs. Hallie, Rowan, Mama, Cal. The song is that exact feeling: being lifted by something bigger than you right when you'd run out of strength to hold yourself up. She spent her whole life carrying everything alone. This is the day people started carrying her.

08

Save My Soul

Noah Rinker

THE SCENE

The first real evening. Cal cooking, the cookies grace, the porch under the stars, "I think you might've saved my life," and Sage writing in her diary against his chest, deciding to stay.

WHY

This isn't the loud kind of rescue. It's the quiet one — dinner, a hand on her ankle under a blanket, a room that's hers with no catch. This is the chapter where she stops running and unpacks, and she says the thing out loud on the porch: you saved my life. The song sits right in that hush, raw and tender and a little cracked open, the sound of someone finally believing they get to be safe. Every hard mile before this was worth it to get her to "I'm going to stay."

09

Fade Into You

Mazzy Star

THE SCENE

Sage sneaking out before dawn in Cal's giant coat, watching him train by the hot spring — and feeling want, real want, for the first time in her life. No survival math, no performance. Just hers. And terrifying because of it.

WHY

This isn't a lust song and this isn't really a lust scene. It's the ache of falling against your own better judgment. Sage's body comes back online here for the first time — no calculation, no cost, just wanting — and it scares her more than anything has, because things that feel this good have always come with a price. The song is that exact narcotic pull: getting closer to someone when every scarred part of you says run. She's fading into him and she knows it and she can't stop.

10

Rescue

Lauren Daigle

THE SCENE

The walks, the town waving at her, the ice-skating pond — Cal cratering the ice again and again just to hear her laugh, and quietly deciding, underneath all of it, that he's going to be the one who comes for her.

WHY

This is my favorite, and it's the one song that sounds like how Cal actually loves. This is Cal. Everything up to here was the rescue from the outside. This one's sung from the rescuer's side — the promise to come looking and never stop searching — and that's Cal's whole heart in this chapter. She thinks she's teaching him to skate. He's already decided he'll fall on that ice a thousand times if it means she gets one thing she should've had all along. It's a promise made before God, whether she believes it yet or not. He does.

11

Another Life

Motionless In White

THE SCENE

Sage's nightmare — the dream-bear, the void tearing open behind him, watching the dark hollow him out and take him while she screams for him to come back and can't hold on.

WHY

This is her terror rendered in her own genre: heavy, gothic, desperate. The dream takes the safest thing she has and devours it in front of her, and she's six years old again, helpless, begging it not to leave. The song is that exact panic — something golden being torn out of your hands while you claw to keep it. It's the fear underneath all her armor: that everything good gets taken, that safe is just a thing that hasn't been ripped away yet.

12

Epiphany

Staind

THE SCENE

After the nightmare. Cal carrying her out to the porch, the stars, Brutus at the steps, and the promise that goes both ways: "Don't leave me." "Don't leave me either."

WHY

This half is Cal's, and it's the sound of a man with something enormous inside him and no words big enough to hold it. He communicates in grunts and open hands, and here he finally says the thing — "don't leave me either" — and it costs him his whole chest to get it out. The song is that ache: a guarded man realizing he's all the way gone and terrified of it. He watched the sun come up knowing something had been born in him that was never going away. He couldn't say it. But God help him, he meant it.

13

Touch My Body

Mariah Carey

THE SCENE

The morning after the nightmare. The wrecked door, the shameless back-arch war in the hallway, and then Sage alone in the six-headed shower — thinking about Cal's hands, finding that one specific setting at that one specific angle, and having the first orgasm of her life.

WHY

Every hard thing in this book earned her the right to a scene this light. This is the first thing Sage ever chose. Not taken, not demanded, not survived. Chosen. And the miracle of it is that it isn't solemn. She's grinning through it. She's crying and laughing at the same time because her own body finally belongs to her and it turns out it's fun. The song is that exact feeling: sultry with a smirk, want without shame, a woman playing in her own desire for the first time and delighting in it. No performance, no price tag, no one watching. Just her, the steam, and a quiet private joy that had been locked away her whole life finally getting to come out and play. She walked in broken. She walked out whole and laughing. I'm sorry, but if you're not cheering you should be.

14

Home

Edward Sharpe & The Magnetic Zeros

THE SCENE

The slumber party at Mary Sue's — Isabelle's billionaire-boardroom stories, popcorn fights, "I love you" whispered under the blankets, and Cal at the cabin planning it all, writing "Tree, with Sage" on the legal pad. Two broken people just starting to glow about it.

WHY

This is the sugar rush. After all the dark, this is the exhale — the giggling, the girl-talk, the warmth of being claimed. The whole refrain says home is a person, not a place, and that's the entire chapter: Sage asking how much longer till she can come home, Cal writing her name next to the Christmas tree, Mama saying "I love you" and meaning it forever. Home stopped being a place a long time ago for both of them. It's finally a person now. It's each other.

15

All of Me

John Legend

THE SCENE

The diner. Sage running her "repeat after me" bit, armored and teasing, and Cal going off-script, finding the words for the first time in his life: "'Drop-dead gorgeous' is too plain for you. I don't think the words have been invented yet." The public "yes." "It's about time."

WHY

This wrecks me every time. Cal talks in grunts and open hands — the whole book, she jokes she needs a dictionary for him. And then, once, at exactly the right moment, the vault opens and the plainest, truest thing falls out. That's the impact: not eloquence, but a man who never has words finding the perfect ones for her. The song is that same thing — a not-flashy man loving every part of someone, imperfections and all, saying it simple because simple is what's true. She braced for him to hedge. He loved the whole of her instead.

16

Scars to Your Beautiful

Alessia Cara

THE SCENE

Christmas Eve, after the spa day. Hallie's boutique, the midnight dress made just for her, the whole squad saving her makeup while she cries — and Sage standing in front of the mirror finally, quietly saying: "I'm... pretty." A modern Cinderella getting the dress at last.

WHY

So many women lose sight of how beautiful they are, buried under Photoshop and perfect feeds and impossible standards. Sage spent years hiding under black hoodies because being seen meant danger. This is the moment she looks in the mirror and finally sees what everyone else always saw. The song is that exact truth: you're beautiful just as you are, scars and all. And her scars — the real ones, the ones the dress honors instead of hides — are the whole point. It was never the dress. It was always her.

17

Been Thinking of You

Jules Delaney

THE SCENE

Christmas Eve — Cal picking her up, the rebuilt Jeep with Felicity's keychain still on it, the drive home and their first intimate moment, and the whole estate lit up as a winter wonderland for a girl who never had a Christmas she deserved.

WHY

Under all the fireworks and the comedy, this chapter is really about the missing — six days apart and both of them wrecked by it. "Whenever I'm not with you, I miss you. I think about you all the time." She confesses the same thing back, in her own chaotic way. The song is that exact warm ache: two people who couldn't stop thinking about each other finally not having to be apart. He gave her back the Jeep, gave her a first Christmas, gave her the space to want on her own terms. All of it says the same thing. I've been thinking of you. The whole time.

18

Cover Me Up

Morgan Wallen (Jason Isbell)

THE SCENE

The Christmas party — Cal asking her to dance, saying "I love you" plain and certain, and their first kiss under the mistletoe while the band plays "Lovely," the song that once carried her lowest night and now scores her highest.

WHY

This is one of the great devotion-and-redemption songs, and it's Cal note for note — a man who was wrecked by his past, who came home hollowed out and thought he was beyond saving, pulled back to living by one person who walked in carrying color. This is the scene where he finally says it out loud, no hedging, vault wide open. The song is that exact vow: shelter, devotion, a hard man laid completely bare for the one who reached him. He's her wall. She's his reason. And the assurance runs both directions — you are enough.

19

Been Thinking of You

The Head and the Heart

THE SCENE

Christmas Day, the gift-giving. Mary Sue's recipe box for Sage, the framed photo for Annie, "to my other daughter, love, Mama," and Annie's SUV with the red bow. The moment Annie stops being the third wheel and realizes she has a family.

WHY

This one's Annie's. Her whole life she's been alone — parenting at twelve, third wheel at best, sure every kindness was really pity. Cal went to jail and then the Navy protecting her, and would do it again in a heartbeat. Mary Sue left folded bills on a table and then claimed her as a daughter. And here, finally, Annie sees it: this was never charity. It's family, and it's hers. The song is found-family in one aching, grateful breath — the people who became your home across all that distance and time. She's not going to be alone anymore.

20

Turning Page

Sleeping At Last

THE SCENE

The hot spring, their first real intimacy — Cal, forty-six and never touched, letting Sage lead him somewhere he never believed he'd get to go. And then the closing shot: the two of them tangled in white sheets, snow falling protective over the cabin, a heart that finally has a place to rest.

WHY

This one's beyond physical. It's a man who spent forty-six years certain he'd sleep alone — too broken, too dark, too late — finally, safely letting someone in. The song is patience rewarded: a lifetime of waiting, and the willingness to wait lifetimes more. But the part that wrecks me is the very end. Two souls, so alike in their scars, so different in the light they give each other, breathing together while the snow falls. Not the body. The rest. The place to land. He finally has one.

21

Doomed

Bring Me The Horizon (MAPHRA vocal cover)

THE SCENE

New Year's, the bar. Sage on stage with her guitar, singing an original song for Cal in front of the whole family — a song that starts as pure despair and then flips inside out mid-verse into a reclamation. "I was doomed... until you." Cal undone, one tear he doesn't bother wiping away.

WHY

This is the source. I couldn't reproduce the exact song Sage sings, so this is the track that inspired it — and it's the only song on here that sounds like her, the goth heart of the girl under all the plaid and piercings. BMTH does the thing Sage does on that stage: name the darkness completely, then scream through it into something that keeps you alive. She takes a doom song and makes it a rescue song. The girl who counted ceiling tiles, who thought the dark would win, she stood up in the body that was always hers and sang the truth that she made it. That girl didn't survive for nothing. She survived for this.

22

Unethical

Faouzia (MAPHRA vocal cover)

THE SCENE

The ridge, the storm. Cal trying to end it to protect her — "monsters don't get happy endings" — and Sage on her knees in the snow refusing to let him go. The question that breaks him open: if God can't forgive you, how can I ever be forgiven for what was done to me? Three broken creatures holding the man who saved them all.

WHY

This is the fight, and it's where the rescue finally goes both ways. Cal stands there listing every reason she should run — the blood, the body count, the monster he thinks he is — and Sage's whole answer is a scream of I don't care, I'd love you past all of it. The song is exactly that: devotion as an act of will that overrides every reasonable objection, love that refuses the warning label. She's a force of nature here, stronger than her own fear, and she uses her own worthiness as the weapon that saves him. If he can't get mercy, neither can she, and she won't accept a world where either of them is beyond it.

23

I Get to Love You

Ruelle

THE SCENE

The proposal. Cal transforming the ridge — lanterns, the fire, Shadow tucked among the pillows — and going down on one knee with his mother's ring, four generations old. "Even after the stars fade, if God allows, I will love you forever. You and no other."

WHY

This is the forever. Not the first I-love-you, not the first night — the vow, made before God on a mountaintop, with a ring that carries his whole bloodline in it. The song is exactly that: a hushed, sacred, I-don't-take-this-for-granted kind of love. A man who walked the road alone for forty-six years, certain someone like him wasn't allowed this, finally getting to say I get to love you. That's the whole miracle of it. He never believed she'd come. And now he gets to keep her forever.

24

Turning Page (reprise)

Sleeping At Last

THE SCENE

The grotto, the final night, and the walk home under a rejoicing sky. The shooting star. "Brighter. Fuller. Theirs." The last page of the book.

WHY

Same song as their first night, on purpose, because this one is the anthem of the whole book and it's right that it ends here. A man who'd wait a hundred years and then a million more is Cal entire — someone who never believed she'd come. And the image of something feather-light bringing kingdoms to their knees is Sage, the part people miss. Everyone sees the girl who got rescued. They don't see the force of nature underneath: soft and fierce and righteous, who brought the most dangerous man alive to his knees with nothing but love, and would burn the world down for the people who are hers. Two vows, one song. His patience. Her power. Theirs.