

Messengers of the Soul



Audrey Rose decided to collect butterflies. There was something so graceful about them, the way their wings carried them through the air, sweeping and diving, sucking nectar. Not wanting to hurt a living creature, Audrey Rose began walking around town, studying the grills and bumpers of cars. The wing of a monarch was crushed on one grill, a zebra butterfly, disco butterfly, pieces of life, the soft fuzz of their bodies, the glimpse of brightness of the corner of a wing and then, on a red pick-up, an entire swallowtail butterfly. Audrey Rose peeled it off perfectly intact. Its legs folded against its body as if it had been laid to rest. The body could be mistaken for a wasps' with yellow and black markings, although the black ran the length of the body, the yellow on both sides. A spattering of iridescent blue and orange highlighted the scalloped edges of the wings. The eyes still stared, although the antennae had broken off, probably on collision. As Audrey Rose held it in her hand, about to add it her baggie of 43 butterfly wings, a man approached.

"Something wrong with my rig?"

"Oh, no. I've just been collecting dead butterflies."

"Isn't that a little morbid?"

"It's beautiful. When else do you get study anything so closely except when it's dead?"

"Why would you want to study death?"

"Because in death are the details. In life is death. Look."

Audrey Rose held the butterfly out. The man peered down at it.

"You can touch it," Audrey Rose reached her hand closer to him.

"If I touch it, I'll break it."

Audrey Rose looked at his thick, rough hands, the dirt under the nails, the chipped edges and nodded her head. That hand had reached out to her before, but she wasn't sure where. She placed the yellow and black stripes in the baggie.

"Whatcha going to do with those?"

"I'm not sure yet. When it comes to me, I'll do it. Let's go." Audrey Rose closed the baggie and looked into the face of the stranger. The man had brown sugar eyes, wrinkles etched around them from too much smiling. His lips were Irish and his body lean with golden sun-bleached hairs on his arms.

"And where might that take me?"

"You never can tell." Audrey Rose winked at the man and skipped down the street. He paused for a moment before he followed her. They wove up and down the streets numbered 9, 8, 7 down to 2nd Street.

"That's strange," said Audrey Rose.

"What's that?" said the man.

"There is no First Street and I don't know your name. How can you have a Second Street if there is no First Street? I mean what's 2nd Street second to? Is it unlucky to have a First Street, kind of like not having a thirteenth floor when the fourteenth floor is really the thirteenth floor but nobody talks about it?"

The man shrugged. "Warren."

"You think the street should be called Warren?"

"No. That's my name."

"Ah. A lot can be caught in the valleys of your W. But you have two r's like butterfly has two t's. This must be serendipity."

"Serendipity or not, I'm getting thirsty," said Warren.

"I agree. A toast is in order. I officially name 2nd Street 1st Street. Let's celebrate." Audrey Rose curtsied to the man, who couldn't help but smile.

They walked to the rooftop of the Rio, which shared one letter with butterfly, and although Sunpie rhymes with butterfly and Bistro started with a b, the Rio had a roof and sunshine and rose up high like the flight of winged creatures.

"So Warren with two r's, tell me a story."

"I doubt there's a story I could tell that you haven't heard before."

"Maybe so, but I've never heard you tell it, so it will sound different coming from your mouth."

He rubbed the scruff on his chin. "Let's see. A story. There was once a little boy who

wanted to fly, but he couldn't figure out how to. He jumped off sidewalks, off his bed. One night after too many drugs, he jumped off his roof, and for just a moment he did fly and everything left him. He survived but stopped talking. He obsessed even more about leaving the ground. He jumped out of planes, off the tops of mountains and off buildings, but what he couldn't figure out was why he always landed."

Audrey Rose got up and kissed Warren on the cheek. "Perfect," she muttered.

They sat drinking strawberry margaritas, which also had a double r, as the winds began to pick up. When her hair was swept off her face, Audrey Rose knew what to do with the wings. She climbed onto the edge of the roof, opened the bag and let the wings go. They were picked up by the currents and carried away.

Warren looked at her.

"Maybe this time they won't land."

-Do not attempt to recreate the events of Audrey Rose's life. They will result in internal and/or external death or at the very least a yeast infection.