

## **The Little Things**

Audrey Rose was a virgin when she left the shelter of the woods at seventeen. She wandered wherever her toes took her, surrounded by great expanses of open fields, shadowed by mountain peaks and drenched in the glory of the sun. One step after the next until her toes touched something hard and hot. Concrete greeted her and out of the ground rose building after building. She crossed a bridge and found herself in the middle of everything unnatural.

Cars passed honking horns. People yelled. Everyone moved. There was no time for looking but looking was all Audrey Rose could do. No one noticed her and the feeling of anonymity felt like a blessing. Lost among thousands of people, Audrey Rose could be anyone she wanted to be.

She curtsied to men dressed in suits and wool coats who smiled nervously at her hair scented with wind and grass and her face darkened by the reaching rays of summer past. Her heart, at first excited and beating quickly at the constant stimulation around her, began to shrink with each moment that passed and looked for a way out of her body. When Audrey Rose reached down to scratch an itch on her ankle, her heart took its chance and slipped out her right nostril quickly shuffling into a crack in the sidewalk.

Lightness filled Audrey Rose as she realized she felt nothing. Memories of the past held no emotion for her. She could smile but she couldn't feel where the smile stemmed from, where it was rooted. Leaves that fluttered inside her soul, each one a piece of her life, began to wilt. The branches scratched against her skull, her rib cage and her pelvis. The tickling made her want to laugh, but she had forgotten how.

Audrey Rose found a coffee shop and ducked in. Around her the bustle of the city seemed amplified. The noise and steam from the coffee makers inspired a dance that came from the roots of her toes that hadn't yet heard her heart had left. She moved her body to the sounds, twisting and jerking, her hair flying in all directions. People stared so Audrey Rose jumped on a table and danced harder. Scrawled across the wall were the words "For even as love crowns you so shall he crucify you."

"Love," Audrey Rose yelled "that's it!" She felt the emptiness and knew her heart was crying out for her to find her. The chair tipped over as Audrey Rose ran to the door. She re-traced her steps but couldn't find her heart anywhere. As she was walking with her head bent down, she knocked into a guy. His Kind Eyes looked her over and he slipped his hand around her waist to keep her from falling. As she was pulled closer she felt a heart beating. She wanted to reach into his chest and rip out his heart and swallow it to fill the emptiness she felt.

Instead, she squeezed his hand. "I've lost my heart. Do you have any ideas where my heart might be?"

The Kind Eyes laughed as he stepped away from her.

"This is my first time in the city and I've already lost my heart," said Audrey Rose.

"That happens to a lot of people, but not usually the first day they're here." He noticed her bare feet, dirt filling the cracks of her toes. "Do you have anywhere to stay?"

"I hadn't thought about it, but I guess not."

"I have a couch that you could crash on."

“Let’s go.” Audrey Rose laced her hand in his as they turned down 24<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Streets. They climbed three flights up to his apartment which was an open room with a bed near the windows and a couch close to the door. Kind Eyes opened the refrigerator and handed her a beer.

The foamy amber liquid trickled down her throat, cooling her, pooling in the empty space her heart had held for so many years. Another beer and the space was almost full. Audrey Rose took the man’s hand and wrapped it around her. They began to dance together to the music of voices and traffic passing by below.

Kind Eyes had soft lips that kissed her, moved over her body. Audrey Rose wished she could feel something, anything but she was completely numb. The tree inside was barren, the roots starting to curl up from her toes. She was about to pull away when his heart beat called to her brain.

“This is what love is,” the heart said but Audrey Rose had no heart to respond. The words were convincing her mind told her. So she let her skirt fall to the floor, let her body shed every thing material until her primal nature took over.

“A new experience for me,” Audrey Rose said when they were both naked.

Kind Eyes paused. “We don’t have to do this,” he told her.

“You can have a piece of me,” his heart said.

That promise made up Audrey Rose’s mind. She let Kind Eyes fill her. There was no pain, there was only two bodies moving together. Audrey Rose’s virgin blood stained his thighs, his stomach with a red so deep he would never be able to fully wash it away. His heart began to race, to mumble things that made no sense. When the man exploded into her, Audrey Rose still felt nothing. His arms wrapped around her were warm on her

cold skin. His breath calmed with her in his arms as Audrey Rose stared out the window wondering what this could have been like if her heart had only been here.

His heart was silent now, not a word came from it. The piece he promised her pushed to escape, to come into her, but his heart was not strong enough.

As he slept, Audrey Rose left. The sidewalk glittered in the streetlights. Bending down to touch the sparkles, Audrey Rose heard the cry of a dove. She turned upward to see wings spread in flight, white against black skies. Out of the crack of a window a vine crawled, a single bud reaching out to the fresh air. Under a discarded newspaper a cockroach scurried. Audrey Rose tried to grab the cockroach but he was too fast for her. The cockroach was part of nature, even here in the city.

With new eyes Audrey Rose took in her surroundings. She noticed a nest built twig by twig upon the head of a gargoyle. Between buildings no stars could be seen, but clouds drifted by covering and exposing light. Ants marched to and from plentiful food sources. Everywhere she looked at nature's details, more exciting contrasted with all that wasn't natural.

As she was following some ants to see where they might end up, she caught a flash of swollen red flesh wedged under the edge of a garbage can. The ants were moving too and from Audrey Rose's heart. She was worried how much they had eaten, but when she bent down to study her heart, she found the ants had been filling it with the beauty of the city. Audrey Rose sat down next to her heart. Her heart felt what had happened and her heart shed tears that flooded the ants and wet Audrey Rose's toes. And the roots in her began to stretch back out.

*-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.*