

Without a Trace

He had wide eyes and a bigger heart. Mike was the one friend who had stayed in Audrey's heart since the day the winds dropped her in Steamboat. There was a gentle fire that warmed his soul. He told Audrey Rose stories about his home, his friends who were his family and became hers. They watched out for her, hugged her when her body needed human touch. Mike took her out showed, her the town, the people. He laughed a lot. They laughed a lot. They danced in the rain, slipped in the snow and caught each other.

When it began, no one realized. Someone's house, a party. Audrey Rose sat on a couch, burned by cigarettes, lines of coke on the table. Everyone was taking turns. The snow flew up into their noses, reached through their bodies, gave them life, strength. Audrey Rose dipped her finger in.

"Hey, don't waste that."

"I just wanted to see..."

"She's okay." Mike slipped down next to her. Audrey Rose licked her finger, felt a numbness.

"You snort it, I'll show you."

"Why would I do that?"

"It'll make you happy."

"But I'm already happy."

"It makes you feel like you can do anything."

"But there isn't anything I want to do that I can't do."

“It makes you forget.”

“You can’t forget the things you know.” Audrey Rose looked into his eyes, the blue was slightly faded.

“If you don’t want to party, maybe you should leave before you bring everyone else down.”

Audrey Rose fled from the house. The pebbles were sharp against her soles. She ran into the woods, up the hill in the Sanctuary to her rock. On top, she lay down in the arms of the rock, felt it cradle her body. She had never felt like anything was missing from her, but in the black of night she wondered.

Without a moon the stars shone brighter.

A shadow moved towards her. Mike appeared.

“I thought I might find you here.”

Audrey Rose didn’t move.

“I’m sorry.”

“Why?”

Mike climbed up on the rock next to her. Audrey Rose sat up. Mike’s shoulder touched her shoulder. They sat in silence for a while.

“I had a sister. She died when she was three.”

Audrey Rose held his hand.

“We were at a picnic, my aunts, uncles, grandparents. Kids were running everywhere, splashing in the river. It was summer. A really hot day. All I wanted was to swim, but I kept getting distracted. I was six. Alison used to follow me around everywhere, she always wanted to hold my hand and play with me. I wanted to play with my cousins. The water was so cold, even though it was August, but I dove in, swimming under water with my eyes open, looking for fish. I closed my eyes and when I opened them, her eyes were staring at me. They were the color of grasses that grew on the bottom. Her lips were blue. I screamed but I choked on the water. I grabbed her hand and pulled her to the shore.”

Audrey Rose rested her head on his shoulder. She could feel his body shaking.

“You were only a child.”

“I still see her eyes. I don’t want to see them any more.”

“I want to make this go away for you.”

“You can’t.”

“When I look at you I know something has disappeared.”

“Maybe someday all of me will disappear.”

The next time she saw him, Mike had lost weight, his chest had caved in. His face didn’t know how to smile. He was in the alley behind the bar, smoking something that wasn’t weed. Audrey Rose was skipping down the street when she found him.

“You shouldn’t be here, Audrey Rose.”

“Where are the boys?” She noticed his backpack nearby.

“I haven’t talked to them in a while.”

“Where are you living?”

“Buff Pass. It won't be cold for a while.” A girl about nineteen came by. She rubbed her body up against Mike's. He offered her the pipe. She took it. Audrey Rose started to slip away. Mike broke apart from the girl.

“Wait, I want you to have this.” He thrust a CD in her hands. Maybe...” He turned away.

When Audrey Rose got home, she put the CD in. Blue October, *Hate Me*. “*Hate me for all the things I didn't do for you...And with a sad heart I say bye to you and wave Kicking shadows on the street for every mistake that I have made...And then I fell down yelling "Make it go away!" Just make her smile come back and shine just like it used to be...*” And Audrey Rose cried. She pulled her knees deep into her, wrapped her arms around her and heard Mike's voice echo in her head, ‘maybe.’ Maybe someday.

When Audrey Rose slept, she looked for Mike in her dreams. She couldn't find him, but she could hear his heart beating softly. When she saw him in town he was a ghost.

Audrey Rose prayed.

-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.