

In the Wake Of

“Ouch. Shit.” Faye says out loud. She hinges her knee out to the right so she can grab her sandaled foot that was just stabbed by a strong canola stalk. The plants have all been mashed down by a recent tornado, making it easier to see the spoils from the old house that was ravished by the cyclone. A poor woman’s entire household was flung all across the ravaged field where Faye now stands. A whole life was just picked up and shaken like a saltshaker – a little bit of clothing here, a little bit of silverware there, and bible pages. So many bible pages.

“Found some maxi pads!” Victor yells from a distance across the field.

“Well, that’s a find,” Faye yells back laughing, not looking in his direction.

“They’re all swollen like grubs.”

“It’s really gross.” Shane, Victor’s son shouts.

This coming from a kid that hasn’t showered in three weeks, Faye thinks. “Well, then don’t touch them.” Her voice sounds so much like her mother’s at this moment that Faye winces.

“I think we should take them. Dry them out and you can use them.” Victor says with a tiny lilt in his voice that Faye knows without looking that he’s smiling.

“Ew, Faye.” Shane says with a giggle. “You should. That way we don’t have to buy you anymore. We’ll call them Tornado pads!”

Faye looks up from her bleeding foot to see Shane, who is walking just ahead of her, and asks, “When have you bought me maxi pads?”

Shane shrugs, “I mean my dad. He won’t have to buy them for you anymore.”

Faye drops her foot and watches Shane walk ahead of her towards Victor who is much further in the field of spoils. She starts to replay the last few lines of this conversation with Shane, knowing she will continue to come back to this in her head for the next few days, maybe even years, depending on how long her and Victor last.

The harsh crunch of the dry reeds beneath her feet bothers Faye. She has a thing about textures and sounds. Always has. She can almost feel the texture of each crispy crunch against her teeth, and if Faye thinks too long about it, she can almost feel bile rise in her throat. She wished she had put on her Vans instead of these god-awful flimsy sandals. She never wears sandals, except when she is at Victor's Dad's house. But she didn't think that they'd be tramping through the toughest type of field to find "treasure" today.

The tornado was two days ago, and according to Victor's father, when it came, it came down quick. So fast, that no one even heard it coming. Victor's Dad recalled looking out the window, and plop, a tornado. He saw it pick up the old woman's house across the road from his house and just spin it around. He saw shingles and gutters swirling in the distance. While he told them the story this morning, Faye thought it was so stupid that he just stood there and watched from his window while this unruly thing spun towards him. But out of sheer luck, the tornado shifted and went toward his neighbor's house, tearing down all their pine trees and then on to the river until, in his words, *poof* it vanished like nothing happened. But something did happen, just not to him.

One house. Just one was taken away in the frenzy. An old black lady's small home that she probably had lived in for 40+ years. Faye knows she is black, because Victor and Shane came across some old albums of dark faced men and woman at a dance in what looked like the

60's. The people in the photos were so stylish with long wool dresses, fur wraps and hats with netting. Faye imagined them going out to the local dance hall to party all night, without a care in the world. Kind of sad to think of this now. This woman had no idea what was coming. Victor also found some paperwork with the last name Lamont on it, which is a pretty common black name throughout Lewisville. Victor tossed the albums and papers aside with a shrug while Faye watched with a pit in her stomach.

"I'm gonna find some jewelry. We gotta find some treasure in all this mess." Shane yells as he leaps dramatically over the stalks.

Faye smiles slightly to herself. Must be great being a kid and thinking there is treasure everywhere. Even after some poor woman's house imploded, spreading Walmart bags and Goodwill clothing across the county, he thinks there will be golds and gems. What little riches there are in this field just isn't worth what Shane thinks it is.

Faye and Victor had only been dating for six months, before he moved into her one-bedroom apartment in the city. Then the next month, here comes Shane for two-weeks. Faye told herself everything was going to be okay, but she wasn't emotionally ready for this visit. She wasn't prepared to feel so isolated. She didn't have kids of her own, always wanted one or maybe two someday, and now she feels left out of some exclusive club, all in her own apartment.

At first, Faye was up for the challenge of having a kid around, that it might be fun to liven things up. And at first, the three of them went to the pool, played games, and watched movies. Shane took to her, and she took to him. The apartment though, was just so small. She picked up plastic blocks, drawing papers, and dishes when she got off work. She tried to ignore

the drink rings on her coffee table and the green smoothie stain on her rug. She overlooked the slightly mean things the seven-year-old would say to her, hoping he was just trying to get used to seeing his dad with a girlfriend.

But then Victor changed and so did their relationship. He slept on an air mattress with Shane in the living room to make sure his kid felt safe and supported while she slept in their queen bed alone. He stopped holding her hand in car or putting his arm around her shoulder on the couch. He made sure Shane was fed, but never asked Faye what she wanted to eat. So, when Victor wanted to go visit his father in Lewisville, Faye jumped at the chance to get out and see if a change of scenery would do some good. But, instead of connecting, they are looking for treasure from a poor woman's biggest misfortune.

"I wonder if she was a caterer?" Victor yells out. Faye looks up from the ground and sees Victor still ahead of her holding a bent silver serving spoon and a flimsy serving platter. Both glisten in the sun, making it hard to stare too long.

"Dunno." Faye says absently, as she comes across a ratty brown robe that had probably seen better days even before being sucked out of the cheap clap board house it once hung in. She looks toward Victor who is now bending down and examining a dented Sterno that is totally unusable.

"I bet I can do something with this stuff." He says, nodding his head.

Victor is always looking for scraps of metal and wood to make "something" out of. Faye's apartment has bits and pieces all over the place. To his credit, he does create things out of nothing all the time. He makes small pieces of furniture from things he finds and sells them

for a quite a lot all across the country. His messiness does pay off, so Faye doesn't complain too much.

"Is that silver worth anything, Dad?" Shane yells while running toward Victor's finds.

"Nah. This isn't silver. Just aluminum." Victor throws the serving tools off into the field.

Shane stops running and his face drops like he was just told he can't get a puppy. He is so money-driven for his age. When Faye was six, she just wanted My Little Ponies, not the cash it took to get them.

"Don't worry, we'll find something good." Victor looks at Faye as he says this and winks. There is a joke somewhere here, but Faye just isn't quite sure what it is. Maybe it's her? She's the joke? She has often wondered if Victor was using her for her apartment. To show his ex, Shane's mother, that there is a clean place for the boy so that she'd let him stay for a long period of time. That would explain why he moved in so fast.

"There better be something good. I'm tired of being let down." Shane says, frowning at his father.

Faye turns to Victor, who is looking at Shane, and like a lover's triangle they awkwardly just stand there staring. The look on Victor's face is heartbreaking. He looks like he was punched in the face and just can't believe how fast it happened. Victor has talked quite a lot of the guilt he feels over leaving Shane, and he agonizes over how to make it up to him. Faye's face though is of another heartbreak, and almost just as bad, it's of one she cannot mend.

Once upon a time, Faye was married. To a man who was not her type. He wore khakis, while she wore jeans. He loved Coldplay, while she loved Marilyn Manson. He played golf, while

she rather die than even hear that tiny golf clap. It was fated not to work, but Faye so desperately wanted to play the role of wife and mother that she hung her hat to the first non-deadbeat she could find. But she was miserable. She was not herself, nor did she care to be herself. She was determined to make the marriage work.

She even gave up sex for two years, because neither of them was attracted to the other anymore. And instead of ending it right then and there, their stubbornness fought the battle, and time marched on. And then they lost. Faye lost more than he did, but at least the farce was over.

Faye fears, she is holding on to something that isn't quite there again with Victor. Now that he is so distant from Faye while his son is around, Faye is worried that she is going to lose again. Lose what little hope she had for a family.

Faye snaps out of her trance to find that the strange moment between the three of them has passed, and the boys have moved further down the broken field. She takes a step forward and feels something hard and lumpy under her sandal. She lifts her foot and bends down to have a closer look. It's white and porcelain, so wiggles it from the dirt and it comes away easily, like it was just lightly thrown down. Standing, she brushes away more dirt and reveals a tiny white figurine with a chubby face wearing a little blue winter cap. Even though the cherub face has some scratches and is permanently smeared brown from the dirt, there are still traces of the red blush on its cheeks. Snow Baby. It comes to Faye just like a whisper.

Faye's Aunt Cam used to collect these little things. She displayed them throughout her house all year long. No explanation, other than she just liked them. Faye always found them

cheesy. Especially when it was summer and these little winter figurines beamed at her from every window, shelf, and table. But they were special to Aunt Cam.

“Why do you have to kiss every one of them, Aunt Cam?”

Aunt Cam puts down a Snow Baby holding a red runner sled. “I want to have the best day ever. So, I kiss each one, sometimes twice.” Aunt Cam smiles broadly at young Faye and without looking, picks up the next Snow Baby.

“How does kissing them give you the best day ever?” Faye asks.

Aunt Cam slowly kisses the cheek of the new Snow Baby, expertly wrapped in a rough looking snow suit. “Because kissing babies always puts you in a great mood. And if you’re in a good mood, your day will be great. C’mon give it a try.”

Faye wrinkles her nose. “No thank you. That’s so weird.”

Aunt Cam shrugs and picks up another figurine, this one holding a small puppy, just as cherub-like as the baby. “You know Faye, sometimes you have to do something weird to feel the magic.”

This time Faye shrugs and picks up her headphones that, at the time, had become one of her major accessories, even when not at her aunt’s house. She ignored the rest of Aunt Cam’s morning ritual, counting down the hours until her dad picked her up.

Faye spent many summers at her Aunt Cam’s house, especially when her parent’s were splitting up. Aunt Cam didn’t have any kids herself, a few marriages, but nothing ever stuck, so when Faye’s Dad needed a sitter, Cam always jumped at the chance of have Faye over for sleepovers. She lived in a large log cabin on the side of a mountain. An actual mountain. Faye

remembers walking out on the front porch and looking down to see all the trees the Blue Ridge had to offer. It was scary but thrilling at the same time, making these visits mystical.

Aunt Cam was always her favorite when she was a kid, even with the Snow Babies, but as an angsty teen, Faye found Aunt Cam sad. She was alone in the mountains, kissing her figurines for luck and Faye promised she'd never end up like her. She even thought this many a night in her passionless marital bed. *I will not end up like Aunt Cam. I will not end up alone. I cannot!*

"What you got?" Shane says as he grabs for the white figurine out of her hand. He always seems to pop up out of nowhere.

Faye holds the Snow Angel tighter, shuts her eyes and twists her body a little so Shane can't reach to take the baby out of her hand. She moves slow, hoping Victor isn't looking and clasps the figurine to her chest. She opens her eyes and Shane is looking at her like she stumped him with a trivia question. She smiles slightly and relaxes her death grip.

"It's a Snow Baby," Faye says quietly. She kneels to show Shane and he follows to crouch down beside her. "My Aunt Cam used to collect these same dolls." She opens her fingers and watches Shane's reaction. He genuinely looks interested. Faye is happy to finally be able to tell a story about her family to someone, to pass some knowledge, or even spread some magic. "They all have these rosy cheeks, see there." She points with her free hand and Shane nods his head up and down lightly. "They say if you kiss them on the cheek every day, right there, you will have the best day ever. And if you do it the next day, that will be even better, and ..."

"Look at this fucking thing!" Victor's loud voice interrupts.

Shane and Faye look up at Victor hoisting a large grate over his head like a trophy and pumping it up and down.

“We got ourselves a grill for tonight. Let’s go fishing. See I told ya’ll we’d find treasure!”

“Yes!” Shane yells as he jumps to his feet. “I’m gonna catch the biggest!” Shane runs toward Victor.

Faye stays crouched on her heels and watches Shane run to his father to inspect the new grill. He runs with his head back, like it’s too weighty and it just can’t keep up with the rest of his growing body. His blonde hair bounces with each leap and it reminds Faye of one of those mop dogs she saw once on the Westminster Dog Show.

She looks back down at her found Snow Baby, smells a faint wisp of pine and dust and remembers the last time she was at her aunt’s cabin to clean it out after she died. Faye was the one who put every single one of these Snow Babies in a box without wrapping them and then carted them off to the Goodwill.

Faye stands, clutching the Snow Baby and looks over the field of shorn Canola. She sees the track the tornado took, and exactly when it veered off in a zigzag toward the river. She scans the broken branches and plants, the places where the greenery is mashed down from something that was once in a woman’s house. She looks across the road, where that woman’s house should be and imagines it like her aunt’s – packed with stuff, dusty, cramped, dirty, but nevertheless, home. A treasure that can be lost at any moment.
