

Amanjot Minhas

Abbotsford, BC

Hide and Seek

It had been a long time since I had last looked at her photograph. The tiny parchment had fallen from my briefcase as I was trying to fasten it shut. I didn't know what to think, as a matter of fact I didn't think. I just stared and kept staring. Where did I take this photo? She looked exactly the way I had remembered her, beautiful and smiling, always smiling. Damn it, why couldn't I remember? She was sitting on a park bench covered in snow, her hands in her lap, her head at a little tilt to the side. December 29th, 1986, that's when I took it. I remember now. I had used the camera my grandparents got me for Christmas. She said she loved taking pictures and of course I took it for her. I had known her for 2 days.

1986, this was going to be the big year for me. I would be graduating and moving away for college, but for now I was stuck at this stupid movie theatre. Exactly 5 hours and 57 minutes until I could finally go home. I really wish it was the holidays again. This was my first day back since. 5 hours and 54 minutes to go. "*Sharpe!*" That would be my supervisor John yelling at me. "*Stop slacking off and take the garbage out will you! We got 21 minutes until the next showing starts so get moving, I'd do it but its freezing out there.* What was wrong with his voice, it sounded like there was a frog stuck in his throat but it came out all weird and screechy. *What are you looking at? GO!*" I was walking down the corridor carrying an overflowing trash bag, I reeked of popcorn, and all I heard was loud music and sound effects bursting my ear drums, I was in hell. 5 hours and 33 minutes left.

The cold air was bitter and pinched at my skin. I threw the bag as hard as I could and it landed perfectly in the dumpster. "*Ouch, what the-*"

A girl rose from the filth, she looked around my age. What a shame, she was too young to be living on the streets. "*Umm... I was just looking for my ring, it fell in here.*" She spoke so softly I could barely hear her. She had like a radio voice or something. It

was quite obvious what she was doing though. I mean I'm not stupid but I felt really bad. *"Look, if you need something to eat, I'm sure we have something to spare inside. My name is Michael Sharpe, nice to meet you."* It looked like she was going to protest, but then her hand came to her stomach. She was hungry. She nodded her head and followed me inside.

Lucky for me, John had probably sneaked into the 8:15 showing to the new Tom Cruise movie. Turned out the girl Sharon went to the same high school as me. It's a small world we live in, she was a year younger than me but I had never seen her at school or anywhere before today. We talked and laughed the entire time. She ate some popcorn and a box of chocolates while I served the customers. She was quite cute actually; she had a really pretty laugh. She played softball, liked coca cola; she even went up to Disneyland once. I wanted to know why she was looking for food in the dumpster though. She wasn't homeless because she went to my school. Did she get kicked out or something or maybe something bad happened to her parents. *"I know what you're thinking, why I'm not at home, right?"* I felt like a complete idiot, she saw right through me. *"I'm sorry I don't mean to pry, I mean you don't need to tell me anything."* *"No, you've been so kind to me, so why not."* After a long pause she finally spoke. *"My dad, he would drink and then he would hit me, a lot. I could take the pain but no one would believe me, not even my mom. My mom wouldn't believe her own child. I just couldn't take it anymore so I ran, I ran as far away as I could."* Her voice was beginning to break. I had no idea how that felt. I did the only thing I could do; I got up, went over to her, knelt down and hugged her. She just broke down crying. *"Hey Mikey pass me more popcorn-"* Okay to a third party this would so be taken out of context. 56 seconds remaining. Surprising enough, John just sneered and told me and my "girlfriend" to get lost now that my shift was over. Sharon and I talked the entire way back as well and by back I meant to a tent in the forest behind my house which happened to be Sharon's shelter. I felt bad about leaving her there but I would be back first thing in the morning with supplies. It would be too risky right now knowing my parents.

Of course I was there 5:30 in the morning with breakfast fit for a king and a duffle bag full of goodies. While she wolfed down the food, I showed her the things I brought. There were some blankets, a flashlight, some more snacks, a pack of cards, and my camera. I don't know why I brought it; I just thought I should pick it up so I did. *"You gonna take a picture of me with that thing? I love taking pictures! I'm going to be a model one day, oh but not here."* I followed her to the park and we took pictures of birds, trees,

but my favourites were the ones of her. "*Michael, you're my best friend you know? Please don't ever leave me,*" she said sleepily. She kissed me on the cheek goodnight and I left for home. She was special, I knew it. I went to bed that night smiling and knowing I had a real friend waiting for me in the morning.

I woke up again with breakfast and headed to the tent. She wasn't there today, actually nothing was there. It looked like someone had cleaned up everything. I hadn't even realized it was Monday today so I had to head to school. I decided to casually ask the teachers about her. One told me she had run away from home but a man had told the police she was seen living in a tent in the forest so she was back home safely now. "What man?" I enquired. Apparently some manager at the local movie theatre had received a hefty award for informing the police about a runaway girl. After school I found out her address from one of my friends and headed to her house to see how she was. I arrived on my bike to see a swarm of people huddled and sirens wailing. Everything was blurry, why was it blurry? From the crowd I saw two men carrying a stretcher with a white blanket over it and another two men, police officers, that were escorting a man into a police vehicle. A delicate, pale hand fell from under the stretcher. I felt warm tears fall down my face as my knees hit pavement. They said she died of internal bleeding. He beat Sharon so hard she died. How can a father murder his own child!

Ever since then I have become a lawyer and an advocate to help end child abuse, children like Sharon. They say I'm quite successful but, honestly that's not what I'm looking to be. If I could help a young child go to sleep without fear, then I could go to sleep without fear. If I could help a child smile, then I can see her smile too. I slipped the picture away in a pocket and fastened my briefcase. I walked out of the court house to be greeted by my 14 year old son and my wife. Who knows when I'll see that picture again, but for now these two will be my strength. Hide and seek, that's what this is.