

# Misery of Me

*By Anne Michaud*

Late summer rain stopped as suddenly as it started, dirty streets stained a sort of tar color and shiny. A lamp above the derelict public library buzzed like a broken neon sign, bright and dim, bright and dim.

Four floors high, the first two stories of the squat were littered with those who couldn't climb the endless stairs, too stoned or too tired, whichever. When someone opened the door downstairs, even after the police raids of the prior week, or when a draft made pieces of litter fly around in little tornadoes, no one noticed.

Three girls and a guy rushed to the fourth floor, excited whispers. Finally home, or something close enough. The silent girl just stared, expectant and smiling. She wasn't like the others. Less dirty, more in control of her need. She had the look though: black clothes, knee-high boots, punk and Goth mixed with something like trash. Matted hair, too much makeup. Tight clothes, good cleavage.

They chose the darkest corner, relishing how the flame from their lighter tickled the spoon, low fire flickering blue atop. Only one needle to go around, but who cared as long as they could stick it in soon. Like now, breathing faster, skin febrile, bodies aching. *Now*.

"Want to go first?" asked the little Emo girl, scared. Only the quiet girl noticed, because she noticed everything. As if considering an important choice.

"I can wait." After each comedown, her voice sounded frail. Thankfully for her, that didn't happen often. Probably why she didn't speak much. She hated how it felt, being in need.

The guy laughed, already high on something else, eyes wild and dilated. "Wait? Who'd want to wait? Give it to me." The syringe glistened, ready. Well used but not so bad, with thin layers of dried blood coating the base of the needle. The quiet girl didn't like him, no one did, but being the dealer, he always found a way to have more and share. Share trips, share needles. He was necessary.

Breathtakingly beautiful, the way a little amount of blood passed through the tip of steel and mixed with the heroin to turn the palest shade of pink. And the ecstasy, the rush, how it made you forget everything and just *be* for a short while.

The guy slumped on the floor, a goner. The youngest girl, a runaway with good manners, pulled an army blanket over his limp body. Not this guy. Not now. The quiet girl stayed strict with her criteria; she didn't take just anyone, unless she had no choice.

The Emo girl took the shot next, not her first but still lacking the experience of the runaway with tracked forearms. Not only in the preparation, but how someone accepted such a gift and welcomed it separated novice from veteran. Like dying but staying alive, every time.

"You know how this works?" asked the runaway girl before she joined her friends in their surreal world. "I mean, you're not a horse virgin, right?" So nice for an addict.

"I just want to watch." It came out low and feral. A warning that went unnoticed.

When the runaway pressed the needle to her arm, pierced through thick skin and even thicker vein, the quiet girl smiled and her already pointy canines lengthened. Thirsty for blood, dying for H. A rare pleasure, she enjoyed the foreplay with her meal. Her companions out of it anyway, no one else would notice till morning. By then she'd be gone.

She sniffed the runaway, chose a clean spot and bit into a soft part of the neck, skin so easy to tear through. She drank quickly, eyes closed in delight, the experience so intense she grasped the body tightly as it responded to imminent death. Too late. Much too late.

The taste sent her flying, her body reacting to the heroin -- up and up and up, never coming down, never having to do anything save breathe in and out, to keep that piece of heaven alive within.

And it lasted, though not as long as in humans. They missed out on so much, so much of everything. And they could die from it. She couldn't. She wouldn't ever, unless she neglected to hide once the sun came out. But so very old, she knew her way around. If a squat's windows pointed east, she'd find a basement. And once there would push her body into the earth, breathing its soil.

Then the quiet girl was gone too, a smile plastered on thick lips smeared with the runaway's fresh blood. Her hands still dug like claws at the dead body, its eyes closed for eternity, whatever that meant. From afar they looked not like murderer and victim but rather like two lovers caught in embrace.

Her senses arose too soon, survival instinct never wrong. Sharp