

Rusted Halo

A Short Story by Jade Alyse

MEMORIES FADE PERFUNCTORILY.

They only become a specter of what our lives used to be, as we traverse toward a definite end, never keeping a steady course, always flowing, always moving.

But there are some memories that choose to linger if only to torment and haunt us, poking and prodding at our souls, the way a child does amidst an endless game of nuisance and fascination.

I was a young boy once, undoubtedly foolish and coy, and as I move a little closer to my own *definite end* the memories of my life and how I lived it are beginning to fade to dust, as the color in my complexion begins to grey and my voice sounds a little weathered.

Exhaustion now attacks my limbs and frosty drafts from a cracked window often hinder my movement; but my soul is alive. It thirsts and bleeds and pulsates, struggling with my poor bodily plight, desperately igniting my mind with my memories in tow.

Like I said, I was a foolish young boy when I felt my soul thump for the first time.

And Wolf Mountain nearest to my home in Dahlonega, Georgia was breathtaking, unadulterated. The breeze that brushed off its summit had always tasted warm and sweet, and the trees at its pedestal always provided the best shade from the copious, aggressive sun.

And on one particular day in June, unlike any other, I lay comfortably at the plinth of an oak tree. You see, I was specifically told to stay put under that tree until she came running to me. Everything had been carefully planned out...and I was fantastically in love.

Every inch of my body stood on its end; and I swore I could smell her perfume in the air, hear her voice echo through my ears.

You see, this meeting was all in secret because it wasn't right. We both knew that if anyone found out about us I'd never see her again. So, I did as I was told and I remained perfectly still, waiting for her...

But the sound of a loud snap stole my peace and I shot up with fright...and I took off running in the direction of the sound like the foolish boy I was.

I knew that something wasn't right, but I kept on running...and then the sound split through the sky again and I ran harder...and the tips of the wild grass nipped at my bare legs scratching me, irritating me as if they wanted me to stop and turn around...

But I kept on, as I left my breath behind, as sweat cooled my brow, as I sank my sharp canines into the pulp of my bottom lip.

I stalled at a clearing beneath a few evergreen trees.

Silence stained my mouth as I stared before me.

It was Isobel Grey.

Now, she had always been a sweet girl and she had always been the one who did what her mama and daddy told her to do. She had always been a good girl; but now her snow-white dress was marbled with an angry scarlet, staining her pretty skin with the golden flecks that glimmered in the sunlight.

There was something strange about her face that never sat quite right with me, and like a foolish boy I stood perfectly still.

It was then that I realized she was holding something in her hand, and a flash of remorse crossed her face.

"Sully," she panted, loosening her grip. She raised herself up. The thing in her hand was shiny and black and it didn't take much time for me to grasp what it was.

"Sully, I need you to help me," she breathed. "Sully, come here...come help me..."

Now, what I neglected to tell you before this point was that Isobel Grey surpassed me in age by nearly ten years. So while she'd come to full bloom at the gentle age of twenty-

five, I was still catching up. But Isobel Grey had looked after me in my infancy and I had always wanted to help her, please her.

But something made me backtrack slowly. And she inched closer to me.

“Sully,” she breathed. She had always been so pure, like an angel. Her voice had always reminded him of the smoothest, sweetest ice cream, or the type of homemade caramel candy that needs no manipulation or chemical to change it; it just melted in your mouth.

“Did you hear me, Sully? I need you...come help me...I need you...”

I backed away some more. I no longer trusted the look in that girl’s eyes. They permeated my dwindling fortitude. After all, I was foolish and young, wasn’t I?

The alarming sound of my own thrusting heartbeat distracted me, and I almost lost my footing on a raised root in the ground. I swallowed thickly, reformed my stance, but that Isobel Grey had the shiny black thing pointed directly at me.

“Come, Sully...come to me...help me...I...I don’t want you to end up like them...be a good boy, Sully...don’t you love me?”

I wanted to scream "No". I wanted to take off running. I knew that I should have continued to wait by that tree. But even in her devilish haze, Isobel Grey still kept my senses in her grasp.

“I’ll tell them, Sully,” she began, smiling. “I’ll tell everyone what you saw last night...I’ll tell them what you know...you don’t want that, do you? You’re a smart boy...you’re a good boy...come to me...”