

(by Heather Skinner)

When you're fifteen, nothing in the world seems to really matter - just you and the motions. It's when you have a kid with the love of your life that the world that revolved around you expands and the world revolves around them too. With a description like that, you'd half expect us to be like those damn Disney birds that flit about happily and sing some sort of crappy show tune you can't get out of your head. The thing about real birds is that they tend to die. Sometimes they die by smashing right into a car windshield and you don't understand why the damn thing wasn't smart enough to avoid the windshield in the first place or why the car was driving so fast. You just want to hold that bird, hoping that some kind of spell will return it to normal. But before you know it, you're taking care of a chick by yourself and trying to figure out what the hell you're going to do for your next meal.

I fucking hate those kinds of stories.

## **EXTRA CHAPTER**

### **Lullabies: Jules Remix**

A couple of days in the dive you lived in before you met that little bird all those years ago can drive a man to drink. Hell, just about anything can drive any man to drink if he's desperate enough.

It's been two years since I dropped Baby at Janine's and while things for her have changed, I don't think I have - not completely, anyway. Jobless, homeless, and more importantly, drugless, is probably the better description of the piss poor life I've been living. Each and every day I wander the streets of Montreal with my head watching the pavement pass under my feet, kind of like I am right now, because it's all I can do to keep from using 'chocolate milk' or going crazy with all these damn thoughts in my head. I mean what else can I do? I never really go anywhere or know where my feet are leading me, they just keep moving. Knowing that the kid is counting on me to be better than what I was, I keep trying to fix the situation, but who the hell would hire or rent an apartment to a damn former drug-addict who's going at it cold turkey?

Nothing in this world makes sense because despite the time that's passed, through dreams and illusions I can still see Manon smiling face and her head smashing against the dashboard. Baby's gentle cooing and her cries as her mother hangs over her lifeless. But the thing I keep remembering is the twisting of metal and the fucking drunkard who smashed into us asking if everyone was all right. I mean, come on, did we look okay?! How could we be when everything is turned upside down in a second? The car was smashed to hell and back, and the woman I loved was dead! At least the kid was all right, that's one plus out of the whole fucking mess.

If I can't get a job or a home, all I can do is at least stop using chocolate milk and be some sort of example for my daughter. Ha. Who am I trying to kid? Heroin is still heroin no matter what word I use to lessen what I was doing. I did heroin to forget all the pain I was going through, to get the high that a life with a kid couldn't give me.

I mean, in the end what the hell was I suppose to do? When you're fifteen, you're still a kid yourself and when you have your own kid to deal with, you're bound to make a few mistakes! It's not like either of us came with a manual on how to act, how we should be raised or what we needed to do be good people or anything! Knowing my goddamn luck that manual existed, but I could never find it. I probably threw it out somewhere along the way.

It's when you find out that your daughter, who you hoped you taught better, had her own key to a hotel room and that she would see her with a goddamn fucking pimp, tends to make you want to turn to the stuff again because you're so mad. Tends to make you want to stick your head in an oven too because you know that you're the one that probably drove the kid into his arms. Baby never told me anything that happened in the months we were separated. She didn't have to. It showed in her eyes when I saw her for that first time in months at the shelter. The glossy look in them, I knew something was wrong. You only get that desperate look when you're craving the damn stuff. When I saw Boney Bones - rather, Aileen - days after dropping Baby off at Janine's, she only confirmed everything I saw in Baby's eyes.

That's the thing about secrets, they're meant to leak out or life would be boring.

But, at least now I know why I gave Baby up to Janine - I can't be a father, not right now. How can I be a man when all I ever was, all I'll ever be, is a fifteen-year-old snot who left everything behind because he was too stubborn to admit that needed help. I must be more messed up than I thought.

I keep saying it, but who the hell am I kidding? I had my chances to ask for help, to turn my whole life around in fact. I had my chances to make things right and I blew them out the fucking window. I couldn't prevent my drug habit or how we lived, let alone my daughter's own drug habit or what she was going to do to make an extra buck.

Some fucking man I turned out to be.

I keep wandering the streets day and night with my head watching the sidewalk pass by, never know where I'm going or where I'll end up. All I know I know is that people stare at me because they've seen me walking that same path before. I don't have to look at them to know that they're staring because since I quit the damn heroin, it's like I've gained some sort of extra sense that let's me read people better without looking at them than when I was on heroin and falling flat on my face in the kitchen. I know I've done wrong and I can't blame anything or anyone but me. I've made my bed so I'll lay down in it. I'll keep on living, and try to be the man I was meant to be.

It's funny - this time, I'm actually able to look up from the pavement. I see buildings that look alike down each side of the road and I can't help but know it's the better part of Montreal. Who knew it existed? Watching the people with their smiles walk by, I can't help but wonder if I could

give Baby that kind of life, if she returns to me. I hear the far-off laughter of a small child as she releases a yellow balloon into the sky. It's strange because I don't know what lead me to this place.

I hear a familiar voice that sounds like bells calling out to me, and I know that I can change things, but only if that stupid little snot kid inside of me wants the stupid old man inside of me to change.