

SILENT SKIES

"One journey. One moment. A lifetime of understanding."

by
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1

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL SIDEWALK - DAY

1

It's a bright, quiet day. Sunlight filters through the trees, casting dappled patterns on the ground. The scene feels untouched and serene. High school students walk across the sidewalk, headed home.

In the distance, AMBER (18, any race, Female), drawn towards the trees, steps into the shade deviating from the others, cradling a 35mm analog camera.

2

EXT. PARK - RIVER - DAY

2

Amber meanders into the park, crouching to photograph leaves, tree bark, and sunlight-drenched landscapes. Her movements are deliberate, her focus unwavering.

The sound of rushing water draws her deeper. She emerges at a riverbank, where the open blue sky stretches above.

Amber's eyes brighten! She snaps a few photos, capturing the river's gentle currents and the way the sunlight dances on the surface.

Breathing deeply, she settles by the water's edge and reaches into her backpack, pulling out an urn. She pauses, holding it close, her fingers trembling slightly.

She opens the urn and gently scatters the ashes. The dust catches the sunlight, sparkling as it drifts across the water like stars.

Amber lowers the urn and picks up her camera, framing one last shot: the reflection of the ashes blending with the river.

She places the camera down, sitting still. Her gaze follows the ashes as they disappear into the distance.

3

INT. HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

3

RIP! A cardboard box is torn open, spilling blue and pink baby shower supplies - plates, cups, balloons, and more.

Amber's MOM (50s, any race, female), sweating and tense, rummages through the orbit of supplies around her. She attempts to keep her scattered thoughts in order.

4 **EXT/INT. HOME - FRONT YARD/LIVING ROOM - DAY**

4

Amber stands outside her front door and hesitates. She listens to the clamor inside - Mom's hurried footsteps, the rustling of packaging, and the occasional muttered frustration.

She takes a breath, quietly unlocks the door, and slips in tentatively.

5 **INT. HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY**

5

The living room is a chaos of decorations and boxes. It's a makeshift baby shower prep station. Mom moves frantically, adjusting items with laser focus, visibly stressed.

Amber sets her backpack by the table and carefully winds up the camera's film roll, avoiding eye contact. Mom notices, turns towards her, and frowns.

MOM

Where have you been? We're running out of time, and you're off taking pictures again.

Amber looks down, quietly cradling her camera almost protectively. She pops open her film camera and removes a film roll. She can't bring herself to meet her Mom's demanding gaze.

MOM (CONT'D)

(stern)

I asked you to pitch in and help make this a special day for your Aunt. Can't you see how much this means to everyone?

She pauses, her voice softening, almost cracking.

MOM (CONT'D)

Family is what we have, Amber. It's the most important thing.

Amber bites her lip, roll of film in hand. She places it in her backpack and sets her camera down.

Mom looks at Amber in disbelief and sighs, her shoulders sagging. A hint of empathy softens her gaze. She gestures toward the boxes around them.

CHA-CHING.

As he sorts through the money, Amber's attention drifts around the store, taking note of all the model cameras on the shelves.

JAKE (CONT'D)

I really want to see more of what you get out there. The local magazines would love it if you shared!

Amber smiles, grateful.

AMBER

Thanks, one day I will.

JAKE

Definitely. It'd be worthwhile.

She notices a stack of newspapers on the counter, one tucked away hiding a large colorful picture. Curious, she pulls out an extra 2 quarters onto the counter.

The sound of an alarm clock blares and echoes in the corner of the store.

JAKE (CONT'D)

Oop! I gotta get back to the lab, see you around.

Jake closes up the register and slips into the dark room. Amber's eyes land on the rack of newspapers again and she pulls one out. The headline catches her attention:

"RARE 100-YEAR EVENT! NORTHERN LIGHTS VISIBLE TONIGHT"

Her eyes go wide and begins to read with fascination while walking out the store.

9

INT. HOME - GARAGE FILM LAB - NIGHT

9

Total darkness. Footsteps shuffle, and there's a soft rustle of paper. The faint sound of liquid splashing.

A dim red safelight flicks on, revealing Amber's hands as she carefully lifts a sheet of photo paper from a chemical bath, shaking it dry.

She pins the enlarged color print of her river photo onto her corkboard, which is filled with collages, test strips, and other photos she's created.

The Northern Lights front page, now cropped and pinned up, is adjacent to her work on the board.

Amber scooches over to her enlarger and removes her 35mm negative strip, storing it on an archival sheet and clipping it into her binder. This corner of the garage is her tiny film lab - a private sanctuary.

The door suddenly swings open, and Mom pokes her head in, drowning the room with unwanted floods of light. Amber panics and jolts her arm, shielding the equipment and her eyes.

AMBER

(agitated)

You're supposed to knock. The light can ruin everything if I'm in the middle of it.

MOM

(dismissive)

Fine. But I need you to help! Set a good example for your Aunt and her husband, they'll need a babysitter so soon!

Amber sighs, reluctantly closing her binder of film negatives. She grabs the newspaper page about the Northern Lights and stuffs it into her pocket. She stands up.

AMBER

I told you, I don't want to deal with any more babies. It took all my free time. I'm about to graduate and I need to figure out my thing.

Mom steps closer, intense and unyielding.

MOM

You're just like your father, always off in a dream. It's time to wake up, Amber. Don't disappoint me tomorrow. Be a proper young woman.

Amber's face hardens, but she says nothing. Mom steps back, and Amber, tight-lipped, heads inside.

10

INT. HOME - AMBER'S BEDROOM - NIGHT "A DREAM"

10

Amber lies in bed in her pajamas, restless and struggling to sleep. She turns onto her side, facing her bedside table, where her 35mm camera rests. She reaches for it, holding it close; it's precious.

Her bike skids and flails, landing twisted and broken, deforming it beyond usability.

Her flashlight tumbles and rolls away, denting on impact. It flickers once before dying, leaving her in near-total darkness.

AMBER (CONT'D)
(wincing, whispering)
Oh fuck... oh my God that hurts.

Amber's eyes dart around in the dark, her breathing shallow and panicked. Blood trickles off her leg, and she tears a piece of fabric from her clothing, hastily wrapping it around her wound.

AMBER (CONT'D)
Come on...

She stands, shaky but determined, and opens her backpack.

She's horrified to find the camera's lens cracked and a roll of film crushed.

AMBER (CONT'D)
No!!!

She kneels down and hastily searches deeper, and sighs in relief upon seeing that most of the camera, another lens, and a few rolls are still intact.

With no other choice, she begins to return back the way she came, towing her bicycle at her side.

Her eyes are finally adjusting to the darkness, and she stops as a faint glow appears overhead.

Thin, otherworldly hazes of colors stretch across the sky, above the trees - hues of green, pink, and purple fluttering softly. Amber is frozen, torn between heading home and chasing the vision before her.

She takes a breath, sets down her damaged bike, and turns around, heading deeper into the forest, following the light.

13

EXT. FOREST - CLEARING - NIGHT

13

She emerges from the trees onto a hilltop, where the sky opens wide above her.

The Northern Lights shimmer, bold and breathtaking, casting a serene glow over the forest.

The colors and lights are brighter, mesmerizing her.

AMBER
It's beautiful...

She quickly sets up her tripod, loads her camera, and begins snapping photos, whispering to the sky.

AMBER (CONT'D)
Wish you were here, Dad.

Amber finishes her last exposure and packs up her equipment. She lies down on the grass, gazing at the auroras. The colors dance above her as she drifts off to sleep, surrounded by a quiet sense of belonging.

She is at her pinnacle of peace, she is in heaven.

14

EXT. FOREST - CLEARING - DAY

14

As the first light of dawn spills over the trees, Amber stirs awake. She blinks, groggy and disoriented, the cold ground beneath her reminding her of the night's journey. For a moment, she gazes at the fading Northern Lights, now just faint traces in the early morning sky.

Reality sets in – she quickly gathers her bag, checking with anxious hands to make sure everything is still there. She stands, wiping off dirt and grass, exhaustion and wildness etched on her face.

With a final, lingering look at the quiet forest, she begins the long walk home, her steps heavy but resolute.

15

INT. HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

15

Amber, disheveled and weary, sneaks in just as the baby shower is in full swing. FAMILY MEMBERS chat and laugh, unaware of her entrance – until Mom spots her, her face darkening immediately.

MOM
Amber! Where have you been? Look at yourself – you're a mess.

Amber freezes in place, the weight of the room's attention pressing down on her. Her torn pants reveal a bloodied makeshift bandage on her leg. A few GUESTS glance over, uneasy. They're shocked.

AMBER

I... I just needed some fresh air.
It's fine, Mom -

MOM

(raising voice)
Fine? You've been gone all night!
You're bleeding Amber! Do you have
any idea how this looks?

Amber's face flushes with anger and shame. She clutches her backpack strap tightly.

AMBER

It's not about how it looks... Mom,
can we not do this here?

Mom steps closer, her tone sharp and venomous.

MOM

Where else should we do this?
You've embarrassed me enough
already. I asked you for one thing
- just one - to be here for your
family. But no, you had to go off
in your own world. Again.

Amber's breathing quickens. She backs away, her voice trembling with restraint. The family is still frozen, watching.

AMBER

Maybe if you actually listened to
me...

Mom's expression hardens. She takes another step forward, and Amber instinctively retreats to the hallway.

MOM

Oh, I've listened. To every excuse.
I've listened to you run from
responsibility. Just like your
father!

Amber's eyes widen, the accusation cutting deep. Without another word, she turns and storms toward her room. Mom hesitates for a moment, and turns to face AUNT, shaking her head, disappointed. Nervous, Mom follows after Amber.

Amber slams the door behind her and collapses onto the bed, tears welling in her eyes.

Mom enters moments later, shutting the door behind her more gently. The air between them is thick with tension.

Amber grabs a first-aid kit from her nightstand and sits on the edge of the bed. She peels back the bloodied fabric on her leg, wincing as she exposes the gash. The sight of it makes Mom wince too.

MOM
(softening slightly)
You should've cleaned that hours ago.

AMBER
(flatly)
Didn't have time.

Amber pours antiseptic onto a cotton pad, biting her lip to suppress a cry of pain as she dabs it on the wound. Mom watches, torn between anger and concern.

MOM
Let me help.

Amber hesitates but reluctantly hands her the cotton pad. Mom kneels down, carefully tending to the wound. Silence stretches between them, heavy with unspoken words.

AMBER
You don't understand... why I needed to go.

Mom doesn't look up, focusing on wrapping a bandage around Amber's leg.

MOM
Then explain it to me, Amber.
Because all I see is you running away.

Amber's voice trembles, anger bubbling up.

AMBER
I wasn't running away. I was doing something for Dad. For me. But you wouldn't get that because you never... you never even try to understand what he meant to me.

Mom pauses, the words hitting her like a blow. She sits back on her heels, looking up at Amber with a mix of guilt and defensiveness.

MOM

Your father was a dreamer, and it cost him. I just don't want you to lose yourself the way he did.

Amber shakes her head, tears streaming now.

AMBER

He didn't lose himself. He believed in me. He... he would've loved what I saw last night. And all you care about is what people think about me not showing up here.

Mom's eyes glisten, her mask cracking. She looks down at her hands, still holding the bandage.

MOM

I... I do care, Amber. I care about you. More than anything. But it's hard to... to watch you drift so far away. I just... want you to have a better life.

Amber exhales shakily, the fight draining out of her. She places a hand over her mother's.

AMBER

I can't keep hiding who I am, Mom. I'm not you. And I... I need to find my way. Even if it's not what you want.

Mom finally meets her gaze. A tear slips down her cheek, and she nods, though the gesture is hesitant.

MOM

You're more like him than I ever realized. And that scares me.

Amber leans forward, resting her forehead against her mother's shoulder. They sit there in silence, the first tentative steps toward understanding.

17

INT. HOME - GARAGE FILM LAB - NIGHT

17

Amber develops her Northern Lights photos. She lifts the prints from the machinery and pins them, their vibrant colors glowing in the dim light.

The door creaks open, and Mom steps in hesitantly, carrying a chair. She sets it down beside Amber and sits.

Amber tenses but continues working, and Mom's gaze drifts to the photos on the corkboard. Her eyes widen slightly at the beauty of the Northern Lights.

MOM

These... they're beautiful.

Amber glances at her, unsure how to respond. Mom picks up one of the prints, holding it carefully.

MOM (CONT'D)

He would have loved these.

Amber's breath catches. She looks at her mother, seeing the vulnerability in her expression.

AMBER

I... I took them for him. For us.

Mom nods, tears welling. As she stares at the photo, the image transitions into the **ANIMATED SEQUENCE:**

First Memory: Young Mom by the river, sketching and dreaming, her face radiant with hope.

Second Memory: Dad guiding a young Amber's hands on a camera, their shared laughter filling the frame.

Third Memory: The darkness of loss – Dad's absence, Mom alone, and her dreams tucked away.

The sequence fades back to the garage. Mom sets the photo down and looks at Amber with newfound understanding.

MOM

He's in you, Amber. More than I...
more than I've let myself see.

Amber smiles faintly, the tension between them easing. For the first time, they feel connected.

18

EXT. PARK - RIVER - DAY

18

Amber and Mom stand side by side at the river, the sunlight filtering through the trees. Amber hands her camera to Mom, who hesitates before lifting it to her eye. A soft smile spreads across her face as she peers through the viewfinder.

The quiet sound of the river fills the space as they share the moment, their bond finally mended.

THE END