

# The Kicker

by Michael D. Brown

Her name was Audrey, but we called her The Kicker because she once rashly told us of her intention to kick, that is, to stop taking drugs of any kind. She was a musician, though she never played it out to any real success. We used to buy grass from her, grass only, though other things were available. Ludo said she looked a mess the first time he met her.

Her speaking voice was a frog's croak. On the price and quality of her stuff, she would rasp, "It's two hundred, man, aaand it's reeeally good," sounding as if she smoked five packs of cigarettes a day. She had plain features suggestive of a Native American, which in fact, she was, partly, and she rarely wore makeup of any kind. She easily might have been indistinguishable in a moving crowd except for her loping gait and a tendency to move her hands around whenever she was mentally working on a song.

When she sang there was a transformation. She had a range of about five octaves. She wrote her own material and it had the mark of sincerity. Her aquamarine voice and black eyes evoked their own sense of beauty. Consistency, however, was not her strong point, and that was why she did not enjoy a greater degree of fame. You could not count on her to show.

When she did, it seemed worth waiting for.

When we first met her, Ludo, Barry and I were visiting Tom. He said he still occasionally smoked a joint and the girl he bought it from was coming over while we were there. He had a smartly self-renovated apartment, for which he was paying nowhere near the going price, in the East Village. The four of us were discussing Broadway shows, over cocktails, while listening to hard to get, underground dance music. When Audrey arrived, her appearance was in stark contrast to the apartment's aura. She was all in black. Motorcycle jacket, dusty black jeans and boots she wore. Oversized sunglasses and cropped raven hair completed her image. The sunglasses were to cover the discoloration around her eyes as we

discovered when she removed them. She appeared not to have slept in a very long time.

"Guys, this is Audrey," Tom said, "She sings in some of the clubs around here. She's not bad."

"How're you all doin'?" she rasped, waving to the three of us. To Tom she said, "Not bad? You haven't heard me get started yet, man."

"I'm kidding. She really sounds great," he assured us. "Would you like something to drink?" he asked her.

"No, man, I can't stay too long. Irene is waiting for me, out in the car. She's double parked." Irene, she explained to us, was helping her to get over the loss of her girlfriend Nicole. Nicole had gotten too heavily into smack and she was really messed up. Audrey and Nicole had a fist fight one night, and Audrey told Nicole to leave. It was two months since she had last seen her, and was only now starting to date other girls. She said she was going to kick and really make it work this time with Irene or Judy, she wasn't sure yet which it would be, though it was unlikely to be Judy because of her name. "Can you believe anyone with a name like that?" she asked, laughing throatily.

Ludo said there was only one Judy, and blessed himself. Barry said, "Oh, I just love 'The Man That Got Away'."

"You gotta listen to my tape sometime, man," Audrey said, "The next time I come over, I'll bring it with me, and we'll hang out, smoke a big doobie or two. I know you're gonna like my stuff. There's one number where I started crying. I couldn't help it, man. It's a song I wrote for Nicole and it really came from the heart. Oh, well, they say you gotta suffer for your art."

"You sure you don't want a little cocktail?" Tom asked, "You're not driving?"

"No, man, really, I gotta be going. I'll drop by next week or so and bring my tape. See you guys. It was nice meeting you."

Tom walked her out to the elevator. When he returned, Barry asked him how she was going to smoke a doobie or two with us if she was intending to kick.

"She's always kicking," Tom said, "Every time she breaks up with someone, it's always because *they're* too much into drugs, and she always claims she can see the light and she's going off the stuff herself. I doubt she'll ever meet someone she can really hold onto."

