

A Kiss on a Cut

Audrey Rose needed to go up, to play in the clouds. Words had come to her in her sleep. Words that were familiar, letters and feelings that she had known that came from her past. Everything from her past was returning; memories, friends, lovers. Some of it beautiful, gentle like a kiss on a cut, some of it tethered to the darkest places of her mind, places that made her nerve endings shrivel and shrink back from her skin, from the place where touch might find her.

The words were not hers, but they were scripted in her mind, the flowing hand of John Fante: “What could I bring her but a return to the brutal wilderness that had broken her?... The hills had her now. Let these hills hide her! Let her go back to the loneliness of the intimate hills. Let her live with stones and sky, with the wind blowing her hair to the end. Let her go that way.”

The trail was a series of rocks, with a thousand foot drop to her right. Her body held close to the side of the mountain, felt for the veins and the pulse of this mound of stone and earth. Her hands found homes in cracks and crevices. Her blood pounded in her head, a tribal beat, a dance ran through her as her body stood upright, remembered the shelter she had in the sky. Wind whipped through her hair, weaving it into a story neither of them understood. A chill blew through her core. As her mind emptied, her head emerged above the clouds, slightly damp.

Her sparkly skirt twisted in the wind, caught the light of the sun, reflected it back out to the world. Her mind was reflecting, her body needed to absorb. Stripping off the skirt, Audrey Rose raised her arms and let the universe touch her, find every part of her body. The wind passed through her now, the sun entwined in her flesh and she allowed herself to remember.

The gusts became breezes that caressed her; the hands of those she had known, she felt again. She lay down, offered her body to the world, and in turn, it responded. The earth understood her, knew the secret places she liked to smile. The sun, open and expansive, covered her, warming her. With eyes half open her back arched as she quivered and released.

Spent, the clouds gathered thickly below her. Darkness flooded the land. To return home, she would have to descend through them. Arrows of light hit the earth, while Audrey Rose lay still absorbing the sounds of marmots and the one lone hawk circling above.

She dressed for the descent, the sequins on her skirt catching drops of rain, holding them before they ran down her legs, between her naked toes. While the rain clung to her neck, her breasts, trickling down, slow moving visions swayed inside her. Drops like knives stabbed at her, an ache formed and moved through her body, but through it all she felt alive. She felt every drop as it landed on her, turned her face up to the sky, tongue out, drinking the flood. She danced her merriest jig as her nerve endings uncurled, reached out

and grabbed the storm. Thunder erupted around her and Audrey Rose clapped her hands, adding to the orchestra.

By the time she had reached the bottom of the mountain, she was filled with elements, filled with places that belonged to every soul. Her own memories were lost in something larger, they became ashes in the wind, carried and scattered. Free. Her toes twinkled and danced all the way to Sunpies Bistro. She ordered up a drink of every color of the rainbow and swallowed them inside of her. Then she reached out for hands and arms. She hugged and danced and moved and felt. Pressing close to them, she felt the heartbeats of men and women in her own heartbeat. And then a hand reached out, thick and tan, veins roping through. The hand held hers, fingers laced through hers and everything stopped. Words returned, Fante written on the underside of her skin, letters of ink mixing with her blood, “the road to each of us is love.”

-Do not attempt to recreate the events of Audrey Rose’s life. They will result in internal and/or external death or at the very least a yeast infection.