

Broken

The bird struggled in the mud. Near by, the first glacier lilies were stretching their yellow petals to the sun.

Audrey Rose had on her sparkly skirt, sequins webbed over the pale peach material that reflected the sun like a disco ball. She always wore this skirt on the days her senses flushed with the smells of flowers and sex. She headed into the Sanctuary barefoot to feel the mud ooze up between her toes. In the open space where grasses grow and flowers rejoice, Audrey Rose danced. A splash of color attracted her. She lay next to the lilies looking up to see what they might see. The sun warmed her face. The sky, waves of universes crashing. *Scchhhhh*. She pressed her ear into the mud, felt the earth moving. She searched until she found the baby bird, wing stretched at an unnatural angle.

When Audrey Rose was a girl, she used to play in the woods behind her house. She would crawl behind a slug, rub magic slime on her body. She became intimate with the trees, knew their knots and twists. Once she got stuck, had climbed up too far. She called for her mother, her poor mother so afraid of heights. Without a word, her mother climbed the tree, let Audrey Rose scramble onto her back and brought her down. “Maybe next time you should make sure you can get down before you climb up, my wild little girl.”

Inside the house her mother changed. If the pillows weren't pushed right into the corners of the cases, or if she put a glass in the plate cupboard, her mother would yell "Why do you do everything the wrong way? Why can't you just do something right for a change?" "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry, mommy." These days were edged with black.

Building a fort, Audrey Rose put the wrong pillow on the wrong couch. Her mother pointed to the door. "Just go outside. I'll do it myself."

Outside, the gold crept in. Audrey Rose escaped into the world of dandelions, bees, hyacinths, clouds, weeping willows. Mournfully hanging. She liked the softness of the pussy willow, a rabbit on a stick. She went in search of fairies but ended up a long way from home. She followed a song to a bird fallen from its nest, wings broken. Audrey Rose cupped the bird in her hand, stroking the soft feathers. She crawled under the overhang on an enormous rock, the bird still in her hand. She stroked the little neck and the bird arched its head back. The cries became solemn.

The bird didn't have much time. Feathers flopped in her hands, a fight between worlds. Audrey Rose pulled out her Swiss Army Pen Knife, the one her father gave her for explorations. She lulled the bird's head back again and nicked the neck at the esophagus. She thought the blood would drain as it did with chickens and the bird could go to sleep. Instead, the bird squawked and twisted, pecked her hands, screamed at her. Audrey dropped the bird. Once on the ground, with renewed strength, the bird hopped and danced and pecked, blood forming on its downy breast. Audrey crawled out from the

rock and hopped and squawked to keep the bird company. Finally, head bowed to the ground as if in prayer, the body toppled sideways. Audrey was tired so she scooped up the bird and lay down under the rock.

Her parent's voices woke her up. The grass was sprinkled with dew, sky blushing at the thought of another day.

"Audrey? Audrey Rose?"

"Mommy? Daddy? Where are you?"

Her mother ran to her first, pulled her into her arms.

"I'm so sorry. Are you okay?" Her mother stood Audrey up and inspected her.

"I'm fine. I was tired so I took a nap."

"My wild girl. My wild little baby." Her mother stroked her hair.

"Were you scared?" Her father had come over and squatted down beside them.

"No, I had this bird with me." Audrey Rose held out her hand and showed them the bird.

"It's dead." Her mother shrieked.

"We'll bury her in the garden when we get back." Her father picked up Audrey. She wrapped her arms around his neck, her legs around his waist. She buried her head into the short hairs of his neck, where she could smell his cologne. Comfort.

Her mother insisted they name her, so Audrey called her Annabelle. They buried her with ceremony. A week later, Audrey dug her up. The feathers had fallen away. Delicate bones were visible. Audrey counted the bones in the wing, then she felt the

bones in her arms and knew she did not have enough. She put the dirt back over Annabelle, a white rose waving for her attention.

She called this bird Ferdinand. A brave soul. Silent struggles. Audrey Rose picked a glacier lily and brought the flower over so the bird would have something to remember into the next world. Not long after, Ferdinand stopped moving. She placed a kiss on the fine feathers, set her eyes where she thought the bird might be now. She left his body exposed, let the world revolve. A ladybug landed on her knee before flying off again. Audrey Rose smiled. Her day was edged with black and gold. Spring was here.

-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.