

## End of the Road



“Take me down to the river.”

They were in Sunpie’s. The words “I love you” hung between them. He said them. Audrey Rose had taken them inside of her.

“Why?”

“I want to dance with you,” she told him.

“There’s still snow.”

“We’ve danced in snow before.” Audrey Rose took his hand.

“I don’t want to lose you in it.”

The moon was full, dancing between the clouds.

“Take me to the river, please.”

Her fingers were cold. He tried to warm them as they walked outside.

“On the bank here. This is where I want to dance.” Audrey Rose spread out her arms and tilted her head up to the moon. The world was lit up around them, snow showing boundaries of their world, the edges they lived between.

“You look like you’re waiting,” he said.

“I am.”

“For what?”

“For the moon to shatter.”

“It might be a long time.” He erased the space between them, stood in front of her, outside of her, let his heat cloak her.

“Touch me under the moon while it’s still whole.”

He moved his arms around her, felt the smallness of her waist, smelt the flowers that lived in her hair. He tried to fill her with his mouth, his tongue, but he was not strong enough to bring her back.

“Let’s sit on that rock down there.” Audrey Rose had already left his embrace, steps taken without any trace left behind.

“It’s almost covered in water.”

“That’s okay.”

“What if you fall?”

“I’ve fallen before.”

“The water’s too cold, flowing too hard, Audrey Rose. It could kill you.”

“Nothing’s succeeded yet. The river takes my breath away, numbs me.”

“Let me do that.”

“You’re too late. You could never find the place this began.”

She waited for him, led him down to the water. He held her hand as she stepped out onto the rock, black shadows moving past.

He sat on the shore. There was only room for one person on the rock. Audrey Rose dipped her naked toes in, felt the ice slicing through her, reminding her.

“Do you know what fire smells like on your hair in the morning?”

“As raw as you.”

“As raw as me.”

They sat in silence for a while.

“If I let you inside me, will you fill me before I slip away?” Audrey Rose memorized the way he sat, how his body was always laid open to the world, unafraid.

“You’re already gone. It’s not the moon I’m worried about shattering anymore.”

“My broken pieces will never become whole again.”

“I can wrap them in gauze.”

“My pain will eat away your gauze.”

“I’ll wrap it in steel.”

“Nothing can make this go away.”

“I could be gentle.”

“You can’t numb me.”

Audrey Rose slipped into the water, felt her breath disappear, returned to the place where she could safely feel nothing. She surfaced before he could reach her. She grabbed his hand and swam to shore.

“Jesus Christ, Audrey Roe, you could have died.”

“You would have died. The river knows me too well.”

“I love you.”

“You say that, but you don’t know how to mean it.”

“Fuck you, Audrey Rose.”

The moon hid behind clouds. Shapes around them were swallowed up. Audrey Rose could barely find him.

“You say the words, but you don’t know how to love me. Your love is convenient. For you.”

“I’m here, sitting on the edge, waiting for you. You’re the one on the rock. You’re the one who doesn’t know how to love.” He stood up. “I care about you too much to watch you do this to yourself.”

He climbed the bank.

To say the words “I love you” terrified her. To have him hear them would destroy her.

“I love you,” Audrey Rose whispered the words. Said them for the first time to his back as he moved further away from her.