

First Day of the Season

Audrey Rose couldn't wait until the morning the mountain opened. The mountain looked like a bald eagle's head, smooth and round, pine trees covered in rhime ice, white feathers keeping the mountain warm. The base of the mountain was as brown as the body of an eagle. A few tracks were already carved into the mountain from the guys who couldn't wait until the lifts opened. They curved with the folds of the mountain. The ones who wouldn't wait were the ones who knew the body of the Mt. Werner, knew her ridges, her belly. Knew where she might be sweet and where she would slide you on the ice. They were as intimate with the mountain as Audrey Rose was.

There was no way Audrey Rose would be able to sleep the night before. She was too excited. She didn't ski unless she could catch a ride on someone's back, but she rode the mountain her own way. There was almost no light that night, the moon was gathering strength to rebuild after flooding the land with her monthly beams. The stars had their way with the sky and the snow glowed from the inside.

Audrey Rose hiked up the mountain to the top of Storm, post-holes dragging her down. The champagne powder tickled her nose when she fell, dusted her cheeks and eyelashes. At the top, she dug out her flying saucer, a round piece of plastic she had found that had a little ridge around the edge. She hopped in and whooped and cheered as she flew down the mountain, hit a rock and flipped out, somersaulting through the air, landing in a pillow of snow. Like a kid, she ran up the mountain, flew down, tumbled out or just felt the air freezing the hairs in her nose, the liquid in her eyes. When she had exhausted

herself, she wandered over the mountain, leaving footprints with those of the animals that would have to find a new place to play come tomorrow. She whispered to them that the mountain was opening, told them about the people coming and warned them to find a new place of solitude. The deer listened and sprung away into deeper nights. The bears laughed at this girl trying to speak their language. They grunted and growled stories of how they had been on this mountain for hundreds of years and weren't budging.

The squirrels and the magpies, ravens and mice all hurried to their nests in case the words this girl had spoken were true. After warning all the animals, Audrey Rose climbed into a tree near Buddy's Run. She waited for the sun, threw her arms out to greet the little warmth they would get that day, then rested back.

Weary night fell into day. Audrey Rose could see the tracks she had left. Her curves merged with the mountain's. They had become one. No one would ever be able to take the life of the mountain out of her.

That day friends and lovers swooshed past underneath her. Tourists fumbled down the mountain, the Texans yipped and hollered to one another, not realizing the mountain wasn't ready to be skied, yet. The locals filled the air with release. Even though only a couple of runs were open, they felt the snow under their feet. They rode down the mountain that was lodged in each of them.

Some people stopped to fix goggles or catch their breath, but no one looked up. Audrey Rose sprawled in the comfort of her tree, feeling the sweetness of this first day. Heat tingled and tickled her until she fell out of the tree, landed with a plop in the freshly-made snow. She wandered through the groves of trees down the mountain, her sparkly skirt attracting a quick look that almost grabbed her, but couldn't quite catch her. Her tiny toe-prints moved down the mountain and melted before the end of the day.

-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.