

For Now



Audrey Rose had rested in the safety of the J's, Joe, Julie and Justin, for too long. She had leaned up against the straight back, had been hooked. Even within the S of Steamboat did she slide into the curves of the hills, the bends of the river. She needed to find her own straight lines again. Her toes were itching, the bears were coming out of hibernation. Far north, a voice called to her.

Audrey Rose packed up her ivory suitcase. She carefully placed a rock from the bottom of the Yampa with her other rocks. This rock was smooth with the years of the river flowing over it, shaping it. In her short time in Steamboat, Audrey Rose had been shaped, too. Pieces felt torn apart and broken, while other pieces were more solid than ever. In one pocket of the suitcase lay the finger of an aspen tree. At the very tip a dried yellow leaf hung delicately. It would not survive the journey.

She didn't sleep the night before. Her mind stumbled over how to form the words "good-bye." She didn't want to say them: Knew leaving was her choice, but knew how much she was leaving behind. Instead of speaking, she crawled into Joe's bed, moved down to his feet and laid her head on his soles. She could hear his heart beating through them. His arms moved around her, the downy softness of his sheets crept inside a memory.

She moved to Julie's bed next, sat on the edge, waiting for Julie to wake up. It didn't take long.

"What's wrong?"

"I have to be with the spirit bear when she wakes up."

“You don’t have to run away.”

“I’m lost. Alone, I might be able to find me again.”

“You’ve never been anything but alone, Audrey Rose.”

“At least in the woods I can be peacefully alone.”

“Loving is about taking risks, not being safe. It’s about learning what you don’t know about you.”

“He won’t come back now.”

“We’re still here for you.”

“I hear the spirit bear calling me. I have to find her before she wakes up.”

Tears filled both their eyes. Audrey Rose hung on so tightly to Julie she thought she might never let go. She had found a friend, a sister and mother in Julie and now Audrey Rose was abandoning her for what was comfortable.

“Take this with you.” Julie took her eagle’s feather from beside her bed.

“But we found that together.”

Julie pressed it in her hand. “Something to guide you, to keep you safe. My spirit will be with you wherever you go.”

“I think you’re starting to talk like me.” Audrey Rose laughed.

Julie had tears running down her cheeks. “You are a part of me and I’m a part of you, too.”

Audrey Rose thought Justin would be the easiest to leave. She went out of the house to climb in through his window.

“Damn it. Shut the window. It’s fucking freezing outside.”

“It’s spring.”

“What the fuck are you doing?”

“I wanted to say... I guess I’m going away for awhile.”

“You aren’t leaving.”

“Okay, I’m not leaving.” Audrey Rose started to climb back out the window.

“Wait.” Justin pulled her legs down onto the bed, Audrey Rose wrapped her arms around him. He buried his head in her chest. She felt her heartbeat leave her body for a moment.

“Just stay. I’m used to you being around.”

“You can get used to me being gone just as quickly.”

His arms squeezed around her so tightly, she felt her ribs crush, her skin warm and her heart struggling. The words from her heart had no voice.

“I’ll be back before you know it.”

Justin looked in her eyes. They felt their souls move in and out of each other.

“Just don’t say good-bye. You keep those words for yourself.”

Audrey Rose tilted her head so their noses touched. Nodded her head slightly.

“Thank you.”

“Get out of here.”

Audrey Rose left through his door, collected her suitcase and walked out the front door, leaving it open.

For a moment, Audrey Rose lost all sense of direction, wasn’t sure which way she was supposed to go. Then her feet moved underneath her. Led her out of the place that was home. Maybe the only home she had ever known.

She kissed her friends, the aspens. Hugged the pines. She told her secrets to the glacier lilies, let them hold pieces of her until she could come back to collect them.

Life caught in her throat. There was no way to swallow that feeling. Audrey Rose lay down on the ground, pressed her ear to the earth. She felt a pulse, knew where the beating would pound stronger. Felt her muscles stretch, her bones brace themselves as one barren foot moved in front of the other.

The hugs of the J’s enveloped her. She could feel their skin, hear their voices still talking to her. She wandered around town, past the places she had known, questioning them silently. Fresh air moved through her lungs, adventure tickled her pores. The sun moved over Fish Creek, stretching light across the Valley.

-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.