

## Home

In the middle of the night, Audrey Rose climbed back into her old room, felt her way to her closet and closed the door. She reached up and pulled the chain for the light. Her blanket was folded into a square and her pillow sat on top. She curled up and went to sleep.

When her body woke her up, she opened the door not sure what to expect. The curtains were blue instead of brown and a family lived in Joe's room; a kitten, a puppy and a snake. She felt a shift inside, knew that he had found life while she was gone. She pulled back the curtains. The sky was blue. The sky was blue! After forty three days of clouds and powder, the sun remembered to shine. Audrey Rose twirled around the room then jumped on the lump in the bed.

"What the hell?" Joe mumbled, until he saw the face closing in on his, a cheek warm against his own. They lay with her on top, holding each other, smelling the new smells that wrapped and wove around them, spice, snow, sand and pine pulled them back together.

"Where have you been?" Joe asked.

"No time for talking, I'll show you."

Grudgingly, Joe got out of bed, pulled on some clothes. "But I want to know." Joe walked over to Audrey Rose and fingered her shredded sparkly skirt. He held the rag between his fingers before moving to the zipper and sliding it off. Audrey Rose stood naked in front of him while he went to the closet and pulled down a bag that had been folded over at the top. He handed it to her. Audrey Rose slowly opened it and peeked inside before she shrieked. She pulled out a skirt the color of the sun hidden behind fog. It was adorned with even more sparkles than her last skirt. Putting it on, she grabbed Joe's hand and spun around the room, circles catching the light from the window, skirt flowing outward, a wave in the river. The bag still had weight, so Audrey Rose reached in and pulled out a faded blue wife-beater tank top. She felt like the day outside.

"Justin and Julie?" Audrey Rose asked about her other two roommates.

"Julie moved back to L.A. and Justin is living with his girlfriend."

Audrey Rose inhaled deeply and realized that Julie's smell was no longer part of the house. So many things had changed. A time had passed.

"He has a girlfriend?"

"Eight months now."

"She puts up with him?"

"He's a changed man."

"So who's living here now?"

“No one. I bought the house.”  
Audrey Rose nodded. “Let’s go.”

She took Joe to her mountain, where her words had been a book with chapters between aspens, book covers of raw silk bark. The landscape was uncluttered, bushes and trees buried under folds and drifts of white. Fairies had sprinkled iridescent rainbows over the snow to catch the light of the sun. Even in the shadows the light tinkled shades of silver and grey. Her words had been buried under last night’s storm. Life disappeared as animal prints became the only sign any creature existed. Entire meadows stood without a mark, momentarily untouched. Next to Joe’s snowshoe tracks Audrey Rose’s footsteps became as unnoticed as a fox or rabbit’s print. Her weight barely sank down and she found herself remembering where the snow was crunchier from shade and where it softened and molded around the heat of her body.

One step and then another, their breathing interrupted by an evening bird that called out “yoo hoo” once before flying on to find a companion somewhere else. They wound around Emerald Mountain, no need to go straight up today. In the pace of their steps, they began to know each other again. When they reached the top, a swath of hill where the snow grew taller than trees, awaited. Audrey Rose motioned all around her. “This is where I’ve been,” she told Joe.

“You’re home now.”

Audrey Rose’s heart evaporated, reaching outside of her chest into Joe’s heart, into the evergreens, penetrating the snow and fueling the sun. She flopped on her back and made a snow angel. Joe lay beside her and did the same. The edges of their wings touched. Their heart beats slowed, their bodies stilled.

When they finally rose to go, Joe knew everything he needed to know about where Audrey Rose had been, why she had left without a good-bye. They hadn’t spoken a word, their secrets had been released by the world around them and their hearts suffered and rejoiced together in all that had passed. Audrey Rose hugged him close.

“I’ve felt your heart,” she said “now I need to feel the heart of the valley.” She disappeared between the trees, only a sparkle of light from her skirt betraying her path.