

Hungry

-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.

Audrey Rose felt raw. She had twisted and turned in her closet all night. The sun had long ago crept under the door and yet Audrey Rose still could not bring her body to want to stand up. The closet was warm, a womb holding her in. Outside the air cracked with cold and the branches of the trees once hidden with leaves stretched their bleached bones.

When her body finally decided to twitch then stand, she opened the door to find her roommate Joe still in bed. She crawled under the covers and rested her head on his feet. She could hear his heart down here, could feel a soft pulse, reminders of her mother long ago. Audrey Rose's head on her mother's chest, comforted. Now she couldn't bear to be that close to a beating heart. Feet were the safest place to remember sad things. They had traveled so far in life, were tough and hardened.

Tenderness swept through her. She sat up straight, her head tenting the sheets. Today was the anniversary of the last time she had seen her mother.

Summer heat beat down upon Audrey Rose who was posing herself like a flower wishing for butterflies to land in her hair, on her arm. Her mother brought out frozen lemonade popsicles that she made every summer. Sweetness rushed through Audrey Rose's mouth

and her legs started dancing, doing a merry jig. Her mother joined her and they locked arms and danced around the garden laughing. Her mother plucked a rose, pulling apart the petals and letting them rain down on Audrey Rose. Velvet gifts from above littering the ground with scarlet, then soft pinks then yellows. Exhausted, Audrey Rose collapsed onto the ground; scents of cut grass, rose's perfume tickled her nose. Audrey Rose stared up into her mother's face, silhouetted by the sun, the shadow of her body cast over Audrey Rose. A chill ran through her.

"Maybe tomorrow a butterfly will come." Her mother smiled sitting down next to Audrey Rose.

"Why is life filled with so many maybes?"

"Because almost nothing is certain in life. Sometimes you wake up and nothing is as it was the day before. Sometimes your whole world is turned upside down."

"An upside-down world."

"Sometimes."

Audrey Rose crawled into her mother's lap. Her mother wrapped her arms, warm from the sun around her.

"So what is certain?" Audrey Rose asked.

Without a thought her mother replied "That you will always be okay."

Outside the sun was shining and birds were chirping. Audrey rose always woke with a glow inside. She rushed downstairs to say good morning to her mom, but found her lying awake on the floor next to the bed.

“How long have you been here?”

“I needed to go to the bathroom.”

“Why didn’t you yell?”

“I wish your dad was here.”

Audrey Rose dragged her mom to the bathroom, helped her onto the toilet. They both cried. She was a skeleton. She couldn’t keep food down. Audrey Rose counted the ribs in her mother’s back as she brushed her hair. No amount of brushing would make the stringy hair shine, but Audrey Rose brushed until her arms ached.

“I love the way that feels,” her mother would say though glazed and medicated eyes. She was battling pain doctors couldn’t fix.

Audrey Rose started sleeping on blankets next to her mother’s bed. In the mornings Audrey Rose dressed her mom, helped brush her teeth, her hair. The life in her mother’s eyes was already gone. Audrey Rose spent all her time in the house, cooking what food she knew how to make, trying to keep things clean. Summer ended. Leaves fell outside but Audrey Rose didn’t notice.

The day came. Audrey Rose moved her blankets outside to capture the smell of the sun, the smell that had been her mother. She slept on those memories. Butterflies

landed on her in her sleep, covered her with gentle wings. She slept so many hours that everything became backwards for her. Day became night, night was day. Audrey Rose ate breakfast in the bathtub. Everything that was hidden in closets or drawers or cupboards she pulled out and exposed to the world. She left every door open. She pulled beds away from walls and nailed pictures to the floor so her toes could feel the beauty that hurt her eyes.

You will always be okay, her mom had said. She never thought her mother was a liar before, but now the words she had said to her fell away and Audrey Rose realized that no butterflies would come for her. She went into her room, shut the closet door and lay down to sleep.

Joe woke up to see a head under his covers.

“Hey,” Joe said.

Audrey Rose didn’t respond.

“I haven’t seen you in days,” Joe said. “I saw this and had to get it.” He reached in the drawer of his bedside table and pulled out a paper bag. He reached to Audrey Rose under the covers. He could hear the paper being opened. Still no sound. Then he felt an ear on his chest.

“It’s louder up here,” she said.

He wrapped his arms around her when he felt tears falling onto his chest. Audrey Rose held a fake butterfly sparkling with glitter in her hands.

“Maybe some day it will be alive.”