

Insatiable

The ground was hungry. The earth had been warming from the outside in and every part of her was in flux. Glaciers were splitting and drifting apart, polar bears had become cannibals, eating their own, because they too were hungry without their usual hunting grounds. Weather crashed and swirled, flooded and destroyed. In Steamboat the winter was long like it used to be years ago and the summer skies flooded with blue. Birds sang, deer sprang and moose and bears filled their bellies with an abundance of berries.

Audrey Rose walked long roads around town. Nothing seemed out of place to her, but her eyes had looked upon this land for so long it was like watching a child grow. They never seem to age day to day except in pictures. So Audrey Rose searched high and low in her roommate Joe's closet and found his camera. She wandered along the roadways and snapped picture of the pines that once stood lush and vibrant and proud. Now their reddish brown needles hung like death from their branches, glowed in the setting sun. Only a few years ago the landscape was varying shades of green from pines to grasses to aspens to scrub oak. Everything blended. Now the pines had rebelled. Tiny holes that had housed beetles so starved for a purpose they killed the trees from the inside out.

As Audrey Rose was photographing, a white blur collided into her. The blur had floppy ears and a tail. The excited barks told a story of running through the snows, scavenging for food and of happiness to meet a like soul. So the two of them, dog and girl made their

way along the streets. The dog's search was different than Audrey Rose's. The dog ran through the weeds and brought Audrey Rose presents of discarded McDonald's french fry boxes, plastic bags, gloves, all sorts of treasures that hadn't littered these streets until the building boom. All sorts of garbage woven into the landscape. The sense of wide open valley was quickly being filled in with house upon house, scattered remains of discarded lives. But it was the trash that drew Audrey Rose's eyes into the weeds. And that's when she realized. There were more weeds. The roadsides were thick with grasses and flowers that people pluck out of perfectly manicured lawns. When she stuck her nose deep into the weeds she sneezed. Again and again. Then it struck. Weeds like heat, grow thicker and exude more pollen in warmer climates. Years ago Audrey Rose's nipples had perked up when the sun went down every night. This summer they never stood at attention. The night breezes weren't cold enough to pucker them up and reach out to the world. Her breasts missed those chilly nights of summer, where the air wasn't filled with sawdust particles. Her feet missed the feeling of running through fields between houses, jumping with the grasshoppers.

The one thing that hadn't changed was the river. It was still cold, carrying silt and stories from up high. She stripped down in the bushes and began to enter when the mosquitoes started to attack. Audrey Rose tried to tell them her blood was no food for them. It might make them drunk, but they didn't listen. Mosquitoes were new to these parts, to this altitude. When her nipples jumped out every night, her skin had never been at risk of bites, of being sucked for its blood. Like the pine beetle and the rich second home owners, the mosquitoes decided Steamboat was quite a nice place to live. Audrey Rose

decided to document it all. She held out her arm and let the mosquitoes suck and took pictures of them. She would have given them all their blood but they were too small to appreciate such a sacrifice.

Next would be the fleas, hungry for the abundance of dogs running free. Then the cockroaches. They always came. It was only a matter of time. Audrey Rose pictured the North Pole, with entire glaciers turning black with invading cockroaches. They had their army, we have nothing as powerful.

Audrey Rose scrambled up Fish Creek to her overlook. She placed her body flat on the ground. The dog lay next to her and together they rested their ears on the soil. They heard the Mother's grumblings. Her appetite for destruction was building and her patience was fading. Audrey Rose spread out her arms and clung tight, pressing her body into a hug against the earth. The Mother stopped for a moment and listened upward. She felt the love seeping down, she felt the awareness and she paused for just a moment.

-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.