

Numb

“I love you, Audrey Rose.”

Petals fell from the sky, red fading to pink, drained to white, to purity. Raining, storming petals, losing their shape, their form before they could land. Audrey Rose splashed her fists into the steaming waters of the bathtub. Marble tile surrounded them, a soft cascade of water still filling, covering bodies. Her legs wrapped around his, facing each other.

“That is not the appropriate response. The correct response is I love football, or I love chicks in bikinis. For you to say I love you, Audrey Rose is simply not the truth.”

He fed her wine. Dark, almost black. Hints of berries, of earth, of decay.

“Fine. I love first tracks on a powder day.”

He leaned forward and she kissed him.

“Much better. I mean how is that, those words, supposed to make me feel?”

“I don’t know. How do you feel?” He leaned back, the water swirling against his body.

Their heat dampened the hairs on his chest.

“The words haven’t reached me yet. They’re still hanging between us.”

“When do you think you’ll feel them?”

“I don’t know if I ever will.”

“I’ve seen you love, Audrey Rose. You love without question.” He reached for her hand, but Audrey Rose took the glass of wine from him and poured the juices over her face, the red quickly fading into the water surrounding them.

“Love without question. Does that really exist? Didn’t you question those words before you said them?”

“I felt them, so I said them.”

Audrey Rose sat up, her back to the edge of the bathtub. “You know, you are like a vein, pumping my heart full of beautiful things, but my arteries suck you out as quickly as you pump them in. You can only live in my heart for a second before you spread through my body and get lost in all the other parts of me. There is no place inside my heart for pretty words.”

“What does that mean?” He pulled her foot onto his lap. Audrey Rose stretched her toes out and wrapped them around his finger.

“Your words scare me.”

“Why?”

“Because nobody has said those words to me before.”

“Nobody?”

“My parents did.”

They sat for a moment. Audrey Rose closed her eyes, felt things trying to squeeze through her eyelids, but she pushed them back inside her and swallowed them into her belly.

He wanted to slam his fist into a wall, wanted to destroy the world that made Audrey Rose feel so alone. Her body looked so small, her eyes too large to escape.

“Just because you haven’t heard them before, doesn’t mean they aren’t true.”

“It makes them not real. At least to me. You can be inside me, fill me, but those words don’t belong here.”

He got out of the bathtub, and left the room. Audrey Rose lay her head on her knees staring at the open space of the door, at the puddles of water on the floor where his feet had been.

She heard him moving around. Eventually he came back with the bottle of wine. He emptied the liquid into the bathtub, turning the water red. He opened another and handed it to Audrey Rose. She drank. He climbed in behind her, wrapped his arms around her. The lower half of their bodies disappeared into scarlet waters.

“Show me where my words don’t belong.”

Audrey Rose touched her heart, then let her hands fall, float on the bloody water. “See? How it beats? Your words could shatter that, maybe break it forever.”

He placed his hand on her heart. It continued to beat steadily.

His words moved towards her, finally touched her skin. One entered her nipple and got lost in the sweet juices. One tried to bore into her foot but her sole was too tough. The third word dove into her chest, shot through her rib cage and buried itself in a tiny corner of her heart where it couldn’t be sucked back out.

“Is this what love is?” Audrey Rose asked.

“It’s the beginning.”

“I can’t see my toes.”

-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.