

Slipping

The sun slid golden across the sky. Audrey Rose lay cupped in the arms of her rock. Snow lay between her and the bumps and indentations of crystal she knew so well. She watched the progress of the sun without interest. Felt there was no where else to go. January was passing and she was watching it leave. At night flakes fell instead of stars. Landed on her, in her. Filling her. Inside was ice, white, a vast emptiness. Her heart as barren as winter lands.

He had not found her. Did not want to find her? She turned her thoughts blank. She tried to separate flakes, but they banded with each other until she could not distinguish what was newly fallen and what had belonged to weeks ago. When she wrote in the snow, she could not see the letters, let them drip from her mind into a landscape that could not hold them. Her breath stilled. Barely moved her chest. She needed less air in winter.

Even the sun moved slowly. Sank instead of dropped. A deer stopped and stared. Scared eyes. Reflected something in Audrey Rose. Bounded off. Birds chirping, singing, silenced when they neared her. Impenetrable silence. Audrey Rose turned slightly. Her head took in Aspens, naked. Pines holding onto clumps of snow. Her eyes digested silver sky, the moment day vanishes. Held in the past.

Touch. His touch. She wanted his touch. Familiarity. Wanted to see the black hairs on his hands, on his knuckles. Wanted to stop imagining them touching her, feel warmth

instead of air. She felt he was gone before she knew. An emptiness around her, creeping towards the place she tried to bury, the place thick with blood. Almost black. He always came back until the time he wouldn't come back anymore. Calm. Without him, calm. Without him, easy. Never wanted to be without him. Wanted to rest her head on his heart. Feel a heart beating. Pulsing. Needed a pulse.

She slid off her rock, sky turning, always turning, and began to dig. Fingernails breaking, feeling the edges of rocks, liberating them to a home on top of the snow not under it. Audrey Rose scraped tiny shreds of frozen earth. Broke apart roots until she had a hole large enough to lie in. She scooped the earth back over her, up to her neck with one arm on top, resting. Closed her eyes. Earth warmed around her body. Gave heat back to her. Movement against her skin. Tiny creatures woken from winter sleep, curling closer. Their lives burrowed to her hers, tried to crawl into her. Skin held them out. Another movement.

A slow thump filled her ears. Thump-thump, thump-thump. Steady. The heartbeat of the Mother. She fell asleep on the breast of the Sacred. Soothed. She let go everything inside. Let it be buried with her bones and slept the sleep of the dead.

As the morning let color rise in her cheeks, Audrey Rose uncovered herself. She went home, climbed in through her window. Her roommate, Joe was sleeping, warm. She crawled in next to him, stained with earth, smelling of life, of death. His hands found her waist and pulled her closer. She stole his warmth, let it spread through her. Blonde hair

on his arms, on his hands, hands that had only held her, never touched her. She let the heartbeat of the mother beat inside of her. Steady. Knew winter had turned a corner. The days were growing.

She crawled down to Joe's toes and slept on his innocence.

-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.