

The Sound of Life

Splat. Blood sprayed outward from the body that had dropped a foot from its mother's vagina. A tail curled and bent under and a squat position was the only indication that the mother was giving birth. Audrey Rose squatted beside the dog, singing a soft lullaby. The mother whined softly before picking up her baby by the head and carrying it into shelter, a bed of cedar chips, where she licked it off.

Tiny feet, little white boots on each one. So small it could be eaten as a snack, a life began to breathe. Audrey Rose lifted her head and howled. She was joined by over a hundred voices crying out in unison for a birth they could all feel. Each howl had its own tone, contributed to the melody of creation.

The mother lay on top of her baby, sheltering it from the world before the next contraction began. Their nourishment would now come from outside, no longer from within. Soon their eyes would open and they would be able to take in the snow covered hills; the wide open sky above them filled with red, with pinks and purples; filled with the glow of the warmth of the sun, and they too would fill that warmth spread upon them.

As the mother lay exhausted after her second birth, two tiny rat-sized puppies squirming against each other, Audrey Rose crawled into the kennel with her, held the mother in her arms, softly rubbing her belly. The whines quieted somewhat. Next door to her, Belle had three puppies one month old who had only recently found their voices. The smallest of them raised its head, extended its neck and let out its first howl, soft and scratchy. The other dogs joined in again.

A pack of huskies, a pack of animals where Audrey Rose felt completely at home, lived outside of town. Some nights she would wait until the owners were gone and then she would sneak into dog kennels, where the dog sledding huskies and hounds lived out their lives in poses of sleeping and running, exhilaration and relaxation. Audrey Rose would move among them, hearing the names as the dogs spoke in their own language. Some greeted her by jumping up, paws on shoulders, full body hugs, other would rest their heads next to her body. When she had moved through every row and said hello or snuggled every one of them, she would find an empty hut lined with cedar chips and crawl in for the night, her mind drifting away to the rhythms of the soft breathing of the dogs around her.

That night, the snow fell hard and Audrey Rose woke up to white lumps where dogs used to be. It was a long labor with six babies dropping one by one in puddles of their own blood. She scrambled over to the mother to see her resting quietly now, little mewlings coming from lives that had just begun. Down the row from Audrey Rose, another mother paced. A mother uncomfortable with human touch, a mother who had just birthed six dead babes. She had nudged them, pushed them around and did not understand why they did not move. Audrey Rose wanted to hold her, but the white dog let no human that close, so Audrey Rose sat across from her and sent her silent prayers. In a few days time, the newest life would pass to death, maybe to comfort the others, maybe just the cycle of

nature, of winter.

As the sun peaked over the kennel, Audrey Rose knew it was time for her to leave. A town awaited not too far away, where she had left her heart and her memories and now she must dig them up again, inspect them to see if they were still in one piece. So many other shards of herself, she had left trailing on pine needles and buried under sandy beaches.

She climbed to the top of Emerald Mountain where she could see the houses below her, could see the mountains that stretched away, and could be a part of the soft folds of winter. Then her finger twitched. For so long they had been disconnected from her brain that at first she thought she was having a muscle spasm. She sucked her finger, although she didn't think that would do any good, but in her mouth, the finger twitched again. And then they connected, brain and finger, brain and hand and the hand began to move and letters and words and sentences came out, written across the snow, a cursive, dance with mind and matter. She let escape all the thoughts inside her until she was completely empty and the mountain was covered in her writing. At the top of the mountain, words were just a faint indent now with the melting of the sun.

Her body was ready to receive new life. Was ready for each new experience that might present itself to her. She made her way to her old house and climbed in the window.

-Do not attempt to recreate the events of Audrey Rose's life. They may result in internal and/or external death or at the very least a yeast infection.