

Ups & Downs

The time had come for cleaning closets. Audrey Rose went into her roommate Joe's closet and started throwing things away. Cobwebs, receipts, Mardi Gras beads. When she was done, the clothes were hanging by color, sweaters to long sleeve to short sleeve shirts. Anything with a hole became scraps for next year's bird nests or rags for cleaning. She washed her blankets and hung them outside to dry so she could bring a bit of fresh air to her dreams that night.

When she was done she wandered around the streets of town, letting her bare toes soak up the last vestiges of heat from the sidewalks, moving around the browns and golds of grasses and bushes. The subtlety of fall, colors fading into one another, a last warming before the cold winter months settled in.

The gold spread from the grasses into their seeds which Audrey Rose rubbed between her fingers. Gold seeped into the lines of her fingers, until it wriggled through her senses. The glow pulled her up Emerald Mountain where there were fields of tall grasses in which Audrey Rose could lay. As the sun was fluttering over her body she heard footsteps. She sat up and through the stoic stalks of grass and saw three people arm in arm coming down the mountain. In the middle was a beautiful brunette woman. Flanked on either side were men. Audrey Rose realized where Autumn stole her palate from. The one man was colored with reddish gold that started on the hairs of his toes and moved up to the hair on his head, wild and thick. Fire from other worlds flushed his cheeks with every smile and in his eyes the clearest blue skies were held. On her other side was a man who matched the woman's dark colors. Shades of soil that lived deep under the ground.

Every few moments they switched places, now Autumn in the middle, now earth, now Beauty again. Words passed between them, some only they understood. When they got close, Audrey Rose jumped up from her place, linked her arm through Soil's and down they continued.

"He's leaving," said Beauty.

"Autumn always has to leave to make way for winter," said Audrey Rose.

They looked at her, looked at each other, "Not Autumn, the dark one," said Beauty.

"Oh, Soil?"

"Yes, Soil."

"Soil?" Asked Soil.

"Deep, rich and full of nutrients. Sometimes you want to smear it on your face, or roll in it like a pig and sometimes you simply understand that without earth we could not live."

They had reached the bottom of the hill.

"Now what?" asked Audrey Rose.

"We go back up." Said Autumn. They all switched places and now Audrey Rose was linked between Beauty and Autumn. She felt the warmth and sweetness that usually comes from Spring, cinnamon and sugar and then she thought of a cinnamon hot chocolate. She sniffed Autumn but his scent was spicy not sweet.

They began the climb. A bear watched curiously, stuffing himself for the winter as they switched places again and now Audrey Rose was next to Beauty.

“Where’s Soil going?”

“Soil, where are you going?”

“Home,” mumbled Soil.

“Home is a nice place to be,” said Audrey Rose, “but if you leave you’ll be taking yourself away from here and maybe you’re home to other people. They will have a little less shelter without you.”

“Strange,” said Autumn and he broke their links and gave Audrey Rose a hug. As he did, Beauty joined in. Soil stood and watched. When the hug broke, Soil offered Audrey Rose his hand to shake, which she did. In his fingers, the veins carried more than blood. Audrey Rose felt his emotions hidden in a sack, which he locked in a dark closet, not knowing that they would dry up and disappear inside walls that were not a home.

When they reached the top of the mountain, Beauty began to laugh. Autumn and Soil talked quietly, angrily, but then soon were hugging each other. In Autumn she realized Soil had a place for the threads of the sack. Audrey Rose and Beauty climbed a tree together. They sat and watched the hawks circling. The day stretched slowly before them. Below, Autumn and Soil arm wrestled. When they were done clouds filled the sky and winds began to blow.

Audrey Rose jumped to the ground; stripped off her clothes to let the air lick at her body, pull her away. Beauty followed, then did Autumn and Soil. Naked, Audrey Rose could better see inside each of them. Every single one of them was filled with holes and tears, green and golds. They were young but full of life and full of love and everything shone through them. Even the dark abyss that lived in each was flooded by a sea of light. Audrey Rose paused then looked inside herself and saw a soul that mirrored theirs.

As the golden ball fell from the sky, she pressed her body against each of them in turn, taking and giving warmth. Deep inside her shadows lived in her closet. She opened her mouth and started telling her secrets to the world.

-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.