

Rosy & The World Other Than Earth, and Better Than Mars.

Rosy woke the way she always did in winter: breath sealed to the air, lashes crusted with frost, the world quiet enough to hear her own pulse argue with the cold.

Above her, the canopy was a cathedral of bare black veins, stitched together by a sky the color of bone. Beneath her, the snow had packed hard from last night's wind, a pale skin stretched tight over roots and stones and all the old truths the forest kept buried.

She sat up slowly, listening.

Not for wolves. Not for men.

For Nature.

Nature never spoke in words. They spoke in pressure changes and drifting scents, in the way branches creaked before they snapped, in the hush that came right before a storm chose its direction. Nature had raised Rosy when the world forgot it could raise anything gentle. Nature had taught her how to eat, how to find water under ice, how to stitch skin back together with pine resin and patience. Nature had taught her the clean mathematics of survival.

But Nature had never taught her to nurture.

Rosy didn't blame them. You could not ask a blizzard to tuck you in. You could only learn how to build a shelter strong enough to outlast it.

She flexed her fingers and felt the familiar ache in her palms—like embers that had spent too many nights pretending they were ash. For weeks now, something in her had

been dimming. Not her body. Not her skill.
Not her will.

Her flame.

It had always been there, burning behind her ribs like a private sun. In dream states it became visible—wild and unchained, dancing out of her skin in ribbons of warm orange and molten gold. In dreams she never had to contain it. She could feel heat bead on her back even when the snow thickened on her hair. She could laugh and burn and be, without anyone demanding she choose a safer shape.

Sometimes, in those dreams, another flame joined her.

A blue one.

Not pale like moonlight, but deep—sapphire-bright, the color you saw when you pressed your fingers to your eyelids and looked straight at the sun. That flame moved with a refinement Rosy did not possess. It did not lunge; it glided. It did not demand; it invited. It was older in a way Rosy couldn't measure.

Misty.

Her twin flame. Her only twin.

They never spoke either. They didn't need language. They turned around each other like two stars bound by gravity, sometimes close enough to blur, sometimes far enough that Rosy felt the loneliness sharpen into something almost sweet.

But lately, even in dreams, Misty had seemed farther away. The blue was there—yes—but as if behind glass.

And now, awake, Rosy felt her own orange heat shrinking. Her breath came out thin. The cold sat closer to her heart than it should have.

She stood, shook the snow from her cloak, and did what she always did when her body threatened weakness:

She moved forward.

Aries energy lived in her bones. Fire, forward motion, fierce independence. When the world told her to stay on the path, she stepped off. When it demanded a choice between this or that—pink or blue, black or white, right or wrong—Rosy carved a third option into the wood with her own hands.

Loneliness, she had decided long ago, was better than regret.

She started walking.

At first, the forest offered only its usual winter offerings: stiff ferns folded into fists, ice wearing the stream like armor, deer tracks scattered like punctuation marks across the white page of the ground. Rosy read them all automatically. Her mind had always been a map.

Then she saw something that did not belong.

White fox prints.

They were delicate, almost playful—each pad pressed with a lightness that mocked the heavy silence of the season. The trail cut

across the snow at an angle that ignored the easiest routes, weaving between trees as if the creature knew a secret shortcut through the world.

Rosy crouched, pressed her gloved fingers to the nearest print.

Fresh.

Her flame twitched, the tiniest flicker, as though it recognized a language her mind had forgotten.

She followed.

The tracks led her away from the stream, away from the sheltering rocks she used in bad weather, away from everything practical. They led her into a part of the forest that felt... wrong.

Not dangerous.

Unplaced.

The trees grew thicker here, trunks old and wide, bark ridged like the knuckles of giants. Snow clung to them in patches that looked like scars. The air had a different density—like she'd stepped into a room where someone had just finished praying.

Rosy's breath slowed.

At the edge of her vision, movement.

A white fox stood on a fallen log, tail curled around its feet like a question mark.

It looked at her.

Not the way animals looked at a hunter.

The way a messenger looked at someone who had finally arrived.

Rosy lifted her chin. "I'm not lost."

The fox blinked, slow, as if amused.

Then it turned and trotted forward, paws barely sinking into the snow, leaving a clean, impossible line of prints.

Rosy followed.

The forest began to open, trees thinning like a held breath releasing. The tracks led between two massive trunks that arched toward each other overhead, forming a gate.

Beyond them was a clearing.

It was not the kind of clearing made by storm or fire or axe. It was too perfect. Snow lay untouched, smooth as a sheet. The air shimmered faintly, though no sun reached this place. The trees around the perimeter were ancient, their branches lifted like arms frozen mid-gesture.

And the bark—

Rosy stopped.

The bark was written.

Not carved with knives. Not scratched by claws. But embedded, as if memory itself had hardened into pattern. Faces emerged in the grooves, half-formed and then gone again. Words pulsed beneath the surface like veins. Scenes flickered—an infant wrapped in moss; a young girl learning to set snares; a storm swallowing a horizon; a pair of hands offering fire in the dark.

Rosy's stomach tightened. "What is this?"

The fox padded into the center of the clearing and sat, tail fanned out like spilled milk.

When it spoke, the voice did not come from its mouth.

It came from everywhere.

From the trees. From the snow. From the place behind Rosy's ribs where her flame had been shrinking.

"Where memories are stored," the voice said, and it sounded like warmth pressed to a bruise. "Where the living forget and the in-between remembers."

Rosy's hand moved to the knife at her hip. Not because she thought she could stab a voice in the air—because old instincts hated what they couldn't name.

"What are you?" she demanded.

The fox tilted its head. "I am L.L."

"Letters," Rosy said flatly. "Meaningless."

The fox's eyes—too bright, too knowing—held hers.

"Love," the voice said, soft as falling ash. "And Lust."

Rosy almost laughed. The sound caught in her throat, sharp. "Fairy tales."

"Dichotomy," L.L. corrected gently. "A creature of in-between. A bridge that does not choose one shore."

Rosy looked away, jaw tight. The world of the living had taught her to distrust anything that asked her to soften. The walking deadmen—empty corpses moving through their days in monotonous cadence—had no use for mystery. They demanded definitions and rules and boxes. They called it safety.

Rosy called it a coffin.

"I don't need bridges," she said. "I need fire."

L.L.'s tail flicked. "You have been watching your flame die."

The clearing seemed to lean in.

Rosy's chest tightened, anger flaring instinctively—hot, defensive. "It's mine."

"Yes," L.L. said. "And also not."

Rosy's eyes snapped back. "Explain."

The fox stood, moved closer. Its paws left no sound.

"You were raised by Nature," it said.

"Nature taught you to survive. To trust the snow's hardness, the wind's direction, the way hunger sharpens the senses. You learned to fail and learn and fail again. This is your nature."

Rosy swallowed. She didn't like being read.

"But you fell out of touch," L.L. continued, "not with Nature's lessons—those are carved into your muscles—but with Nature's music. The part that isn't about enduring. The part that is about belonging."

Rosy's throat burned. "Belonging is for people who have others."

L.L. looked at her as if seeing the small child beneath her armor. "And you have told yourself you are alone because it feels safer than needing."

Rosy's knife hand trembled once, then steadied. "Needing gets you killed."

L.L. stepped closer still until Rosy could see the faint iridescence beneath its white fur, like frost hiding opal.

"I did not come to kill you," it said. "I came because your flame was given."

Rosy's skin prickled. "Given by who?"

The clearing answered before the fox did.

A low hum rose from the trees, and the bark's patterns shifted, rearranging like a book opening to a page Rosy had avoided reading.

A memory surfaced: a night so dark it felt like the world had ended. A child—Rosy—curled in a hollow under roots, shaking, starving, the kind of small that disappears in snow. Above her, branches cracking. The wind screaming. And then—

A blue light.

Not lightning.

Not moon.

A flame.

Sapphire-bright, pristine and true.

It hovered near her like a watchful eye, like a hand that did not touch but promised to catch. And from within that blue, a second heat sparked—orange, sudden, fierce, wild.

Rosy's breath caught.

"My dreams," she whispered. "Misty."

The blue flame in the memory pulsed, and Rosy felt it in her bones, ancient and patient.

L.L. spoke softly. "Misty is not merely a friend you meet when your conscious slips away."

Rosy shook her head, refusing. "She's my twin flame. She's—she's just—"

"A guide," L.L. said. "An older flame, yes. A refinement shaped by time. But not your source."

Rosy's heart hammered. "Then who?"

The clearing's hum deepened. The bark's grooves shivered, and a word rose from it—not carved, not written, but known.

The Other.

Rosy staggered back a step, as if the word had weight.

"The Other is real," she said, voice rough. "Spirit. Energy. The in-between."

L.L.'s eyes softened. "Real as your hunger. Real as your anger. Real as the warmth you cannot explain."

Rosy clenched her fists. "So you're telling me my flame isn't mine."

“No,” L.L. said, and the fox moved in a slow circle around her, as if tracing a ritual. “I’m telling you it is yours the way a heartbeat is yours. You did not build the first beat. But you choose, every day, whether to listen to it.”

Rosy’s flame flickered weakly, as if offended by the conversation.

“And you,” Rosy said, pointing at L.L., “what do you have to do with it?”

The fox stopped. Looked at her with a gaze that felt like a door opening.

“I reintroduced you to Nature,” it said simply. “Because you had turned Nature into a tool and forgotten they were also a teacher of wonder.”

Rosy swallowed. It was true. She had used the forest like a map, like a pantry, like a shield. She had stopped seeing it as alive.

“But Nature could not teach you to nurture,” L.L. continued, “because Nature does not hold you when you break. Nature breaks you and grows something new from the pieces.”

Rosy’s vision blurred. She blinked hard, furious at moisture. “Then who teaches nurturing?”

The trees answered by shifting again.

A new memory rose—one Rosy did not recognize as hers until she felt the ache of it.

A hand over her heart.

Not gripping.

Resting.

A presence like a cloak around her shoulders.

A voice without words saying: You are allowed to be warm without burning yourself down to prove you can.

Rosy’s knees almost buckled.

“The Other,” she breathed.

L.L. nodded. “And you have touched it in dreams and called it freedom. But you have believed you can only be free when your conscious slips away.”

Rosy laughed, broken. “Because when I’m awake, the world demands chains.”

“Only the world of the living does,” L.L. said gently. “The walking dead demand you choose. They demand you dim to fit their hollow shapes. But you were not made for their monotony.”

Rosy’s throat tightened. “Then why does my flame feel like it’s dying?”

L.L. stepped closer, nose nearly touching her gloved hand. “Because you have been trying to carry spirit like a weapon instead of a companion.”

Rosy flinched. The words landed like truth.

“I’ve survived,” she snapped. “I’ve done everything myself.”

“Yes,” L.L. said. “You have been brave. Fierce. Independent. Fire, forward motion, Aries. But bravery without tenderness

becomes a blade that cuts the one who holds it.”

Rosy’s eyes squeezed shut.

Inside her ribs, her flame sputtered—orange light coughing against cold.

“Show me,” she whispered, voice small in a way she hated. “If it’s real—show me how to keep it alive.”

The clearing went quiet.

Then the snow in front of Rosy darkened—not with dirt, but with shadow gathering itself into shape.

A figure formed.

Not human. Not animal.

Something softer than either.

A silhouette of blue flame, standing like a person made of sapphire heat, edges shimmering as if sketched by moonlight.

Misty.

Rosy’s breath hitched. In all her dream states, Misty had never stood this close in waking life. The blue flame pulsed, and Rosy felt it like a steady hand on the back of her neck.

The figure lifted an arm.

Rosy’s own orange flame—thin, dim, stubborn—rose from her chest like a reluctant ribbon.

For the first time in waking life, Rosy saw it.

It wasn’t just a feeling. It was light. It was movement. It was her spirit made visible, trembling in the winter air like a candle threatened by wind.

Rosy stared, awe cracking her defenses.

Misty’s blue flame reached toward the orange—not to swallow it, not to dominate it, but to circle it, to cradle it in a shape that blocked the cold.

L.L.’s voice came softer now, almost reverent. “This is nurturing. Not forcing fire to burn bigger. Not shaming it for dimming. Holding it in a way that lets it remember itself.”

Rosy’s eyes burned. “But I don’t know how.”

Misty’s blue flame pulsed once—patient, ancient.

And Rosy understood without words:

You learn the way you learned everything else.

By failing.

By trying again.

By letting yourself be held when you fall.

Rosy’s orange flame flared suddenly, startled by the gentleness. Heat rolled off it in a wave, and Rosy gasped—sweat beading at her hairline despite the freezing air.

Her flame wasn’t dying.

It was exhausted.

It had been dancing alone for too long.

Rosy lifted her hands, palms open, and for the first time in her life she did not reach for a knife or a map or a plan.

She reached for presence.

“I’m here,” she whispered—not to L.L., not even to Misty, but to the part of her that had always been burning. “I’m awake.”

The orange flame trembled, then steadied, rising higher like it believed her.

Outside the clearing, the forest wind moaned, hungry. Inside, the trees hummed, remembering.

Rosy turned her face toward the ancient trunks, toward the bark where memories lived, and she let herself feel it: the invisible threads connecting her to every season she’d survived, every storm that had tried to take her, every quiet moment Nature had offered without asking for thanks.

Nature was there—watching, as they always had. Not comforting. Not coddling. But present, steadfast, a witness.

L.L. sat down again, tail curling neatly. “Nature taught you to endure,” it said. “The Other teaches you to embrace. Spirituality is not an escape. It is continuous growth—moment by moment, chapter by chapter, again and again.”

Rosy swallowed, flame warming her throat from the inside. “And the dichotomy?” she asked. “Love and Lust?”

L.L.’s eyes glinted. “Two forces the living insist must be separate. One pure, one shameful. One safe, one dangerous. But in the in-between, we understand: they are both fire. They both move you forward. They both can burn you. They both can save you.”

Rosy let out a slow breath. The orange flame danced with it, unchained, awake.

“Then what now?” she asked, voice steadier than it had been in weeks.

Misty’s blue flame leaned closer, and for a moment Rosy felt it—the twin presence not as a distant dream companion, but as a steady refinement beside her wildness. A reminder that time could soften a blaze without extinguishing it.

The trees around the clearing shifted once more, and Rosy saw new grooves forming in the bark—fresh memory, being written as she stood there.

L.L.’s voice warmed. “Now you stop waiting for solitude to feel free. You stop waiting for night to dance. You stop treating your spirit like a secret. You burn bright in the land of the living, even among the walking dead. Especially among them.”

Rosy looked down at the snow, at the fox tracks that had led her here.

They were already filling in, softening under a new drift, as if the forest refused to make the path permanent.

Of course.

Mystery did not leave road signs.

Rosy smiled—small, fierce.

She stepped forward, out of the center of the clearing, toward the gate of two ancient trunks. Her flame moved with her, orange and alive, and Misty's blue stayed close—not eclipsing, not competing, simply there.

As Rosy crossed the threshold, Nature's cold air rushed to meet her. The world of the living waited, heavy with its dull rules and its insistence on either/or.

Rosy felt her flame flare in answer.

She did not choose pink or blue.

She did not choose love or lust.

She did not choose dream or waking.

She chose the in-between—the place where spirit lived, where growth stayed constant as long as life continued.

And as she walked, the snow around her seemed a little less hostile, the trees a little more like companions than obstacles.

Not because winter had softened.

Because Rosy had learned, finally, that she could be awake and still dance as if she was dreaming.

That she could survive and nurture.

That her flame was a gift from The Other—
and accepting it, embracing it, was not a destination.

It was a practice.

A cycle of constant rebirth and renewal.

With every bend, a turn.

With every ebb, fire flows.

Rosy grows.

The End.