

The Avalanche's Daughter

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My father was an avalanche.

People would ask me, How is it that your father is an avalanche?

I would go to the mountain to ask him. I would shout into the hills, and he would crash down the mountainside, tearing old spruces up from their roots. I would be covered in a spray of powder, and his only answer was the sound of his fall.

Each time I went to the mountain, my father was smaller. He uprooted fewer trees. One winter, I went to ask my father how I could be the daughter of an avalanche, and he did not come down at all. The peaks above were all bare stone.

Later, I fell in love. I felt the dizzying heights of the mountaintops, the weight and thunder inside my chest. The fear of being uprooted and lost and consumed. The unending tumble.

I married. I had a son. My son was born a waterfall.

My husband left us. He couldn't be the father of a waterfall. He didn't know how to love a geological formation. He'd wanted a son who would be woodsman or a blacksmith.

People ask me, How is it that your son is a waterfall?

And I tell them he is like my father.

As he plays on the lichen-scabbed rock between the pencil pines, I don't ask him how or why. I close my eyes. And listen.

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