

Valentine

She removed the dagger. In the hopes that one day this symbol would become true love she inserted the tip of the blade into the soft flesh of the birch. She carved their initials together: J.K. + V.L. There is no rejection in the forest. A birch may sustain thousands of cuts without bleeding, but not so a little girl. All the cuts, all the wounds, all whispered prayers and yearnings are invisible in the middle of the forest. The birches there are scarred with initials dating back to her parents' time. The hearts date back even longer. It is a forest of stories. Of memory. A place of temples and sacrifice as ancient and fragile and pristine as love itself. Today --- a day for all loves --- when she stands perfectly still with the blade in her hand she can feel the wandering echoes of history hold their breath along with her. Together they freeze in anticipation. J.K. + V.L. If it is to begin, it will be today. If it will be today, it will be forever. At last, the two lines move downward and converge to complete the heart. The arrow comes last, sharp, unerring, pointed fast at its target. The target flutters and beats. The target is large and wet and overflowing. The knife clicks shut, the girl leaves the forest, and the branches overhead sway in a wind so faint it is barely a wind, barely a breeze, but more the idea of these things together.

