

# The Arms of the Forest

*by* Roberta

Watch me sleep. Say I'm lovely, marbled-white. Pretend my forest is other to me. Pretend I am what you have made me. The sugar-almond starlet. Your virgin. Your treasure to break into. Believe me unconscious. It is you who are the dreamer.

Look how those thorny branches sprout from me. How I am red, vulva-red. Is it fiery hot in my womb? Am I frozen like Winter, a girl forced into a coma? You want to blame the evil witch, the bad fairy. What if I say: Father! Father: you kept me in suspended animation. All the spindles far from me, lest I spread my legs and blood pour out. All polished white, and soft as girls are meant to be. You kept me waiting. Far from anything that could split me open; wake me up.

But split I did, father. A choice I made; a particular delight.

Retreat to a place far from here. Find me in the forest. That legend they tell now. The sleeping goddess. The beautiful dreamer. How feminine, her almost-death. My preserved body, never wrinkling, never fattening. And oh, how the roses grow from me, my pubis thick barbed velvet. How the buds bloom ripe and darkest red. The men who pursue me ride in on horseback. Feign innocence, but just watch their axes come down on the spread of petals. How they lick their lips. That poor pristine princess.

What if I tell you that I sleep to give myself armour? How cold it was in the palace, how bound I was in expectation and code. Now here I lie, the tree-limbs sprouting from my body. My green leaves, my howling wolves. I wait for no man, though they can try. How my tree holds me — how its leafy fingers ease inside of me. (Does the princess move? Does she wriggle forward, gasping? Why, a mere rumour, blasphemy.) Here, in this place without time. Here I am

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home. How I meet my ecstasy. Keep far from me. This place is mine.

