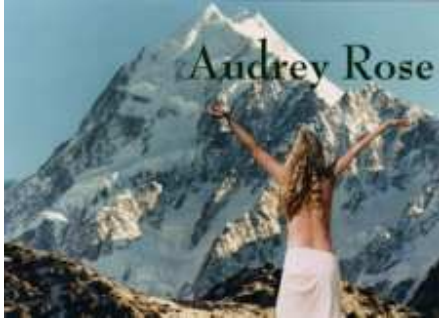


A Change of Pace



The morning frost made the earth sound like it was covered in Captain Crunch, but by the time the sun pulled high into the sky the, the trees glimmered and the sky was crystalline Curacao. The way the breeze tickled the aspen leaves, coaxing them to fall, put Audrey Rose in a jolly state of mind.

Lately, the world had been closing in around her with negativity. People were angry at the upcoming elections, felt helpless about the state of the environment, were so afraid to love they hurt themselves instead. Last night at Sunpie's there had been a woman, whose eyes had dulled over, rocking back and forth. Her words were incoherent before she started banging her head on the bar mumbling over and over "I want to go home. Take me home goddamnit." When someone asked her where she lived the woman had no idea. "Aren't I home? I want to go home."

The desperation and pain inside the woman sent a chill up Audrey Rose's spine. Audrey Rose tried to hug her, "Don't fucking touch me," the woman responded. Audrey Rose had never met anyone who couldn't use a hug. It disheartened her so she headed for the streets, the chill wiggling and writhing through her body until she came face to face with a penguin.

The penguin spoke. Keep it Cool, he said, or rather the shirt said below the image of a penguin. Walking inside the shirt was a pair of high and perky breasts that led up to a neck and a face that was beautiful in its plain simplicity.

"That's it," Audrey Rose exclaimed "I've been so obsessed with warmth and heat and melting that I forgot there are some places that need to be frozen. If every heart melted how would we know what that meant? If every glacier melted how would we know the difference between ice and water and who's to say which one is better. I've been so foolish."

The girl's eyes bugged out a bit at the rant she heard, but when Audrey Rose curtsied to her, she couldn't help but smile.

"I got it from a company called Swell Foop."

"Fell Swoop as in Shakespeare?"

"No, Swell Foop as in Peter Sellers and The Pink Panther."

"Brilliant!" said Audrey Rose. I must find Swell Foop and see what other messages they

have for me.”

Audrey Rose skipped down to the library and jumped on-line. She searched for Swell Foop and came up with a book from other galaxies. After a few minutes she found it www.swellfoop.com. The logo said ‘Saving the world in one swell foop.’ It was so backwards it made sense.

Looking through the website a flurry of emotions was stirred in her. She saw images of a Bison and the word ‘Roam,’ the Grey Wolf with Dream. Audrey Rose closed her eyes and could see the Bison moving across borders and boundaries to wherever food and curiosity might take them without repercussion. The Grey Wolf was no longer hounded, no longer made an outcast, but restored to its rightful place of beauty and splendor keeping the eco-system in check. And then Audrey Rose realized what she needed to do. She rushed to the librarian and asked her to place a call.

The next day the package arrived. Audrey Rose headed straight for Sunpie’s. The woman wasn’t there any longer, but the bartender said he had seen her crying under a tree, leaves scattered around her.

With a brief description of the tree, Audrey Rose headed for a cabin from days past where some of the trees reached the sky. The woman had only dried streaks down her face. Audrey Rose unfolded the shirt and handed it to her. As she was walking away, she heard a cracked voice.

“I haven’t in so long, I forgot I could,” the woman said motioning to the word Dream.

“Come on. There’s a place I know where all your senses can be stimulated.”

The woman looked at her hesitantly. Audrey Rose held out her hand. The woman wrapped her arms around herself but got up and followed.

Audrey Rose took her to the house of Alfred O. Gorgon and his girlfriend Zola. As soon as she opened the door, her nose woke up; cream, spices, cheese, veggies, mushrooms, wine, chicken. The smells made her dizzy. Audrey Rose turned back to the woman and thought she saw the hints of a smile.

“My friend has been starving.”

The woman was silent, overwhelmed. Alfred and Zola ushered her in and gave her a glass of Pinot Noir. On the stove, fettuccine mixed with a delicate cream sauce. Green peas and broccoli livened up the mix, chicken sliced on top.

“Oh, yes please!” said Audrey Rose.

Alfred dished up plates as full as they could be. Audrey Rose and the woman sat across from one another with Alfred and Zola at either end. There was something magical about hands that could create, bring together unique flavors and let them blend. Alfred’s talent was cooking; Zola’s was keeping Alfred happy enough to cook.

After bellies became distended, tears fell down the woman’s face.

“Thank you,” she said first looking at Alfred, then Zola, then Audrey Rose. She held Audrey Rose’s gaze and inside those eyes for the first time the dullness shined a little.

As they left the house of intricate ingredients, of which they had all played a part that night, the woman reached out to Audrey Rose and hugged her. Her arms trembled and shook as she tightened her hold around Audrey Rose.

“I was starving.”

-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.