

Audrey Rose – A Hero’s Journey

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Footprints led deep into the forest as Audrey Rose commenced her search for the perfect Christmas tree. Her roommate, Joe, was with her. They had thermoses filled with peppermint schnapps and hot chocolate with tons of whipped cream on top. After a while of searching Joe suggested Audrey Rose spin him around and wherever he pointed to would be *the* tree. So Audrey Rose put her hands around his waist and spun. Around and around Joe went, until he fell over – only partially from the spin – and his finger pointed forward into an empty space with a black dot at the end.

“Holy crap that’s a long ways away,” said Joe

“It’s perfect. It’s a journey for us to take and you are the reluctant hero. This is going to be an epic saga.”

“So now I’m a hero?” Joe reached for Audrey Rose to pull her down into the soft powder with him. Audrey Rose fell on her back and made a snow angel.

“We must fuel up for the path we have chosen,” she said unscrewing the lid to the thermos and passing it to Joe. He took a swig and passed it back. Audrey Rose finished it. She let the sugar pass into her body until she couldn’t lie still anymore.

“Come, on. It’s time.”

They headed out over the landscape. Audrey Rose’s bare feet tread lightly on the earth, vanishing behind them, while Joe’s heavy boots broke through the top crust of ice and post-holed him across the field leaving a hundred reminders of where he had been.

The black dot got closer and branches could be seen. The tree was tall, spindly needles stretching to the sky, maybe twenty feet high; a tree that had seen fire, survived the beetle epidemic, hundreds of years old.

“Brave tree. A hero we will need to hang the Christmas star. Let’s go.”

The skies parted. What was blue turned to white. Everything more than ten feet away disappeared. Audrey Rose ripped off a section of sparkles from her skirt and tied the gauzy material around the highest branch she could reach.

“We’ll never get back,” said Joe.

“Ah, the perfect hero talk. Doomed to be defeated until an epiphany shows him skills he never knew he had.”

“Enough with the hero talk,” said Joe as he fell into his own boot tracks. “That’s it. We’ll follow my boot tracks back. They’re deep enough.”

Audrey Rose just smiled. They hadn’t gone very far when Audrey Rose saw something out of the corner of her eye. Huge antlers flashed behind a tree. Then another set and another. One of the twig eaters was swollen in the belly. The others were pushing their noses into the ground foraging for food. The male stood close to 6’5” over a thousand pounds.

Nostrils flared. They had caught man's scent. Audrey Rose stopped in her tracks while Joe fumbled closer and closer to the twig eaters. The male called out a warning, warbled, magical. Joe stopped, cocked his head. He approached slowly, the male getting antsy, stomping back and forth. The female and young stayed in the safety of the tree.

Joe extended his hand forward, a gesture of peace. The twig eater charged. Joe ducked behind a tree. Only feet away from crashing into Joe, the twig eater retreated. While the male twig eater was distracted with Joe, Audrey Rose had moved to the females and was sniffing at the belly of the momma. Gently, she placed her hand on the swollen roundness and could see the healthy calf inside. Audrey Rose's eyes locked with the moose.

Without understanding, the male pawed the ground, snorting, Audrey Rose in his sight. Joe moved from his place of cover, charged the bull and slapped his ass. The male reared around as Joe sheltered himself behind a thick tree. The bull nailed the tree, shook his head and backed away to retrieve his female.

Audrey Rose had taken the time to climb the nearest tree. She waved happily to Joe and mouthed "my hero."

Joe just shook his head. When the moose were safely on their way, they climbed down. Audrey Rose was so pleased with herself she skipped through the snow while Joe kept mumbling.

"You're crazy. You are fucking crazy."

Audrey Rose had already assembled all the supplies they needed. She built a fire they could sit in front of while they threaded popcorn onto a string, Audrey Rose singing

*Silent night, holy night
All is calm, all is bright
Round yon Virgin Mother and Child
Holy Infant so tender and mild
Sleep in heavenly peace
Sleep in heavenly peace*

"I wonder if that moose was carrying baby Jesus returned to earth."

"Some people would consider that statement sacrilege."

"Why? Why wouldn't Jesus want to come back to see the beauty still left on earth, wandering the land, eating from its fruits. That's how he lived the first time. It's really a fairly sane thought. Plus, moose are shaggy like Jesus with the long hair and all."

"Just thread your popcorn," said Joe as he shoved the bowl towards her.

For the return trip they both carried backpacks stuffed as full as they could be. Traces of them had already disappeared from the day before, swept away by strong winds and a new snowfall.

“I have an idea,” said Audrey Rose as she jumped onto Joe’s back.

“What are you up to now?”

“I want to see how deeply man can tread on the earth. If we go deep enough, maybe it will take centuries to erase our tracks.”

“More like days.”

“Optimist. Has our hero had a change of heart?”

“I was discounting what you were saying,” said Joe as he shifted his pack to accommodate Audrey Rose.

“I know what you think you were trying to do,” said Audrey Rose as her legs wrapped tighter around Joe, “but in doing so you actually were saying we could erase the damage man and woman has done to the earth in a relatively short period of time, which is a very positive outlook and one I commend.”

Joe dropped Audrey Rose in the snow. She shook herself out and surveyed the surroundings. The sun was climbing above the trees, shimmering sparkles in the snow and a few feet above ground, something else sparkled.

“There,” Audrey Rose pointed. There’s our tree.

When they reached the tree, they began their work, stringing popcorn around the branches, hanging bulbs and tinsel. As the wind blew softly by, the tinsel glittered in the sun and the bulbs radiated a rainbow of colors. For the top of the tree, Audrey Rose pulled out a golden star. She shimmied up the tree and on the branches surrounding the tippy top, she attached feathered butterflies, ready to carry the star away.

“Okay, Joe,” she called “come hang the star.”

“I don’t know about that.”

“You’ve come so far. This is your final challenge.”

Joe carried the star up the tree and placed it on the top branch.

“Satisfied?”

“I will be soon.”

They spread out a blanket and waited as still as the snow, until curious creatures came to claim their Christmas treats. First a bird, then a few more, then a squirrel, until the tree came to life and a hero had been born.