

## Happy Holidays

Christmas day welcomed Audrey Rose with a table-full of Sprinkles Cupcakes. He had them sent from LA. Vanilla peppermint, eggnog spice, chocolate peppermint, coconut, Red velvet with cream cheese frosting, vanilla milk chocolate. Her table was covered with brown and white frosting. Her roommates were gone for the holidays, so Audrey Rose had no one to share them with. She knew what she must do.

She began at one end of the table, peeled the paper back, ate the bottoms off, so the tops would have a better frosting/cake ratio. Buttercream frosting, Creamcheese, milk chocolate, vanilla. Melting, swirling, filling her belly. Underneath each cupcake was a letter. 36 cupcakes later, she read the message. “A woman should not encourage a man to be wild.” Audrey Rose knew the quote, would always recognize Tennessee Williams *The Rose Tattoo*. She twirled and spun, raised her arms high over her head. The sugar took flight, skipped and raced through her veins, pumped into her heart and came out sweeter. Everything in her felt light. Her mind raced, her legs followed.

To Sunpie. She didn't stop at the seat. Before even she knew what she was doing, she was on top of the bar. Her top came off, her bra was swinging around her finger, around and around. The girls were free again. The bra flew off, landed on top of a dark and sultry head. Hazel eyes looked up from underneath the pink of Audrey Rose's bra. They were amused.

“Girl, you better watch what you take off. You might lose more than your bra, tonight.”

The mouth was as brazen as the rest of the body. Kim Keith. The photographer. Black and white. Bodies, the naked bodies Audrey Rose had danced with. Next to her was boyfriend Larry. He bought them all a shot. Audrey Rose tilted back the tequila and did ten jumping jacks. The tequila exploded into the sugar and Audrey Rose tapped and jiggled until her body settled down.

Lonely hands reached out for her ankle, a slug slowly slipping up her leg. Audrey Rose jumped over his head to the ground and pushed her way in between Kim and Larry.

“Merry Christmas, Audrey Rose,” said Larry as he ordered another round. Peppermint schnapps. It was Christmas after all.

Audrey Rose gave Larry a kiss on the cheek and Kim a kiss on the lips.

“You better get that bra back on if you want to be kissing my boyfriend.” The hazel eyes were joking. Kind of.

“It’s Christmas. I’ve had 36 cupcakes with messages a wild men.” She took her shot, curtsied and moved to the other side of Kim. No bra. Nothing contained tonight.

Larry and Kim snuggled into each other. Audrey leaned over Kim, holding her hand above their heads.

“What’s that supposed to be?” asked Larry.

“Magic mistletoe. I can’t believe you guys couldn’t figure that out on your own. Hello. It’s Christmas. What else would I be holding?”

Kim and Larry kissed. Fell into each other. Audrey Rose moved away, but they didn’t notice. Her friend Sassy was at the end of the bar and they shared spankings and holiday hugs.

Moving around the bar, Audrey Rose gave kisses to everyone’s cheeks and necks. The sugar and tequila were buzzing in her ears. Beers were quiet. Shots melted holiday blues. Too many faces needing too many things.

Audrey Rose curtsied to the bar, to her favorite bartender, Matt and disappeared into the snow. She climbed in through Joe’s window, sniffed his pillow, then went back to the kitchen. The sun was muted through the window, falling far away.

The fireplace was filled with ashes. All the wood had been burned. A chill started in Audrey Rose’s big toe. It moved up her foot, into her leg, her thigh, rested in her belly.

She ate the crumbs, the paper and the message. Her message. Her heart. She swallowed. Finally full.

Her eyebrows felt wild. Her armpits tickled. Horses stampeding her life. She moved back out the window, her bare feet grounded in the snow. Knowing dirt, rock lay underneath. Step after step. She greeted her trees, knew each one by name.

Finally she saw the steam rising off the water. The hot springs were closed, the pools were empty, eerie in the blur of the moon. She stripped off the rest of her clothes and lowered her naked body into the water. Stinging nettles as her body melted into black, disappeared under water.

All around her, emptiness. Empty water, empty sky. She whispered to the water. Her words were carried away. Sent holiday cheer the squirrels warm in their fur, to the animals that didn't want to be seen. Up here, Audrey Rose was the only creature that knew it was Christmas. She carried her joy in her left ear. She carried peace in her right nostril. She felt happiness in places she couldn't explain.

Snow sprinkled down, melting on her cheeks.