

The Quest



The sun reached her under the crack in her closet door. Audrey Rose waited until it started to shift away before she got up. Everything in her body moved slowly, reaching towards something; she wasn't sure what. She could hear her roommate Julie in the kitchen, Joe's soft snores in his bed. Everything was as it should be. But how should it be? People were walking around without answers. Audrey Rose wasn't sure what the question was, but she knew something needed to be answered today.

She snuck out of the closet and into the kitchen. As soon as Julie saw Audrey Rose, she cracked another egg in the pan and put an extra piece of bread in the toaster.

"Julie, I need to know the answer to something."

"What is it?"

"I'm not sure. If I asked you to give me an answer, any answer, what would it be?"

"Selflessness."

"What's the question?"

"What is love?"

"Hmmm." Audrey Rose got up and buttered their toast, got a Coca Cola out of the fridge.

"Strange you would ask that."

"I didn't ask it, I answered it."

"But why love?" Audrey Rose climbed on the kitchen counter, crossed her legs under her and began nibbling on the toast. Julie motioned for her to put it down so she could flip the egg onto it.

"Because something in your face this morning made me think of love."

Audrey Rose cut the edges off the toast, then used them to dip into the center of the egg.

"Perfect. Not too hard, still some soft, runny golden sunshine running out."

"Does that answer your question?"

“It’s no longer a question, it’s a quest.”

“What do you think love is?”

“I don’t know. I might have touched it, might have come close to it, but it’s scary.”

“Scary?” Julie sat at the table facing Audrey Rose.

Audrey Rose dipped a piece of yolk covered toast in her coke, then felt the soggy bread dissolve - so many flavors in her mouth. “Terrifying.”

Audrey Rose hopped off the counter and jumped out the window. She went into town, her bare feet feeling warmth creeping into the sidewalks. She stopped people walking down the street.

“Excuse me, what’s love?”

A young girl twisted her hair around her finger. “It’s when your heart skips a beat when you see that other person.”

“Lust.” Muttered an older woman passing by.

Audrey Rose skipped behind her. “If that’s lust, what’s love?”

“Sacrifice. Constant sacrifice.”

“Does that make you happy?”

“It’s why we were put on Earth. We sacrifice our lives as Jesus did.”

“Jesus was a fun guy.”

“Fun?”

“He was a drinker, the whole water to wine option. Most drinkers are fun. But his love was so pure.”

“Just like I said. Sacrifice.” The worn down woman continued down the street.

Audrey Rose stopped a man on the street. “Sir, what do you think love is?”

“I don’t know what it is, but I know for sure, it’s not divorcing your husband and taking 75 percent of his pay, while he works to support you and your new boyfriend. Excuse me.” The man hurried off, a cloud of anger floating around him.

Audrey Rose felt like she was getting there, but to be sure, she decided to go to Sunpie’s. A few drinks made everyone more honest. Her favorite bartender, Steve, was at the bar.

“Hey Steve, what’s love?”

“You want a drink first or an answer?”

Audrey Rose squatted on the stool. “I’ll have a Giddy-up.” Steve poured a shot of grape vodka in Red Bull and passed it across the bar.

“Yummy. Okay, tell me.”

“Love, sweet Audrey Rose, is sacred. It’s the biggest thing you can feel. It changes everything inside and takes you away from yourself and gives you back to the world.”

Audrey Rose turned to the guy with the red nose beside her.

“Do you agree with that?”

“Love is about surrender. The ultimate surrender.”

Audrey Rose lay across the bar and tipped her head under the beer tap. Steve filled her mouth with foamy rich brew. Audrey Rose closed her eyes for a minute, then she jumped up on the bar.

“I get it! Love is an S.”

“An ‘S?’” the bar echoed.

“Precisely. It is the sinner and the saint.”

“The saint always has a past, the sinner always has a future,” said Red Nose.

“But more. See, there’re two curves in the S, the top curve and the bottom curve, turning different ways, but still connected. They are the yin and yang of love. Audrey Rose grabbed a napkin, spread it open on the bar while Steve got her a pen. She drew a giant S and out of it she wrote sacrifice, selflessness, sacred, sanctuary, sincerity, sweetness, surrender. But then out of love can come the yang: sorrow, suffering, slavery, scary selfishness, scorn, sadness. Is it really a coincidence all these words start with “S?” Seriously? See? I feel it curving and sliding through me like a snake. Snakes can be sensual, curved into a ball of snakes, seeking out the one female in the group. But if they bite you, you’re going to suffer.”

“You should drink more. It’ll help you think less,” Red Nose got up to go to the can.

“I have found the truth. Ali Baba! Hah!”

“You want to know what love is?” It was him. The man who had said those words to her. Audrey Rose got on her hands and knees and crawled across the bar to him. She sat on her haunches.

“Tell me.”

“Love is when you don’t see my way and I don’t see your way, but when we look down a road, we see it together.”

“It’s a long road.”

-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.