

Rude Awakening

By: Donna Ison

The barstool had a wobble to it. So, Genie jumped down and wedged a cardboard coaster, stamped Atomic Cayote Saloon, under the janky leg. When she reclaimed her seat, she was no longer alone. A man with a thin mustache and tweed vest who emanated teakwood musk was perched on the next stool. Their eyes momentarily locked. A familiar buzzing began at the base of Genie's brain—a warning that soon she was bound to do something she might well regret.

A girl wearing a skintight tee with a howling cayote stretched across her ample chest leaned over the bar. "What can I get you, sir?"

"May I see a drink menu, please?"

The man perused the page as if it were instructions on disarming a ticking explosive. Genie scooted away: never trust anyone without a go-to cocktail.

"Is the juice in the pomegranate martini organic?" he asked.

"Sure. Why not?" The bartender turned to Genie. "Another scotch on the rocks?"

"Sure. Why not?"

The man swiveled in Genie's direction. "You really should drink wine instead. Hard liquor increases the chance of breast cancer."

"Are you a doctor?"

"No, realtor. Name is Asher." He stuck out his hand.

"Genie," she said, with a practiced smile.

The bartender returned with their drinks. "Enjoy." She winked and rushed off to serve a trio of Sig Eps pounding on the bar and chanting, "Beer wench. Beer wench."

"I do not envy her," Asher said, staring after. "Trying to maintain a sense of bodily autonomy in this misogynistic atmosphere."

For the next hour, they discussed...or rather Genie pretended to listen while Asher discussed intersectional feminism, lesbian stereotypes, the "Me Too" movement, and the resurgence of unmanicured pubic hair.

Suddenly, he stood and announced, "Gotta' go. Early open house tomorrow." He slid Genie a glossy business card. "If you ever need a male perspective on the female condition, call me."

"Yeah, sure thing, you really seem to get us."

"Thank you. Still, I truly wish I could understand women even better."

And, with that Asher was gone.

The next morning, Genie woke and stretched luxuriously.

Meanwhile, across town in a predictable industrial loft, Asher lurched from bed and clutched his stomach. It felt as if he were being slowly stabbed with a dull machete. This pain was rivaled only by his throbbing head. Every muscle felt weak and tender, especially his pectorals. His mood was utterly despondent.

On his nightstand, an iPhone 8 emitted a ring that demanded to be answered.

"Hello," Asher moaned.

"Good morning."

"Who is this?"

"Genie. From last night. How you feeling?"

"What did you do to me?"

"I gave you what you wished for...to understand women even better. What you're experiencing is premenstrual syndrome. It'll get worse before it gets better. Then, you'll get your actual period. I've arranged for an extra heavy flow. Enjoy."

Over the centuries, Genie had felt remorse for many of the requests she'd been forced by fate to grant. This was not one of them.