

Ladies' Day At Sam's Place

by Ray Nessly

I'm warming my stool at the far end of the bar as usual, nursing my fourth draft on a balmy Wednesday afternoon when I lock eyes with this lady who's bashing her head through the front door. You've heard the expression, "50-yard fox," right? —Looks attractive at first, but when she gets closer you go, *ewww*? Well, this lady's the opposite of that. Meaning, she looks exactly like a goddamn witch. (At first, at first. Bear with me.)

She's old, for starters, real old. Should-be-dead old. (Old, young, whatever—she shouldn't be bashing holes in private property with her head, if you ask me.) Typical witch face. A bumpy, oozy nose, like a rotted, green apple squished in all the wrong places. And blemishes, this lady? Talk about blemishes! Pustules, scars everywhere. Warts like barnacles. And she's wearing a potato sack that's smeared with black mold as she kicks aside what's left of the door.

Sam's got two customers now. But one of them wrecks his nice door, and looks and stinks like a witch. Except, no broom. Doesn't fly, this witch. She *whooshes*. Whooshes around with her legs stiff and her back upright like, I don't know—a vacuum cleaner?

Suffice it to say she's the kind of lady who, from a goodly distance and under normal situations, wouldn't get my manly blood moving. But let me assure you, nothing much is normal about this lady, this afternoon, at Sam's Place.

Did I mention her cackle? Her rotating head? No? Well, she lets out a pretty good cackle, all snort and snigger and Hee-hee-HEE!, her scarlet eyes flashing as her head spins around and she whooshes past Sam. He's riveted to the Padres game on TV, trying to steady himself by leaning on the beer tap. Got his back to her. Misses everything as usual. *Tch*.

You know, game or no game, tipsy or no, I'm surprised Sam didn't hear anything. Bash! Whoosh! Hee-hee-HEE! Or catch a whiff of her. Yuck.

But then again, it's bases loaded in the bottom of the ninth, the score tied.

So he misses everything, goddamn everything! What I'm about to tell you. About her transformation, I mean. Like I said, she's the opposite of a 50-yard fox. That is, as she whooshes toward me she starts looking better—a lot better. Not only looks better, but she's goddamn changing into a knockout. Hair by hair, she's going from ghost-gray to the kind of redhead I really love. It's like she's dyeing her hair for me, custom-like, woodpecker red. And blemish by blemish, wrinkle by wrinkle, she's suddenly got the complexion of a virgin half my age. Who doesn't like a virgin? And her hag nose is straightening, shrinking, nice and pert now. I like pert. Her missing upper teeth are magically descending from her gums, making a whirring sound like little white automatic garage doors until she's got a gleaming set of what you'd call pearly whites if you were given to cliché. And her sagging, gnarled boobs are rising from her belly and suddenly they're, well, right there in front of me. Firm, shiny beaubs peeking through a black cocktail dress. Fantastic! How'd she know I had a thing for formal evening wear?

Gorgeous dress clinging to her like shrink-wrap. Pearl necklace. Diamond-studded belt. Real pearls, real diamonds? Who knows? Point is, the potato sack dress is gone, the scarlet eyes are gone, the witch is gone. And here's—dare I say it? —the green-eyed lady of my goddamn dreams, her bubble butt floating toward me like a cloud in my idea of Heaven.

Oh and her head's stopped spinning around too. A definite plus.

So, considering the ruckus, I suppose it's understandable that I didn't notice right away what she was carrying. A little goldfish bowl, with maybe a pint of water sloshing around in it. No fish, just a tiny plastic boat. And stuck into her diamond-encrusted belt is a

hairdryer. A hairdryer! It's almost like she's packing a weird gun in a fancy holster, except for the frayed electric cord. I don't have a thing for goldfish bowls or hairdryers though. Maybe she doesn't know that.

Slinking onto the stool next to me, she sets the bowl on the bar. She smiles at me, then at Sam, who finally takes a gander at her boobs and starts dipping into his inventory of rye.

"I'll have what the gentleman's having," she says to Sam.

The gentleman. I like how that sounds.

So, over two frosty Miller Lites we exchange names (Benny; Nora). We're having a nice chat: weather, sports (we're both Cubs fans in a Padres' town!), when naturally, I bite:

"So, Nora, what's with the stuff?"

"Hmmm?" she purrs. "Oh! The stuff. Well, handsome . . ." She scoots the goldfish bowl with toy boat toward me. "In my bowl, I've got me a little ark. Our ark."

I squint. "Ark. Our ark?"

"Yep. And in our ark what do you suppose we have, hmmm?"

"Um, two of everything?"

"Bingo! You're sharp—fastest guy I've had yet!" She's twirling her long string of pearls, looking me over. "Nice buns. I demand that of my shipmate. Dark hair: check. Six-foot plus: check."

I take a long sip of my beer, hiding the quizzical look on my face. I set the glass down. I can feel a sudsy mustache clinging to my upper lip.

"Benny? Are you, perchance, fertile?"

"Fertile?" I mumble, wiping my lip. My elbow tips my beer over.

"I knew it when I saw you, Benny! You're perfect. The man I've been searching for! Of course, I only started this afternoon. Took, like, *forever* to round up all those darn animals first."

A misty rain taps at the windows. It was sunny a minute ago. Now it looks like Ireland out there. Mist in San Diego, in August. Don't that beat all.

"Yep," she says. "It's all coming down—soon. Found you just in time. What an ordeal, I mean, two of everything?! I got *Ursus horribilis*—grizzly bears, to you. *Canis familiaris*—boy, was that easier! Got every reptile, mammal . . . you name it, one male, one female. All done, except for us. We go last, of course."

I nod, thinking: Great bod, pretty face. Knows her science. So what if she's a little nutty?

I point at the hairdryer in her belt. "And that?"

"This?"

"That."

She tsks-tsks, and says, "You don't know?"

"Um, nope."

"Why, my darling Benny, that's my Brookstone X-5000 shrink-ray gun. How else ya think I got all those critters into this itty bitty plastic boat?"

"Brookstone. What will they think of next?"

"Only have two shots left," Nora says. "Holy cow, there's a lot of species out there."

Thunder cracks in the distance. Wind moans, chunks of shattered door sent skittering across the floorboards. Darkness at 3 PM? In summer? Huh?

She shakes my arm. "Ready to go, honey bear?"

Sam turns from the TV in time to see Nora stand up, draw her ray gun, and point it at me. He's half-past drunk.

"Jeez, lady," he says. "That a gun?"

I raise my hands. "No, Sam. No gun. This here's my friend, Nora, and that's her, uh—"

"No guns in my 'stablishment, by God!" He lunges for the Brookstone.

Well! As often happens in situations involving hazardous gadgetry, a struggle ensues, natch. And a shot—tragically—is fired.

BZZZRRRTTT!

"Um, Sam? Where . . . ?"

I'm looking behind the bar. No Sam.

"Sam? Not funny, Sam. Not!"

Then Nora, her hands squeezing her face in horror, yells—and I remember clearly her shrill voice—“No, no! Not him! I transformed myself for you, Benny, not him! I gotta start the world over with a drunk? Criminy”

That's the last word I would ever hear my Nora say: 'Criminy.'
Poetic, it's not.

But over and over, it's all I hear, until . . .

Nora, pointing the Brookstone at her chest, fires her last shot—BZZZRRRTTT!—and disappears.

And then, outside, it begins to pour.

