

Arranging The Merchandise

Carrie Nation was in the Equinox, arranging scented candles at the front of her store. She was working at a big flat pine table, made with barn boards, each one about twelve inches wide and polyurethaned with a bright gloss. She was putting squat, colored candles in a straight line across the table top. She was building a candle pyramid.

First she had a group of cranberry candles, then some lemon verbena, and lastly a shitload of chamomile ones. Then on top of all those, stacked about 18 inches high, she put the piece de resistance, the vanillaroma scented candles. They were a little more slender, about the thickness of a baseball bat, with little wicks bent over at the top. She loved the vanilla smell, and by putting them on the top of the pyramid, the candles acted like little room air fresheners, giving out their scent to everybody walking by in the store.

She lit one vanilla candle and put it flat on the table in front of the design stack, like an offering at a Buddhist shrine. The light flickered gently and the vanilla scent infused the room with a sweet smelling overhang.

Carrie had on a long hippy skirt together with sterling hoop earrings. She had a nice figure and filled out the skirt in just the right places. She wore a tight tee shirt with sleeves cut at the shoulder that had a Jasper Johns flag painting on the front with a distressed look. On the back it said Arlo Guthrie World Tour and had a bunch of dates. The shirt kept her breasts high and tight. She was dressed as a sexy hippy, wearing wedge clogs to finish it off.

It was ten am and she unlocked the front door to the store, but it was too early for customers during the first week of June. So she kept working, rearranging items on the shelves, stocking inventory, bringing things up from the basement, dusting the goods.

The store was a mix of tourist souvenirs, head shop, and natural products for healthy living all-in-one. The tourists generally loved the items she sold and she priced everything low enough to make for a lot of impulse purchases as people drifted in after a long day at the beach. She had a separate island of

sun tan lotions from Banana Boat to Coppertone to custom Vineyard stuff made by the locals.

The store was her pride and joy. She had been a school teacher in Melrose for ten years teaching art and English literature but burned out from trying to teach spoiled, bratty kids.

So she took a flyer and started the Equinox on the Island five years ago and she was able to make it into a modest success. It turned out that she loved retail and the artistic expression of setting up the store and deciding what products to carry and sell. She had a real knack for it. Plus, it gave her winters off.

Bill Fletcher walked in the door ten minutes later. He was up in the front of the store, looking at the incense display, picking out individual sticks and bringing them up to his nose, smelling each scent, frangipani, desert sky, summer rose.

Carrie recognized him immediately. She walked up behind him and stood there, hands on her hips, as she looked him over. He was dressed more Island now, like one of the local contractors who came in to buy Zig Zag papers in the store. She noticed that he had started to lose the preppy look since she had last seen him.

“You make it over to the Island all right that night?” Carrie said as she moved in front of him so he could get a good look. He had to think for a second to place her.

“Where do I know you from?” Fletcher said. He put down the joss sticks for a minute, now looking closely at Carrie Nation, taking her in.

He was impressed with what he saw. He thought that she looked like a New Age version of Gracie Slick, or maybe Stevie Nix. He liked them both, so he paid attention.

“The Lee Side last month, remember? We were talking before you tripped on that dog on the floor. You were trying to make room for me to get out. You made an ass of yourself.”

Now Bill Fletcher remembered her. She had dropped her mainland clothes and went native on the Island, and pretty radically. But he liked the hippy-dippy look on her.

“I did, didn’t I?” he said nodding, just accepting the naked truth as Carrie said it. “Thanks for stopping and helping me out that night. I was flat on my ass and not moving too well.”

Carrie started laughing. “I know, and I’m sorry! I couldn’t stay around to help you. I was mortified when you fell over the golden retriever. I figured that there was a little alcohol involved. I was shocked it happened so fast. The karma just wasn’t right that night.”

Fletcher smiled, looking at Carrie, and changed the subject. “I like your new look. Kind of earth mother, huh? You’re keeping it real.”

“It’s faux hippy. I like to play dress-up in the store when I’m here.”

“You work here?”

“I own the place” Carrie said. “This is what I do.”

“You like it?” Fletcher asked, looking back at the incense sticks. He was clearly impressed.

“Love it. It’s a lot of fun. It’s a people business, basically.”

Fletcher grunted. “How much are these joss sticks? The frangipani ones. I want about ten of them.”

Carrie Nation went around Bill Fletcher and walked to the front counter. She shook the mouse on the Apple Mac Pro, waiting for the pricing screen to come to life. She glanced up at him. She decided that she liked Bill Fletcher’s new look and that she’d play it out a bit. She needed a little excitement anyway. She was a people person, a salesperson.

”What’re you going to do with them?” she said as she scrolled down the inventory screen. “A dollar each. If you buy the box, I can give it to you for \$8.50.” She looked up at Fletcher and fingered her big hoop earring.

“It’s for my office. I want it to smell a little funky.”

“Have you thought about a vanilla candle or something like that? Or maybe a cranberry one?”

“I’m not a big candle guy. This will do fine” Fletcher said.

“Too bad, ‘cause we’re having a sale on ‘em.”

Carrie Nation was no believer in fate but it was pretty coincidental that Bill Fletcher walked into her store that morning. Kismet. She wasn’t going to let

it pass. She pushed out her breasts in the Jasper Johns tee shirt and waited as Bill Fletcher rummaged through his wallet for a bill.

“So we never finished that conversation about you being Indian and all and what you were going to do down here.”

Fletcher smiled, impressed. “You’ve got a good memory.”

“For some things” she said.

He handed her a credit card instead and she noticed that it was an American Express Slate card. One of those with a high credit limit. She swiped it through the reader and waited for Fletcher to say something as the transaction was processed.

Fletcher took his card back and didn’t miss his cue.

“So how about we try it again over dinner and I give you the rest of my story. But no dogs involved.”

“Your story?”

“My Indian story” Fletcher said calmly. “It’s kinda fun.”

So they agreed on dinner later in the week. Bill Fletcher left the store with a box of frangipani incense sticks and a whole new appreciation for the artwork of Jasper Johns.