

VON MAUR NOIR

By Jeff Dunne

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CHARACTERS

MARTIN

A cashier in Household Goods. May or may not be wearing women's underwear.

ALISON

A customer accompanied by a snake. Very likely to be wearing women's underwear.

SETTING

A counter in a department store.

SCENE

(Martin is working behind the cashier counter in the Household Goods department of a department store when Alison approaches with a snake draped around her shoulders. There's traditional film noir music circa 1945 playing in the background, just a little louder than is comfortable. Martin faces the camera.)

MARTIN (FRONT)

I knew she was trouble the moment she walked up to my counter. My old man used to tell me “never trust a dame with a snake”. 'Course, that was after he fell in love with that plumber...

ALISON

Excuse me?

MARTIN (FRONT)

...and she flushed his love down the—

ALISON

(Louder...)

Excuse me?

(Martin turns to look at her.)

MARTIN

What was that?

ALISON

I said excuse me!

MARTIN

Hang on a minute.

(He picks up his cell phone and turns off the music.)

MARTIN (FRONT)

I don't know why I keep that so loud.

MARTIN

Now what was that?

ALISON (FRONT)

He knew what I said. He was just playing games. Music games. But I didn't have time for his... games. (*She looks quizzically at the camera.*) Mu-games? Mus-games... Ahh, forget it.

ALISON

I said excuse me.

MARTIN (FRONT)

I knew she said excuse me. Dames like that always want to be excused.

ALISON

Who are you talking to?

MARTIN

What?

MARTIN (FRONT)

I'll be right back.

MARTIN

Nobody. Who were *you* talking to?

(Alison looks at the camera, considers the audience, then turns back to Martin.)

ALISON

Nobody.

MARTIN

Did you ever wonder if we might be talking to the same nobody?

ALISON

No.

MARTIN

Me either.

ALISON (FRONT)
He wondered.

MARTIN (FRONT)
She wondered.

ALISON

Look, mister...

MARTIN

Martin, but *you* can call me... Martin. And what about you?

ALISON

I'll also call you Martin. If you don't mind.

MARTIN (FRONT)

I didn't mind. In fact, I kind of preferred it.

ALISON

I need your help with something, Martin.

MARTIN (FRONT)

It was much better than what my ex-wife called me.

ALISON

Martin? Can you hear me?

MARTIN

Oh, right. So what kind of help do you need? I ain't got all day.

(Alison looks around at the otherwise empty store, then at Martin who also looks around.)

MARTIN (FRONT)

Alright. Maybe I *did* have all day. And a good bit of tomorrow too.

ALISON

I think someone's after me, Mister Martin. I'm scared for my life.

MARTIN (FRONT)

(Completely self-absorbed...)

I had been scared for *my* life once. I'd been working at the Flap and Tickle Brewery, dressed like a pelican, when this— *(drunk mountain lion stalked up ...)*

ALISON

Don't ignore me, Mister Martin. A dame don't like to be ignore for a pelican story.

(Martin gives the camera a look of being offended that someone would dare not want to hear his story, then relents and turns back to Alison.)

MARTIN

You say you're being followed?

ALISON

That's right, Mister Martin. And I need to find a frying pan.

MARTIN

Gonna clock him one, but good?

ALISON

No, I... just need a frying pan. And maybe a new blender. Mine is... well, just getting lazy these days.

MARTIN

Well, ma'am...

ALISON

Geneva.

MARTIN

It's nice there.

ALISON

No. My name. It's... *Geneva.*

MARTIN (FRONT)

I could tell she was lying.

MARTIN

Is that so, *Geneva*? I think you're lying to me.

ALISON (FRONT)

I was lying to him. I had to lie.

MARTIN

I think your name's Alison.

ALISON (FRONT)

He was right. My name was Alison. (*Considers, then realizes...*) Still is. But then, he'd been reading the script, so I probably shouldn't have lied about *that* in the first place.

ALISON

Alright, Martin. You caught me. So now what?

MARTIN (FRONT)

I knew what she really wanted. Dames like that only want one thing from a guy like me.

(Martin pulls out a frying pan.)

MARTIN

Is this what you're looking for?

ALISON

Well, well. Mister Martin. What a big, strong blender you've got there.

MARTIN

It's a...

MARTIN (FRONT)

She got me. What could I do?

MARTIN

That's right. One class A blender. The Vita-Prep 3000. It'll blend your socks off.

(Alison hefts a frying pan.)

ALISON

I think this'll do.

MARTIN

You're not gonna use it on the snake, are you?

ALISON

(Suddenly upset and accusatory...)

Who told you about the snake?

(Martin looks at the camera with a "she's kidding, right?" expression, then a quick glance back at Alison, then back to the camera...)

MARTIN (FRONT)

You can see the snake, right?

ALISON

I wanna know who told you about the snake!

MARTIN

Nobody. Nobody told me about the snake. I just...

ALISON (FRONT)

Why the hell would you tell him about the snake? That was supposed to be just between us?

MARTIN

Who are you talking to?

ALISON

Nobody!

ALISON (FRONT)

That's the last time I trust you with my innermost snake problems. I'm very disappointed in you.

MARTIN (FRONT)

I could tell she was disappointed in someone.

ALISON (FRONT)

I think he suspects that I'm disappointed in someone.

MARTIN (FRONT)

Probably because she just told you she was.

ALISON

Wait. Can you hear me when I'm talking to... (*motioning at the camera...*) nobody?

MARTIN

(*Considering his answer carefully, then...*)

No.

ALISON

Uh huh.

MARTIN

Can you?

ALISON

Hear when I'm talking to nobody? Maybe.

MARTIN (FRONT)

I think she can hear us.

ALISON

You're talking to them again. Stop it. I need you to focus here (*spoken innocently, but with a gesture that suggests... you know...*). Can you help me, Martin?

MARTIN

I just might. You say someone's after you.

ALISON

That's right.

MARTIN

And you think he's... close by.

ALISON

I'm sure he is. And it... it makes my skin crawl.

MARTIN (FRONT)

I felt like I should tell her. But the scene ain't over yet.

MARTIN

When did you first get this feeling?

ALISON

When I stopped by the counter on the second floor.

MARTIN

Outdoor and Garden Supply.

MARTIN (FRONT)

It had to be Outdoor and Garden Supply.

ALISON

No, Mister Martin. The one by the brassieres.

MARTIN (FRONT)

She was probably looking to do a little outdoor cooking.

ALISON

Not braziers. *Brassieres.*

MARTIN

Is there a different?

ALISON (FRONT)

He knew the difference.

ALISON

You know the difference!

MARTIN

Well now I just feel like a boob.

MARTIN (FRONT)

What could I say? I was busted.

MARTIN

Maybe I do. So that's when you noticed you were being followed?

ALISON

That's right. It started just after I asked the clerk to help me find a boa that would go with this blouse.

MARTIN

I think I can help you with your problem after all, Ms. Alison.

(He motions for her to lean close. She does, and he removes the snake.)

How do you feel now?

(Alison, now free of the snake, looks around, shifting her shoulders about like she's testing her new glenohumeral freedom.)

ALISON

Mister Martin! That did it! How can I ever repay you?

MARTIN

No payment necessary, Miss Alison. It's my job.

(Alison hefts the frying pan appreciatively.)

ALISON

No payment? My, my. You're so kind. Thank you.

(She tucks the pan under her arm. Martin goes to object, as that's not what he meant, but she just keeps rolling forward.)

ALISON (CONT)

To think the answer was... practically staring me in the face the whole time.

MARTIN

So close it could have bit you. Well, just sorry I couldn't have been there sooner.

ALISON

If only you worked in Women's Apparel.

MARTIN

How do you know I don't?

ALISON

I meant today.

MARTIN (FRONT)

So did I.

(Martin gives the camera a knowing wink, then lights out.)