

Bernice

by Rick Marcou

So it's kind of an interesting story, the one about Bernice. It goes something like this:

Bernice decided to go to the nail salon Saturday morning. No particular reason, it just made her happy to go and get freshened up with her fingers and toes. Morty certainly didn't care, he just nodded and made a noise that was either "have fun" or a belch. You never really knew with Morty. But it didn't phase Bernice, because freshly painted nails made her happy. Made her feel glamorous, even in her very unglamorous life. The only people who would see her nails would be Morty, who would again belch out something resembling a compliment before returning his attention to the ballgame, and maybe Irene next door if she was outside when Bernice got home. She certainly wouldn't go over there if Irene wasn't outside, that would be too desperate, even for Bernice.

And so Bernice went to the nail salon. Which meant she turned left at the Mt. Olive Street light, instead of the right turn she normally took which led past a park to the grocery store, the drug store, and pretty much everything else that comprised her weekly schedule. Which was a good thing today, because just 10 seconds after Bernice turned left and headed down the street, a police car pulled out of that park and nabbed a driver going 43 in a 35. Bernice was doing 47 in the other direction, which was actually kind of low for brick-footed Bernice.

The nail salon was in a strip center half a mile down, along with a pet store, a vacuum repair shop and a check cashing place. Not exactly a high-end retail center, but it was the nail salon she liked. And it was the closest. So in she went, and 45 minutes later she emerged from the salon, with a shiny merlot coat on her fingernails and bronze on her toes. She walked out carefully in her sandals, with tissue paper in between each toe in case they weren't yet fully dry. She decided to walk around for a few minutes before getting back in her car, to make absolutely sure they were dry. Didn't want to mess up the perfect coat.

She walked into the pet store, something she had never done despite getting her nails done here probably 20 times before. As soon as the door closed, and she took her second step in, she heard "pretty lady" squawked out. Stopped her in her tracks. She looked around and didn't see anyone other than the counter man in the back. She moved forward and heard it again, a little louder, "pretty lady." She stopped and looked around, this time seeing a magnificent white bird in a cage along the back wall. It was moving around, looking up at her one moment and then bobbing its head in different directions as it moved along its perch. "Oh my", Bernice exclaimed as she walked in the direction of the bird. "Pretty lady." "Oh thank you so much." "Pretty lady".

"I think he likes you," said the clerk walking towards her. And so 20 minutes later Bernice walked out of the store carrying a bird cage, bird feed and some other birdcare items. But not before the clerk said, "and I really like your nails." Bernice felt like the magnificent bird now.

So now Bernice is greeted every day by the words "pretty lady." And not always from the bird.

The moral of the story?

Always get your nails done. You never know how it can save your day, and put an ever-present smile on your face!

