

The Duke of Yelp

“Who is this person?” Said Armen, the owner of the new bakery. Armen looked around at his customers, sitting at café tables, drinking tea or coffee and eating desserts. Meanwhile, John was on his computer in the second-floor apartment next door. He was playing a game of hide and seek with Armen.

“Guess it’s time to make another appearance” said John. Whenever the café was busy, John came in, bought a cookie, hung out a while and checked in, but since he also checked in from his apartment, Armen had no idea whom the Duke of Yelp was.

The modern coffee house was not a bohemian or flower child flophouse. Instead of a bearded man playing a guitar, there was jazz and spa music coming out of ceiling speakers. Tie-dye cloth and beanbag chairs gave way to expensive leather furnishings expertly matched to create an ambience of warmth and relaxation. At least a dozen people were connected by phone, laptop or iPad, tapping away while talking with companions; heads bobbed and eyes darted up and down. Although Armen was playing catch up, it seemed all young people were skilled in tech use. He just hoped none of them were hacking into his computer to get credit card information.

“Great shortbread,” John said to the cashier. “I’ll take four.”

The dark-haired girl with Mediterranean looks selected four unbroken cookies and put them in a bag. “Will that be all?” she said smiling.

“And a coffee,” said John as he selected a large take-out cup and lid, then filled it from the self-service decanter. While John was waiting for his change, he tapped on his iPhone, checking in to the location.

Armen heard a ping from his computer and looked around the room. He walked over to his computer, set to the Yelp page that showed his bakery/café. “This one person keeps checking in with the name Pat27. Hmmm. Could be a man or a woman. No picture.” He needed another way to find him or her.

A 20-something Asian woman with faded jeans, soft, brown boots and a pink cotton sweater walked in; John’s head came to a stop as he saw her. He watched as she bought a tea and raspberry scone, sitting at the corner table and opening her kindle to read. Normally not one to take chances, John decided this was worth the risk. He walked over to her table, paused, presented his bag and said, “Have you tried the shortbread?”

The woman gestured for John to sit down, “No, I would like that. I’m Amy.”

John smiled. “John” and he sat down next to her.

“I don’t normally take desserts from strangers” she said.

“I don’t normally offer them,” said John. “Are you from the Mission?” John asked.

“No, the Sunset. My friend is in the wine bar next door.”

Armen walked around the seating area, glancing at screens. People continued to come and go. He decided to secretly take snapshots of them with his phone.

John wondered if her friend was male or not; he hoped she would offer this information. “Yes, it looks like a fine place, a little upscale for this neighborhood though.”

Amy broke off a nibble of shortbread and swallowed. “Well, that’s my friend’s way of meeting rich guys.”

John put his hand on the table. “And you?”

Amy took a sip of her tea, and then put her hand on the table closer to John. “Money comes and goes. I don’t waste it, so I don’t need much.”

John was feeling comfortable now. “Yeah, me too. But I guess you can tell by the way I dress.”

Amy looked John over. “You look fine, do you mean the plaid, flannel shirt?”

John nodded. “Holdover from winters in Berkeley. You?”

Amy leaned forward. “UCLA, but I grew up here. You’re not from here, are you?”

How would she know that? John had no discernible accent. “No, Boston. How did you know?” he asked.

“You speak more slowly than natives.” After about an hour of social dancing, John and Amy walked out, went up to his apartment and made love.

Back in the bakery, Armen looked at the customer pictures he had on his phone. It was 10:00pm, closing time when a man in a mask came up to the register, pointed a gun at Armen and demanded the money. The gunman tapped something into his phone. “Ping.” The dark-haired girl took the money out and handed it to the gunman.

You could almost make out a smile from the robber as he turned to leave. “Remember the Duke!”

When the police arrived, Armen showed them John’s picture. “This is the guy who’s been casing my place.”

John escorted Amy back to the wine bar. “Who is this?” said Jenny as she saw John with Amy.

John extended his hand. “John, this is Jenny, a sorority sister visiting from L.A.”

Jenny could tell where Amy had been. “So, John what do you do?”

Amy gave her a nudge. “Hands off girl, I saw him first.”

John was flattered with the attention of these two beautiful women. “Would you ladies like a drink?”

Amy and Jenny said in unison “champagne please.”

In his peripheral vision, John caught them whispering to each other as he walked to the bar. “Three champagnes please, but let’s keep it under \$25.00.”

A waitress from the wine bar pointed out John to a policeman, who was letting them know about the robbery next door. “OK, I see him.”

As John and the women were toasting, John pulled out his phone and checked in to the bakery one last time, after they had closed. This would give Armen a laugh when he got in next day; it was just harmless fun.

The policeman, seeing John posting on his phone, confiscated it, looked at the posting for the bakery. “Turn around Pat27, we got you” and led him out the door in handcuffs. “Or should I call you Duke?”