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- MUSIC
- 24/7
- FOOD
- CLASSIFIEDS
- PROMOTIONS
- SPECIAL SECTIONS

Home » Articles » Columns » Flavor Saver » Flavor of the Week: Martha Cool Girl

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Flavor of the Week: Martha Cool Girl

ADAM WADE lost the girl who passed the bar but found another who would actually go to one

By Adam Wade



Thomas Pittilli

On a Friday night in March, my hopeless, 31-year-old body lay on my futon. The futon embarrassed me, along with the countless water bugs scaling the walls, the extremely low ceilings and the basement apartment itself.

A corporate lawyer had just dumped me, only months after we were set up by a coworker of mine. The lawyer didn't feel she was better than me, she just didn't really know the type of person I was. We typically went to fancy sushi restaurants and places where I had to wear a collared shirt and dress shoes. One night I met up with her wearing jeans and sneakers. I told her I felt like going to a diner for grilled cheese

sandwiches. This ballooned into an argument and the following day she broke up with me via email.

In my apartment, my phone vibrated on top of my rickety, three-shelf, thrift store bookcase. Text messages from my friends at the local bar. They were all harassing me to come and join the fray. Most of them were four or five years older than me; they were cops, teachers and firemen, and the closest I had to family in New York. Finally I received a text from Pat the Bartender, who looks like a young Carroll O'Conner. "If you're not here in 19 minutes, I'm taking it back." It was the television he gave to me when he found out mine was broken. He showed up drunk at my door one night wanting to watch The Wire on DVD. When I placed my laptop on top of my deceased TV and pressed play, he blurted out, "Are you serious?" He left in a huff. The next morning, as I dressed for work, Pat knocked on my door. He was there with a brand new one in his arms.

Pat's playful threat was enough motivation to leave the house. When I walked into the bar, my friends all shouted my last name in unison as if I were the patron saint of the place. Pat opened a bottle of Heineken Light without me even asking. This was Pat's way of saying he wanted me to have a good night.

I took my first sip and began clearing empties off the tables behind me; sometimes I swap bar-back duties for a few rounds. I gathered some finished bottles at a table where two pretty girls in their mid-twenties were sitting. I gave them a grin and happily nodded my head, something I do when I'm overexcited. The girl on the left gave me a slight smirk, but the one on the right flashed a huge smile. The center of my forehead, right above my eyes, numbed a little and I heard ringing. The kind of ringing that comes from a bell mounted on the handlebars of a girl's bicycle. She reminded me of a girl I used to scoop ice cream with at my high school job.

The Smile Girl spoke to me: "Have a drink with us."

"OK," I said, and stuck around for a half hour chatting, and they invited me to go to a dive bar a couple blocks away. I thought about it for a moment until the smile girl patted me on the back and said, "C'mon, it'll be fun."

Leaving with the two girls, Pat and the regulars giddily watched me, like proud parents at a little league game.

A few beers, three shots of Jameson and two and a half hours later, Smile Girl's friend was long gone and the two of us closed the joint.

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She talked about her cat, Leo the Lion, and how he broke all the sides of the plastic blinds that were in the windows of her apartment. She also told me that her clothing closet was in her kitchen. I found her realness extremely attractive. I bet she liked going to diners and ordering grilled cheeses.

Her name was Martha, which was also the first name of my 60-year-old landlady. When she gave me her phone number I immediately plugged her name into my cell as Martha Cool Girl—I planned on calling her and didn't want to end up dialing my landlady by mistake.

Martha Cool Girl walked me home, and for the first time I wasn't ashamed about where I lived. As we stood outside the steps of my basement apartment, I told her, "It's just temporary. Once the renovation construction of the penthouse is complete, I can move back up there." I pointed up to the top floor of my building, the unkempt art studio that belonged to my landlady's husband. Through the windows you could see the lit, multicolored Christmas lights and silhouettes of plastic plates made to look like UFOs.

She laughed. "Who's renovating it, Captain Kirk?"

I laughed out loud, then leaned over and gave her a peck on the cheek and said, "I had a great time, Martha Cool Girl."

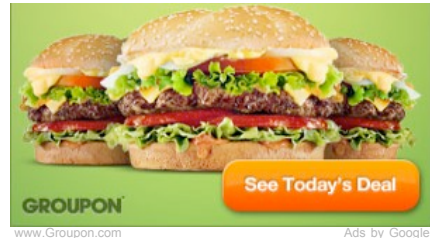
Then I went in again, this time for her lips. I took a rare, uncharacteristic chance, and as she kissed me back, I felt like I had just won the lottery.

Martha smiled, and as she started walking away, she turned to me and said, "You got my number; you better call me." As I watched her walk into the misty night, I grinned and happily nodded my head. There was hope for me after all.

Adam Wade is a New York-based writer and current GrandSLAM Storytelling Champion at The Moth. You can find more of his work at adamwade.com.

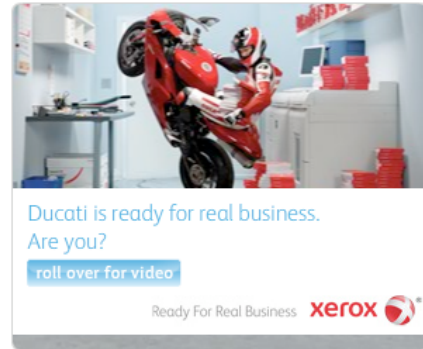
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