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***Of Vietnamese Food and Birkenstocks*****Bethany Ivie**

The thought of taking one of my good friends and awarding her with a first-place blue ribbon makes me a little sick. The term “best friend” kind of annoys me. Since all of my friends are special little snowflakes in their own right each has a special place in my affections. I love ‘em all. That said I can’t make myself call Marilyn Bolton my best friend. Anne Shirley would call her a “bosom friend”. Yes, that’s more like it- a kindred spirit. When I describe Marilyn it borders on gushing: I tend to take every good quality that you see listed in a personal ad and apply it to her: pretty, and smart with a “great personality”. I’m also fairly certain that she likes piña coladas and getting caught in the rain (or maybe it’s Miller Lite and wool scarves...who knows). But, at any rate, I have never met anyone as unique as Marilyn Bolton, and that’s one of the reasons that I love her.

There are some people that hide their quirks under mainstream clothing and normal socks. Marilyn doesn’t. She wears corduroy pants, funky scarves, logo t-shirts, hats and, usually, a pair of brown mary-janes or Dr. Martin’s. In the summer she switches to a pair of tan Birkenstocks (or “Jesus Sandals”). She has worn a pair of brown framed glasses for years. Originally these glasses were regarded, among the orthodox, to be a little eccentric. After all, she didn’t need them. But a lucky trip to the optometrist proved that she had a fortunate astigmatism which made the specs legitimate. She has long brown hair and dark brown eyes and I have been told that, in the face, we look a bit alike. She is big. In today’s world describing someone, particularly a girl, as “big” is a honey-coated way of saying that she is fat. My friend is nothing of the sort. She is tall, muscular and quite strong. In

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fact, I defy anyone, male or female alike, to beat her in an arm wrestling match. I have tried, and am almost positive that I nearly pulled a bicep. She has the legs of an Olympic speed skater. With all of this in mind, I have been trying ever since I met her to find a single phrase to physically describe her. So far I have narrowed it down to “an Amazon in indie clothing”. That works well.

There is a saying, “You can tell a lot about a woman from the contents of her purse”. This holds true to my friend. First of all, the purse itself is pretty telling. It is one that she has knitted from army-green wool. Inside, typically, is a black moleskin journal, a pocket sized bible, a small sketchbook, some drawing pencils, a pack of cigarettes, and sometimes, a new knitting project that she is working on (it’s a big purse). The pencils, sketchbook, and even the knitting convey her vocation, though the logo emblazoned apron in the back of her car would suggest she is merely a Starbucks barista. She is an artist. She draws, writes, carves and uses her hands to create all of the time. She could make a gown (or at least a really cool bag) out of a feed sack. In fact, every time I see her she has a new idea of what to use her talent for. First, it was a theater set designer, and then it was a tattoo artist. I think now it is an illustrator for graphic novels, though she mentions the fashion industry here and there. She is a deeply creative person, constantly jotting down thoughts or memorizing poetry. Her repertoire includes Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “Xanadu” and Shel Silverstine’s “Ickle Me, Tickle Me, Pickle Me Too”. She will recite either of them for you, if you ask her to, but always says her lines in one big breath as if she doesn’t much like it:

(Inhale)”IcklewascaptainPicklewascrewAndTickleservedc

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offeeandmulliganstewAshigherAndhigherAndhighertheyflew  
ckleMe,PickleMeTickleMetoo.” (Exhale)

One of the many things that unite Marilyn and I is our love of food. We both love to try new food with a passion that borders on romance (yes, yes, we are both single, but that hardly has anything to do with it.) Some of our favorite haunts include a small little pub that serves burgers, to a hole in the wall Vietnamese restaurant, to a sushi bar. It is in these little, insignificant places we have had some wonderfully deep conversations about life and God. There have been times when she has whipped out her pocket Bible and looked up a passage. Marilyn has one of the most refreshing, original relationships with God that I have seen in a while. It is deep, earthy and 100% real. One of the best examples that I can remember of this is a particular night after we had eaten sushi. Stuffed and satisfied, we went for a stroll in the brisk night air. The conversation turned to God and His work in our lives. How He wanted to use us, and what He would do with us in the future. Out of her knitted bag Marilyn pulled a cigarette and her lighter. She lit up, kept walking and said, “You know, the crazy thing is, you just never know what God’s going to do in your life. The other day I was reading Mark chapter...oh, hey, do you want a cigarette?” This simple question well nigh blew my mind. Coming from a conservative church I had been ingrained with a stigma of the Christian, though I didn’t know it. “Good” Christians didn’t drink, “Good” Christians didn’t curse (At this point her voice cut into my thoughts with “Oh, I think that my lighter is out. Damn it!), and “good, strong” Christians certainly didn’t smoke. But here was one, my old friend, standing in front of me shaking her lighter (Damn lighter), with a lit cigarette between her lips. I took the cigarette (I took two

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actually) and smoked it with her.

So, you see, my friend Marilyn Bolton is not my best friend. I have many others that minister to me and I to them. Naturally, she does as well. I know this because they come up in conversation. But Marilyn is one friend that is unique refreshing, honest, and genuine in a special way that no one else could ever be. There are those that are funnier (though not by much), and there are those that I see more often, but there is only one brunette who has the nerve to smoke a cigarette while wearing a band t-shirt, letting out a rare profanity in our parting prayer.

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