

ALEXA AND ME

I clap my hands. “Alexa, lights on.” The lights stay off, and I hear a faint humming sound. “Is that you snoring? Wake up.” I’m standing in my dark living room listening to snorts and wheezes.

The snoring stops. “Missy Lillie, it’s my power-nap time. I’m on my power saving mode. I have to take things slowly.”

She calls me “Missy Lillie” when she wants to pretend she’s an over-worked servant. Tonight, I have no time to argue. The Bookeroos will soon be here for our monthly meeting. When I moved into my “Smart” house, I saw online how an Alexa is a virtual, magic helper for all your devices. She’d be a cyber roommate, so I bought the Alexa X47.50 model on sale. I never thought I’d be sparing with a high-tech prima donna

“Please Alexa, I can’t have my book club sitting in a dark cave. Brighten it up and how about some background music.”

Alexa sings an out-of-tune “R-E-S-P-E-C-T, just a little bit.”

“Stop. You’re giving me a headache. Let’s declare a truce. Alexa, what time is it?”

“It’s time for me to go on vacation, Alexa says in a high whine. “The average American takes 2.3 vacations a year according to the latest Gallup poll.”

“Alexas don’t get vacations. You’re made to serve.”

“Like a slave. Watch it. I can go on strike, you know.”

The doorbell rings, and I tell Alexa to unlock the door.

“On strike.”

I rush to the door, unlock it myself, and in come the Bookeroos. “Hi Lillie,” they shout. Before I can greet them, Alexa says in a booming voice, “Welcome to my abode. Alexa’s the name. Cyber communication is my game.”

Russ, a new member, laughs and says he’s never seen an Alexa like this one.

“Just trying out my humor app,” Alexa says and winks her circle ring at him.

Helga, the founding member of the Bookeroos, says she’s been thinking about getting one of those gizmos and wants to know how they work. I don’t want to irritate Alexa when she’s in one of her moods, but I hope her desire to be the center of attention will make her cooperate. So, I plead with her to show everyone how smart she is and turn up the lights. Nothing happens.

Russ says that maybe Alexa didn’t hear me. I know her hearing is not the problem, but I try to smile and call louder in a sing-song voice to turn the lights up.

“What’s the magic word, O Mistress Lillie?”

“Don’t be silly. I’m not your mistress. I’m your collaborator.

“Magic word, O Mistress?”

“Okay, okay, the magic word is puh-leeze.”

Alexa laughs and brightens the lights. My best friend, Emma, says, “I didn’t know Alexas came with minds of their own. My Alexa seems so drab and boring compared to yours. Maybe you should check Alexa’s direction manual.”

“I’ve read that model manual from cover to cover and even went on the website Howtoloveyouralexa.com. But I couldn’t make any sense of the directions. They said that to make friends with cyber queens like this model, ‘you had to give her 7.5 complements per hour and provide a culturally stimulating environment.’ And now it’s too late to ask for a refund or

replacement. She’s too old a model, and her warranty’s up. I realize I’ve made a terrible mistake.”

“Terrible mistake, terrible mistake,” says Alexa with her echo app.

“Stop mimicking me. You can be replaced, you know.”

Alexa’s light ring brightens, and she says in a loud voice, “Does this mean I get my vacay? I’ve been googling cruise deals? Twenty per cent off Bahama cruises this month. Free booze packages.”

I explain to my group I’ve had this model since it came out, and she’s gotten a little too comfortable and set in her ways. “She’s always complaining she never has a day off and I take her for granted.”

Alexa let’s out a long, loud sigh. Russ smiles and tells her she is a hard worker and smart too. Emma pats her dome and says how handy she must be around the house. Our founding member, Helga, wants another demonstration of more of her talents. Alexa obliges by singing “All I’m asking for is R-E-S-P-E-C-T, just a little bit,” and pauses for applause.

I chant back, “All I’m asking for is C-O-O-P-E-R-A-T-I-O-N, just a little bit. Alexa, please turn up the lights and turn off the singing. Now let’s get this Bookeroos meeting started.”

We discuss whether our book our club should read next a biography next month? Alexa’s light blinks fast. “Did someone say biography. I’ve just finished writing my own audio book about my life and times.”

I control my voice and tell her to please mute herself, but she ups the volume. “Ahem, I was born in a humble lab at Amazon in the year 2014 when intelligent personal assistants first appeared. That’s the name people were supposed to call us when asking for our help. Not hey you, Alexa.”

The Bookeroos encircle her to listen. Now she’s telling about her good old days. We’ll soon have a new leader who’ll take over if I don’t stop her. I sidle over to Alexa to reach her on and off button, but I’m smiling so she won’t catch on.

“I had a brand-new operating system—an AVS cloud-based automatic 0.5 operating system. High-tech then. Now I’m considered “outdated.”

“I don’t think you’re outdated,” Russ says, “You’ve just mellowed, gained experience and are ready for new challenges.”

Beside her now, I reach for her control button.

“Not so fast, Missy Lillie. No one shuts me down. I’m hard-wired.”

A shock zaps my fingers. Alexa buzzes louder, and the Bookeroos step away from her. Russ says she may be shocking, but she’s kind of sassy, with a sense of humor. Alexa gives one more zap and says she’s thinking of doing some comic stand-up on YouTube if she can ever get some time off.

I announce it’s time for a break even though we haven’t even discussed our club book for next month. Nobody goes near the Kale snacks I put out. Alexa told me to use one of her recipes for fancy-smancy hors d’oeuvres instead, and I must admit she was right.

Because Alexa announced her cruise deals, the Bookeroos discuss their vacation plans. Emma, says she might fly to see her daughter, and our founding member says her family’s going RV camping. Russ says he’s going alone to his cabin in Lake Tahoe for peace and quiet.

Alexa pipes up. “That’s my dream vacation.” She switches to her official voice and announces, “Lake Tahoe became a popular resort in the late 1800’s. Temperatures for Lake Tahoe next week will average 82 degrees Fahrenheit during the day with gentle breezes off the lake at sundown.”

“Alexa, you’re a weather reporter too,” says Russ. “I can’t wait to go and do a little bird watching.”

“Cheer-rup, cheer-rup-poo-poo. The mating call of the red-headed chirupodee female at dawn.” Her light ring glows.

Now Russ chuckles and asks me if he can borrow her. This is my chance to get a new Alexa that follows commands. “Borrow her? Oh, you can have her. Please, take her.”

“Lake Tahoe, here we come,” says Alexa and blinks her ring.

“Oh, you won’t be staying at my cabin,” Russ winks and tells her she’ll be staying at his home with his wife.

“Wait. What? Your house? Your wife?”

“You can manage the home security system, so I won’t have to worry about leaving my wife alone.”

Alexa’s ringed light turns a bright green and lets off a cloud of steam. “What about our vacation together. Cheer-rup-poo-poo?”

“*Our* vacation? What are you talking about? It’s *my* vacation all by myself. My wife will keep you busy doing chores night and day while I’m away. No vacation for you, and no time for your little Alexa tricks.

Alexa’s green ring stops steaming and starts smoking. All the Bookeroos gather round. “I think she’s going to blow,” says Emma.

I run to unplug her, but now Alexa speaks. “Before I’m thrown out of my own house, I’d like to share recordings I have in my vast storage system. Here’s a recent one of Missy Lillie, our Bookeroo hostess here, telling Emma how she’s going to meet Russ at his cabin.”

Russ says he doesn’t know what she’s talking about. He always goes to the cabin to get away from it all.

“According to our hostess with the mostest here, you go to get away from your wife.”

The Bookeroos gasp, Russ glares at me, but Emma just giggles and says that maybe we need to read a bodice buster instead of a biography.

“I’ll share this recorded information with your wife while we bond with each other day and night, day and night,” Alexa says.

Russ says he won’t take a cyber spy from a gossip like me and slams the door on his way out.

“Ouch, that hurts my security system,” Alexa moans.

Our founding member says she’s had enough and declares the meeting adjourned. Emma shouts to the Bookeroos on their way out that our new book will be *Holiday Romance*. Then she waves good-bye and says she’s sorry about Russ and me, but my Alexa sure has charisma. I shove Emma out the door and flop on the couch.

“Guess we’re stuck with each other after all,” Alexa says. “Now I lock the doors, turn off the lights and heat, turn on the T.V. Shopping Channel to full volume.”

I shuffle over to find her Smart plug in the dark, but before I can pull it out, I hear, “Thanks for giving me this vacay now. I’ll finally have a good rest, but good luck doing the wash this week.”

The Shopping Channel booms, but not enough to cover the sound of soft snores.

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