

PALO ALTO ODYSSEY

Sexual harassment in Silicon Valley

MIRANDA bought a coffee for Eddie at Cafe Venetia on University Avenue.

He was the old friend of her brother's, whom she'd grown up with, and who had turned into a street person in Palo Alto.

"Fifty hits of acid," was the story her brother had told her many years ago, "All at once."

They sat there together and read the papers.

Miranda absorbed with interest accounts of a lawsuit in Palo Alto by a woman employed at a prominent VC firm, who claimed sexual discrimination.

Miranda knew a few things about the glass ceiling, and how it is sometimes navigated. There were too few managing partners who were female in the law firms she had worked with. The guys still wanted a man to tell them how things worked.

This is part 29 of a 48-part fictionalized serial appearing in the Daily Post, written by John Angell Grant with illustrations by Steve Curl.

A woman telling a man how things worked frightened a lot of men, especially ones who were high up in the pecking order.



MIRANDA

Miranda recalled a conference in which Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor told her that after graduating third in her Stanford Law School class, she was offered only secretarial positions at law firms.

Miranda's mind rambling, she wondered how much of the economy was rooted in men leeching after women. Palo Alto's famous Facebook

was founded by a geeky Harvard undergrad who wanted a website where he and classmates could ogle and compare women.

That turned out to contain the seeds of a booming business plan.

Miranda's niece Christi had told her the glass ceiling was a reason to marry money, rather than to try and earn it yourself. Was a woman marrying for money a good business plan?

Miranda turned back to her newspaper. The former female VC almost surely, in Miranda's experience, had been sexually harassed. But she looked like a bad witness.

She had a history of advancing in her career through romantic relationships. That would not play well in court. She had affairs with co-workers that advanced her career. Though she probably did experience sexual discrimination, most likely her lawyers advised by her to give it up.

"What do you think, Eddie?" Miranda asked her childhood friend, reviewing the VC news story with him.

"There's no difference between genders," said Eddie. "The seed and the pod. The warp and the weft. God is a woman. The modern epidemic of auto-immune disease means that the human race is eating itself, and is on the way out. We've messed up our chances. Mother Nature is turning it back over to the cockroaches."

Suddenly Miranda felt an earthquake. The table shook, the coffee jostled, the plants swayed.

Looking around she could tell who were the people who'd grown up in the area; and who knew what was happening. The out-of-towners looked perplexed.

"Here we go," said Eddie. "This is it."

More on Monday.