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 Retort Magazine

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Pimiento by: Asterisk

Note: The following is an excerpt from Asterisk's upcoming book, "**The Modesty of Gangrene.**"

RETORT MAGAZINE -----

My mood was irritable and the a.c. was over-cranked, again, which made considerably more skittish. The Freon laced air was seeping into the inte of my skull and giving it jagged goose bumps. The phenomena was mystical and painful for me to bear much longer. Every time I moved head, my brain felt like it was a freshly erupted poison ivy rash grin against an old wool sweater--one that reeked of musty moth balls.

Victoria, the hostess, took notice of my severe discomfort. She was a s number, a model type, wearing a spaghetti strap dress that resemble cosmic negligee.

"Edgy?" she said as her black chiffon hair lingered about her bare should Her skin was a warm, mellow-almond shade, but her eyes could bite, w made me wary of her smile.

"The damn thermostat's frazzled again," I said. I started to shake my h in disgust at the matter but stopped when I felt the jagged goose bu scratch viciously at my brain. "Doesn't the chill get to you?"

She gave me a blank stare as I unconsciously looked down at her brea Her nipples were calm. Strange visions of hibernating bees wand through my head.

"Snap out of it, Boy," she said as she gently slapped me on the ch "They're not that impressive."

She obviously missed the segue, but the confidently over-frank observa about her small handfuls of bulging flesh begged her pardon.

"I wasn't--"

She cut me off with a wild, bubbly laugh and said, "Drink your bitters. got some people to seat."

She moved toward her podium with steamy precision and greeted a part 5 Argentinian men, irisless hustlers whose savoir-faire was as congested their egos and whose cologne was as cheap as it was strong.

Their stench was intolerable. My head reeled. I looked down at the snifters of bitters and soda I had poured myself...how long ago, I couldn't remember was half full, but fizzing with gusto and the closest thing to an ethereal palate cleanser within my grasp. I seized the glass and slurped the piquant refreshment. My temples twitched dramatically and a cool wave ran through my body as the carbonated bubbles exploded in my mouth and throat. My relief multiplied when Victoria led the Argentinians toward their table, out of my vicinity. They gawked at her easy sway, made smarmy, bark-like gestures and exchanged numerous comments about her physique in their own tongue.

"Cut up some lemons," I said to myself as I placed my empty snifter in the sink beneath the bar.

I had restocked my garnish tray with wedges of lemons and luscious maraschino cherries, slices of navel oranges, little round onion balls and about to get to the olives when a group of swanky, South Beach hips bounced through the front door and distracted my streamlining routine which was securing my Zen for the time being. They were a typical party martini swilling, Jack and Jill lounge hounds...flashy dresses, black patent shoes, glittery faces...they were a typical party except for the Sombro Factor. Amongst the four women and lone bachelor was a puppy-faced young boy who, aside from his leather pants and black satin polo shirt was wearing red plastic slippers and a rather authentic looking sombrero.

Victoria greeted them and Sombrero Boy began to paw at her wispy, dress.

"This material is divine...it reminds me of a Gucci," he said. "And you, you are absolutely gorgeous."

"Listen kid," said Victoria, "you don't want to aggravate me."

"But you're so stylish, you can't get aggravated."

"Style and aggravation are more similar than most people think."

"Isn't she precious?"

The Jack and Jills chortled with amusement.

"If you'll follow me, I'll show you to your table."

"What a precious doll," lisped out of his mouth repeatedly as she escorted

the group to the last open table in the restaurant.

* * *

"Hoytchotbe nyekaterere ees-nashih leudey smogut oovidit echnuyou boili sroo na eech fsyechk..."

The trio of Russians spoke loud and fast and before Victoria could det them to me, they attempted to find a table themselves.

"Excuse me," Victoria shouted after them as she squirmed away f Sombrero Boy. They raised their boisterous and choppy voices, attempt to ignore Victoria.

"Excuse me!" she demanded.

Realizing there were no available tables they finally paid her some h Victoria corralled them, then situated them at the bar for me to cont with.

"Good evening, what can I get for you?" I asked. They huddled fc moment and seemed a bit indecisive. "Vodka? Stoli perhaps?"

"Bah," grumbled the man. His wife squawked as if deeply insulted and t portly, twenty-something daughter just sat there mute, like a wet stone.

"Tequila, you stupid yabatsa!" he shouted.

"Indeed," I said and felt the scratching between my ears surge.

"The best! Three shots of the best!"

"Of course, the best...I can sense that about you, sir."

I reached back without moving my head, grabbed the new bottle of sii barrel Porfidio and furnished them with three prompt shots.

Bam, Bam, Bam. They sucked them straight down.

"Three more!" he shouted.

Bam, Bam, Bam.

"Three more!"

Bam, Bam, Bam...

Half-way through the bottle, I noticed Sombrero Boy doing an impres amount table hopping. He was aquatinting himself with the chic fer specimens of various candle-lit tables by sensually caressing their temp Watching him seemed to vicariously quell my festering discomfort in s odd way, but I was having a difficult time keeping his frolicking in focus.

My vision was beginning to get blotchy due to the massive amount shimmering coming from all the glam-wear that the Russians were sport. The husband's bellowing stomach had set an eye-whipping, full-sail to bolts of material that constructed his silvery-satin, Moschino shirt. mother of pearl buttons swirling light in fractured directions. His w Versace purse and sequin blouse funneled streams of incandescence of her puttied face--she had globs of lipstick stuck to the corners of her m and enough foundation piled on her cheeks to plant a geranium in--and streams of incandescence seemed to get stuck on her purse and blouse would break free of them in violent bursts that mocked a savagely epile beacon. Their daughter was crammed into a golden tasseled Thierry Mu outfit. It was some sort of sparkly, bathtub-gin, party dress, and it being stretched around her moping, hippo figure with no mercy.

"Appetizers, now! Zakuska!" shouted the husband.

"Food for us! Food now!" shouted the wife.

The daughter just sat there, bumble faced, her shiftlessness retarding shine of her envelope-pushed dress...its subdued tassels were the solace for my semi-blinded eyes, but I opted to face toward her parent feared that if I had continued to look at her instead of her parents, her o all appearance would have twisted my retinas in much more tragic ways.

I tried to find another direction to face, but they had me cornered, mor less. I looked up in desperation and realized that the overhead track lamps were fired up full whack. They were burning high-power halogens shot rays like laser beams off of the Russians.

"I must get to the dimmer switch," I mumbled to myself, then addressed family haughtily, "I'll be right back with some menus."

"We know what to order, yabatsa," said the husband.

"I want rice," said the wife.

"Feed me egg rolls," said the husband.

"We have spring rolls or salad rolls and fried rice or--"

"The rice with no meat," said the wife as she waved me off.

"Well, we have rice with shrimp, rice with peanut--"

"What is this. You think we stupid Russians? Just feed me some rolls and wife some white rice," he demanded, then looked at his daughter, who m a small spherical gesture with her thumb and forefinger. "And some ol for my daughter."

"Absolutely, sir," I said in a tone that usually accompanies a salute. nerves were starting to snap. Normally the Russians' attitude would be match for my well-honed belligerence counter-measures, but things we little too wobbly in my world right now. My only hope was to get to

dimmer switch before I broke into auto-pilot and attempted an off-kilter knee-jerk attack that would end with pot-luck results.

I put their order into the computer and continued to tap on the touch screen to feign a monitor glitch while I schemed a way to get to the circuit breaker where dimmer was located.

Tap.

Tap.

TAP.

TAP.

TAP!

SMACK! Victoria batted my hand away from the screen.

"You're going to crack the monitor, Silly," she said.

"Hun?"

"Haven't you settled yet?"

"But these Russians...they...the light..."

"Easy now...Easy. Why don't you close out their check. Their table is already ready."

"Olives! Olives for my daughter!" shouted the father.

"Yes! The Olives!" I exclaimed. I pushed Victoria aside and scrambled from behind the bar toward the kitchen, which contained the circuit breaker and a bonanza of jarred olives--all the olives a Russian's daughter could ever want. But, before I made it several steps past the exit of the small L-shaped bar, I was intercepted by Sombrero Boy. He smiled at me. It was a lecherous smile. He had braces cemented to his teeth and the halogens went into frenzy as their beams ricocheted off of his mouthful of stainless steel studs.

I winced and staggered backwards, falling into the arms of Victoria. Sombrero Boy closed in, his smile expanding.

"Tell him to cover his mouth," I pleaded to Victoria.

"Olives! Damn you! Olives," shouted the Russian couple.

"Isn't he precious," said Sombrero Boy. He began to paw at my velour pants and talk about God and Jesus and Madonna songs. My brain went completely raw. Rancid fluids shot into my sinus cavities.

The Boy's finger tips stroked the length of the zipper on my pants.

Zzzzam!

I shot up out of Victoria's arms and sprinted toward the kitchen, ne plowing down the boy and several small waitresses carrying armful: Chicken Pad Thai. I skidded into the kitchen, stumbled over a soap buc and grabbed the dishwasher's shoulder to prevent my fall. The room silent. The chef, the prep-cooks and the dishwasher gazed at me ' confused expressions, sweat drooling out of all their pores.

"It's freezing out there," I gasped. Their confusion turned to contempt didn't understand their disgust at first, but after several moments in heat of the kitchen my faux pas crystallized into a solid realizator cohesive thought that finally anchored me to the moment.

* * *

I emerged from the kitchen with a gallon of Spanish olives. A strange soi bravado had jolted my psyche and I felt geared for action. Victoria already seated the Russians at a table next to the Argentinians. The coi was busy scoffing down their appetizers, but I caught their daughter's ey raised the jar of olives in her direction, smiled and flashed her a jus minute forefinger. She sneered at me.

I had subdued the halogens to a point where they were barely glow which gave the bar area an obscure, ambient atmosphere. Upon re-ente it, I broke out some plastic cocktail arrows, cracked open the jar of ol and began to shish-kabob them, three to a skewer. The arrow heads wer sharp as scalpels and in the low light I was having trouble navigating tl through the olives without stabbing my finger tips. I punctured my several times. The blood that dripped out looked more black t red...everything was beginning to take on a shadowy hue.

Victoria strolled behind the bar, told me the Jack and Jills wanted a roun martinis, then reminded me to close out the Russians' bar check and ac to their dinner check.

I looked around, nodded and quietly said, "okay," referring to the lighting

"Feeling better are we?" she said with peculiar sensuality.

"That's one way of putting it."

"It is. Got enough olives there?"

"Some people never get enough." I quickly looked down at the fl realizing how cliché this must have sounded. I cleared my throat. "Wi you mind bringing this over to the Russians?" I slid a hurricane g overflowing with skewered olives toward Victoria.

"Not at all, sweetie-pie," she said, her upper torso writhing slightly.

Before she could even set the glass down on the table, the Russi daughter grabbed it out of her hand and dumped its contents out c

napkin. She picked up one of the plastic arrows and munched the olives of it in a sloppy, corn on the cob fashion. She studied the left over plastic arrow. Enamored by it, she extended it out in front of her, as if she were checking a pool cue for warpage. She flung the arrow away from the table, huffed a laugh, grunted, then picked up another trio of olives. She was either severely drunk or severely retarded--or both.

"Both," I said to myself so loud that it caused me to flinch.

While she continued this behavior, I looked down at my various utensils and was struck with a colossal paraphernalia epiphany. I grabbed a plastic cocktail stirrer and fitted a plastic arrow into one of its ends. Into the other end I notched a set of cross hairs then bent out each of the four segments so that they were perpendicular to the shaft. After connecting three straws end to end and inserting the stirrer-dart into them, I knew I had fashioned, even Khrushchev would have recognized as, ingenious weaponry.

I blew up my cheeks, took aim, then shot a violent burst of air through the cocktail blow gun. The stirrer-dart shot across the restaurant, grazed on the Argentinean on the side of his neck, then fell into his lap. Several beads of blood trickled out of the resulting scratch. The Argentinean wiped his forehead with his hand and saw blood on his palm. He looked down and saw what appeared to be a plastic cocktail arrow teetering on his thigh.

"Eh? Que el fucking infierno es esta?" he shouted. He looked around and saw the Russian's daughter gobbling olives. Little plastic arrows were littered around her table.

"Tu cochino bitche," he yelled while lunging at her. He ripped a skewer of half eaten olives out of her hand then stabbed her in the thigh with it.

"Waaaah!" she squealed. The father tried to swing at the Argentinean, but before he could, the other four Argentineans were hammering his face with their fists. All the Thai waitresses scurried under tables. Plates of food fell to the floor. The mother roared in anger...particles of Thai sticky rice belched out from between her scarlet tarred lips. She swung her Versace purse at one of the Argentineans. Its medusa-faced, gold buckle sliced into his cheek. She continued to recklessly swing her purse through the air. It whacked several other diners while they were running for the exits.

At one point she came at me, her back-hoe teeth shellacked with soy sauce tainted saliva. I grabbed my soda gun and used it like mace, shooting a stream of water into her eyes. She stammered back and shrieked with terror, realizing she was soaked and all of her make-up was sliding off of her face. She scrambled out the front door with her arms wagging up in the air.

The wailing daughter ripped the arrow out of her flesh as she struggled to catch up with her mother. Blood diluted with cellulite oil flowed out of the wound; it ran down her leg to the heel of her Manolito Blahnik pumps, causing the soul of her foot to slip haphazardly in the shoe. She finally ran it out the door, but not before leaving a trail of her quasi-liposuctioned blood which had burst out of the arrow-hole and punctuated her steps.

* * *

The restaurant had cleared out and a large crowd had gathered on the walk by the front entrance. The Argentinians heard police sirens in distance and shrewdly dashed out the back door. The only ones left in were myself, the bludgeoned father and Sombrero Boy, who was pou Perrier onto the blood stains on the father's shirt.

"This will never come out," he moaned as he blotted a large spot on collar. The father's body began to go into spasms. Instead of being start Sombrero Boy just seemed disenchanting. He stood up and tossed the nap he was using as a blotter on top of the convulsing body and walked to me.

"Now where's that precious hostess of yours," he lisped.

"She not my hostess," I said.

"Don't be so queer."

"Actually," I said with a laugh under my breath, "I think she slipped out back."

Red and blue police lights began to strobe through the windows; although I knew they should've agitated my brain in some way, I was oblivious to pain. I stared at one of the halogens and actually wished it was a little brighter.

"Let's go find her," said Sombrero Boy. He took me by the hand and led out the back door just before the police entered. We walked through an alley to a parking lot across the street, where we found Victoria. She was leaning against the fender of a Porsche Boxer, smoking a joint. She tossed her head back with exotic finesse and blew a silver stream of smoke up toward the stars. Sombrero Boy bowed his head to us, curtsied, then skipped off to mingle with the crowd out in front of the restaurant.

"What...the fuck...was that all about?" she asked me. I said nothing. My focus was lost in the jovialness of the crowd. Men in velvet suits were drinking champagne straight out of the bottle while cops took statements from their brassiereless dates. A Thai chef was spoon feeding shrimp dumplings to the medics as they wheeled a gurney through the front door of the restaurant. Sombrero Boy had convinced a pair of lanky French debutantes to prop themselves up on the hood of one of the patrol cars to remove their shoes so he could massage their feet.

"Hello?" Victoria said as she waved her hand in front of my face.

I turned to her and looked straight into her eyes. "Sometimes all it takes is a different kind of light."

"You're such a deer, dear." She laughed and mussed my hair with her hand, then passed me the joint. I took a toke, passed it back to her, then licked a dry speck of blood from my finger tip.

A long silence passed.


"Indeed, sometimes that's all it takes," I said distractedly.

"I've got to spike your bitters and soda more often..." she said with a sn but I was unable to pay much attention to her words. I was too caught u the way the police lights were reflecting off of her teeth.

--Miami Beach

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