

A Tasteful Dessert

The dinner conversation, which had flowed through a familiar course of friendly topics and questions up to this point, was brought to an early halt by a gentle knocking from the front door. Arthur looked up from his beef roast.

“Ah now, who could that be? Dear, are you expecting anyone?”

Robin nodded. “Oh yes, I believe Mrs. Bauer was going to drop off some of the pickled strawberries she talks so much about. Junior, could you go get them? Be sure to thank her!”

Junior obliged, eager to help his parents. However, when he had opened the door, he did not find Mrs. Bauer. In the doorway stood a man wearing a tan suit and a choreographed smile, clutching a thick briefcase in his right hand, his knuckles white from the weight of it. Upon seeing Junior, the man let a more genuine smile form on his face; he couldn’t help but to have a soft spot for kids. He crouched down, releasing the weight of the briefcase to the floor.

“How’s it going there, sport? Your parents home?” inquired the man. The man’s voice was a beautiful and refined product, each syllable being graciously served to Junior’s ears, although Junior couldn’t quite place his accent. All the same, Junior nodded.

“Do you think you could get them for me? I’ve got a little something here they’ll want to see.” The man’s fingers gently drummed against his case, which Junior curiously eyed, before nodding again and rushing back to the dining table.

“Mom, Dad, there’s a man at the door! He wants to talk to you!”

Arthur walked to the doorway, Junior following closely behind.

“Can I help you, sir?”

The man handed a business card to Arthur, who looked it over and, like his son, eyed the case with interest.

“Pleasure to meet you, sir. The name’s Mr. Silvera. Hope I’m not interrupting anything. Do you have an interest in my wares? I promise I’m a good enough salesman that this visit shouldn’t take too long.” Mr. Silvera’s right eye winked.

Arthur chuckled and let him in. “I haven’t seen a salesman of, uh... your kind, in ages. Please come in, come in - you can set yourself up on the coffee table. Junior, go get your ma, and you bring back a couple glasses of water.” Junior obliged.

“It’s a bit of a dying trade, but there’s still some of us out there,” the man acknowledged.

When everyone was gathered, the family settled into their couch, and the man cracked open his briefcase, pulling out and displaying jars on the table. Each jar was no more than a couple inches tall, over halfway full with an opaque, pink-ish fluid. They all had been carefully labelled, with ages, prices, and places of origin being displayed on their lids. *Egypt. Vietnam. Thailand. Brazil.* Junior picked up the closest jar, and peered in; he then proceeded to give the jar a series of sharp taps. Something lurking in the fluid flailed in response.

“Careful now, don’t go hurting the product. They can be a tad sensitive.” Turning to Robin and Arthur, he asked *“I imagine that you both are currently using your originals?”*

“I don’t think I’ve used any other since our wedding, dear,” admitted Arthur, pulling out a black and white photo from his wallet. In the image, a younger Arthur was playing the guitar and singing to his bride. “I asked my uncle if I could borrow his, and he lent it to me as a wedding gift. What a shock it was for everybody! ... I always thought he had the nicest singing voice.”

Robin smiled. “It was a lovely performance, Arthur.”

Mr. Silvera finished unloading the case, and poured out some rubbing alcohol into a small dish. “*Now, are you particularly interested in anything, or would you like to just try some of them out?*”

Arthur’s mouth opened to speak, but his wife was too quick. “Well, Arthur has been going for a promotion at work, but they keep overlooking him.”

“Yes... I’m afraid it’s true.” Arthur appended. “People often interrupt me, I struggle to make myself noticed. Do you have any recommendations?”

“*Why certainly,*” the salesman purred, selecting a jar from the group. “*I’ve just the thing.*” He unscrewed the lid, and set the open jar on the table. Junior scrambled closer to get a better look.

At the bottom of the jar, there sat a fat pink tongue, wrapped up tightly in a nylon string. The string was sewn into the base of the tongue, with the other end knotted around a half dollar coin, which sat on top of the tongue. While the tongue occasionally twitched and struggled against its bonds, it was wound far too tight for it to break free. Junior thought the tongue looked like a fat worm or grub. Mr. Silvera carefully plucked the tongue from the fluid, and set it down into the dish of alcohol, which incited a more furious kind of floundering from the tongue.

“*Would you like my assistance, sir, or would you prefer to remove it yourself?*”

“I can manage, thank you though,” Arthur responded, before taking a hearty swig from his glass and swishing the water through his mouth. When he found it sufficiently clean, he swallowed everything down, fears and all. Arthur then stuck his hand deep into his mouth, grabbing his tongue by its roots, and slowly pulled it out. Like that of the jar, Arthur’s tongue had a tail of nylon thread; even when the tongue had been completely removed from Arthur’s mouth, this cord still tethered the tongue to Arthur’s innards, until at last, the string’s anchor

popped loose, and Arthur delivered the squirming tongue to his glass of water. Despite his rinse, Arthur's tongue had a brown stain from his recent meal; the color slowly oozed into the surrounding solution as the tongue spasmed in its new environment.

While his wife and the salesman kindly averted their eyes from Arthur's delicate operation, Junior could scarcely look away. Once the tongue had been placed in the glass, he finally whispered, "Woah... CAN I DO THAT?!"

"Junior, hush." Robin instructed. "Daddy has to focus."

Arthur continued with the transplant. Grabbing and unwrapping the tongue from the jar, Arthur first swallowed the strung coin, and then he slowly led the tongue into his mouth, until it was back in place.

"Well, what do you all think?" The difference was quite pronounced. Arthur's more soft and unassuming voice was now replaced by a rich and deep sound, bellowing even in a single question. Again, Junior struggled to identify the accent, but he thought it sounded somewhat British - it certainly sounded nothing like his father.

"Arthur, I love it! It's so manly!"

"What we think is besides the point - what do you think?"

"My goodness, this is amazing! The guys at the office won't talk over me now!"

"Marvelous. Let me tell you about this particular tongue. It was harvested in Northern India, and as you can tell, has a beautiful means of expressing itself. If you have any intentions to continue serenading your wife, I think you'll find that this should serve you well." Another wink emerged from Mr. Silvera's right eye.

“This tongue also has an exquisite palate. Given their extensive culinary range, Indian tongues are far more sensitive and resilient to spices and flavors than most other tongues, so I absolutely recommend that you take advantage of that.”

The salesman stopped selling, letting the others finish his job for him. Junior tested his father with several tongue-twisters, which he completed with ease. Upon inviting a kiss from her husband, Robin happily noted an improvement in the experience. Arthur himself was grinning cheek to cheek, occasionally bursting into imaginary conversation, just talking to hear the melodious sound of his voice.

“I want to try! Please dad, can I?”

“Of course you can, Junior!” Arthur jubilantly allowed. ***“Mr. Silvera, if you would.”***

The salesman looked through his selection, seeking his smallest specimen. Unsatisfied with his first search, he went through all the jars again, until at last selecting a jar.

“Alright, here we are! With this, you’ll be just like your old man. I’ll help you through the process.”

Like his father, Junior cleaned out his mouth with water, and then let Mr. Silvera into his mouth. The removal process took several attempts, during which the boy choked on his coin repeatedly, but eventually his tongue was transferred into a spare jar.

“Great job, Junior. Now comes the easy part. You’ve just got to swallow the coin. It will slide down your throat, and the weight will move the tongue in place. I’ll assist you again.”

Junior shook his head, picked up the new tongue that the salesman had selected, and stepped away.

“Junior, you’ll need help here. How about your mother or your father helps you?”

Junior continued to refuse, holding the tongue over its container, as it writhed and dripped its

brine. He then opened his mouth, and reached to stick the tongue in. But just as it was about to enter, his mother snatched the tongue from him with her left hand, and kept his mouth open with her right. Junior flailed, trying to break loose.

“Junior, let us help you.” Reaching into his mouth, Robin pushed the tongue in, nudging the coin down his throat.

“Attaboy, Junior. Now swallow the coin, and the tongue should end up in place.”

But try as he might, Junior could not. Wielding its string as a noose, the tongue had locked his uvula in a stranglehold, it thrashing against the aggressor. Junior doubled over and gagged.

“Junior, you need to swallow it.”

Getting desperate, Junior defied his reflexes and tried to swallow the coin again, only to tighten the knot around his flesh.

“Why don’t you try drinking some water, sweetie?”

“hellll... eee...” came the cry from within the mouth. Junior then forcefully vomited, his dinner and everything but the tongue coming out. It hung on with its harness, and took the opportunity to slide down into Junior’s throat. He could no longer breathe.

“SPIT IT OUT, DARLING!”

“DON’T VOMIT, YOU’LL CHOKE!”

“BITE THROUGH IT! PLEASE!”

Overwhelmed, Junior collapsed onto the floor.

“OPEN HIS MOUTH! HELP HIM!”

“QUICK! PULL IT OUT!”

But the tongue was too quick. It burrowed further down his airway, wedging itself in Junior's throat. He clawed at his neck until the oxygen gave out, his parents did until they pulled the malignant mass out themselves. By then, it was too late.

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Once the authorities had ferried the corpse away, all that remained of Junior was his tongue, which sporadically undulated in its jar, resting upon its coin.