

CHARACTER ASSASSINATION

by bri Carneski

"...so there won't be any problem with our...transaction?" Wilhelm asked, leaning forward to muffle his words and allow the buzz of the other restaurant patrons to cover his conversation.

"No problem at all," answered Wilhelm's opposite number, a go-between known simply by the pseudonym of Igor, "In exchange for the agreed upon sum, you and your associates will be...custodians...of the free remnant of Rocky Mountain National Park. All the water rights, all the mineral rights, not to mention the timber. Everything."

Wilhelm barely concealed his grin, and thought, I'm sure to get the promotion to vice-president.

"Then it is an agreement," Wilhelm said, smiling deeply, "Petrochem and its subsidiaries are glad to do business with you Mr. Igor, and your...client.."

Igor shrugged, his eyes continuously scanning the environs for any possible trouble, before adding, "Just make sure the sum is in my account first thing in the morning, or else the deal is off. Then, we will pass along the paperwork. Don't make me think this was a waste of my client's time. You wouldn't like to see what happens to those who waste my time."

Wilhelm laughed, though even he admitted it sounded a bit hollow in his ear, "You wound me, Mr. Igor. We are civilized businessmen here, and we certainly wouldn't renege on our promises."

Wilhelm thought wistfully, At least not now. Appearances are everything. If anything, we've had to become more subtle. I guess it's better. I certainly lived longer than I thought, but I miss the old days. Then your heart would race, your blood would pump. You actually knew you were alive. When everyone was literally gunning for your seat.

"Yes, civilized," Igor chuckled, "In fact, I would say this has been a most enjoyable evening except for one thing. Where is our meal?"

Wilhelm nodded in agreement, "I was just thinking that myself."

While the two men continued to talk, the door of the restaurant opened to reveal a man in the uniform of Global Express, pushing a dolly that ahead of him. He looked through the crowd, drawing dismayed glances from the other patrons. Before any employee could stop him, his eyes fixed on Wilhelm, and the man slowly made his way to Igor and Wilhelm's table.

"Special delivery for Wilhelm Knapp. Are either of you gentlemen Wilhelm Knapp?" asked the deliveryman.

Disgruntled, Wilhelm said, "I am. Why are you intruding on my dinner?"

The deliveryman took Wilhelm's anger in stride, and said, "Please sign here sir. Special delivery."

Wilhelm looked at the label and saw it was addressed to him, care of Petrochem. With great irritation, he scrawled his name, and then looked at one of the massive boxes brought in.

"So what is it?" he growled speculatively, and pressed his hand on the side of one of the boxes. Suddenly, a bright, conical light emanated from the top of the box, showcasing a three-dimensional pair of chartreuse panties. A voice filled the restaurant, "Thank you for your purchase of Sens-U-All Edible Underwear - Salmon Flavored. With your purchase of 1000 pairs, you have earned yourself one-hundred free pairs of your choice. Next time, you may wish to try some of our other exciting new flavors like Kiwi Surprise."

The voice continued to drone on for a few more minutes, and laughter filled the restaurant while Wilhelm burrowed deeper into his seat, his face flushed with embarrassment and anger.

Igor, a hint of a smile playing about his lips, tapped the boxes and said, "I didn't know you were

into such things.”

Wilhelm growled, “I am not. I didn’t order any of this. I’ve been set up.”

Wilhelm’s eyes searched the restaurant looking for the deliveryman, but in his bout of anger and embarrassment, the man wisely led.

If I find out who did this, they are going to die for it, Wilhelm promised himself, I wonder if it was Norris in accounting. He’s always had it in for me. Well, two can play this game. Appearances be damned, I know how to make it look like an accident.

Wilhelm shook his head, putting aside thoughts of vengeance, and motioned for a passing waiter to come near. As the individual drew near, Wilhelm snarled, , “Where is our food?”

“It’s on its way you bastard,” grumbled a young man from within the depths of the kitchen, flicking his long hair out of his eyes, revealing a momentary silvery sheen to his ears before the loose strands fell back into place.

One benefit of being a Jammer, he mused slightly, silence means nothing with us around. Now, let’s see, what did friend Wilhelm order. That’s right, the steak. Igor got the fish.

He pulled at the hem of his shirt, wishing that he didn’t have to wear this silly monkey-suit. At the same time, he palmed a vial hidden within his sleeve. Carefully, he twisted the lid off, and gently sprinkled the contents on Wilhelm’s meal.

Sabine better be right, thought the youth, This better work.

Wilhelm hungrily wolfed down his steak. Though the spices were a little off, it wasn’t too bad. He belched gently as he glanced at Igor, and noticed the man had barely touched his lobster.

“Go on and eat. The meal is on Petrochem after all,” Wilhelm jovially said, and patted his stomach with his right hand...which is when he a deep rumble filled the room.

“I’m quite full,” Igor replied quietly, then pushed his plate towards Wilhelm, “But you my friend, you still sound hungry. But it would be a bit inconspicuous to meet in a restaurant and not eat, wouldn’t you say? Go ahead and order something else if you wish.”

Wilhelm tried to answer, but he suddenly found his mouth closing of its own free will while deep in the pit of his stomach it felt like someone set fire to it.

“Is everything alright, friend Wilhelm?” questioned Igor.

“I...I...I don’t...” responded Wilhelm, when he suddenly heaved forward, his stomach feeling like it was on fire, and his body needed to expel all contents. A piece of steak hit Igor in the middle of his face.

Igor rose, and his fist hit the table heavily, “Wilhelm, control yourself.”

“I...I can’t...” uttered Wilhelm before his words were drowned with another bout of vomit.

Igor slammed his fist on the table, calling out, “Someone, get a medic here. Now.”

Wilhelm, however, didn’t hear the rest for darkness mercifully took him, bringing an end to his intense abdominal pain.

Wilhelm’s fluttered open, and he saw a woman in a surgical mask leaning over him.

“Am...am I alright? Where am I?” croaked Wilhelm.

The woman removed her mask, and said, "You are quite fine, Mr. Knapp. You are in Trauma Team Spinner Charlie-64-Bravo. You just had an intense allergic reaction to your meal. In fact, you are more than able to go home, if you wish."

Wilhelm, his throat feeling like someone had punched it all day, tilted his head, "I...would like that."

The doctor turned around, and said, "Then we shall be there shortly. You may wish to take it easy for a day or two, though, Mr. Knapp. And don't have any solids for at least a day. This is more for your throat, than anything else. It's just been through a great deal."

Wilhelm nodded, though he knew that come the morning he would be busy finalizing his business deal with Igor and the group of bureaucrats he represented.

The doctor continued, "And the restaurant has agreed to cover all your medical costs. They are very sorry for what happened."

Wilhelm closed his eyes, and snorted, Sorry? They practically poison me, but they're sorry? Let's see how they like being sued into oblivion.

"It's quite alright," Wilhelm replied, giving lie to his innermost thoughts, "I just want to get home."

"Just a few more minutes, Mr. Knapp." the doctor said.

Wilhelm stumbled out of the spinner none to gently and blinked at his surroundings. The dismal, decrepit buildings penetrated his awareness. Angrily, he turned on his heels, and shouted, "Hey, this isn't where I live..."

However, the spinner was already aloft once more. Wilhelm suddenly felt very alone as he took in the surroundings, not helping but notice the group of young man standing on a street corner, their own gazes resting uneasily on him.

Slowly, Wilhelm took note of the sun, and started to walk away, trying not to draw attention to himself. He managed to make it for a half a block, when a small figure darted out of an alley, and hugged him tight around the waist.

"Daddy!" shrieked the small figure, and upon further examination, Wilhelm saw it was a young child of about seven or eight.

"Daddy," continued the child, "You came back just as you said you would."

"Get the hell away from me you filthy urchin," Wilhelm yelled, pushing with both arms against the kid.

The child's grip broke, and fell to the concrete. The small kid started to wail, "Don't leave me again daddy. If...if...me and mommy missed you. Please don't hit me..."

A large, muscular hand fell on Wilhelm's shoulder, and he was spun around face-to-face to stare into the angry face of one of the youths Wilhelm passed just moments before.

"Here now, what is the meaning of this?" the youth said, his voice sharp as an ax, "You aren't going to hit the little one are you?" Flanking both sides were another four men, dressed much the same way.

"I..." Wilhelm started to say when the small child piped up, "No sir, he won't. Not as long as I let him...play with me."

The kid's head dropped, and pulled his arms tight, "Though the last time Daddy touched me, it hurt."

The youth's eyes widened, and he lunged toward Wilhelm, grabbing the corporate by the neck, and bellowed, "You bastard..."

Wilhelm futilely tried to curl into a protective fetal ball, at first trying to explain that he never even saw the kid before, but the pummeling continued so long that all thought of proving his innocence fell to the wayside. The blows continued to rain down, until Wilhelm lost track of all pain. The only thing he was aware of was the ringing in his ears. Then, the hits all stopped, while the ringing changed to a dull whoop in his awareness.

"Buddy, are you alright?" said a soft voice in his ear.

Wilhelm warily opened an eye, and caught the looming shape of a man in police uniform standing protectively over him.

"No," Wilhelm gasped, wincing with every syllable he spoke, "They...just attacked me for no reason."

"Well, you are safe now," the police officer said.

The officer acted as if to speak further, but was cut off by the raucous barking of a dog.

"Hey, what's wrong with Jerry Lee?" the cop shouted over the din.

Wilhelm opened his other eye, and twisted his head, a wave of agony filling his body as he saw another officer, this one trying with all his might to restrain a dog on a leash. His glance focused on the barking dog and shivered as he realized the dog was fixated on his position.

"You know why he gets this way, Robert" the cop retaining the dog shouted, "If he smells even the faintest hint of a drug he goes nuts. 10 to 1 gets you that he is hiding something."

Wilhelm mumbled, his concentration on the dog alone, "I didn't do anything."

The formerly friendly cop roughly forced Wilhelm to his feet, and pressed him against a wall.

"That's what they all say buddy," snarled the cop who began to pat Wilhelm down roughly. Wilhelm moaned with the quick, if brutal search, and was pleased when the officer finally stopped after having patted his buttocks.

"Now, do you believe me?" Wilhelm muttered in a jumble.

"Oh sure, I believed you until I found this vial. Looks like we have a man with a taste for the hard stuff." Robert said.

Wilhelm turned around, slumping against the wall and saw Robert holding up a clear vial filled with green crystals.

"That...isn't mine," paled Wilhelm.

"That's what they all say," growled the cop. Robert lashed out with his feet, knocking Wilhelm to the ground. With a savage kick in the ribs, Wilhelm rolled onto his stomach, when he felt his arms pinned behind his back.

"Please...stop..." Wilhelm breathed heavily, grunting as he felt a tightness descend on his wrists.

"We will...eventually," stated Robert, "But not until the boys downtown get through with you. I hope you aren't holding anything else out on us..."

The dog handler laughed, "As it is, when we are done with you, you'll have a good idea what a puppet feels like."

Wilhelm cried incoherently as he was hoisted to his feet once more, "Why is this happening to me?"

Within a small, dilapidated room, the voice of the evening news anchor filled the small room, "...in other news, Senior Manager of Acquisitions Wilhelm Knapp was arrested today on charges of drug possession. Due to his resisting arrest, and the new changes in the drug laws, he can look forward to anywhere from five to ten years in prison. Officials at Petrochem expressed surprise at

their employee's secondary habits. They further state they don't condone such behavior, though, and hope that Mr. Knapp's incarceration will give him the time to reflect on his actions. Finally, let's go to Jennifer for the weather..."

Cries of youthful laughter rose up in the room, and there was the slapping of hands. Eventually it died down, and someone stated, "That worked better than I thought. For the moment anyways. That will stall Petrochem's plans for a little while, buying a little time. And the synthi-skin gloves. Good idea. We don't want to leave any prints behind, now do we? And hacking into the spinners database on addresses. Genius. You know, this has me thinking. If it worked once, we might be able to do it again. Of course, we have to be careful, but I was thinking we could target..."

The discussion continued long into the night...