

Bread & Circuses (Revised)

This might actually be the end for that big oaf. Maybe he can squat a hundred-fifty kilos ass-to-grass, but I don't think he can take the four-thousand Newtons of meat-head punch to the chin. I just wanted to play some pool. I step in to pull him back from what would inevitably escalate to him getting his teeth kicked in. I couldn't understand very well what degree of profanity was being shared in their German shouts, and that may be for the best. The dainty girl that was probably dating the other guy pulled him back to. I wrestle my buddy out of the bar and onto a bench directly outside.

"Julian," I start at him, exhausted from containing his eager lust for violence, "it's one thing to hit on a man's girlfriend, but *accidentally* whacking him over the head with a pool cue is deserving of a good sock on its own."

He musters a good chuckle, as if his brawny abs were a bellows, but, like his talking, it somehow came out slurred.

"I know, that's why I did it. You think I have fun playing pool with someone who's so autistic? If you want to measure angles why not just come work at Airbus with me? Besides, I see that douche at the gym all the time, he deserves to have some teeth knocked out."

"Then do it when I'm not trying to just have a fun night out. I came to stay with you to see what it's like in another country, not some knockoff MMA shit."

"This is what it's like in this country. Whenever I am flirting online with a woman, out of ten, eight got children. What the fuck is wrong with this place."

"I don't see what that has to do with being a confrontational asshole."

"That's just how we are here. Maybe you would have a girlfriend by now if you were more like me." He shot me a snide smile.

"I'd also have a restraining order if I were more like you."

"Hey now," he stood up drunkenly, using the bench as support, "maybe she should have paid more attention to me than her stupid car."

I pulled his arm over my shoulders to ease carrying him.

"Maybe you should have told her that instead of crashing it."

"I have issues, okay?"

"It only took a couple dozen shots to get you to admit it."

I dragged him back to the flat. By the time we got back, he was decently balanced enough to start cooking. He mumbled about wanting something to soak up the booze. I took to the spot he had generously offered me for free, a nice spare mattress in the corner of the living room by an outlet. I didn't need much more, as most of my time not spent keeping Jul out of trouble was spent working on ideas for projects I had queued up during my studies.

"Say, I don't think I've cooked this for you yet," he said from the kitchen.

"Cooked what?"

"I call it a *LuftWaffle*. It's a pun with *LuftWaffe*. It's something I came up with while I was in our air force. We ran out of food a lot but typically had a lot of flour and butter so I made something for my troop with it."

"Flour and butter? Sounds bland as hell."

"Oh it is. But it's...what's the word? Oh—nostalgic. Here come try." He slid a plate onto the counter that separated the kitchen and living room. It didn't look appetizing from afar, and especially so up-close. Just as he had described, it was a crispy glob of wet flour.

"You know I'm trying to avoid carbs," I said, flaying the surface with a fork to see if anything about it was enticing.

"Yes, I'm also hosting you for free and trying to cut costs. If you want to run to the market and buy some stuff yourself then feel free, but this is all I'm cooking tonight."

I took a reluctant bite. Surprisingly, there was something oddly satisfying about the vapid flavor and powdery texture. I quickly found out why this was a popular treat amongst the soldiers—these things fill you up almost immediately with very little resources. I couldn't even eat half. What a life it must be to live off of something so plain.

"This is hardly a waffle. But it's a good metaphor for your personality. Bland and bloated."

"Ouch, how will I recover? At least I know how to talk to women."

"You mean single mothers?" He tossed a butter knife at me.

"You know, the reason I hate that guy at the bar is because of his girlfriend. She and I used to see each other and had a falling out. I really liked her."

"I take it she liked her car more?"

Julian spouted another hearty chuckle, though it seemed choked up due to the glob of flower in his belly.

"Well, we got into a fight. Afterward we just met up and then she started to yell at me, and I yelled at her, and we yelled. I grabbed her arm and someone already called the police."

"You just met up?"

"Well, I 'trapped' her. I talked to an old friend of her who also liked me, so I asked that old friend if she could try to convince her to meet her. So, my ex would think that *they* would meet, but then there was me. Genius, right?"

"Why...would you do that? Why not just get with her friend?"

He shrugged, and collapsed the brawn of his weight onto the sofa.

"It's likely I just don't understand women."

We sat for a while as our intestines groaned at the labor of dissolving the lazy dough in our guts. He neglected to mention that the waffles usually make you sick, but they at least stop the hunger. He stood up and sauntered closer to the mattress.

“Let’s go for a walk, I’m feeling sober enough now.”

“If you mean a walk back to the bar, no thanks. I’ve done enough babysitting for one night.”

“No, something better. Maybe even poetic. I think you’ll like it. It’s a special place I go when I’m feeling depressed.”

“Why aren’t you there all the time, then?” He kicked the mattress. “Alright, alright, I’ll tag along. Not like laying here suffering is any fun.”

We walked through the night into the more rural part of the town. There was a wimpy brook that paralleled the rutted path that ran between many pastoral properties. The night sky was clear and the air was cool, a nice change of pace from the neon bar scene. Although the path was serene in its own right, we had yet to arrive to our destination. Eventually Julian stops by a fence that outlines one of the properties.

“Here,” he starts, “this is it.”

“I don’t get it. It looks just like any of the other places we walked past.”

He starts making some squirrely noises with his mouth and clapping. A smallish 4-legged creature walks up wearily to the gate and let’s Julian pet it.

“A donkey?” I ask in disbelief. “You’re practically writing the jokes for me. You comfort yourself with an ass?”

He began to explain himself, “This ranch is owned by Spaniards. They train abused horses to sell. One of their batches from Spain had this donkey for no reason. They just keep him since no one will buy him. He’s a sweet guy. We have an understanding. He’s all alone, no one to love him.”

“I guess that’s a little poetic. But it’s not like you aren’t partly responsible for your own loneliness.”

The donkey snorted delightfully at the simple pets.

“Sure, I’ve realized.” He looked up at the sky stereotypically. “It’s not worth the trouble. Girls, anyway. If it wasn’t that bald douche, it’d be someone else. Not like beating whose ever ass it is that’s with her will change anything.”

I took a turn petting the donkey. It was definitely cute.

“I mean, that’s right I think. But that’s probably common sense to most other people.”

“Yes, but it feels good to just pummel some asshole. I got into a lot of fights before you stayed here.”

The silence lingered. I didn’t feel there was anything I could say that would mean anything. He would probably continue in his ways, despite his realization, even after I’ve returned home. He will probably get himself killed prematurely. Some stars just burn hotter than others. Maybe that’s some part of his charm.

“Why not buy the donkey?” I tried.

“Heh, where the hell would I put a donkey?”

“In the flat. It’s small enough to write off as a big dog.”

“I’m not keeping a donkey in the damn flat.”

“You two could cuddle.”

“No, no. This isn’t America, we’re civil here. You can’t just live with a donkey in your flat.”

“You already share it with one ass.”

“You?”

We smirked as if we had both won the shit-talking. The donkey was sick of us by now and returned to where it was laying before we disturbed it.

Julian laughed again, “Well he’s cute enough that I’ll consider it. I am an ass-man after all.”