

A MATTER OF TASTE

By

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FADE IN:

INT. RUN DOWN APARTMENT- BATHROOM - NIGHT

OWEN REEVES (early 30's) scrawny, rat faced, studies his reflection in the bathroom mirror.

He's deathly pale. As he applies the last of the cosmetic powder to his face we realize why.

He turns his head left, then right, inspecting his handiwork.

Satisfied, he picks up a set of false teeth from the side of the wash basin. He fits them over his own teeth. He curls a lip back, checking the overly large incisors.

REEVES

Okay.

He opens a cabinet and takes out a bottle of pills. The label reads BETA-BLOCKERS. He taps a couple out and swallows them.

REEVES (CONT'D)

Let's do this.

CUT TO:

INT. PENTHOUSE APARTMENT - NIGHT

Two figures face each from opposite ends of a table.

The first of these is DUKE VINCENZO SALIBRI (to judge by appearances early 40's). Salibri is a perfectly groomed, aristocratic figure with slicked back hair, someone who oozes privilege and the self-entitled arrogance that goes with it.

The second is his complete opposite. ARTUR DUBEK (like Salibri, seeming to be somewhere in his 40's). Dubek is a stocky, thick set individual with a brutish face and is carelessly dressed. He seems like a man with no interest in the finer things in life.

It's clear we're in the middle of something, although we're not quite sure what.

Seated close by are some special guests, VIP's. There's six of them in all, each one carries their own air of authority.

(CONTINUED)

None though are particularly important to us, apart from one figure we've met before, Owen Reeves. Reeves has an antique style notebook in hand. Concealed next to it is a smart phone. He's filming the whole thing.

Salibri picks up a glass of ruby red liquid and places it to his lips. He takes a delicate sip.

He runs a tongue over his teeth, stopping at an enlarged canine.

SALIBRI  
East European.

He places his glass down on the table.

SALIBRI (CONT'D)  
Slavic.

He looks at his opponent.

SALIBRI (CONT'D)  
Definitely peasant stock. I would  
say the west bank of the Vlatava.

He sits back, satisfied with his proclamation

He looks over at a third figure, someone we've not been aware of until now.

MORTARUS is a dark suited, polished and well spoke Master of Ceremonies. He claps his hands together, impressed.

MORTARUS  
Duke Salibri has an excellent  
palate.

The Duke bows his head a fraction, accepting the complement.

MORTARUS (CONT'D)  
For the bonus mark, would you care  
to guess the year?

Salibri steeples his fingers thoughtfully.

SALIBRI  
I would say sometime just after the  
Great War. Let's say 1922.

MORTARUS  
Excellent. Bottled over New Year  
1922 and 1923.

The VIP guests murmur their amazement.

(CONTINUED)

Reeves makes a big show of scribbling on the notepad.

Mortarus turns to Dubek.

MORTARUS (CONT'D)

And now Mr Dubek, for your  
challenge if you'll be so kind.

The brutish figure snatches up his glass. In contrast to Salibri he gulps half of his drink down. It's almost as if he's making a point to challenge the decorum of the occasion.

DUBEK

Spanish.

He holds up a hand.

DUBEK (CONT'D)

No, wait.

MORTARUS

Take your time, sir.

The Duke gives a condescending smile.

SALIBRI

Please do.

Dubek takes another gulp.

DUBEK

South American.

He slams the glass down.

DUBEK

Chilean.

MORTARUS

Excellent.

Again, impressed murmurs pass through the VIP's.

MORTARUS (CONT'D)

Now, for....

DUBEK

My God damn bonus point? There's a  
hint of Mayan in there too.

He takes a deep breath. His chest swelling with confidence.

(CONTINUED)

MORTARUS  
Exactly right.

Mortarus turns to the guests.

MORTARUS  
Ladies and gentleman. It seems that despite reaching our final round we find ourselves with a tie. Something not seen here for over a century and a half. Yet as we all know, there can be only one Jupan, one head of the families.

The two competitors regard each other with ill concealed dislike.

MORTARUS (CONT'D)  
The high chair seats only one.

The VIP's repeat the phrase like a mantra.

Reeves writes it down in his book.

MORTARUS (CONT'D)  
So now therefore we must proceed to a tie break.

He snaps his fingers.

A DULL EYED BRUTE shambles in carrying a tray. On it are two silver goblets. The Brute places one each before Salibri and Dubek.

Mortarus waves him away.

MORTARUS (CONT'D)  
The rule is simple.

He raises a finger theatrically.

MORTARUS (CONT'D)  
The first one to guess correctly will be the new Jupan.

He turns to Salibri and Dubek.

MORTARUS (CONT'D)  
Gentlemen, if you're ready.

SALIBRI  
I am.

DUBEK

Yeah.

MORTARUS

Then, in your own time.

Salibri picks up his goblet as if plucking a flower.

Dubek grabs his and gulps the whole thing down.

The Duke swirls the liquid meditatively then dips in a finger, tasting the contents.

Reeves' eyes flit from one to the other as if he's watching a tennis match.

We catch a glimpse of his book. As well as lots of comments he's also made a quick sketch of Dubek and Salibri, something we might see in a courtroom drawing.

Finally, Dubek raises his goblet above his head.

MORTARUS

Ladies and gentlemen, Mr Dubek has signaled he is ready to give an answer.

DUBEK

Huguenot.

The master of ceremonies sucks air through his teeth.

MORTARUS

Not quite I'm afraid.

Salibri gives a soft chuckle.

SALIBRI

An easy mistake to make, for one of a certain class anyway. I think you'll find it's actually South African Boer, of Huguenot descent only.

The master of ceremonies nods.

MORTARUS

Ladies and gentlemen, we have our winner.

Applause breaks out.

Reeves is watching Dubek closely. The man looks apoplectic.

(CONTINUED)

DUBEK  
To hell with this.

He stands up, reaching into his jacket.

DUBEK (CONT'D)  
No way I'm bending my knee to him.

He pulls out a pistol.

MORTARUS  
Please, weapons are not allowed  
here.

Dubek fires.

It makes a hole through Salibri's chest.

The Duke looks down, clamping a hand to the wound in  
disbelief.

DUBEK  
That bullet was filled with garlic.

Salibri collapses forward.

DUBEK (CONT'D)  
You're finished, Duke.

The dying figure glances up.

SALIBRI  
As are you.

Suddenly, Dubek doesn't look so sure of himself.

SALIBRI (CONT'D)  
I had both drinks laced with holy  
water, blessed at Jouarre Abbey. A  
little can be tolerated but I knew  
a savage like you would simply gulp  
his all down.

Dubek places a hand to his throat.

SALIBRI (CONT'D)  
You can feel its effects already, I  
trust.

Dubek collapses back into his chair.

DUBEK

You ...

The weapon drops from his grip. His head slumps forward.

Salibri is just able to enjoy the scene before his eyelids flutter shut.

Reeves watches, open mouthed.

REEVES

(Softly, to himself) Holy shit.

Mortarus remains as cool and composed as ever.

MORTARUS

We find ourselves in unique circumstances. Never before have both challengers for the high chair simply 'eliminated' one another. It seems we have only one recourse of action. We must wake Count Tepis himself.

Mutters of consternation greet the announcement.

MORTARUS (CONT'D)

I'm aware his excellency's wish was to be left to slumber for the century, but the alternative is a war between the old and new families. Who amongst us would want that?

Reeve scribbles something down. We can read the first four words, D-R-A-C.

MORTARUS (CONT'D)

Since the heads of the families are here perhaps it would be best if we held a meeting straight away. I will act as chairman. Unless there's some objection, of course.

The reaction is favorable, with the elite turning to each other and nodding.

Mortarus watches them each in turn. His eyes stop on Reeves.

MORTARUS

But before we do, I'd like to introduce someone.

He gestures towards the rat-like little man.

(CONTINUED)



MORTARUS (CONT'D)

Mr Owen Reeves, a human who bribed our official chronicler to trade places with him here today. He works for one of the lower order tabloids.

Eyes all turns in Reeves direction, fangs bared wide.

MORTARUS (CONT'D)

No doubt he expected it to be his big scoop, exposing our world to the humans.

The crowd hiss. Any moment Reeves could easily be torn to pieces.

MORTARUS (CONT'D)

His actions though have made me realize two important things. The first is that our chronicler is an untrustworthy, traitorous wretch who deserves death.

He pauses as the VIP's murmur their agreement.

MORTARUS (CONT'D)

We can decide on the method later. The second is how antiquated the very idea of a chronicler is in this day and age. What we need is our own publication. And here is just the individual to run it for us.

He smiles at the reporter.

MORTARUS (CONT'D)

Isn't that right, Mr Reeves?

Reeves gives a soft, nervous laugh. All eyes are firmly on him.

CUT TO:

INT. EDITOR'S OFFICE - EVENING

Reeves (now wearing sunglasses) sits across from his EDITOR, a graying, bespectacled man. On a stress scale of 1 to 10, the Editor looks to be in triple figures.

A paper filled desk stands between them.

(CONTINUED)

EDITOR  
But you can't quit.

REEVES  
Sorry, Chief. I got an offer I  
couldn't refuse.

EDITOR  
But you said you were onto  
something huge.

Reeves shrugs.

REEVES  
Things didn't work out as I  
planned.

EDITOR  
God damn it!

The reporter stands up.

REEVES (CONT'D)  
I should get going. Be seeing you.

He moves over to the door.

EDITOR  
Wait.

Reeves stops at the entrance way.

EDITOR (CON'T)  
Let's sleep on this, okay? Come  
back tomorrow morning and we'll  
discuss it, maybe see about a  
raise. What do you say?

A look of distaste passes across the little man's rat face.

REEVES  
Sorry Chief, I don't do mornings  
any more. I don't do afternoons  
either. In fact, from now on I only  
work nights.

With that, he disappears out the door.

FADE OUT: