

The Inner-shit-issue

(Excerpt from: The Quest for Blissful Mumiyo)

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Dedicated to www.cloaca.be

I

Finally it has come true. Bonaventure is on the way to his wedding with Kastroola. He is neatly packed in a tuxedo, and as he drives his metallic-grey hybrid Volvo, moments from the past seven years of yearning and hard work flash in his head. A new age began when he first met Kastroola. He remembers vividly every detail of that day in early May at the College Bar. The smell of cheap coffee, the chewing faces of students, the glossy posters of Tim Horton's donuts – all this has been imprinted in his memory forever, for at that moment his eyes fell upon her. She was radiant, sitting in the middle of the room, in her student uniform: blue jeans and a white t-shirt. Instantly, her hands mesmerized him. The slim yet powerful fingers dexterously sliced a cinnamon muffin with a plastic fork into small pieces and the muffin bits floated in a divinely refined gesture towards her mouth. She had thin pale lips that twisted at the corners and when the mouth was closed, they formed an elegant Cupid's bow. When they parted, the Cupid's bow transformed into an infinite abyss of pink velvet enfolded by two rows of white pearls. Bonaventure had an irrepressible urge to leap into that abyss and get dissolved in the aroma of cinnamon.

"Hi there," she yelled at him through her muffin. Bonaventure almost dropped dead. "What? Me? She wants to talk to me..."

He hardly made a few steps towards her, when she said, "Oh, it's not you. Sorry, I got you mixed up..." Instantly, Bonaventure realized that she was going to slip out of his life before she even touched it. This was his chance and his feet carried him across the smell of burritos, French fries, sticky donuts... - those smells that carried him like wings towards her. "It's O.k.," he squeezed out. "May

I sit at your table?” “Yeah, no problem. I’ll be leaving soon anyways. John hasn’t shown up...” and her Cupid’s bow turned into a butterfly as she smiled. From this moment, a feeling took hold of him, which he identified as love, a feeling that filled his life with the smell of food. And a magic thing happened: she seemed to emanate some scent, some recognizable essence, which reminded him of the chocolate cake that his mother used to bake on special occasions when he excelled at school as a child.

After this chance encounter, there followed another planned meeting, then another, and another, and so on. At first, they met on neutral territory: at the fountain, the library, the cafeteria...

He was in his second year of film studies while she was writing her thesis on social work. Yet, the more they spent time together, the more they realized that despite their different interests, they shared the essential drive of their lives - an insatiable passion for food. Nothing escaped their attention: they could spend hours discussing the best choice of ingredients for Lasagna Neapolitana, or they could have fervent debates about the nuances of such little known recipes as Venison in Guinness with Horseradish and Mustard Dumplings or the exquisite Muscles with Black Beans in Honey Wine Sauce, or yet the Deep Fried Squid with Spicy Cognac Salt; they would dreamily cuddle as they whispered into each other’s ears about the expensive honey cake they had spotted at a local health food store. Passers by marveled at the two creatures whose love so totally engulfed one another.

With each day, he sunk deeper into her world filled with myriads of nuances and undertones of aromas, delicate essences, and tastes. With each day, he got to depend more and more on her for his life. He never tired of her wild array of recipes and secret knowledge. In turn, she never failed his hopes.

Before this auspicious encounter, he had been an ordinary film-student. He liked good food, smart talk, and intellectual company. He spent most of his time in trendy smokey dungeons passed for cafes with his artsy comrades. Over countless mugs of light-brew lager they endlessly discussed their favourites such as Woody Allen, Niels Pideresson, Lars von Trier, Koupon Skoparae, and so on. And even though he prided himself for belonging to what was deemed as the bohemian clique - that elitist circle of YTI’s (the Young True Intellectuals) who floated above the mundane worries of the zoo in which money was exchanged for knowledge - he also knew that his future promised advancement and a solid career. Yet, occasionally, a tiny voice inside him nagged that not all was well.

The profoundly inspirational intellectual debates on the equality and inequality of historical forces, on food production, on post-intellectualism, politics, literature, philosophy and art were tidily folded into the lager-mugs and left behind in the dungeon as Bonaventure and his pals fled to their private lives and shopping chores. On the way to his kennel on the third floor at the corner of Van Horne and McEachran, Bonaventure would stop by the local supermarket and stuff his shopping cart with products advertised on sale. Once home, he would hastily consume them and with a grumbling stomach retire to a wild array of strange and incomprehensible night-dreams.

Kastroola burst into his life like a bright ray of sun into a dank cellar. This light exposed the little lies he's been hiding from himself. It dried up the mold, cleaned up and put everything in place. Kastroola exposed to him the brutal reality of conventional shopping, where bloated commercials stuffed people into huge, lifeless and stinky warehouses called supermarkets and there consumers exchanged their money for junk - junk produced by enslaved, impoverished, miserable third-worlders. Even though the exploited third-worlders were an abstraction to him, Bonaventure managed to put a face to them with some help from Kastroola's elaborate descriptions and a few documentaries that depicted them so well. "Ah, only if we, the people of America, could get our hands on these corporations, everything would be better" he thought. But for whom it would be better and how, he did not specify - not even under his breath. "We, here in America, believe that we deserve things. We deserve the best. And that's why we have them," - Kastroola had a magic way of weaving words. And Bonaventure could not question any of what she uttered. Now, he felt good and confident about himself, his life, and his place on this earth. The tiny guilt voice was pacified too, for now he chose only those products that carried the stamp of fair trade and promised good life, health and harmony with all things living.

His mornings began with the sweet trepidation expecting the evening's feast. He spent his days submerged in the lulling remembrances of things devoured the day before. During the hours spent in his newly discovered intimacy of the Oasis, he followed Kastroola's instructions as to how to respond to those particular fruits, vegetables or products that she said had soul in contrast to the dead junk he used to buy before. These souls chose and called their devourer. He was learning how to feel them, talk to them and to reply as Kastroola said that it was a vital stage in the preparation of their evening mystery. At the store, tears filled his eyes and he would burst

with joy at the realization that at this very moment he was the medium between this harvest filled with soul and the banquet of their nights. And she never let his expectations down. *Bien au contraire*, she always surpassed them.

After the feast, the delicate intricacies of tastes filled him with lace. Overcome with joy, he would retire to the bedroom and weep his face into the pillow. Kastroola seemed to know and never interrupted these revelations. Thus, his gratitude towards her grew deeper with each day. By now, he whispered to the eggplants in the store and they quietly murmured back.

These days, Bonaventure and Kastroola rarely ate out, and only at specific places. Kastroola knew well the people who frequented these places and exchanged with them friendly greetings and, sometimes, short chats. Bonaventure didn't care to know any of them and she never bothered to introduce him to them or them to him. He liked the atmosphere, yet with time he grew aware that he enjoyed that food much less than hers and hence their private cuisine romances at home formed the essence of his life. Now, there was no question for him of going back to the smokey, trendy cafes or the stinky, noisy supermarket of his past.

One day, he decided to surprise her. He went to the Oasis and chose the very best friends. He brought them home, washed them, soothed them, thanked them, chopped them, and cooked them. The Bulgur Wheat and Lentil Pilaff turned out superb. The fresh farmer's onion, so finely chopped, glittered on the bulgur flakes like snow. It contrasted with the lush parsley. The yellow lentils brought the warmth of the desert. The aroma of coriander, pepper and cinnamon blended with olive oil and garlic provided a sea of contradictions and feelings. When he finally garnished the dish with lightly baked Turkey Sosaties marinated in a Curried Apricot Sauce, he knew that he had outdone himself and that, at this point, any first class chef would have envied the result.

When Kastroola came home, she eyed him and his dish, then gave them a quiet smile. Without uttering a word, she headed to the bathroom and locked herself in for what seemed to Bonaventure an eternity. During these endless minutes he paced sweaty circles; and as his whole being itched and scratched he prayed for her acceptance. Kastroola came out and walked up straight to his face. Again, without a word, she looked deep into his eyes then kissed his lips. Relieved, he joined her at the table. With each spoonful, however, he found it difficult to tolerate the smells emanating from his dish. Each spoonful seemed to be getting heavier and heavier while

the taste was becoming unbearable, the essence suffocating. Kastroola sat quietly and studied her reflection in the spoon. Like a smacked insect, he crawled off his chair and rushed to the bathroom. When done vomiting, he went to his room without daring a glance at her. As usual, she did not disturb his privacy. He dug his face in the pillows and for the first time since their relationship he wept not with joy but with ultimate shame, feeling himself to be the most miserable, the lowest, the stinkiest cockroach of all possible stinky, low, and miserable cockroaches.

Here he realized once and for all that without her he would perish. He now knew that he should hold on to her with his teeth for his life. He mustered all his will and strength and came out to face her. She remained calm and speechless throughout his ordeal. She was still sitting on the same chair holding the same spoon. He knelt on his knees and embraced her thighs. Like a puppy, his big teary eyes spoke devotion, pain, gratitude and a whole array of emotions, which he could not even name. Kastroola knew it all. Her Cupid's bow was tight and her eyes observed him curiously. He then proposed to her his hand and heart. Without raising a brow, she proceeded to discuss the various practical details of their marriage.

"Very well," said Kastroola. "We need a solid material base, since we'll have kids and kids need food. We should provide them with the same quality of food that we enjoy, meaning the best. So, you need to concentrate on getting a good income. The wedding itself is no problem. We'll do it as soon as we settle our bank accounts and mortgage." And hence, they continued to live together and their relationship stayed as passionate through the years.

Each evening, Bonaventure continued to swim in his pillows drenched with tears and dribble savouring the precious instants of dinner magic.

II

Here he is. Bonaventure is driving to be wed with Kastroola. The past years of relentless perseverance and hard work have finally yielded the fruit of harmony and mortgage. As he drives, his tummy sweetly purrs with the memories of yesterday's Cornet with Bilberries and Cream; his face is lit with a pensive smile. Years of cozy evenings on their private patio, calm, contemplative children building a toy railroad from one room to another, a heap of freshly washed

socks with the smell of lavender await him as he approaches Kastroola's mother's house.

Here he is. He holds Kastroola by her hands. Her strong, dexterous, aristocratic fingers grip his palms and softly caress them. She is radiant – no, more radiant than ever. Her essence envelops him. And once again, that old, enticing chocolate smell of his childhood awakens.

Dreamily he steps through the official part of the ceremony. The popping of champagne bottles slightly spreads the mist of Kastroola's essence apart and he glimpses the happy half-familiar and unfamiliar faces. He responds to their handshakes and smiles and nods at their good wishes.

Unlike his usual self, Bonaventure does not pay attention to how he swallows the crab spring rolls, the caviar crackers, the spiced dolmates; he does not even notice how half the roasted rabbit in three mustards vanishes through his throat. His sole concern is not to miss her gaze. Only the mountain of their wedding cake brings him out of his daze.

It was sublime. Here he understood that this cake was his future. Each bite made it more real. He thus would bite, bite, bite and bite fervently into it so as not to miss a single crumb.

III

And hence came the era of tender serenity, of languid days and soothing desserts. The cake has been long devoured, the guests long gone, the wedding page long flipped, yet the fragrance of that heap of chocolate delight lingered and even intensified. Kastroola's mother took off as well and settled down in a retirement home, leaving them her house and their savings for mortgage. Now they savoured the spaciousness of the well-equipped marital bliss.

Every morning, for five days a week Bonaventure took off to head the local Cinemastival Unlimited where he organized premieres for intellectual films and various cinematographic projects. By now he preferred European films and sometimes relished in the various third-world productions that could be appreciated only by such sensitive natures as his. He would come home bursting with energy and impressions. The first to greet him as he parked his car in the garage was usually the neighbours' dog Taysha behind whom beamed the good-natured, robust Mr. and Mrs. Zhopkins. Kastroola awaited him with three dishes to choose. Now that they were living at her mother's

house, she had more space and more possibilities to fully express herself. Her social work consumed only a few hours a day. She continued visitation with a selected few families and the rest of her time she dedicated to the various explorations of the soul and the betterment of their home.

With time, the friendly Zhopkins became even friendlier. However, he experienced a tingling of unease at their candid winks. Soon, the middle-aged Mr. and Mrs. Machinados across the street along with their teenage children began to grin and to wink as well. However, none of them ever exchanged more than the banal “have a good day” and “how are you”. He began to notice that Kastroola was more occupied than what seemed to be necessary with her social work. She had numerous agendas, notebooks, cases and crates that she received, sent or stored in the various safes of her mother’s mysterious home. Her strong-willed, elegant fingers, which he so cherished, now potted about in odd papers, pecking the keyboard sending strange e-mails and messages he knew not where. Yet, he did not pay much attention to any of it, since their relationship was as immaculate. As he would drive his Volvo home, his stomach hummed his favourite gastric tunes.

Gradually, however, these tunes began to skip notes and with time they became indistinct. His tolerance was on the edge with the now annoyingly winking and nodding neighbours. The fragrance of years past began to wean as well. Kastroola’s aura was no longer tangible. Bonaventure’s health, now wanting, alternated between grey moods and periods devoid of energy. He would often show up at home earlier than expected. A couple of times, he caught strange people meeting with Kastroola in her conference room. They would beam at him respectful smiles and hurriedly pick up their bundles and leave. The phone rang frequently and she would lock herself in her room to discuss incomprehensible matters. The doorbell sounded often too and unknown, bowing low couriers exchanged packages marked fragile with her.

Some inexplicable irritation towards Kastroola and all these people suddenly got hold of him. The food he had so profusely worshiped before has now become the source of exasperation. Some peculiar underlying odor appeared to constantly haunt him. He began to lose appetite, sleep, and peace of mind.

Until one day he collapsed at work. It was the Japanese movie week. He apologetically smiled at the band of important Japanese film-makers he was to host that day and quietly crawled up a cab leaving them pondering. As he stuck out his face from the back seat,

a rich brown shower sprinkled the dazzled Japanese and the headlights of his Volvo watched him in shame and disgust.

When he finally crept home, he barely made it to the coat closet where he crumbled oozing the gross liquid.

IV

He comes about as he hears the key turn in the front door. Unable to move or to utter a sound through his stickiness he watches. Kastroola walks in humming. She puts some of the packages she brought with her in the cold safe next to the kitchen. Still humming she heads towards the grand bathroom leaving the door open. As he observes her, he cannot help feeling some regret for past intimacy and awe at her divine movement. Kastroola strips naked and performs a mystical ritual. Her long arms convulse in rhythmic motion. Her powerful neck excretes coarse groans. Her once Cupid's bow lips are now an open cave breathing out fire as she pushes torrents of air back and forth through her throat. Suddenly all gets quiet. She squats and through his sickness Bonaventure detects the long lost fragrance. Kastroola steps out of her shrine carrying a plate of some barely visible substance delicately arranged in comestible flowers. The essence of the past years overwhelms him with an unexpected revelation. Large tears roll down his face and in crystal drops shatter on the closet floor. He emits a guttural sound and blacks out.

V

He awakens in bed.

"You mean you no longer give it to him? Nothing at all?"

"No. Already before the wedding I started supplementing 50% with B-2. And he seemed fine. After the wedding I switched him totally to the B-1 and B-2 and of course followed Dr. Gaderman's method".

"Hmmm. Dr. Gaderman's method, you say..." – doctor Vonishich takes Kastroola's hand and leads her to the farthest corner of the room. "What you have done," he whispers, "is extremely dangerous. The poor guy could have died."

"Yeah," Kastroola whispers back, "I kind of lost track of him lately with all this hassle. You know, orders, promotions and bla bla bla. And now these presentations and degustations and what not..."

“When you calculated his daily formula, have you checked against what his mother used to give him?”

“Well, we had 93% concurrence. I measured it with the essensograph.”

“You need to go urgently to the Archive and check the exact ingredients of his mother. We can lose this guy any minute. And you’ll be responsible for him, regardless of your current high score.”

“But I have already promised Bonaparto Exclusives 90% of the production and 10% for the Presidential Degustations. I’ll see if I can squeeze out a few extra teaspoons for him.”

“No, teaspoons won’t save him. You need to give up at least a third now and God knows how it will go on later.”

“Mother, Oooo’ no...” groans Bonaventure and passes out again. He dreams of his mother happily playing golf with hard, dark balls. Each time she scores, she gives him a wide grin.

The old endearing fragrance awakens him. Before him stands a lap tray with the cherished dish. “Eat if it makes you happy” - Kastroola stares at him from her chair in the far end of the room. He reaches towards the dish - his past - with all his might. But when he looks into the plate, he groans “O’ my God! All these years, all these people... were... were feeding... were feeding me...”

Black out.

VI

Pounding sounds. Screams. Bonaventure opens his eyes slightly. Kastroola furiously punches a creeping and begging courier. “This is A-1 -- not A-2 or J-4. Asshole. Everyone knows this. It’s in the guidebook. What the hell? What do you bring me? I told you the quote for A-1. This’s what I get. No less. You want me to call Brown Delight or Internal Shipping? So tomorrow you get fired and go live in the dump and pick those stinky dog-rolls?”

The courier attempts to free himself from her iron grip whining helplessly, “Madame, please, don’t do this. Please, please, please, let go of my balls...”

Bonaventure moans and Kastroola dashes towards him. Bowing low, the courier crawls hurriedly away. “Everything’ll be fixed, madame. First thing in the morning, you’ll get the new estimate. The Essentric Brothers guarantees royal class services and the highest standard. Thank you, madame; thank you. You are our most precious client...” The courier disappears.

Kastroola picks up some charts and checks them against each other. "Right. What have we here? 30% hydroxedium, 16% osmosium, the rest calculated in Quanta. Right?" she turns to Bonaventure with a soft smile. "How do you feel?"

Bonaventure is sweating and drooling. He attempts to mumble an answer, but as nothing coherent comes to mind, he staggers and suddenly the image of his mother appears. "Mother, mother. Why? Why this?" But mother only smiles, then fades away. Kastroola, having taken his temperature in the meantime, pats him softly. "Darling, you really got to get a grip on yourself. Yes, you're getting better, that's for sure. However, if you don't solve your inner issue, our methods won't be able to bring you back to life again. O.K. honey?"

"Mmmmmmmmmmmrrrrrrrrrr," dribbles back Bonaventure and shakes his head vehemently.

"Shhhh, ssshhhhh, not so hard, sweetheart, not so hard. I know this has been tough on you. I thought you knew all along. I promise to do everything possible to help you out," Kastroola tucks Bonaventure in, while he turns to face the wall and gnaws on the pillow. "Gosh, this pillow stinks. And this darn wall, and her eyes, and this whole world..." Everything appears to him in a rich coffee tone. And yet, against his will, desire lingers.

VII

"...so, it's the inner issue, right?"

"Of course, what else?"

"I'll fix it, no problem. It's part of my profession, after all. By the way, my wife and I are great fans of yours. But ordering through Bonaparto Exclusives has become horribly expensive. And anyway, they now cater mostly for royalties and celebrities. We signed up through their internet services, but you know how that goes, we're only number 22 000. I know it's a big thing to ask, but if we can get just a little bit, I'll pay cash right away?"

"The problem is that Dr. Vonishich suggested to give him 30%, but that wasn't enough. I actually give him 40% if not more. 10 still goes to Presidential Degustations and Bonaparto Exclusives now get only 50%..."

"Yeah, no problem. We'll fix his issue soon. That's what a psychologist is for..."

“O.K. then, next month, I’ll offer you three A-17 Deluxe deliveries, 25 grammes each. You don’t have to bother with cash. A money transfer will do.”

Dr. Pheekalstein rolls up to Bonaventure’s bed and purrs a satisfied greeting. “I’m aware of your situation. But trust me, you’re not alone in this. Of course, who could have guessed that by your age you wouldn’t have figured it out. But there are cases like yours. Believe me. And I’m here to help you. I promise, we’ll solve this issue together.”

“Ca, ca, can you explain to me, why? How come...”

“What “why”? It’s always been like this. You see, we live in society. And we need each other. You have to learn to accept and to love people. And they will love you back. You know, you’re one hell of a lucky bugger. Your wife is so valuable, you can’t imagine. She’s got a rare talent, a truly rare talent. Do you know that it is not even 0.005% of the population who can provide substance that needs no processing? I mean, look at all the canned, frozen, packed shit in the supermarket. It’s just garbage to fill the boor. Your wife provides pure QR001-88 Super Deluxe. Do you know what that means?”

Bonaventure: “behbehbehbehbeh”.

“You have to understand, it is our duty - and I mean all of us - to take good care of her and never give her cause for chagrin. Only in this way can she accomplish her maximal inner bloom. We need to work out your feelings. Tell me, what do you feel?”

“Eeebbbeebebe. Gross,” mutters Bonaventure and turns away.

“It’s understandable. I empathise with you. But there are people in much worse conditions. Like this family last year. We even had to ask your precious spouse to come and help out even though she had quit her social work. I mean, doctors, social workers, psychologists, pedagogues... - the whole gang. And nobody could help them except for her.”

“Yeah? ...?”

“O, it was this weird family. They wouldn’t give their kids even the basic substance. The kids were uncontrollable, wild. They couldn’t share any common ground with their classmates. Freaked out on teachers. Refused to share our basic values, our essence. The parents wouldn’t even provide for the supermarket canned ZWG-397 quality. It was a question of saving the kids at least. We even found a good foster home whose family was willing to provide the kids with a much higher grade...”

“And?”

“And she helped. She succeeded to save the family and bring it back to its normal state. Even if it took so much of her time. And she even loaned them some of her own substance at a very decent percent. They’re a really happy family now.”

“Get lost,” - Bonaventure throws up.

Dr. Pheekalstein patiently waits till he’s done. Then helps him clean up.

“You need to get in touch with your feelings,” the psychologist continues. “Here is a list to help you name them. I’ll count to ten and with each count, you search your soul and dig out one inner-self-issue at a time. Get a strong grip on each and every one of them. When I’m done counting, I will leave. And everything shall be well.” Dr. Pheekalstein kisses Bonaventure on the forehead and begins to count.

THE RELIEF

“Aaaaggghuuuuu, ghugugou... Here’s another little spoon for you. Yeeeeeeaaaaas. Thaaaaat’s it, my boy. And remember, the more you give out, the more you can take in...” Bonaventure puts down the spoon, picks up his toddler and waltzes through the rose bushes in their lush garden. Kastroola beams at them from the patio and softly rocks her head to the rhythm in Bonaventure’s soul.

The End