

GLITZING WITH THE BIG DELICIOUS

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On the morning of Dandelion's birthday, which also happened to be the day I was to settle up with the Big Delicious, Hello had a *glimmer*. I had just blown out the candles—all but one of them, that is—when I caught the hint of it in my peripheral, lazily circling Hello's head like an uncertain halo.

It was momentarily forgotten as the lad reprimanded me for my lack of wind. “I warned you not to miss any candles,” he said, frowning at the lone flame still burning among the thirty-one sticks of wax. “Dandelion could lose her wish.”

“Hello, I don't even know what her wish would be.”

“A violent death to the Big Delicious. What else?”

“I won't deny that's a fine choice, but how is *her* wish supposed to come true when *I* am the one blowing out the candles?”

“You're acting in her stead,” he said.

In more than one capacity, I thought. As I started to add more to the conversation, he put his hand up to stay me, face assuming a faraway look. I remembered the *glimmer* the second before it appeared in his eyes, the revelation spreading across his features as he stared at me over the cake and its last, stubborn flame.

“You won't have to settle up with the Big Delicious,” he said.

“Why?”

“Because Dandelion's wish is going to come true.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean he'll be a goner before his evening snort.”

“That can't be, Hello. Look who we're talking about.”

“I'm telling you, Zen, if you go to the Coral Mansion to make good with the Big Delicious, you'll be giving your money to a ghost—whether he still has a heartbeat or not.”

“If you're wrong, Delicious's goons are going to dismember me.” But I knew he wasn't wrong by the intensity of the *glimmer*, still orbiting his scalp net, yet to be released by his brain's enhanced electromagnetic field.

* * * *

It wasn't as though I were settling up for myself anyway. The debt belonged to Dandelion, rest her soul. I just happened to be her surviving spouse and as such—at least in the Big D's bulbous eyes—the one upon whom the obligation fell. Not that I could blame Delicious for protecting his assets; he really had no choice but to enforce the deadline Dandelion herself had suggested. She was a fool to have imagined he would not do so because it fell on her birthday. What Dandelion wasn't as a wife, she *was* in recklessness. To the accusation and epithet “degenerate gambler” she inevitably responded with: “If I'd been born two years later, I wouldn't be in this mess.” As if a scalp net was the fucking lottery.

We all might have been born a few years later. The Big Delicious might have been born a single week

earlier . Outside of the test subjects, he was after all the first person to be equipped with a scalp net. And whoa the example he set when he reached ‘maturity’ and his net was activated, revealing the *glimmer* s. He didn't merely *experience* them to his appetite's content, he also ingested them, snorted them, shot them into his veins until he could scarcely be distinguished from any other humongous amorphous phosphorescent mass. He became the repository for all the premonitions, déjà vus, and instances of deeper knowledge that Vestibule's citizens experienced. He was a worm glutting on luminous soil, turning its energy back into waste in the form of fat.

The *idea* behind the scalp net meant nothing to him. He had been chosen to blaze the path because of the high level of electrochemical activity in his brain, not because of his interest in the pursuit of science. He didn't care one whit about the theory that all living things were interconnected through the planet's electromagnetic field, nor that this might answer such mysteries as why intimates sometimes read each other's thoughts or shared each other's dreams. He expressed as much to Dandelion when offering her a dose of his newest method of *glimmerglitzing* , as he so garishly put the act of feeding his craving. To her credit she declined to snort the *glimmers* adhering to the bald head sticking out of the conductor tank, happy to pocket her parley earnings from the weekend's Mannequin Ball and be on her way.

* * * *

"Will the Big D's goons come collecting when he is dead?" I asked Hello, that one flame still murmuring over the white and blue cake like the last dance.

"I'm sure of nothing except that he will die, today, and you don't want to give away your money."

I was satisfied with that. The sum, which amounted to all my savings plus all the credit I could get, insisted I be satisfied with that. I wanted to know if we should just wait around for the inevitable or go do something.

"Like what?" Hello said.

"Arena?" I suggested.

He tilted his head as if to say he was surprised at me.

"What else is there to do anymore, Hello?" The subtext the lad knew: No more movies because you young people won't buy, having seen too many fragments in advance to make the pictures interesting anymore. Can't go out to eat because the healthier spots are all overbooked. Can't play raquetball because the winner has often been decided before entering the court. No wonder Dandelion got involved in the Mannequin Ball, the one sport where the participants themselves cloud the outcome.

"Better we just stay quiet," Hello said. "What time is it?"

"Ten past eleven."

"They're coming. I hear them ... in my net."

"Who? What are you talking about?"

"They don't know the Big Delicious is on his way to the Coral Mansion on High. They're coming for the money."

"You said—"

"I said the Big Delicious is a ghost. That's all."

"Damn, Hello. We've got to do something."

The knock came. More a pounding than a knock.

"We'll have to kill them," he said.

"How?"

Two *glimmers* of extra-origin began snapping around his head. He toyed with one for a moment before settling upon an action. "I will convey the premonition of their own destruction."

"Which is ... forthcoming?"

"If it is foreseen, it is forthcoming."

The subtleties of that wisdom were beyond my netless mind. Nor did I care to be enlightened as I clung to a reinvigorated hope that I could somehow save my money as well as an audience with his majesty's phosphorescent jelly.

* * * *

Dandelion didn't know, though I did, that she was becoming a mannequin herself. It could have been the sauce, yes. It could have been the stress and malnutrition associated with her increasing gambling habit. Indeed, it could have been some other illness contracted along her wayward journey. But I knew. I like to tell myself that I knew before the scientists themselves knew what the deficiency of intuition/insight/sixth sense was doing to the non-equipped thirties demographic. To the older crowd it didn't matter. They had expended their share of cosmic enlightenment. A *déjà vu* to the dulled senses of a forty-year-old is more akin to nostalgia.

It is certainly true that after a time I had an inside to the Big Delicious that the scientists no longer had due to his foreknowledge of any and all attempts to access him. Through Dandelion, who had known him previously (having purchased his biological son, Hello, on auction), I had been there for his meteoric self-piloted descent from celebrity to bookie, which profession he had always wanted to be in because of his passion for numbers. Unfortunately, that talent, combined with the piles of stewed prescience he consumed, made him the oddsmaker as well, and one who couldn't be beaten.

In any case my wife grew deficient by the day and hour as all of the little insights of life escaped her. Gambling, I believe, filled the vacancy. The Big Delicious was the axis of a cycle he didn't even know existed, as it wasn't an *event*, the context to which he was accustomed. Mannequins were born because of his gluttony. The Mannequin Ball came into being because a scalp net was installed in his skull. Money traded over the dummies he sucked of enlightenment. And then one day the Gamekeepers found Dandelion, shrunken to a pallid photogenic skeleton and they took her away to the Arena, for television consumption. The *glimmers* were there of course, but Hello snatched them out of their flight paths before the Big Delicious could burp from his previous meal. She went off to die riding hydrogen balloons in the Arena while she owed a small fortune to her bookmaker.

I think Hello wanted his adoptive mother to perish in competition. He has a sense of the aesthetic that is undeniable. The beauty of the Big Delicious being denied his monetary due on the day of his death is one of many examples. Hello and I have been close from the start, but our relationship is based upon *his*

knowledge that *I* will not conform to societal strictures. It is why I put up with his mother when she grew pale from the exertion of being without kindling; it is why I continue to put up with him when he knows where I will have lunch even when I do not.

* * * *

As we prepared for the worst, the candle flame still danced its defiant dance. I leaned that way but couldn't bring myself to blow it out. In spite of its wavering, it was constant, resilient. It lived when the life it represented did not. I let it burn, now low, almost in the icing, while Hello used a defense against our visitors that I could only ride the coattails of. They had added shouts to their poundings when I saw the charged *glimmer* pass through the door.

Beyond the door, a silence. Then a slow, elongated, unisonous gasp, in total contradiction to the definition of the term. The door stood like some primeval gateway suddenly showing the corrosion on its long-dutiful mechanisms. Behind it were the beings of another school of creation, smeared with the seepage from the Big D's burned out nostrils, the concept of a moment of greater understanding hanging like deposits from their bestial features. I found myself wondering, during that strange and wondrous interval, whether or not my beloved degenerate gambler had kept a concealed gun around the house.

An abrupt roar from one of the super-dimensional miscreants prefaced the door crashing down (which proved in a way that they had not been completely deprived of their sense of the future). Simultaneously, I had a *déjà vu* as powerful as I have ever had (which likewise proved that I had not been completely stripped of my sense of the past). I met my attacker with the only thing I had—the knife I should have been carving the cake with. At least I was still carving her memory as I slashed at Guido's descending arm, eliciting the equivalent of an operatic miscue. Something wasn't right as the white and blue cake appeared in the fray, the flame sucking out dully, just like the end, and Hello failing in his bid to launch his unlikely weapon as the sticky sugary shower drowned his adult-sized curses.

I swung the blade again, had it ripped out of my hand, saw the gleaming instant of my death, tasted icing, and was off to that Coral Mansion on...

* * * *

Low.

I'd come home again, and all my wife's Mannequin Ball losses like so many daydreams in the Big D's fat-fingered hands.

"Seventy, eighty, ninety, TWELVE. There it is, you sweet boy! As soon as you pay the expenses for the injuries to Hugo's arm, we are square."

No, Big D—as the whole phosphorescent blob of him came into focus—*one of us is definitely not square.*

"Would you like a drink? A Coral Mansion cocktail heavy on the *vu* ?"

"Where's Hello?"

"I can't keep up with that boy."

Yet I noticed something different about him, a surplus phosphorescence and bloatedness, a general overmuchness matched only by his inadvertent but quite obvious restraint. The *glimmers* spun around him like flies, and his flesh quivered with a musical regularity, but he wasn't *tactive* as he normally was. He had

counted the money with the expected interest, but he hadn't *relished* it. He caressed it even now, but as if he were caressing the handle of a crutch.

I said, "There's no one you can't keep up with, Delicious. What have you done with him?"

He leaned forward, a great exercise: "I know what he tried to accomplish with my men, so I finished the deed for him, with my personal stamp. They still have not recovered from the shock of being no more." He closed one fatty eye in an effort at a wink. "I fed Hello thirteen *premos* and put him to bed. I figure if he doesn't wake up, the *glimmers* are necromancy."

"Wake him up."

"Ha. On whose command?"

"Your own. He predicted your death."

"Oh? And I can't do that myself?"

"Apparently this time, no."

"He also predicted the death of my men, but who had to make it happen."

"They're dead, aren't they?"

He laughed in jiggles and glints. "Touché."

"Where is he?" I said.

"Before we get into that, would you like to sniff some of my good stuff?" I followed his chunky finger to the tanks along the rough coral-surface wall. Lights overhead reflected on the bald heads, the *glimmers* like glitter on their rounded surfaces, bristling electromagnetically. The faces of the young men suspended in the water told of raptures unavailable on the street. If there was any toe on their opulent master's feet which they would not suck, it wasn't evident here.

"I amend my remark that there's no one you can't keep with," I told his opulence. "Sure, I'd love to show you how to sniff the good stuff."

"*Ho ho*," he blew. (Indeed, like Claus.) "Have you indulged in the more sublime pleasures before?"

"Dandelion turned me on to a taste of your—what's the word she used? Exotica? But the rest of us obviously don't have access to your boundless supply." I gestured luxuriantly.

"So Dandy was paying attention after all. Splendid! I could never get her to partake with me. Business and pleasure, I suppose."

I wanted to plunge my fingers in his eyes, but I imagined two black holes sucking all the *glimmers* in the universe into his unfathomable density. A belated chuckle from him made me wonder if he could follow my individual thoughts. Considering his magnificent appetite, his equally lavish arrogance, I decided that for my (tenuous) purposes it didn't matter.

"So let's get to it, Delicious. And do me a service—now that we're square and all—and refrain from

referring to my late wife as Dandy."

"You drive a hard bargain, Zen, particularly when the dope's on me—but okay. Now take this and make a straw out of it." Not to my surprise, what dropped out of his engorged digits was one of the bills he had been caressing.

The action brought our persons closer than I'd have liked, even on a Sunday, and I heard a sigh, a great cumbersome sigh from his bulk. The *glimmers* humming around him like bees about the hive sparked in my eyelashes, on my breath. There was clearly something amiss here, and lo, but I was going to exploit it.

"So what is it I'm to do with a thousand spot, D?"

"Roll it up, you pagan," he said, sitting back on his slabs. "Let's *glitz*."

Despite what I'd said, which I rather suspected he didn't believe to start with, I'd never done the thing I was about to do. Holding the rolled up note in my fingers, I tilted my head towards the nearest tank.

No sooner had he nodded in reply than a live picture of the Mannequin Ball appeared on the coral wall behind the receptacle, balloons bouncing across the court, their pale naked riders flailing and trying to keep a grip on the pommel all at the same time. For a moment I was mesmerized, seeing the rerun of Dandelion's aloha, so much gas out of the strange, funky sail of life and its caprices.

I shut out everything but the task at hand as I stepped over to the tank, leaned down and snorted every last *glimmer* off the poor college kid's scalp. A dozen images compounded by a syrup of *I swear I almost know where I came from and I want to go back* ! spiced with a concoction of *Did I already take this picture* ? succumbed to the superimposed face of Hello, surrounded by pillow, one comradely eye winking like I was on the right track and he'd known so all along. *Then* came the chemical responses, spinning around in me like little tornados, rendering my nerve endings the unlikely filaments that held the tossed salad in harmony.

"That's pretty good shit, Delich," I confessed. "But you really think you can keep up with *me* ? Who do you think put the mannequin in Dandelion? Every déjà vu, every intuition, every premonition, every *spark* was mine after she turned me on."

For a second I saw that superfluous spark in the Big D's bulbs, but he wouldn't commit to there, to the truth, even now that he was breathing in waves. I gestured he do his thing and waited to be dazzled on top of my dazzlement. The Big D did not disappoint. He snorted every *glimmer* off every head in the room, and then croaked in frustration when the scalp net itself did not suck off of the skull of his last slave subject. As he jerked his mass around to tell me about it, his eyes blazed with the spectacle of his mind. I asked him if he was sure he hadn't missed any.

"What's left?" he scintillated.

"Where's Hello?"

"Eh?"

"Hello's *glimmers* would be the icing on the"—*Dandelion's*—"cake. Who but Hello attracts *glimmers* like you do? Are you intimidated by his being your son?"

"Where is that boy?" demanded the big Delicious.

"Where is he, Big D?"

Again came the unbidden image, Hello winking at me from some bed, somewhere.

"If you're unwilling to explore that avenue, I will. I fucking will, D. Where is he?"

He moved like the great movement that he was, calling doors open in advance of him, filling the air with his exhalations, squeezing what oxygen there was through his cellulite. "Hello," he murmured. Hello.

"I'm here, Delicious."

And there he was, at the end of the cul-de-sac in front of us, pillowed by coral walls, and the aura of him.

"Hello"—the Big D's voice had a wheezing quality to it—"I want your *glimmers* . I'll return them with interest."

"Come and get them then," said Hello. And the air in the corridor, upon those words, began to ignite, particles accelerating through the scientists' super tubes.

"Gently, though," said the Big D, wavering like Dandelion's thirty-first flame. "I am only so much Delicious."

Only so much Delicious: a circumstance that belied the entire culture of him, his cult, his godhood. As I watched him huff and heave as he tried to ingest it all, even what wasn't there, I knew the game had been decided. He had overdosed.

There was a flushed departure of the *glimmers* , as if from the told boy on the block ... then a new honeycomb formed of the scattered cells.

With, perhaps, a lad's eye for the aesthetic.

THE END