

BRUSHTOWN STORIES

The Caterwahl Initiative Part 1

With a quick exhale of air the balloon was filled and then twisted into the form of a dog. The assembled group laughed. But the laughter was cut short. "We must never forget what was done to us," the man holding the balloon doggie said. He took out a needle and popped the dog. "We are victims."

There were murmurs among the small group. It was a meeting of the Painted Panthers a group of renegade clowns who were still fighting for the liberation of those sent to the Ha-Ha camps.

These were some of the top representatives of their factions and this meeting was long in the planning. An uneasy alliance was formed for a greater purpose.

Squeaky Tiki a Polynesian themed clown spoke up - "I'm concerned that we are not taking enough action to free our Bozos and Bozettes from internment."

There was more arguing. Until the balloon dog was popped bringing everyone to attention. The man who popped the balloon dog - Laughy Piemos argued that patience was the best course for the time being.

That's when Presto the Clown Magician piped up: "Presto thinks there should be a change-o in leadership."

The group then returned to arguing. But one of the clowns, Heehee kept quiet. She just watched all the shouting. Finally Tiki honked his bicycle horn and the group simmered down. "You've been quiet Heehee," Tiki said, "what do you think?"

"I think," Heehee said as she rose to her feet. "I think you're all under arrest!" With that Heehee ripped off her wig and revealed she was in fact FBI Agent Samara Javadi. She had gone undercover when Heehee was caught in a dragnet outside the Chuckle Hut. Comedy clubs were still allowed under the stand-up corollary. But the line between stand-up comic and clown was firm and involved some strict enforcement. But that didn't stop the painted set from showing up for laughs. They loved to laugh and that was that weakness that the FBI liked to exploit.

As the FBI stormed the building the clowns panicked and ran like wet voles from a blow dryer cat. Samara took down Presto

herself. When it was all said and done they managed to apprehend 6 of the 10 harlequins.

As the clowns were loaded into the prison vans Assistant Director Simmons came up to Samara. He congratulated her on her work and discussed a possible promotion. She could head up the LA bureau tasked with taking down the cartels. But she demurred. She liked the clown beat. It's what she knew, what she was good at.

A few days later the clowns had been put into holding cells ready for interrogation. Their possessions logged and inspected. One thing that drew the team's attention was a piece of paper with just the words: 'Caterwahl Initiative' on them.

Samara tried to interrogate Presto but he just did a few sleight of hand tricks and then mimed locking his mouth and throwing away the key. Typical clownery, Samara thought. The things she'd do if she could. But she knew they couldn't stoop to the clowns' levels.

The next day some of the agents were congratulating themselves on the big clown bust. But Samara wouldn't have it. There were always more. The world was their car and they were always more and more cramming themselves inside. She scowled as she refilled her coffee mug. A bright yellow mug with the words World's Greatest Grampa printed in bold red letters. But today she didn't feel like the greatest grampa or even a great grampa, she barely felt adequate. And she wasn't even a grandpa she had just got the mug for a dollar at Dollar-o-Rama when her Punching Justice mug broke. Still though the mug just seemed to be mocking her less than greatest and grampa status.

She was angrily sipping her java when one of the lab techs came up to her. He had important news -- when they analyzed the paper they found it was a rare type only produced in Bazamia.

Since Bazamia was a sovereign nation its doings fall outside of the FBI's purview, but Samara had a contact.

Laster that night she headed into the Pink Fox the trendy lesbian bar in Mauvetown. Why did she let *her* pick the meeting spot? She always did this. Samara figured she picked the place just to make her uneasy. That was her style after all.

Inside was abuzz. Joan Jett was playing on the speakers. She picked her out right away but then again she was the only Bigfoot in the place. Agent Squatch smiled and waved her over.

"You like the place?" she asked.

"I didn't realize - um. You --"

"They make a good dark and stormy. Sometimes I like dark and stormy sometimes I like sunny days. I don't really conform to one type of weather."

Samara shrugged.

"Oh," Agent Squatch added, "I got you a cranberry juice. I know you don't drink," She handed Samara her juice as they move to a table.

They had met at a leadership conference a few years back and stayed in touch. Though Squatch's hard partying lifestyle and outsized personality sometimes rubbed Samara the wrong way.

"So about the paper," Samara began.

Squatch leaned back. "The Bazies aren't easy like those clowns you usually chase after," she kept her eyes focused on Samara.

"I'm not going to be intimidated by a bunch of rogues with bionic attachments living on some barren island." Samara figured it made sense that Unstopapopolus would help the clowns. Anything to destabilize the country.

Squatch disagreed. She felt it was more a singular person. She suggested the Bazamian businessman Holiday Roman. He was called the mad landlord because he built an apartment building that was designed to drive its tenants mad. He also worked on a corn maze that caused a farmer to burn down his barn and ride his favorite cow into the state capitol. Holiday was tried as an accessory for the crime but got off on a technicality. He also created the notorious Tarantula Arms Spa and Resort Bazamia's famously bizarre hotel. Recently he moved back to the US and was currently ensconced in a penthouse near Vinegar Row.

It seemed like a good lead and Samara thanked her for it. Agent Squatch finished her drink and leaned back. They shared a plate of truffle fries and complained about work. But then all of sudden Agent Squatch leaned forward and almost in a whisper asked: "What do you know about the Dentites?"

Samara gave her some basic info. She wasn't sure why Agent Squatch would want to pursue the issue since the Dentites were almost completely US based and thus outside of the scope of the CIA.

Later as Samara walked home the hair on the back of her neck started to tingle. She was being followed. She ducked down a side street and it was then that the samurai attacked her.

She was quick to fend off the first few, blocking their swords. But eventually they were able to grab a hold of her and chloroform her. She tried to fight it but soon she fell into unconsciousness.

When Samara awoke she was in a nicely appointed bedroom. It seemed like a hotel room with well-appointed semi-industrial style furniture and cool blue tones. Yet somehow impersonal. She got up, a little woozy, the floor seemed to list under her feet. Everything in the room seemed just a little off. She had a pit in her stomach as she gripped the dresser. A wave of nausea and nervousness washed over her. She quickly grabbed the door knob and pushed herself out of the room. She stumbled into a giant living room. Floor to ceiling windows looked out over the city. In a mid-century cream chair sat a man in blue pin-striped suit. He smiled.

"Like the room? Every item is slightly askew. From the desk to the bed even the walls and floor. It creates a sense of existential dread. One of my own designs."

Samara's head was still foggy and she only managed to spit out: "Who?"

The man ignored her. He hopped to his feet and walked over to a wet bar and made himself a drink. He smiled. "I'd offer you one, but I know you don't. Noble if a bit prim. Sorry about the samurai I wanted them to bring you willingly but they are just so eager. Samurai? Right? I considered ninjas but everyone does ninjas. It's so 1980's like acid wash jeans or wine coolers. I did consider mamluks or hoplites but who can recognize a hoplite on sight. Maybe Dan Carlin, but I'm not interested in abducting him. Yet. Ha. Kidding. But please Agent Javadi sit. I've been a terrible host. Do have some of the pretzel nuggets on the table. They're dusted with a chili rub sold only to Frank Bennis and myself."

Samara walked to a chair and plopped into it. She grabbed a few pretzel nuggets and ate. A bit of spice a bit of salt, solid - she thought.

The man sat back down. He took a long sip of his drink. "I'm Holiday Roman and it's a true pleasure. Welcome to my nightmare house."

END OF STORY