

BRUSHTOWN STORIES

Since Sliced Bread Part 1

Senator Thurlow McMenemin was in his well-appointed office going over changes to the new low cost tooth care initiatives he was presenting to the Health Committee. He was worried that Senator Browbridge was going to demand cuts. It was a petty game of one-ups-manship when it came to entitlement programs. But by the Ur-Tooth, he'd get this legislation passed. There was a knock on the door and then his assistant Ellis Boule entered.

"Senator?" Ellis asked. Thurlow looked up at him. Boule scowled before he continued: "You're sister is here." Thurlow adjusted his glasses and rubbed his chin.

Great, he thought, just what I don't need right now. "Show her in," he said.

Marissa McMenemin was 12 years his junior and was the happy accident of his parents' later years. She was the baby of the family and had floated from scheme to scheme after dropping out of Reede College. Last he heard she was developing an opera based on the former first lady called The Electric Barbara Bush Acid Test and the music was all key-tar based. Thurlow didn't know what a key-tar was but he was sure it was dumb.

Marissa was dressed in ripped jeans and a sweater. Her hair pulled back into a ponytail, she had on heavy eyeliner that gave her eyes a catlike appearance. "Formal dress today?" Thurlow said with a frown.

"You are the worst," she said, "I need a favor."

The senator put his hands on the desk and pushed out his chair. "During the second generation in the post-founding of New Molar it was Jormish McMenemin who was forced to lead when Horace went into his self-imposed exile."

"I'm not here for a history lesson, Low." He hated that nickname. Low. But then again he didn't like nicknames to begin with In fact Thurlow wrote a whole essay in the Washington Post opposing the arbitrary shortening of names. A young boy in Delaware wrote him a letter saying it inspired him. Thurlow had framed the letter. Mostly people only wrote their senators to complain so any sort of positive fan mail was a welcome change.

But op-eds and fan mail were not the order of the day. He would not let his little sister derail his

He pushed forward: "We are the direct descendants of Jormish, it is in our blood to make societies better, to lead, even women like you have done great works: Hrotsvitha lead the raid on the Blackfoot. Marianne Boule-McMenemin was a nurse during the Civil War. Bellicose Helena was at the signing of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Amendment."

"Yeah, I know, and I'm trying. Really. Look. You're always so - this. I voted for you, so really you work for me, if you think about it - I pay your taxes." Marissa sat on his desk which she knew would annoy him.

"That's not. What do you want?"

"What if I told you I had an amazing investment opportunity not just for you but maybe the government itself?"

"I'd say you were a liar," Thurlow replied.

She continued undeterred: "Hilarious. You. Really. Do you like knowing what time it is? Do you like eating? What if you could combine them?"

"What?" Senator Thurlow replied.

"Introducing the sandwatch! The watch that tells you what sandwich you want! Oh look it's 3:15 - peanut butter and jelly! Wow."

Thurlow was trying to figure out if she was serious. She handed him the watch. Indeed there was a PB&J in the center. "This is absurd." He inspected it. It appeared to be a simple digital watch that also had pre-loaded images of sandwiches which it would display with the time. Somehow this foolish juxtaposition was supposed to inform you both chronologically and gustatorially.

Marissa hopped to her feet. "Listen, I worked on this for a while. We have about 10 prototypes out to different places. Some in the hands of very important people. Hands get it? Watch humor. Anyway, you need to jump on this now or I'll take on other offers."

"Take on other offers," Thurlow said.

"I'm serious, Low, other governments. Other societies. You do not want to miss out on the sandwatch!"

"If - in this wide world of ours - there is some fool dumb enough to invest in your little pointless bobble then I say jump at the opportunity."

Even with a little sales related small talk Marissa could tell Thurlow wasn't going to invest. She stuffed her hands into her pockets - which she did when she was angry - and headed out into the bitter DC winter. There was a soft powder on the Mall as she walked toward the Washington Monument. But before she even got to the reflecting pool a red limousine pulled up and stopped next to her. The window rolled down and a large woman with a metal plate riveted to half her face called to Marissa.

"Are you Marissa McMenemin?" the woman asked.

"Are you a debt collector and or bounty hunter?" She replied.

"No." The woman replied.

"In that case yeah, I'm Marissa."

The woman smiled. A whirring like that of a motor accompanied her upturned lips. Her eye seemed to zoom in on Marissa. "Please come with me. The great Republic of Bazamia would like to make you an offer."

Now Marissa knew that Bazamia was founded and run by a super villain and while business with this pseudo-Republic was frowned upon it wasn't technically illegal. So perhaps out of spite or just disinterest in villainous politics she hopped into the limo.

The woman was Ulsa Killmost a woman who was rebuilt by Dr. Sonar after her fight against Super Agent Bill Brill on Moon Base Mu. One of her hands was replaced with a cannon. Her flesh had taken on an almost purplish hue and her veins were visible under her skin. They had an odd black glow to them. But Marissa tried to keep it professional and not stare at Ulsa.

Marissa started to ask about why Bazamia wanted to talk with her but Ulsa cut her off saying that out in the open they were subject to the many ears of their enemies. So they drove in silence until they arrived at the Bazamian embassy.

It was a former mental hospital and the renowned Mad Architect Holiday Roman had embellished the Gothic elements to a perverse degree. Ulsa took Marissa up to a small meeting room. Various

chains and spike decorated the walls. Ulsa gestured to a chair with her cannon arm.

"Don't worry," Ulsa said, "it's not loaded." She laughed. Marissa sat. Suddenly she was nervous. Maybe this wasn't such a good idea.

"Look," Marissa said, "if this is about my brother or the government and junk I do not know about that. I barely even know how the government works. Like the three branches I thought they were executive, vanilla, and chocolate. For like a long time. I'm still not sure why only chocolate can declare war."

"You're funny," Ulsa said, "I don't understand jokes myself. That part of my brain was lost. But I was trained to recognize and appreciate humor. In an abstract way. Like a bear enjoying a Monet painting. But rest easy -- your brother, your government is of no concern to us. You are what we care about."

"Awww, that's sweet," Marissa said.

"Sweet as donkey pie," Ulsa said with a whirring smile. Ulsa pressed a green button on the wall. A small hatch opened and a person dressed completely in black leather and dayglow blue goggles entered. It knelt before Ulsa and offered up to her a small box. Ulsa took the box and then kicked the person to the floor. It scurried off back into the hatch which closed behind it. "You did create this, yes?" Ulsa said handing the box to Marissa.

Marissa opened it and took out one of the sandwatch prototypes. "Hey! My sandwatch! You got one!"

"Indeed we did. The Bazamian Republic is very interested in this device and its sandwich predicting powers."

"Well it is the watch that always knows what you want between bread. That's our current slogan. I know, it's a bit long but we're open to workshopping it. Getting it pithy," Marissa replied.

"Marketing is not our concern," Usla replied.

"Fair. Great, so we're going to need some startup capital. I mean we made the prototypes. But really to mass produce them ..." Marissa didn't want to get into the fact that her sandwatch company was deeply in debt or that they had no funding or means and the office she was working out of was the back of an erotic

biscuit bakery. And by 'the back' she meant that she ran an extension cord from the bakery to her car to keep her computer running. And that lately she'd been subsisting on day-old butt-shaped buttermilk biscuits she found in the dumpster.

"Money is no concern." Ulsa said. Marissa perked up at this. "Our dear leader Unstopapopolus would personally like to discuss your sandwatch."

"Cool, cool, so maybe next Tuesday? When is he in town?"

"Oh he is never 'in town.' But we would like to offer you an all-expenses paid trip to Ulan Populus the capital of Bazamia where you shall meet with Unstopapopolus at his lair."

"That is ... I thought Americans can't visit Bazamia."

"Well we'll have to transfer in Moldova. And once there we can issue you a special visa as a visiting diplomat from South Ossetia. It's the same loophole that allowed Johnny Guitar to play Unstopapopolus' birthday bash."

"OK, that's ... we can do that. And by all expenses. Are we talking drinks?"

"Yes."

"Alcoholic drinks."

"Yes."

"Top shelf?"

"Yes."

"Is there a limit? Like is this a you give me a bunch of drink tickets but once they're gone I'm on my own or it like that G.G. Scrumptious black card that gives you infinite Mancaroni for life?"

"I think you're getting hung up on details."

"The devil is in the details. I want all I can drink. Any drink anytime. No bar closes at 11. No we won't fill up your tub with gin. If I want a hot tub of whiskey you say bourbon or rye. That's my terms. Oh and donuts. Like eight or nine donuts." Marissa was proud of her tough negotiating stance. She smirked at Ulsa.

Ulsa's flesh seemed to ripple with a mauve color for a moment and her eyes flashed green. She put her cannon to her chin and

considered before saying, "you are a tough and shrewd negotiator. But we have a deal."

And after two long flights and a layover at a rather boring airport Marissa found herself on the crater pocked shores of the Bazamian lava fields. Jagged rocks burst through the earth as patchy yellow grass died in the heat. What few trees there were seemed dead their branches seemingly reaching toward the sky as if asking the gods why they were ever born. Marissa clutched her duffle bag and whispered to herself 'I think I really beefed this.'

END OF MARISSA ONE