

BRUSHTOWN STORIES

A Game of Cat and Clown 1

Agent Samara Javadi had been assigned to the clown division of the Bureau for five months. Since clowning was made illegal by the Defense Against Clowns Act the funnymen were a constant target. Some clowning groups went underground. Some of the more artsy types crossed into Canada and set up ex-pat tumbling clubs. They helped others get across the border. They called it the Underclown Clownroad, which was clunky and borderline offensive. But clowns loved being offensive. At least that's how Agent Javadi saw it. It was late and she was reading over some files on a clown cell active near Little Crimeatown. That neighborhood used to be rough, but in the past couple years gentrification had taken over. An odd place for a bunch of rogue clowns. Unless.

She got to her feet and headed down to the archives floor. Mitch was behind the desk. "I need you to pull a file," she said. Mitch groaned. He complained that it was after hours. Samara said if they'd just digitize them she'd do it herself.

Mitch pushed the glasses up his nose, "please you think they'd pay for that, besides you can't hack paper."

"I bet the Bazamians could," she replied.

"That's the CIA's problem," Mitch replied, "so what do you want?"

"Gigglepuss," she replied.

Mitch let out a defeated sigh, "this again?"

"Dr. Gigglepuss is the highest profile clown doctor still at large. She has a small fortune and she's been funneling it through all sorts of fronts."

"She's probably dead," Mitch countered. "Gigglepuss is your white whale, but you know what happened to Ahab in the end don't you?"

"I prefer Hafez to Melville." Samara leaned on the desk. She smiled. "Come on, Mitch, be a pal, do your job."

Mitch grumbled and went into the back room. But he had a point. She'd been after Gigglepuss for a while. Samara believe she

almost had the good doctor cornered near the Great Falls, but Gigglepuss managed to slip through the cracks. Some at The Bureau thought Gigglepuss wasn't even alive and that a group used the name interchangeably. Some argued that she was made up out of whole cloth to scare kids like the were-bear or hoagie Hogan the submarine killer. But she knew better. Dr. Gigglepuss was real. The very idea that they used to let clowns be doctors and dance and cheer up children sent a shiver down her spine. The naiveté of a simple age. Luckily those red nose horn-honkers were being hunted down.

Mitch returned with the file. "How many times have you read this Samara? What do you expect to find?"

She wasn't sure herself. But she had a hunch. Little Crimeatown was the key. Somehow Gigglepuss had found herself a safe house there. She took the file to her desk. She'd read it all before but she decided to reread the bio again just in case -

Dr. Hahahester Gigglepuss was born Hester Greenblatt and got her degree from John Hopkins and seemed to be on track to be just a normal doctor until something happened. All of a sudden she spent all her time visiting the Vamboo Family Circus which had sent up a tent behind the Costco in Silver Springs. She met funny folk who indoctrinated her into the world of clowning. From there she worked at St Jude's - probably to start turning kids toward buffoonery, they're so susceptible at that age - and was eventually let go when the first anti-clown protests began. She was arrested while protesting outside Blackgate prison on the night Clownie Brown was executed. Takes a real messed up head to support that guy, Samara thought. Gigglepuss then went underground. She was believed to have joined the Painted Panthers Party and the Marceau Liberation Army. The MLA robbed a bank in Perth Amboy and set fire to the Funco Rubber Chicken Factory. Huh, Samara thought, why would clowns firebomb a Rubber Chicken Factory? She never considered it before. Strange.

But the biggest moment for the MLA was when they tried to assassinate Senator McMenemin with an improvised explosive. She looked over the blast photos. Shrapnel and whip cream tore up his office. Luckily he wasn't in his office when the bomb went off. She noticed something in the photos. She ran back down to the archives floor.

Mitch saw her coming and put down his crossword puzzle. "What now?" he moaned.

"Where is the evidence from the McMenemin bombing?"

"The pie scraps?" Mitch grimaced. "Come on, Sam, you're driving me crazy."

"Tell me and I'll buy you the Stubby's breakfast sub of your choice?"

Mitch considered it. "Even the Club Foot Sunshine Sub?"

"I'll even double the cheese and you know it's extra," Samara replied.

Mitch searched the database. "It's down in the museum on level 1."

"The secret museum? Damn it's closed."

"Yeah but I have a key," Mitch said.

Few people know that the FBI has a secret museum. Or that it also has a gift shop, but since everything is classified the gift shop only prints receipts in code. Keeps the visitors' names a secret but it makes returns and exchanges damn near impossible. Samara learned that first hand one bitter post-Christmas day. But the gift shop was not Samara or Mitch's concern that night as they walked through the darkened museum.

It was a treasure trove of FBI artifacts. Dillinger's mustache. The Unibomber's manifesto, the hat worn by the pumpkin that wouldn't die. But eventually they came to a small case with delicately arranged shrapnel. Mitch found the light switch for the case and flicked it on.

Samara scanned the pieces. She tapped on the glass. "Right there," she said. She pointed to an odd bit of yellow plastic looking debris it had little bumps on it.

Mitch gave it a look. "So?"

"That there, Mitch, is a piece of rubber chicken." The Rubber Chicken factory fire was a cover. They were working out of it. A secret burned out base and it was in use for who knows how long. But that burned blight didn't last long in the new and upcoming neighborhood. Recently that same factory had been turned into the Funco Promenade, an upscale shopping gallery right in the heart of Little Crimeatown. In fact it was the centerpiece of the town Council's revitalization project.

Perhaps, Samara, thought Dr. Gigglepuss was still using some part of the old factory. A cruel worm in the warm heart of consummate consumerist America. Those fright-wigged fiends.

The next day Samara went down to the Funco Promenade and met with the general manager of the space. The manager's heels clicked on the concrete floor as she gave Samara a tour. "As you can see we kept as much of the shell of the factory as possible. It gives it a nice industrial vibe. Here was the head processing center now it's a gourmet cheese shop. Over here is the design studio for Betsy Glouw." Tamara kept her eyes on the corners and walls as the tour continued. They ended the tour at the luxury Christian tea shop Stigmacha.

"What about a basement?" Samara asked.

"There's no basement. Its solid cement all the way down," the manager replied.

Samara narrowed her eyes. She'd seen the blueprints. But she decided to play it cool, for the moment. "You know, I want to thank you for touring me around and buy you a coffee." The general manager demurred but Samara insisted and finally the manager relented and sat at a small table at the Thermos and Pie Coffee Shop which was built in the old rubberizing furnace.

Samara ordered two coffees and then a small whipped cream pie. She put the coffees down and then placed the small pie on the table. The general manager looked at the pie and then up at Samara.

"You like pie?" Samara asked.

"Um, I guess," the manager replied.

"Why don't you pick it up? It's quite light," Samara said pushing the pie toward the general manager.

The general manager took a sharp intake of breath. Sweat started to form on her brow. "I'm good."

They stared at each other. The little pie between them.

"Go on, give it a touch, don't you just want to throw it?"

"What? Why would I want to ..."

"I don't know," Samara said, "I've known certain types to have an uncontrollable urge to toss a pie."

"I'm not. Not me," the manager stammered.

"What if I said I was a wealthy uptight dowager. 'Oh I never. This is all simple too much.'"

"Why are you doing this?" The manager said. She was now holding the pie in her hand. Her hand trembling.

"Because I *hate* clowns."

"It's not what. It's not ..." the manager trailed off. She startled to giggle as a large smile took over her face.

"You're going to have to come with me. I'm going -" Samara was cut off by the pie splatting her in the face. The manager let out a goofy laugh and ran off.

"I should have seen that coming." Samara wiped the cream off her face, hopped to her feet and drew her weapon. "Funny business is over." With that she took off after the general manager.

END OF PART 1