

THE ASSASSINS

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(Anamnesis of Hieronymus)

By Ares Demertzis (June 2006)

“The master of the monstrous...
the discoverer of the unconscious.”
(Carl Gustav Jung)

The diminutive, stooped, anorexic Oriental waitress sucked the viscous mucus back through her nose into her mouth and spat the gelatinous blob out through splintered, discolored teeth to the broken tile floor of the kitchen. She used the damp sleeve covering her fragile arm to again wipe the thick perspiration coursing down her face as she carefully arranged the plates of Dim Sum on a large tray. With an audible whimper of complaint, she hoisted the heavy serving tray to her bowed shoulder and walked rapidly in short, precise steps out of the steaming kitchen, into the dining area of the Chinese restaurant.

The restaurant was located in the basement of an abandoned brick building that had years ago been consumed in a conflagration of uncertain origin. It was at the end of a deserted, labyrinthine alleyway, hidden from the crowded, chilled streets of New York's Chinatown, today illuminated by a paltry midday winter sun. It wasn't a place you came upon by chance; you had to be deliberately looking for it. From the penetrating, glacial cold of the street, a long and narrow flight of almost vertical, squalid stairs led down into a bleak, confining darkness where a transparent glass door stood askew, having fallen from its hinges. On the door, a sign haphazardly attached with red tape read: "Open 24 Hrs." Just inside the door stood a tall African Negro wearing a hand woven natural silk Kente cloth, flaunting around his long and elegant neck the colorful beadwork of rank and privilege awarded him by the tribe he had long ago abandoned. His function was to verify the clients reservations on a small computer positioned insecurely on a Makonde dais by his side. Loud, angry rap music bellowed inappropriately from unseen speakers.

The dining room was dingy and disheveled. Oppressive. Asphyxiated by a sultry, intolerable heat, even in the middle of a cruel winter that punished the city above without mercy. Through a scorching mist that blurred everything except the immediate surroundings, antiquated broken booths, their rusted wire springs pushing through worn red vinyl upholstery were visible. White rice paper lanterns that had faded to a dirty grey hung from the low ceiling, their soaked red tassels plunging hot drops of vapor through the mephitic environment. The lanterns were stained with fly excrement and housed small watt incandescent bulbs that provided a meager illumination.

A single decoration hung crookedly against the peeling red velveteen wallpaper that had torn to expose the fractured bricks of the wall beneath. It was an elongated, hand painted antique photograph of the skyline of old Shanghai emerging as a stumpy, irregular horizontal line above a muddy and turbulent Yangtze. Beneath the cracked glass of the frame the paper had curled and twisted from the ambient moisture, the colors running together, giving it the appearance of an expensive contemporary work of abstract art.

The waitress approached a table occupied by two individuals, one sipping hot tea. The younger person was a woman of imposing proportions, perspiring copiously. Her pale complexion was white as porcelain, her head adorned with blonde hair arranged in an elaborate coiffure, and her cheeks immoderately rouged an artificially intense pink. An ostentatious, albeit expensive necklace and overstated earrings were lying carelessly on the table where she had discarded them. It was evident she nourished an inordinate concern regarding her appearance; the image she projected to those about her.

The young woman breathed laboriously, gulping the foul, stagnant air through an open mouth, her penetrating, almost colorless grey eyes observing the surroundings with a piercing intensity. She had removed the jacket of her impeccably tailored scarlet suit, accommodating it carefully next to a full length sable coat draped beside her in the booth. She had also opened the collar of a drenched canary yellow silk blouse that clung tenaciously to her torso, thereby revealing her full, unfettered breasts, with only one erect nipple. It was the right nipple, the left one having lost this innate idiosyncrasy since a silicone breast implant considerably enlarged her meager bust. The operation had been performed years ago in Washington, D.C. in an unsuccessful attempt to make

her appear attractive. A tummy lift conducted at the same time had left her with a double navel, and a permanent scar just above her bikini line that caused inordinate embarrassment when its existence became discernable. The extortionate Georgetown cosmetic surgeon, after exhaustive consultation with his most eminent colleagues, had assured her that the scar would disappear in time, and both her nipples would harden perceptibly on those appropriate occasions. In fact, neither scenario became a reality.

She had reluctantly acquiesced to the unavoidable surgical intervention, considering it an indispensable public relations necessity during that anguished period of Gorbachev's Glasnost, with its attendant humiliating capitulation to the Americans. Later, this transformation, which had been meticulously designed to be euphorically embraced, was surprisingly repudiated. She correctly assumed it was caused by two factors: first, the invalid concept that democracy is synonymous with freedom, and secondly, the buffoonery of Yeltzin, who demonstrated unequivocally to the world (by gyrating the twist as a strategy to seduce prospective proletarian voters), the unvarnished certitude of the fundamental, unwritten canon that democracy requires absurdly ridiculous performances by candidates for public office.

Sitting across the table from her was a much older man of indeterminate age, overweight, squat, resembling a pre-Columbian figure carved from a block of square granite. He had thick, black eyebrows beneath a bald head, and displayed a meticulously trimmed, slender mustache beneath a flat, wide nose, suspended above voluptuous, protuberant lips. He admired her breasts with unabashed interest through fathomless melanic eyes set into the cinnamon complexion of his face. The woman speculated that he was Latin American. Possibly Mexican, or Columbian, perhaps even Argentinean. No. Argentinean no; most probably Venezuelan. She just couldn't be sure, and this uncertainty, as any ambiguity, molested her.

A large, round protrusion swelling the shoulders of the man's white tuxedo gave him the appearance of a hunchback; a wilting pink carnation adorned his silk lapel. The large celestial blue silk bow tie and handkerchief extravagantly inserted in the breast pocket of the tuxedo added to his dandyish appearance; and he seemed totally unaffected by the stifling environment, contentedly sipping hot tea.

The only other customer in the restaurant was an apprehensive young Arab boy with watchful, distrusting eyes. He was sitting rigidly before an empty table in an impenetrable, unilluminated corner of the restaurant, dressed in the traditional Islamic tunic, his head covered with a red and white checkered shumagg which was held in place with an ugal, whose black circles appeared paradoxically to resemble the halos of Christian saints. He cautiously pressed against his bosom a package wrapped in a suspiciously stained and soiled black cloth, tied with a large knot.

The waitress arranged the small plates of Dim Sum in front of the seated couple, large drops of perspiration dripping ceaselessly from her forehead to spatter carelessly on the cracked tabletop.

The young woman was breathing with difficulty, wiping the hot, stinging wet with stubby, rough, muzhik fingers from her pale, sanguinolent eyes, where the mascara had streaked into dark blotches, giving her a clownish appearance.

"So you'll kill him this week, right?" she asked.

The man nodded his assent. He responded deliberately, in a quiet voice, enunciating every syllable with an accent difficult to identify.

"He will expire tonight, comrade."

"We don't use that expression anymore, unfortunately."

"I am truly very sorry. I thought you would be pleased. That regrettable experience of yours has, of course, also negatively affected my business, although I must admit the Muslims are recently providing some very much appreciated compensation. Let me ask you, my dear, oh, is it acceptable for me to call you my dear?"

"No problem. To paraphrase my favorite Chinese malediction: we live in interesting times."

"So true. So true, my dear. For your information, the person of your current interest and I have an appointment after his speech to the General Assembly. He

is of European extraction, as almost all of them are, therefore I have made a reservation at a modest Spanish restaurant I frequent, just across Canal, in Little Italy."

"You should invite him to a fast food place for a hamburger. After all, that's the pinnacle of their cultural contribution to the world."

The man chuckled, amused, but felt obliged to mirthfully rebuke her with a clacking of his tongue.

"Mol tea?" the waitress asked.

"More tea will be glorious, thank you so much," the man responded politely.

"You have any cold drinks? In a can or a bottle?" the young woman inquired with an irritated voice.

The waitress barked her response stridently, in her customary indecorous and unpleasant staccato pattern of speech: "No! No cold dlink. Fliglato bloke. I bling hot tea!" Without waiting for a response, she inconsiderately hurried away with small, rapid steps to the kitchen, the heels of her slippers slapping against the unwashed, broken floor tiles.

"You invited me to lunch and I'm starving, but I wouldn't eat here to save my soul!"

"The Dim Sum is actually quite delicious,"

Chewing with appreciative satisfaction, the man carefully plucked at a plate with his chopsticks, the pretentious and costly stone set in a gold ring on his index finger sparkling.

"This place smells like decomposing rats!"

"I sincerely regret that you are disappointed, my dear. I do know other restaurants all over town. I was actually considering a small, exquisite French nouvelle cuisine establishment that would have surely enchanted you. I am

directed to dine there with uncommon frequency. Remarkably, and I mention this in strict confidence, the chef was once an important senior figure at the highest levels of the French government. Truthfully, however, at the last moment I had a sudden yearning for Dim Sum.”

“I’ve never been comfortable anywhere in Chinatown. But I would be interested to know why you picked this rat hole. There are a million Dim Sum restaurants in this city!”

“They know me here, my dear. As with the French and the Spanish restaurants, I am considered family.”

The young woman swiftly glanced at him with a keen look, inquiring sarcastically: “And German restaurants? Aren’t you also considered family in German restaurants?”

“Oh, but of course, my dear. Most particularly German restaurants! However, sauerbraten has the unfortunate effect of contributing to my chronic dyspepsia.”

The young woman erupted into lengthy, immoderate laughter with unreserved delight, and then added: “I’ve been invited to some crummy places in my life, but this...Christ! I’m melting from the fucking heat!”

“Please, my dear, don’t mention the Lord’s name, and don’t use profanity, it doesn’t become a person of your stature. Thank you.”

From the kitchen, the sound of the waitress expectorating reached the dining room as the young woman pulled an envelope from her elegant designer purse and passed it across the table.

“This is fifty percent. The other half when you finish the job.”

The man accepted the envelope silently. Opening it, he ran a thumb across the bills stuffed within.

“It’s all there.”

"I trust you, my dear."

The waitress returned with a dented, grimy, round metal tea pot. Large drops of sweat splashed again to the table from her forehead, and as she reached a skeletal arm between them to remove the empty tea pot, hot perspiration filtered through the thin, translucent material of the saturated cloth revealing an unshaved underarm.

"What are you going to do with the body? If they find it, the political repercussions will be severe."

"Don't be concerned, my dear."

"Oh, but I am concerned. Finding his body will undoubtedly lead directly to me."

"This is not my first undertaking, my dear."

Holding the empty tea pot in her hand, the waitress stood respectfully away from the table and asked solicitously, "Evlythin Okay? Dim Sum good?"

"Yes. Everything is superb, as usual. I appreciate it infinitely," the man responded in his habitually exaggerated and ceremoniously courteous manner. The young woman, although irritated by the insistent politeness, disregarded the affectation; a cultural imperative acquired in his native country, she surmised.

Lifting a dumpling expertly with his chopsticks, the man deposited it daintily into his capacious mouth.

"Turn on a fan. It's hard to breathe in here!" the young woman ordered the waitress with undisguised annoyance. Over the years, she had acquired a reputation for being brusque, authoritarian, and arbitrary; unconcerned with the sensibilities of others.

"No can turn on. Fan. Broken!" the waitress responded impertinently.

"Yes. I suspected as much." The young woman swore inaudibly under her

breath. "Bring me a large glass of ice water," she demanded.

"Water hot. No ice!"

"Of course. Why would a restaurant have ice? How silly of me!" the young woman rejoined sarcastically, her voice rising with unrestrained irritation. She burst into a parched, exasperated laugh, turning impulsively to address her companion resentfully. "I can't believe you're not sweating! Here I am turning into a puddle of stinking water and you sit there without a drop of sweat, cool as a cucumber!"

"I am used to the heat. I like it."

"Oh, God, I need to get out of here!"

"Please don't use the Lord's name. Thank You."

The young woman leaned forward belligerently, her large, soft breasts altering their shape into asymmetrical lumps as they pressed against the edge of the table separating them.

"Why are you so deferential and religious? I mean, considering your line of business, it's just such a contradiction."

"Oh, yes, I am extremely polite, and deeply religious for that matter. For your information, I regard inconsiderate and boorish conduct to be unforgivable, my dear. Do I make myself understood?"

The young woman slumped back apprehensively against the bench, not responding, and abruptly occupied herself by wiping her wet face and neck with a paper napkin that disintegrated in her hand on absorbing the excessive moisture. She flung the shreds to the floor in manifest disgust.

"Tell me, my dear, has it occurred to you that perhaps the person you want eliminated may have the same design concerning you?"

"Sure. But I'm buying the best in the business. That's you, right?"

"That is correct. Everyone will tell you there is no one better than I."

"They call you the Angel of Death."

"An unfortunate sobriquet my dear, however, yes, I am occasionally called that."

"So it's a done deal, as they say in the local argot."

The man lifted the metal tea pot and offered to fill the young woman's cup. "More tea?"

"No. My cup's full. If you didn't already notice, I haven't touched it. I can't understand how you can drink that hot stuff. And in this filthy place!"

The man smiled gently in response, and sipped his hot tea contentedly. From the kitchen came the unmistakable sound of the waitress loudly snorting back thick mucus, hacking up the gelatinous phlegm and spitting coarsely. Abruptly, the young woman stood up, her body swaying, her movements uncertain, appearing inebriated.

"I have to use the ladies room. I think I'm going to vomit!"

She glanced about awkwardly, confused; her temples throbbing, her mouth gasping for air. "I assume there is one here?" she added with alarm.

The man pointed with a crooked index finger through the scorching mist toward the far end of the dining room, the precious stone mounted on his ring sparkling.

"I'll be right back. Then I'm getting the hell out of here."

"I have it on good authority that one can get accustomed to the rigors of Hell, my dear."

"Not me. I'm leaving as soon as I freshen up."

The young woman staggered toward the indicated direction, her body lurching

forward on fevered legs, her mind befuddled by the suffocating heat. She passed tremulous, distressed hands through her soaked hair, disturbing the impeccable arrangement; the artificial curls and swirls sagging into drab, sopping piles circling her head. Yanking aside the dirt encrusted, tattered red velour curtains, below a hand scrawled sign that specified this as the access to the unisex rest room, she disappeared into an overwhelming blackness that consumed her.

The man skillfully devoured another Dim Sum, rinsing it down with a swallow of hot tea. He strained nearsightedly at his gold Rolex to determine the hour, and from the pocket of his jacket pulled a small caliber pistol.

The waitress approached the table. "Evlythin Okay?"

"Yes," he replied with surprisingly uncharacteristic brusqueness, squeezing his corpulent body out of the narrow booth. With his free hand he unhesitatingly scratched his crotch without embarrassment, his features registering observable relief. Through the cloth of his pants he peeled away his testicles that had adhered to thighs moist from the heat. "I will be leaving in a few minutes. Bring me the check. And a newspaper," he ordered.

"Newspapel. Check. Light way," and the waitress hurried back to the kitchen.

He chambered a bullet, the action simultaneously pushing back the hammer to the cocked position. Leaving the table, he strolled casually in the direction of the bathroom, vanishing tranquilly into the haze. Two soft explosions rippled through the dense, searing air of the restaurant. Moments later he reappeared, materializing through the red velour curtains, which abruptly burst into spontaneous flames.

Corpulently waddling with confident impudence, he disregarded the blaze raging behind him, from which long orange fingers searched horizontally across the red velveteen wallpaper, inciting a sooty, smoking glow, and vertically to the hanging rice paper lanterns that burst violently into incandescent spheres of fire.

The man indifferently regarded a head unsteadily balanced on the table in front

of the decapitated torso of the Arab boy. Hereceived a discreet and appreciative smile from that severed headon passing. "Allahu Akbar," the colorless lipsconspiratorially whispered hoarsely, trembling with rabid zeal. It was a greeting arrogantly disdained.

He returned to his table asthe waitress emerged with a newspaper through turbulent clouds of billowing, inky smoke that were rapidly permeating the entire room.

"No have today newspaper. Tomolow newspaper okay?"

"Tomorrows newspaper will do just fine."

The waitress simultaneously presented him with the bill. Accepting the proffered pen, he initialed it with an intricate, mannered crosshatching of lines to form an undecipherable personal symbol. He reached inside his suit jacket, unexpectedly revealing a crimson silk lining as he removed the envelope given to him by the young woman.

"This is for you," he said with inconsiderate condescension.

The waitress clasped the envelope gratefully, holding it tightly in her two open hands between her small breasts as in prayer, bowing repeatedly with much deference before the man. Like a butterfly emerging from its confining and inflexible chrysalis, she abruptly metamorphosed swiftly into an elegant, poised Japanese Geisha; her delicate, painted white face and erotically sensual red lips a graceful picture of cultured Oriental beauty. She wore an intricately hand embroidered Heian silk wedding kimono, held in place around her waist with an elaborately tied obi that pressed against her spine, obliging her to stand straight. The silk brocade design of gold wrapped silk threads portrayed a Phoenix rising, surrounded by cranes in flight; the symbol of eternal fidelity. Also depicted was an overflowing treasure cart, brimming with gifts, a talisman auguring unrivaled prosperity.

The man placed hisnewspaper on the table and separated the front page which bore the bold headline: "Double Murder. Chinatown & Little Italy." In smaller print: "United Nations Ambassador Assassinated." And still less significantly: "confidence in corrupt world body at historical low." The man folded the paper

carefully into a child's boat hat, making certain that the photograph of the young woman was visible on the left side and that of a middle aged man with a cheerless smile on the right. After ceremoniously settling the paper boat hat on his head, which gave him a bizarre appearance, he struggled to accommodate the hump on his back into a heavy overcoat. He was unaware that from beneath his jacket a small, black feather emerged, floating unevenly until it collided brusquely with the floor. Wrapping a soft Cashmere scarf about his neck, he walked away leaning heavily on a silver capped walking stick, ignoring the continued, fawning and humble reverences of the Geisha/waitress who followed several steps behind.

From a cut glass Tiffany bowl the African Negro, now transformed into a repulsive, deformed albino midget, offered a lollipop. Unwrapping it, the man mouthed the thin white stick as he passed through the transparent glass door, leaving behind the infernally blazing conflagration that was consuming everything in its path. With the difficulty of age, he climbed the steep, vertiginous stairs unsteadily to the snow covered alleyway. When he reached the empty sidewalk, his appearance was that of an emaciated, wizened blind man staring with vacant, unseeing eyes. He wore a threadbare coat, holding a tin cup in one hand, and with the other swinging a white cane with a red tip before him as he advanced. He walked leisurely, curiously without leaving an indentation of his passage in the deep, pristine snow. Only one set of footprints were visible, going in the opposite direction, toward the restaurant; those that the young woman had left manifestly outlined on her arrival.

The diminutive, stooped, anorexic Oriental waitress sucked the viscous mucus back through her nose into her mouth, and spat the gelatinous blob out through splintered, discolored teeth to the broken tile floor of the kitchen. She used the damp sleeve covering her fragile arm to again wipe the thick perspiration coursing down her face as she carefully arranged the plates of Dim Sum on a large tray. With an audible whimper of complaint, she hoisted the heavy serving tray to her bowed shoulder and walked rapidly in short, precise steps out of the steaming kitchen, into the dining area of the Chinese restaurant.

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