

FANTASY

by Eric Boyd

Normally I would have never drunk such a wine, but it was late on a Friday evening and the bottle was on the house. Riesling, grown in Monterey County. I poured, swirled, dipped my nose in, sniffed. The typical scents of green apple and ginger. I took a small sip and let it wash over the tip of my tongue; I savored the off-dry sweetness for just a bit before allowing the wine into the rest of my mouth, where the flavor of peaches and lime became more evident.

It certainly wasn't a fine wine, but it was perfectly drinkable. It would have paired quite well with spicy food, perhaps Asian. I poured more into the glass, filling it to nearly to the rim. Debussy was playing in the background.

The more I tasted it, the more I liked it. Overall, the wine was fairly crisp, and not as sugary as some imported Rieslings get, which are often so one-dimensional that they give a person even more reason to be happy the Germans didn't win the war.

Anyhow, I looked over the glass for a moment, drained it in completely, then put it in the rack with the rest. I turned the machine on, looked behind me quickly, then chugged the rest of the wine straight from the bottle. Fuck, it wasn't bad at all. It was at least enough to keep a man warm.

"HARRY!" my manager, Mr. Synder, shouted.

"Uh, yes Mr. S...ahcahcah?" I began coughing, choking from being startled.

"Goddamnit, Harry! I told you not to drink the leftover from the bottles any-fucking-more."

"I'm sorry Mr. Synder," I said, still clearing my throat, "I'll remember not to again."

"Remember not to again, *again*," Synder said, annoyed. He drummed his fingers over his large, round gut and eyeballed me hard.

"Sorry, sir."

“Christ, you think I didn't see you?” Synder chuckled. “I even watched you swirl that glass like an ape; you had to have over-oxidized that wine. I'm surprised your arm didn't fall off.”

I had no idea what he meant. It was just that, when I had time—and Synder was in his office—I'd come up front and watch the customers, watch how they drank. Lord knew that, for minimum wage, I could never afford half the shit at the restaurant. I just liked to drink the wine, trying to learn as much as I could from reading the backs of the bottles. I'd actually grown a bit of a discerning taste. Anyhow, I figured what the hell; it didn't hurt anyone for me to have a little nip now and then. It didn't hurt to let me pretend.

“Who gave you that bottle anyway?” Synder demanded. “It was Kim, wasn't it? That little tramp. She knows she's supposed to empty the bottles into the kitchen's work-sink before it comes back to you to be thrown away. Stupid bitch.”

“I don't know,” I said, lying.

Synder began to walk away, then turned back to me. “You know, Kim can *earn* her job back,” he said with a wink. “You can't.”

I had no response. Synder walked away with the confidence only a slimy, fat fuck like him could have. I lit up a cigarette and turned up the classical station on the radio before going back to washing the dishes.

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