

You're A Bad Dad: The Story Of Juniper M \acute{e} lange

by Matt Rowan

Juniper M \acute{e} lange was a cat person, not a dog person. Truly detested when she perceived falseness in another person. She wore glasses and drank tea. Had dark straight hair and light skin. She dressed conservatively and would watch the sky most days. She wouldn't try spicy food because her mouth was severely frostbitten when she was young, the result of a snow eating contest her irresponsible older brother had foisted on his younger siblings. Juniper had won and lost at the same time. Parts of her tongue were amputated and the rest that wasn't was badly damaged, which had left her all but desensitized to flavor. Food, as a consequence, was always underwhelming. Spicy food was especially smug, she felt. Its liveliness taunted her.

The loss of feeling and functionality in her tongue had also caused a speech impediment, and naturally, try as she might she could not rid herself of it.

She immediately disliked any individual who suggested she practice her enunciation, particularly if they did so before being made aware of her condition — and especially if they persisted afterwards. Frequent offenders were elderly women who thought her speech was lazy, and pedantic college boys who wouldn't deign to speak with a girl so forthrightly illiterate.

Juniper was a professional photographer who had personal artistic ambitions in that field, as well. Little or no talking, just picture taking. It was a beautiful arrangement.

As fortune would have it, Juniper was on a certain occasion

contracted to chronicle in photographs a luncheon celebrating grandmothers and their Ivy-League educated grandsons.

A group of those very grandsons huddled together in a corner of the banquet hall, bantering back and forth as such young men are known to do.

"But this guy has the nerve, nerve mind you, to say the committee hadn't the authority to deny him the genius grant. Who among the committee was a genius? He should be judged by his peers, not the mere mortals on the committee. Isn't that right, Rothscoe?"

"'Tis true, but I promise you this, gentlemen, with only a modicum of time I could prove worthy of the grant, gentlemen, I promise you. I need no more than one work week, that's five days for the less informed among you, gentlemen, to turn even the most ribald of rat women into a Hindu Deity, graceful and extraordinary," said Rothscoe.

"R'If Irg Courrgld gerrrt aer snapsherrrrt of yourgh gentlerghmen, jurrst a momenterrr of yerour timegh. Ssstandslrph sstillrh, please," said Juniper, interrupting the young men's conversation. They put down their drinks and smiled condescendingly. All except for Rothscoe.

"Well, who's ready for chalupas?" one said after the pictures were taken and they had slyly mocked Juniper to their satisfaction.

"Hear, hear!" all but Rothscoe replied.

"I'll stay behind. I must stay behind, but I'll be along directly," Rothscoe said, eyeing Juniper.

"Derrn't evener sayrgh onegrh worrrd," Juniper preempted Rothscoe at his disingenuous approach.

“Please, don't, I'm sorry for my friends. Have a taco, won't you? They say they're very spicy.”

“Fuckrgh yourgh!”

“Ok, ok, well come with me, please. I think I can help you. I think I might grow very fond of you and never want you to leave me, in spite of all that happens. Will you allow me to help you, dear,” Rothscoe skimmed her ID badge, “Ms. Juniper Mélange?”

He grabbed her by the hand, not wasting a moment to hear her angry “Noergh!” He pulled her to the stairs, sensing his prize was almost within reach. He'd soon have it. He was consumed by euphoria. So much so that he tripped over his own two feet at the top of the staircase, proceeding to fall chest first and was only barely able to get a hand out in front of him to brace his fall. His arm caught in an awkward position couldn't fully support him and snapped beneath his weight like a rotted twig. He broke his teeth and jaw on the travertine staircase and was knocked unconscious, very nearly dead, by the time he'd tumbled violently to a stop at the very bottom.

“Significant brain damage, if that's the worst of it,” an associate professor audibly declared amidst the clamor of the spectators.

Juniper returned to her taking photographs. “Whatre dicergkhrread,” she said sullenly, though secretly she was pleased to have captured the violence with her camera. It would eventually become an award-winning collage, appearing in several photography exhibitions over the next two years and earning her both critical renown and monetary reward.

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“All right son, good night, sweet prince,” says I, the narrator.

“You're a bad dad!”

“I said good night!”

