

THE ASSASSIN

AND

THE SEA SLUG

by

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A gentle sea breeze floated through the open window, bringing with it the happy voices of the children playing in the sand. The curtains, part-drawn back, moved gently as they were caressed by the warm air, and in the dim room nothing stirred.

A shadow filled with pain sat hunched in a ball behind the right curtain; and it watched the golden beach below through powerful binoculars. The curtain moved slightly in the breeze and threw light beams onto the shadow, and in the dimness it transformed into a man. The man was in his late forties and was wearing pyjamas that seemed cut for a larger frame. The light was immediately absorbed by a drawn and sallow complexion that was; and sunk deep into the head were faded eyes, reflected pain, and death's summoning hand was reaching out to the still spectre. As the curtain softly moved back, the shadow was reborn. Leaning against the wall, next to the shadow, was a powerful rifle with a large, no-nonsense, silencer viciously screwed into its mouth. A wide-eyed telescopic sight sat snugly on the back of the rifle and stared patiently at the ceiling. The customised wooden stock roughly ground its heel into the soft pile of the carpet, and the worn pistol grip attested that this rifle was no virgin.

The assassin sat motionless behind the curtain, and waited, and watched, and waited...

Franco Scaripolus, the drug king known as the "Sea Slug", loved the ocean, and during the sultry season he would slither onto the beach around three, and steal the last rays of passion from a weary sun. On these larcenous excursions, the Slug would be attended by his current mistress, and her employment was to massage the obese and bloated body. And so it was that expensive oils and unguents would be used to anoint the dead-chicken skin, and the whole lot would be left to cook for ninety minutes with occasional basting.

The assassin stiffened momentarily... Franco had made his appearance. Putting down the binoculars and glancing at his watch, the assassin noted it was two forty-five.

"Early eh... that's good... that's very good..." he whispered.

Slowly easing himself up, the assassin cautiously moved his chair to the wall. Long sensitive fingers carefully picked up the rifle, and the bolt impatiently slipped back without a sound. Taking a long vicious-looking bullet from his pocket, the assassin carefully scrutinized it, smiled approvingly, and expertly secreted it in the breach. As the well oiled bolt eased forward, it cocked with an ominous click. Laboriously kneeling behind the curtain, the shadow raised the weapon and pulled the butt into his shoulder. he felt the smooth, cool, wood against his cheek, and he carefully rested the rifle's barrel on the window sill - only the tip of silencer was visible to the outside world, and it sniffed the air as it looked to find its quarry.

"That's good... just you and me, my old friend... just one more time..."

Franco lay on his back with his puffy feet reaching for the sea. Through the telescopic sight, the assassin watched the basting of the Slug, and though his vision was blurred with pain, the assassin kept the cross hairs motionless on the Slug's balding crown.

The shadow had again been reborn, and was kneeling motionless behind the curtain, watching, and waiting, and watching...

It took twenty minutes to cook the Slug's belly; and then stirring to life in his own gravy, the greasy, sweaty, panting, Slug started to roll over. The assassin tensed, and his finger automatically became one with the trigger. As Franco flopped over onto his stomach, he casually looked up, and unbeknown his gaze met with the assassin's. The trigger confirmed its presence, and the assassin smiled.

"We're both condemned..." he rasped, "but, you first..."

With the sound of a cork leaving a champagne bottle, the rifle spat, and a new eye had grown in Franco's forehead. With a surprised look, the slug slowly lowered his face onto his towel, and died. He twitched slightly as if dreaming, and then all was still. The court had sat, the verdict had been given, the sentence had been executed, evil had been excised, and justice had prevailed. However, justice outside of the law has a price - and another life is forfeit to balance the account.

"It's a strange irony," thought the assassin, as he wearily turned from the scene, "the Slug's got a bullet in the brain, and the assassin's got a tumour in the brain... Shit... anyway you look at it, we're both terminal cases."

The assassin carefully placed the rifle in the corner, and walked slowly and painfully into the bathroom. As he washed the dampness from his hands and face with cool water he looked into the mirror and wistfully smiled a greeting.

"God... you look like shit... you poor sod."

Returning to the room, the assassin eased himself onto the edge of the bed, and lifted from the night table a worn photograph of a little boy. He was about four years old, and encircled in the arms of a pretty young woman in her twenties. The assassin gazed at the figures for a while, and then whispered, "It's been a long time... since... I wonder where you're now... Yes... it's done... like I promised... God... I'm tired... and this damn pain..."

He sighed a little, and whispered almost inaudibly, "Yes... it's time to rest..."

After placing the photograph so it could be seen from the bed, the assassin picked up a syringe from the night table. He reached into his pocket and took out a large vial of golden liquid - his hand was trembling and his vision was blurring with pain. After carefully filling the syringe, he quickly injected the golden liquid into his left arm. Tossing the empty vial and syringe into the wastebasket, the assassin smiled and whispered, "Thanks, Slug... Now, what thou doest, do quickly."

Climbing into bed, he fluffed up the pillows, and pulled the blankets up to his chin. Snuggling down he gazed at the photograph and smiled... the pain had gone now... it was going to be all right.

Feeling a slight coldness in his toes he curled up tightly, and let his eyes slowly close on the little boy's face. He felt a lightness and freedom wash over him, and with anticipation he prepared to dream the greatest of all dreams... the final dream.

As he drifted he felt a small hand come into his, and he heard, by his ear, a small boy's voice say, "Come on daddy, we've been waiting for you..."

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