

Busting Yu Yan

Retirement has compensations, yet it's much like a haunted house. After leaving the San Francisco Probation Department and relocating to Sarasota, Florida, I've had dreams about the thirty years I spent mitigating crime: dreams where I wrestle bad guys, dreams where I stop a bullet, dreams where a waspish defense attorney vilifies me in court. And so I am eager to seek the company of other retired cops—perhaps too eager because I have lunch every day with Roscoe Bennett. Were he not a former vice squad detective, I would have nothing to do with him: he is boastful and unprincipled, he repeats himself all the time, and he's in the habit of salting his beer, which I find to be annoying. But we still lunch almost daily in Mello

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Mushroom Pizzeria, a building that replaced an adult movie theatre where Roscoe once worked undercover.

Roscoe often reminisces about combing adult theatres and bringing its patrons to justice, a debatable use of police power although one of his favorite duties. But a week ago he began a story he had never told me before. This time his target was not some poor joker abusing his fist in a theatre, but a woman who spared her clients the bother of performing that chore for themselves. Roscoe's voice, which blares like a trumpet, grew softer as he spoke, and his face wore the feckless composure of a phantom at a feast.

"Her name was Yu Yan," said Roscoe, as he folded his tree-trunk arms. "I caught her in a sting. While posing as a customer in an Asian spa, I got her to touch my cock."

"If you persuaded *her*," I said, "that sounds like a case of entrapment."

Roscoe ordered a pitcher of beer then filled up both our glasses. "Ya may be right," he conceded, "but that still didn't make the bust *easy*. I visited the parlor every night for a week before she crossed the line."

"Every night for a week?" I repeated. "Could you find nothing better to do?"

Roscoe shrugged. "This town doesn't *have* a better class of vice. And the mayor kept insisting he wanted the sex spas shut down. He said tourists need an environment as cheery as Walt Disney World, and them parlors were about as inviting as turds in a swimming pool."

I said, "Those whack-off lounges are pretty much closed already. Their lights are off, their blinds are pulled down, and I doubt that they're registered."

“They still offend some of the tourists,” Roscoe said.

“You sure about that?” I replied. “I’ll bet the only ones offended were the women you hauled off to jail.”

Roscoe’s face grew red—he does not like to be interrupted. “Ya wanna hear the story or not?” he snapped.

“All right,” I said. “So tell me about the time that you busted Yu Yan.”

Roscoe drained his glass of beer then quickly poured another. Foam crept over the rim of the glass as he continued to talk. “I have no use for them joints,” he said, “and I’m gonna tell ya why. My dad caught the clap in one of ’em back when I was a kid. Hell, I heard him moanin’ and groanin’ every time he took a piss.”

“He should have sued the place,” I joked.

“He did sue,” Roscoe said. “But the mama-san skipped town with the girls after the sheriff served the subpoena.”

“Sounds like your dad got jerked around.”

“Will ya stop with the puns,” Roscoe said. “I guess he shouldn’t have gone there, but he didn’t deserve the clap. So when I got picked for the mayor’s task force, I knew it was payback time.”

“Sounds like payback was pretty slow coming.”

“I toldja to stop with the puns. Now if ya don’t wanna hear this story, we can talk about somethin’ else.”

“No, tell me the story,” I said. “I want to know how you busted Yu Yan.”

“Only five detectives got chosen,” said Roscoe. “We each were assigned a big wad of cash and a parlor that needed bustin’. Mine was a joint called Hands of Gold—it used to be down on Gulf Gate Avenue among all them bars. I’d been hanging around there anyhow, ever since my last divorce, so it wasn’t no inconvenience for me to work undercover there. Well, I put an audio device in my pocket to record the conversation, and I headed to the Hands of Gold parlor to bust me a prostitute.

“Now I wanted to look like a snowbird, so I wore an Orioles’ cap. That made it appear like I’d come from up north so’s to attend spring training. At eight o’clock in the evening, I knocked on the door of that place, and this mama-san, about eighty years old, let me into this tiny foyer. There wasn’t nothin’ in it but a few plastic chairs, a dusty desk, and a television set on a mount. The television was showing *Leave it to Beaver*, which I thought was kinda funny.

“The mama-san looked at me kinda suspicious, and she said to me, ‘You a cop?’ and I told her I’d just come there to cop myself a massage. I told her I’d driven down from Ohio, and my shoulders were tight as a banjo. Well, the mama-san called the girls in, and there was three of them. Two of them turned me off—their eyes were dull and tired-looking, and they hadda be in their fifties. But the third one looked about thirty years old, and she caught my eye right away. She wasn’t exactly beautiful—her nose was hooked, her teeth were uneven, and she was as skinny as an eel—but she had a real pleasant manner about her, and that got me interested. Hell, she gazed at me with these big doe eyes and she gave me a little wink, and she blushed when I told the mama-san that she was the one I wanted. The mama-san made me cough up a fifty-dollar house fee, and she told me tips were accepted if I

was pleased with my massage. 'You get only massage,' she told me. 'You no get a happy ending.' I suppose she hadda to say that in case she ended up in court.

"Well, I followed the dame I'd picked to this room that was smaller than even the foyer, and there was this portable massage table in it that looked yellower 'an a corpse. She introduced herself as Yu Yan and she gently shook my hand, and I was glad her grip was gentle 'cause her hand felt hard as stone. She asked me what my name was, and I said it was Roscoe Bennett. Yeah, I was there to bust her—stop grinning at me like that. I just didn't see no reason to lie about my name.

"Now the broad asked me if I was a cop, so I told her I was a snowbird, and she smiled and said, 'Roscoe Bennett, does that mean that you can't be a cop?'

"I stood there feelin' foolish 'cause I'd just put my foot in my mouth, and I was kinda relieved when she asked me to strip to my underpants. I yanked my shirt and pants off and I hung 'em on this rack, and I straightened my pants real careful so the recording device wouldn't fall out. After that, I lay down on the table and let her massage my back, and her fingers were stronger than whale's breath and my muscles started to howl. I heard her laugh as she worked on me, and her laughter was gentle as rain. 'Roscoe Bennett,' she said, "I believe you are a cop.'

"What makes ya say that, honey?' I said.

"Your muscles are very tense,' she said. "You are not relaxed, Roscoe Bennett. Is that because you came here to put poor me in jail?'

"Honey,' I said, 'I'm a fertilizer salesman, and I'm here to watch some baseball.'"

"I hope that is true, Mister Bennett,' she said. 'A cop should not be so nervous.'

“She massaged my back and legs for a hour, and we chatted about this and that, and I had a kind-sized hard-on when I finally rolled onto my back. She draped a sheet over it, and she patted me on the shoulder and said, ‘Thank, you, Roscoe Bennett, for letting me work on you.’

“I asked her if I could come back tomorrow, and she said, ‘Come anytime. You’re a very nice man, I believe, even though I think you’re a cop.’

“Now I didn’t wanna to blow my cover until she crossed the line, so I shelled out an extra large tip, the kind a rich tourist might give her. She giggled and said, ‘Roscoe Bennett, this must be my lucky day.’ And she tucked the money into her bra and blew me a little kiss.”

“And was it?” I asked.

“Was it what?” Roscoe said.

“Was it her lucky day?”

“Naw,” Roscoe said. “But I did kinda like her, and I wanted to know her better. I wasn’t in too big a hurry for her to stroke my Johnson.”

“How did you stretch things out?”

Roscoe groaned. “Will ya *please* stop with them puns? This is something I’m touchy about, and you’re turning it into a joke.”

“All right, I’ll rephrase the question,” I said. “How did you keep it up?”

“I went back to see her every night for a week, and, at first, she did most of the talking. I guess she was pretty lonely and was glad to have someone to talk to. She said she came from Beijing and she missed her family a lot, but she hadda come to Florida to keep house for her grandmother. She said her grandmother was very strict

and scolded her like a peacock, but she kept house for her anyway because elders deserve respect.

“She also said she worked at this nail salon in downtown Sarasota, and that if I ever wanted a pedicure I could go and see her there. She said not to give her too big a tip if I went to the nail salon. ‘You would make the owner *very jealous*,’ she said. ‘I do not wish to lose that job.’

“After a few days, she said, ‘Oh Roscoe, I’m such a selfish woman. I have done so much yapping that you, my best customer, have had no chance to speak. Will you tell me about yourself, Roscoe Bennett, and forgive me for talking so much?’

“I was hopin’ she wouldn’t ask no questions ‘cause my cover wasn’t that great. And, also, her voice got hollow, like she was expectin’ to hear bad news. I don’t think she ever quite believed I wasn’t no cop.

“Well, I told her about my three divorces, and I confessed I was an alcoholic, ‘cause ya don’t wanna lie more than ya hafta when you’re trying not to blow yer cover. But I don’t know shit about fertilizer so I made a joke about that. I told her I was an entremanure and that’s how I made a buck.”

“Let me get this straight,” I said. “This was a woman you were starting to like, and she was warming up to you. But the moment she offered to jerk you off, it was all going to come to an end.”

“Yah,” said Roscoe matter-of-factly. “That was it in a fucking nutshell. But I was hopin’ she wouldn’t offer ‘cause I was liking her more and more. Ya know, I took her out on a date before I hadda cuff her up.”

“A date,” I said incredulously. “Where the hell did you go?”

“The Longhorn Steakhouse on Route 41, my favorite restaurant. I had a ten-ounce T-bone and she had chicken tenders. And I said to her ‘Honey, I wish ya wouldn’t keep workin’ in that dump.’”

“Did you say that to sound like a tourist?” I said.

“Naw, I meant it,” Roscoe said. “I really didn’t want her to be a hooker no more.

“Well, she looked at me kinda angrily, like she’d heard that line too many times, and she said, ‘Do not try to save me, Roscoe. I do not want to be saved.’ Now she didn’t come out and say it but I think she had this notion that, if I was going to save someone, I oughta start with myself.

“When we finished dinner, I asked her if she would like to go for a drive, and she suggested we go to the beach because the sun was about to set. So I drove her to Turtle Beach and we sat down on the sand, and we watched a fleet of pelicans go driftin’ across the sky. She dug her toes into the sand like she was searchin’ for gold doubloons, and she said to me, ‘Roscoe, it makes me sad to watch the sun go down.’”

“So how did you manage to bust her,” I asked, “if she was suspicious of you?”

“I hadda force things a little,” said Roscoe. “The police were raiding massage parlors all over Sarasota—that’s ‘cause the rest of the task force was doin’ its job better ‘an me. And the sheriff called me into his office and asked why I was lagging behind. He said any detective worth his badge would have made a collar by now. Well, I told him I was workin’ on it, and he said that I was too late. He said he already had enough evidence to raid the Hands of Gold.”

“From another reluctant witness?” I guessed.

Roscoe nodded and sipped his beer. “Some John agreed to testify that he’d got a handjob there. Probably a repeat offender who was lookin’ at prison time.”

“So why did you need to bust her yourself?”

“I hadda save face! Whaddya think? I ain’t no half-assed cop. Besides, I thought it’d be easier on her if she was arrested by me.

“So I begged the sheriff for one last chance to make a bust on my own. I guess he felt kinda sorry for me ’cause I was practically on my knees. He said he would give me one hour, and that was all I was gonna get.

“Well, I hurried on down to the Hands of Gold, and I musta looked a wreck. The mama-san stared at me like I was sick and asked if I’d like some tea, and she said she would waive the house fee since I seemed to be in a bad way. And when Yu Yan saw me, she gasped and said, ‘What is the matter, Roscoe?’ and I gave her a hundred dollar tip so she would hurry and cross the line. But when I was laying on the table and she was massaging my chest, I couldn’t even get a hard-on. I was that upset.

“Well, her fingers brushed my Willie a coupla times while she was workin’ on my hips—it wasn’t exactly a handjob, but it was gonna hafta do. So I pushed her away and got off the table and put my clothes back on, then I fished my handcuffs outta my pants and said she was under arrest. When I ordered her to turn around and put her hands behind her back, I didn’t see no surprise on her face—she just looked kinda sad. It was how she looked on Turtle Beach when we was watchin’ the sun go down.”

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Roscoe excused himself from the table to grab a smoke outside, and I felt a sudden impatience for his story to come to an end. I was feeling a nagging

compassion for him, and that would never do—not when he had every intention of remaining a rabid cop. So when Roscoe returned to the table, smelling like a chimney, I asked him to finish his story and stop beating around the bush.

Roscoe ordered another pitcher of beer and refilled both our glasses. Despite my gnawing impatience, he was determined to take his time. He sat for several minutes without offering a word, and when he spoke his voice was flat, like he was reading a traffic report.

“Well, I herded Yu Yan outta that joint and I put her in my car, and while we was sittin’ next to each other, she finally spoke to me. She said, ‘My wrists hurt, Roscoe, and I feel so sorry for you.’ I said to her, ‘Babe, I’m just doing my duty,’ and that’s when all hell broke loose. Two police sedans and a paddy wagon pulled up in front of the place, and their lights were racing like greyhounds and their sirens were squalling like cats, and half a dozen deputies scrambled outta the cars, and they barged into the parlor like they was stormin’ the Alamo. While they was marching out the women and a coupla customers, Yu Yan said, ‘Roscoe Bennett, what kind of duty is this?’

“I said I needed to know where she lived and she sat there biting her lip, then she gave me the address of her grandmother’s house, which was up in Bradenton. Well, I drove her to her grandmother’s place and it didn’t look too invitin’—it was nothing but a broken-down bungalow that the city shoulda condemned. We sat in the car for a while then I took the cuffs offa her, and Yu Yan started rubbing her wrists ‘cause I put ‘em on a bit tight. She said, ‘Roscoe, I told you already that I do not want to be saved.’ ‘Honey, it ain’t you I’m savin’,’ I said, and I let her out of the car.”

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Not wanting to improve my opinion of him, I asked Roscoe, “Is there more?” My thirty years as a peace officer had inured me to sentimentality, so I was not going to cut him slack because of a single charitable deed.

“Yah, there’s more,” said Roscoe, and he slowly finished his beer. “Did I tell you she’d overstayed her visa and there was a warrant out on her, and that some of them girls we rounded up got deported back to China?”

“So you both overstayed your welcome,” I said.

“Naw, that ain’t exactly what happened. What happened is I married her steada handing her to the feds.”

I sat as though I’d been tied to the chair—this was not something I wanted to know. My only consolation was the thought that he had acted selfishly.

“I did her no favor,” Roscoe admitted. “She’d have been happier back in Beijing. But the marriage was good while it lasted—I gotta admit to that.”

“What ended it?” I asked him.

“She kept workin’ in them goddamn parlors,” Roscoe said, “and I couldn’t handle that. And she didn’t like my boozing and hanging around the bars. But we lasted a year before splitting up, and it was a pretty good year.”

“Would you call it a happy ending?” I asked.

Roscoe salted his beer. “It was happy enough,” he said, “when ya consider the situation. She fell in love with a cop’s cover, I fell in love with a whore. How much longer do you suppose something like that could last?”

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