

The Pearl Diver

“I like the way Garth looks in his jeans,” Angelica Presley remarked to Cressey, her fellow server. “He wears them low around the hips. Sometimes I think about the way he walks. He’s...slinky.”

Angelica leaned over the glass dessert case to watch the dishwasher make his way through the dining room. Gathered around the espresso machine before the dinner shift, Cressey and the other servers, all men, two Italians and one American, followed suit, tracking Garth as he breezed past a decorative three-foot high long neck bottle of Tuscan Chianti and pushed through the swinging wooden doors to the kitchen.

Angelica’s eyes wandered to a large fresco on the wall in section two. The fresco depicted a sunset reflecting off the walls of Florence’s Strozzi Palace. The palace towered over small, impressionistic versions of Renaissance-era citizens, placed in the foreground and robed in rich reds and golds.

Angelica turned her head and watched the entrance of the evening’s first customers. She placed her demitasse and saucer into the busing bin underneath the espresso machine, tied a red apron around her black skirt and touched up her burgundy lipstick. For the latter operation, she employed a bright yellow compact she had owned since her teenage years in Spain, when her mother, a career diplomat, had been posted to Madrid across two presidential administrations. Angelica approached a corner table of section three and, possibly inspired by Garth, the Strozzi Palace, or both, sold a bottle of \$100 *Amarone*.

Until Angelica brought him into consciousness, Garth had enjoyed a nearly invisible profile in the restaurant. Broken toothed and greasy haired, shaped like the spoons he scrubbed, with a head made to look larger than it really was by thin shoulders

and a skinny waist, Garth had never before been mentioned as an object of interest by a co-worker. He called himself a “pearl diver” because he regularly plunged his sinewy left arm to the bottom of pots and pans. As the restaurant’s primary pearl diver, Garth understood the social gap between himself and the well-heeled crowd that patronized *Avé Strozzi*, most of whom owned, or could afford, actual pearls, and much more. In the restaurant he confined himself to an occasional countrified “*Come stai?*” accompanied by an ironic, crooked smile, as if he knew Italian sounded wrong on his lips.

For the rest of the evening, as the dining room staff moved around each other to make salads with crumbled gorgonzola and collect platters of marinated eggplant, tomatoes, peppers, and olives, the surprising things Angelica had said about Garth kept coming up in their side conversations. The servers were amazed that Angelica, *Angelica*, allowed herself to think about the way Garth Cutler looked in his jeans, the way Garth moved.

Avé Strozzi was located in Seattle’s Fremont neighborhood, which boasted a prominent statue of Lenin and a by-gone reputation as a hotbed of the counterculture. Since the emergence of Microsoft and Amazon, the urban village had surrendered its radical character in favor of designer boutiques, fancy cafes, and sleek restaurants.

The restaurant’s dining room staff was almost evenly divided between Americans and Italians, with the Italians almost evenly divided between Neapolitans and Florentines. The owners, a Florentine Paolo and a Neapolitan Paolo, competed to stack the employee roster with natives of their rival city-states. On weekend nights, the two Paolos installed

their families at a long table in the front window and manned the entry, chatting up attractive customers in plain sight of their American wives, who ignored them.

Because there weren't enough Seattle-based Florentines and Neapolitans to go around, American servers were required to fill out the dining room staff. Most successful American job candidates fumbled with European cigarettes, struggled to make just the right wrist turn as they sipped espresso, and attempted to close the authenticity gap with their Italian co-workers by ending sentences with upward inflections and expressive hand gestures.

Angelica was different. She was already an honorary southern European, after a fashion. Fluent in Spanish – Italian's closest cousin – from a girlhood in Madrid, Angelica could make out the restaurant's native language better than anyone who hadn't been born in Italy. She had no trouble projecting Mediterranean style as she listened, cigarette in hand, to Italian conversations. Never letting on how much she understood, she concluded that it was important to stay away from Italian men, at least the Italian men who worked at *Avé Strozzi*.

Unusual among dining room staff, Angelica didn't fraternize with her male co-workers, American or Italian. This was noteworthy because *Avé Strozzi*, a dark, vibrating place, was a zone of promiscuity. The servers moved back and forth in space, in coordinated rhythm. They flirted over salad trays, rubbed lightly against each other by the espresso machine, touched one another's arms and hips while maneuvering around the dessert case. By the end of a typical evening, everyone would be exhausted, whatever minimal personal defenses they had put in place for professional settings thoroughly worn down. After work, they often gathered at one of the nearby bars or in the empty

back section of the restaurant, enjoyed one or two drinks too many, and continued the flirtations, now with leisure and alcohol at their disposal. Most had a full-fledged set of dalliances behind them, with different co-workers at different times, under slightly different circumstances, a set of quasi-incestuous relations, gay and straight, with people they saw nearly every day and that throbbed with varying levels of intensity and awkwardness, depending on the circumstances of how they parted and what future possibilities remained intact.

Which isn't to say that Angelica didn't frequently enjoy carnal pleasures. In fact, she shared stories of her romantic exploits with a *cogniscenti's* delight. After work one evening, a few weeks before her public comments about Garth, Angelica was seated at the long table in the front window. Holding a wine glass of *Pellegrino* and fresh lemon, she spilled details to Cressey about her latest experience over *spaghetti puttanesca*, though plenty of other co-workers eavesdropped.

"I met this guy at a bar last night. He was very good looking. A lawyer or accountant, I can't remember. He was very sweet, too sweet. I almost lost interest."

"What made you acquire interest?" Cressey asked.

Twirling pasta, Angelica looked thoughtful.

"He touched my wrist the way I like. It surprised me. As the night went on, he focused on other things. And he didn't talk too much, which was good. Not talking helped him quite a bit. I know you're not surprised," Angelica continued, "how many men struggle to talk with women. But we keep giving them a go, feeding pearls to swine."

Cressey nodded and sighed.

A few days after observing out loud Garth Cutler's attractions, Angelica gave notice to the Paolos, having set her date for moving to Spain, where she was emigrating to set up an import-export leather goods business, a purely pragmatic professional vehicle to get herself back to Spain.

"Madrid embraced me as a girl," she informed the Paolos. "When I visit, it still feels like home."

As news of her coming move to Spain hit the restaurant staff, some co-workers built a mental image of Angelica starring permanently in her version of an Almodovar film, with many unconventional sexual adventures in front of her. Others imagined Angelica thriving in Madrid's robust bar culture, pursuing good times with Cava and tapas, followed by a satisfying Ducado.

What Angelica didn't share, with the Paolos or anyone, were the overwhelming feelings she experienced when, visiting Madrid, she made it a point to be the first patron of the day in the *Museo Nacional* to stand opposite the cubist marvel "Woman with Mandolin" by Juan Gris. From the time as a schoolgirl that she first saw the painting, Angelica had recognized in the angular rendering of its subject her own many-sidedness, the richness of humanity, the pathos of mortality, the importance of living an artistic if not an artist's life. And although she didn't play the mandolin herself, when facing the Gris masterpiece she somehow heard its Spanish music.

Yet as each month and year created more distance between Angelica and her girlhood in Madrid, she found it increasingly difficult to summon reliably all the notes of the mandolin melody. At ever shorter intervals that seemed to be collapsing in on themselves, another note would fall away from Angelica's ability to conjure it. She

finally concluded that as long as she remained in Seattle, or, really, anywhere outside of Madrid, the melody seemed likely to deteriorate further, over time becoming an unrecognizable fragment before, she feared, disappearing altogether. Following this reasoning, Angelica determined that staying permanently away from “Woman with Mandolin” amounted, at best, to deliberately impoverishing her life. At worst, it meant committing a kind of suicide.

Meanwhile, the staff of *Avé Strozzi*, even Cressey, with whom Angelica was most intimate, remained oblivious to the existence of the melody and its fundamental importance to her. The men attuned their ears instead to the ticking clock of her coming emigration to Spain and what, in a rapidly diminishing window of time, that trans-Atlantic move might mean for broadening Angelica’s willingness to fraternize with soon to be ex-colleagues.

“She’ll be in my bed before she boards the jet,” declared Primo Canzone to a group of American servers, all men. He raised the espresso demitasse to his mouth, a loose silver bracelet curling around his wrist, and nodded once, reinforcing his self-confidence.

If any of the Americans had guaranteed the successful seduction of Angelica Presley, as Primo did, they would have been the subject of ridicule. Primo, though, had earned the right to make guarantees. Over the course of a typical week, a parade of attractive women walked through the restaurant’s doors with the expressed intention of seducing – or being seduced by – him. They drank glasses of *Valpolicella* and *Orvieto* with the Paolos in the front window and lingered until Primo completed his duties.

Somehow, Primo always managed to depart with one of the women without killing future opportunities with the others. Quizzed by the Americans about how he pulled it off, Primo shrugged.

“Americans, they talk too much. *Parlare, parlare, parlare,*” he repeated. “As if talking is going to help them. *Me,*” he paused, “I don’t talk too much.”

As Angelica’s last day approached, Primo took to making espresso for two, standing a well-calibrated distance from her, at once signaling interest and indifference.

“You know,” he murmured, “Spanish men are supposed to be good lovers. Some say as good as Italians. Though not as good as Neapolitans.”

“That’s not what I’ve heard,” Angelica replied.

Primo was left slack-jawed.

Angelica further wrongfooted Primo by sprinkling “Garth” into this and their other brief conversations. “Have you seen Garth drive off in his Firebird?” Angelica inquired, as if Primo might be interested. “It’s beautiful,” Angelica continued, “to watch Garth weave in and out of traffic.” Confused and incurious, Primo didn’t know how to make sense of the dishwasher’s sudden relevance.

Garth Cutler hailed from Hoquiam, a small mill town that nearly reached the Pacific Coast, southwest of Puget Sound. Like his grandfather and father before him, Garth had figured to end up in a paper mill. But during the summer between his sophomore and junior years in high school, he took a job at a local diner, where he turned out to be “Oh my god!” good at washing dishes. Thirty years in the restaurant business and the diner’s owner had never seen anything like it. In between menthol puffs on her

Salems, she bragged about Garth to anyone who would listen. Garth enjoyed the praise so much he stayed on for three years past his eighteenth birthday, finally winding up on the doorstep of *Avé Strozzi* after allowing himself to fantasize about the possibility of a real-life adventure beyond Hoquiam. It never occurred to Garth that he might try to find a different profession on arriving in the Emerald City.

Now that Angelica had declared Garth to be “slinky,” and oddly pushed the beauty of his driving, the other servers, more curious than Primo, took to stealing glances at the dishwasher, tracked his movements and whereabouts. Especially on slow nights, buried deep inside the kitchen, Garth peeled garlic, left-handed, seated at a wobbly table. In between making his way through a new head of garlic, Garth sometimes placed on the table a small, sturdy lock box that housed his personal effects. Huddling over the lock box’s uncertain contents, a wistful smile formed on his acne-scarred face.

Because he always showed up on time, worked complete shifts and turned around whole sittings like no one in the history of the restaurant, the Paolos rewarded Garth’s performance by doubling his wages and granting unprecedented perks for a dishwasher, like the opportunity to drink a glass of wine after hours, or to dine on *saltimbocca* or *linguine vongole* at no extra charge (Garth found *prosciutto* too salty and clams too rubbery). Instead, he usually ordered something simple, like *fettucine bolognese* or *penne quattro formaggi*, which he called, shyly, “that funky macaroni and cheese.”

After closing, the restaurant emptied of customers, one of the Paolos would play Tony Bennett or Pavarotti at a high volume. Charged with mopping the restaurant from end to end, Garth vibrated, unconsciously moving to the rhythms of the music. He

transformed the mop into a graceful dancing partner, unaware of the mesmerizing, incongruous spectacle he had become.

One night, Angelica lingered behind and watched Garth perform his mop dance. She wasn't sure, but as she watched she thought Pavarotti receded in favor of a succession of notes from the mandolin melody – which Garth somehow summoned. The unprecedented phenomenon made Garth, in Angela's sensory experience, much more than simply "slinky."

Subsequently, Angelica began spending time at Garth's dishwashing station. She didn't say much, but instead pondered deeply the self-proclaimed pearl diver, who had come to preoccupy her. Finally, on one of the slower evenings, after Angelica had wrapped up her tables and was free to head home, she marched instead to the rear of the restaurant and sparked up a conversation.

"What does the future hold, Garth?"

"I'm going to finish here," Garth said, hosing down a round serving tray, "then do some damage on a six pack back home."

"Not tonight," Angelica replied. "The *future* future."

Garth looked skeptically at Angelica. As far as the dishwasher was concerned, he had already made it in the big city, having left Hoquiam far behind. "I'm not sure I've been introduced to the *future* future."

"What are you going to do after your run is over at *Avé Strozzi*? No one can stay here forever. Me, I'm off to Madrid. That's where my blood jumps. I'm still young and I don't care much about what I do in the next little while, but whatever I do, I want to do it in Madrid."

“I’m a pearl diver, Angelica” Garth said. “This is the best thing I’m good at in the whole world.”

In that moment, Angelica tried hard but couldn’t make out any part of the mandolin melody she now often associated with Garth.

Twenty-four hours before Angelica was due to leave for Madrid, Primo believed himself to have made enough headway to stand next to her, hip to hip, against the dessert case. Before the restaurant became too busy, he shared with Angelica more of the parallels between Spanish and Italian men, taking care as always to give a slight advantage to Italians, and especially to Neapolitans. In the midst of Primo’s murmurings, Angelica raised her hand to his mouth, silencing him. She turned to a group of servers milling nearby and made an unexpected offer.

“It’s my last night, guys. Do you want to meet later for drinks?”

Primo frowned. But Angelica’s offer was enthusiastically accepted by the others.

As the drizzly Seattle evening gained momentum, with *Pagliacci* playing on a continuous loop, providing the background music to the dynamic choreography of servers corking wine, slicing bread, and carrying trays to successive waves of customers, Angelica’s proposal played out, especially in the men’s private bantering, when they allowed themselves to imagine the happy outcome of improbably coupling with the departing *madrileña*.

By half past ten, a collection of *Avé Strozzi* servers – three American and two Italian waiters, including Primo, and two American waitresses, Cressey and Jessica (a new hire and Angelica’s replacement) – huddled in a large horseshoe-shaped booth over

a heavy wooden table in a smoky basement bar, a few blocks from the restaurant. They were waiting for Angelica. Alcohol, mostly beer, flowed freely.

Angelica finally arrived, surprisingly trailed by Garth. She shook out her hair, hung her rain jacket on a hook adjacent to the booth, and pushed in. Garth, eyes directed at the floor, thumbs hooked in empty belt loops, shifted his weight from one dirty canvas sneaker to another.

“Garth, pull up a chair,” Angelica instructed.

Primo hailed their tall, shambling server, who wore tinted John Lennon glasses, a sparse goatee, and a blonde ponytail.

“Two shots of Southern Comfort,” Garth mumbled.

“So here’s the deal,” Angelica began, consulting her cell phone. “Paolo wants us back at the restaurant. He’s organizing the Italian crowd into a get together. He asked if we would limit ourselves to a couple of drinks here. He offered to crack open the *Barolo*.”

“If you have a choice,” Primo replied, “between Italian wine and American beer, and the Italian wine is *Barolo*, the answer is clear.”

“That’s two SoCos,” Garth repeated, louder now.

“Southern Comfort,” Primo grimaced. “That’s, what do you call it, redneck whiskey?”

“That’s right,” Garth agreed, amiably. “We rednecks know what’s good.”

When the server returned, Garth held up the golden liquid to the smokey light. Angelica intercepted the glass and threw back its contents.

Garth grinned and engaged Primo. “SoCo’s too strong for Italians, I think. You’re better off sticking to wine or beer.” Garth downed the second shot.

Marcello, the other Italian waiter, laughed. “Let me try this SoCo. We’ll see if an Italian can handle it.”

With the arrival of Marcello’s shot glass, Garth leaned forward, putting all his weight on his elbows. “Angelica’s right. It’s not for sipping, home boy!”

Marcello sniffed the liquid, then downed it. “Tastes like cough medicine,” he choked.

“Yeah, it does!” Garth agreed, slapping Marcello on the back and nodding enthusiastically.

“You’ll drive the ladies back to the restaurant, won’t you, Garth?” Angelica turned to her female co-workers. “You should see his Firebird. It’s a time machine.”

“Firebird,” Primo said, “it’s a kind of, what’s the word, ‘stock car,’ isn’t it? I thought you could only drive one on Saturdays, at the race track.”

“No, he drives it every day,” Angelica interjected. “It’s a muscle car.”

“Rebuilt it myself. It moves...,” Garth said, throwing back another SoCo, “...fast.”

Marcello called out for another round.

“Haven’t you already impressed the dishwasher?” Primo said.

“It’s not for me,” Marcello said. “This one’s for you, *mio amico*.”

“And one more,” Angelica pounded the table. “I don’t think they serve SoCo in Spain.”

Primo raised the shot glass to his lips. After draining it, he held himself together for a bit before spraying SoCo across the table. Angelica wiped away the golden droplets from her hands and arms. She tapped her glass on the table and threw it back.

“That hits the spot!”

“You know,” Garth said to Primo, as the group pushed out of the booth, “I couldn’t handle SoCo either on my first try, at 13. Didn’t spit all over a girl, though.”

Primo elbowed past the dishwasher.

The three women followed Garth to the cherry red ’71 Firebird. Light rain fell on the foursome as they climbed into the car. Angelica took the front seat. Garth gunned the engine and whooped into the night.

Meanwhile, the Italian and American men began their silent, misty trudge back to the restaurant.

By the time the male servers made it to *Avé Strozzi*, Florentine Paolo had already contacted dozens of Italian friends. His fellow expatriates were arriving in twos and threes, seeking the promise of *Barolo*. Paolo opened several bottles. Standing at the counter, he hummed an aria from *La Bohème* and served *antipasti*. Angelica and Cressey sat with Garth at a table in the back section, hidden from pedestrians who might peer in and mistake the place for being open.

Passing Paolo and following Primo, the waiters shuffled to the back of the restaurant. As they approached, they heard Angelica engaged in a drinking game. “I never did it in the kitchen of *Avé Strozzi*.” Cressey raised an eyebrow but didn’t lift her glass of *Barolo*. Garth produced a wide, gap-toothed grin. He raised the wine glass to

his lips and threw it back, as if it were a shot of SoCo. Angelica and Cressey erupted, squealing “Garth!”

The laughter subsided and the newcomers pulled up chairs. Garth poured himself another glass of wine and lowered his eyes to the red and white checked table cloth. Primo took a seat and began posing questions to the women. “You believe the dishwasher? That he had sex in the kitchen? With a *girl*?” He sized up Garth and shook his head. “Maybe he had sex with himself, but never in the kitchen...not with a girl.”

Garth spoke up.

“Wendy used to come see me sometimes. Between the lunch and dinner shifts. We would sit at my table in the kitchen and talk. One day she came by. Paolo...” Garth raised his chin to the Florentine, who had just arrived with two more uncorked bottles of *Barolo*. “...Paolo had to go to the bank. He left me in charge. Wendy and I were alone.” Garth paused. “We did it on my table.”

The group, formerly hunched forward toward Garth, now shifted its attention to Paolo, seeking confirmation. Paolo examined Garth. Could this really be *his* pearl diver?

“*Vero*,” Paolo agreed. “I left him here one afternoon, with the girl. I must have been gone maybe *venti minuti*. Plenty of time,” he concluded. Grinning, he slapped Garth hard on the back.

“We had to hurry,” Garth added. “You came back sooner than we thought.”

Garth pulled a thick brown wallet out of his jeans and removed what looked like a tattered high school class photo. It was a picture of a pretty young woman, long sandy bangs falling over one eye, accentuated by a wide purple headband.

“That’s Wendy?” Angelica asked.

Garth nodded, gazing at the photo.

“Sometimes she slips away from me. That’s when I pull out her picture.”

“She’s lovely,” Angelica said.

“What happened in the kitchen,” Garth said, privately to Angelica, sadness entering his voice, “it was goodbye, before her family moved to New Mexico.”

“*Io, non ci credo*,” Primo asserted, registering disbelief. “*Non ci credo*.”

“Why don’t you believe it?” Angelica asked, cheeks flushed. “You had a boy, a girl, a table, and an empty restaurant. All the opportunity in the world.”

“A locked, *empty ristorante*,” Paolo added, growing more enthusiastic. “Garth, Garth,” he repeated, raising his voice. “GARTH! Giving women pleasure in the kitchen!”

“There was only one,” Garth corrected.

“*Madonna Campanila!*” Paolo cried, even more animated. He rose and walked around the table, throwing his arm around Garth’s shoulder. “This needs more than *Barolo*.” He rubbed his hands together and scanned the wine racks, before stopping at the towering bottle of *Chianti*. He kissed Garth on each cheek.

Before anyone knew what was happening, Paolo had uncorked the monstrous bottle, formerly regarded by the staff with wry, dismissive smiles as the kind of circus object a late middle-aged couple on a maiden trip to Florence might pick up, to prove to folks back home the Bacchanalian excesses of Italian culture.

“I’ve been saving this for a special occasion,” Paolo almost whispered. “Garth making love in the kitchen, Angelica journeying to *Spagna*.” Paolo shrugged, pressed his

palms together and shook them up and down in a Florentine rhythm. “*Questo è un occasione speciale, i miei amici!*”

To pour the giant bottle of *Chianti*, Paolo needed help. While two waiters anchored the base, Paolo tipped the neck and filled empty glasses. Not sharing Paolo’s triumphalism, Garth went along. He extended his wine glass and received the *Chianti*.

No one knew the *Chianti*’s vintage, but hallucinatory effects shortly followed, as if the bottle had been laced with LSD by a Tuscan hippy. Someone turned up the music and turned down the lights. Someone else replaced Pavarotti with The Doors.

Hello, I love you, won’t you tell me your name?

Now the congregants set aside their glasses and began dancing. Angelica grabbed Garth by the waist. They moved together, stiffly at first. Then, growing more comfortable, Garth began to glide, as though he were dancing with one of his mops. As Angelica danced with Garth, the sound of the Doors receded from her inner ear. The hypnotic rock tune was replaced in Angelica’s head by the mandolin melody, now fully realized for the first time outside of Spain. Angelica whispered something in Garth’s ear.

The dancers spilled out across the restaurant, some swaying alone, some pairing off. Garth and Angelica paused. Garth took Angelica’s hand, led her through the swinging wooden doors and guided her to his workstation. Garth produced the key to his lockbox and opened it.

Primo, meanwhile, pulled back from his small dancing group and began searching for Angelica. As he ran his eyes over the darkened restaurant, he grew agitated. Disoriented, he wandered from the white wine refrigerator to the bread bin to the dessert case, before making his way to the kitchen.

“*Io, non ci credo,*” he repeated. “*Non ci credo.*”

What Primo saw was Garth standing over Angelica at the dishwasher’s work table. What he couldn’t understand is why Garth was placing a purple plastic headband onto Angelica’s head, as though crowning a princess.

“Like this?” Angelica said to Garth, rearranging her hair in a style similar to Wendy’s photo.

“Uh huh,” replied Garth, featuring his gap-toothed grin.

Primo stepped forward and pushed aside the dishwasher. He snatched the curved plastic from Angelica’s head.

“Give it back,” Angelica screamed. “Give it back now!”

Confused, Primo raised the headband. “This...?”

“...isn’t mine, asshole! I was doing something for Garth.”

Primo met Garth’s eyes, wild with rage. Putting at least two arm lengths between himself and the dishwasher, he tossed the headband onto Garth’s work table. He shrugged and shook his head at Angelica. Then, retreating, he watched Garth warily and muttered “*Basta. Basta.*”

Angelica led Garth out the swinging doors, grabbed a random wine glass and asked for a refill of the *Chianti*, still working its hallucinatory magic. Marcello and Cressey, who had been dancing, now stripped down to their underwear and ran outside together in the light rain, circling the block to the cheers of the revelers.

Noting the late hour and her international departure the next day, Angelica danced up to every member of the staff and clinked glasses, toasting “*Adios.*” She tottered up to

Garth. Now seated on the floor, he was staring into space, trance-like, and clutching Wendy's headband. Angelica waved her hand in front of his face.

“Drive me?”

Garth came back to life. He hooked the headband into his front pocket and let Angelica haul him to his feet. Angelica threw her arm around Garth's waist and he followed with his arm over her shoulder. Arms entwined, they pushed open the front door. Paolo shouted “*Amanti!*” Angelica squeezed Garth tight, pulling his hip into hers, translating the Italian word onto the pearl diver's body. The mandolin melody played louder than ever in her head.

The next day, only a few minutes before the dinner shift, Garth arrived at the restaurant wearing his usual long sleeve black t-shirt, half an hour after his scheduled start, the first time he had ever been late to work. Italian and American servers, slouching around the espresso machine, invited the dishwasher to join them. Declining espresso, he poured himself a cup of American coffee. Everyone studied Garth.

Finally, Marcello spoke up. “You and Angelica sure enjoyed the Southern Comfort, didn't you? Did you get your hands on more last night...or did you get your hands on something else?”

Garth grinned at Marcello and returned the curious looks of his co-workers. His bloodshot eyes paused slyly on Primo for a beat longer than the rest, one half of his mouth turned upward, allowing himself a single smirk. Garth shrugged, simulating what an Italian from Hoquiam might look like.

“Me? I don't talk too much.”

Garth set down his cup of coffee. As he navigated the dining room to the swinging wooden doors, he hummed a funny tune that no one else recognized.

The dishwasher donned a rubber apron and set himself up in front of his work station. Continuing to hum the mandolin melody Angelica had taught him, he imagined that, hours later, she would be doing likewise on the flight to Madrid. Even though he had no firsthand experience of flying, Garth pictured Angelica on the plane, a moving image in full color.

Pushing both long sleeves above his elbows, Garth stood over the sink, filled his lungs, and resumed the quest for pearls.