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CONTENTS

1	The Baked Goods and Bitcoin of Skiophobia	1
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CHAPTER ONE

THE BAKED GOODS AND BITCOIN OF SKIROPHORIA

Angelique Fawns · Nov 30, 2024

It took a few moments, but he was finally able to focus he saw a white-cloaked woman, sword at her side, with intricately braided hair on a podium. He was behind her, so he couldn't see her face, but he certainly admired the outline of her taunt back.

She was strutting on a platform while waving at a crowd of women in togas. A female warrior in chainmail scuttled beside her while trying to keep the sun off her head with a white umbrella. The sun was bright and hot in an endlessly blue sky.

The more she waved, the louder the crowd roared.

Beyond the robed women, Caleb saw homes of marble and stone. They rose up a distant mountain like mushrooms in a field. With some effort he rotated his head to the side.

Why was his neck so stiff?

There were two floating heads in tanks mounted on silver pedestals beside him.

Caleb blinked. Everything was blurry because he was also a head in a tank.

His eyes widened and he screamed into the thick viscous fluid. Bubbles obscured his view as the floated from his mouth to the top of the tank.

His neck wasn't stiff. He had no neck. In fact, he couldn't feel anything below his chin.

"Silence! Your Queen Athena will now speak," the guard shook her umbrella at Caleb.

Caleb left his mouth open but stopped yelling. Maybe this was a dream? He squeezed his eyes shut and opened them again.

He was still a head in a tank.

Waves of red panic beat splashed behind his forehead. Beating on his skull.

Raising a megaphone, Queen Athena addressed the gathering:

"Every June, we celebrate Skirophoria! Today is a day for women and the harvest. Men are not allowed on this one day."

The women cheered, waving chunks of purple garlic.

"Today we are being a new tradition! Our scientists discovered a capsule from the past filled with frozen men! Interestingly, the heads were stored separately from their bodies," Athena said.

"Any women in this elite capsule from yesteryear?" A teenage girl with buck teeth asked from the edge of the podium.

"Just men. Twelve privileged men of wealth," Athena said.

A woman with a bejeweled afro shook her fist. "Women didn't rate being frozen for the future?"

The crowd booed and threw phallic-shaped cookies at the pedestals.

"No, so far we've only found cryogenically preserved men!" Athena caught a cookie and crumbled it. "Annually, on the day of Skira, three of the capsule's inhabitants will be thawed and judged.

One may reclaim his body. The other two will be turned to stone and displayed as busts on our feast table.”

Caleb's ears throbbed along with his head. This did not sound good. One man would be given his body back, but two would be turned to stone? He tried to remember...

He knew he'd had a body when he paid the jaw-dropping fee of fifty Bitcoin to get cryogenically frozen on his fiftieth birthday. When he got diagnosed with cancer, the fossil fuel deposits on his farm helped him afford the outrageous new medical procedure. There was no 'beheading' clause. His cheeks flushed with indignation. What happened while he'd been asleep? This was not how he imagined the future. Instead of flying cars, he saw hitching posts, chariots, and horse-drawn carriages.

Athena unraveled a scroll. “Caleb Quicken, you ran an oil company that plundered the earth and polluted our air. You, and others like you, are why the Gods had to reclaim the world. Why should you walk again?”

“Can I see a lawyer?”

“Answering a question with a question. Unacceptable!” Athena pulled a syringe from her pocket and inserted it into his pedestal. “Prepare for stoning.”

“Wait, wait.” Caleb pitched and rolled in his fluid. “I helped people get to where they needed to go!”

The women in the crowd jeered, some pointing to the horses they'd ridden.

“To save the climate, we ditched the cars. As the ox is sacrificed, so will you be.” Athena's fingers twitched on the plunger.

Caleb pressed his lips against the glass, eyes bulging. "I really loved my daughter and she was an environmentalist! I paid for her education; I encouraged her. She made a difference."

"Interesting. I'll reserve judgement." Athena removed her syringe, the murky fluid still in it.

She walked to the next pedestal which held an acne-scarred head with thick grey hair. She withdrew the sword slung over her hip and pointed it at him.

"Alonzo Perucho Morengo! You are the most notorious drug king pin in history. Why should you live?" Athena asked.

"This is no justice. I will show you justice," Alonzo said, spitting bile into his tank.

Athena put a hand on an exquisite sword hanging by her side. "Is that all you have to say?"

"When I get out of this fish tank, you will see notoriety! No one takes a piece of Alonzo Perucho Morengo!"

Athena swung her sword over her head and smashed it down on his tank. Alonzo's head split in two and rolled a few feet away.

"He's too unpleasant to look at during dinner, no bust for him," Athena said, drying her sword off on her cloak.

The women roared. Enjoying themselves, they nibbled on their male genitalia cookies. Caleb clenched his teeth and tried to break the side of his bowl with his head, but the glass wouldn't give.

Athena moved to the third and final tank. The young man with a shaved head seemed calm, causing hardly a ripple.

"Matt Marple, you are the creator of Click Clack. It was the biggest and most destructive social media platform ever created. Responsible for fostering hate, igniting dissension, and facilitating suicides globally."

Matt's eyes blinked a few times. "I, too, created a wonderful daughter who helped the world as a doctor. And at least I didn't poison the earth." Matt tilted his head over at Caleb. "I deserve your pardon more than the entitled Texan."

Caleb's teeth chattered. Matt had a solid argument. If Caleb had a heart, it would be breaking right now. He really wanted another chance to live. Oil had made him money, but farming was his passion. The thick black dirt in the distant fields looked so fertile... perfect for the prize-winning garlic he had been growing in Texas.

Athena nodded. "Matt, you have earned your legs."

She stepped back towards Caleb's tank, pulling her syringe out.

"Wait, I have another argument." Caleb bobbed frantically.

Athena paused...

"I lived on a big farm in Texas and developed Spanish garlic! My harvesting innovations helped create the hardiness of the purple variety. I did help the world," Caleb wiggled his eyebrows for emphasis. If he had hands, he'd be pleading.

A frown creased Athena's face. The crowd of women cheered and threw their garlic cloves in the air.

"As this is a festival that celebrates the harvest, and especially garlic, you have won your second chance," Athena said.

Matt's head spun and bobbed, bubbles pouring out of his mouth and nose.

Caleb's cheeks sagged in relief. Athena spun and inserted her syringe into Matt's pedestal. Matt's head stilled and a grey substance moved up his face from his chin, cementing his features in place.

With the show over, the assembled revelers relaxed and went back to nibbling on their perversely-shaped treats.

“You will now be taken back to the capsule and reunited with your body, but it won’t be exactly as you remember,” Athena said to Caleb.

“What do you mean, not as I remember?”

“You might be missing a few parts.”

“What exactly do you mean?”

“Each Skirophoria, we bake male fertility cookies to ensure a good harvest. We use actual genitalia to create our molds. You, Matt and Alonzo provided this year’s designs.” A smile tickled at Athena’s lips.

Caleb’s face turned Spanish Garlic purple. Maybe being turned to stone was the better option.

The End

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