

Table Manners

By Geoff Nelder

I am out of the box, then. Ah, the aroma of roast pig. Must be some grand occasion for them to risk it. Centuries-old crud is stuck on me and I'm more black than silver these days. There, on the table waiting; will this be my moment? They've put a new man at the table. Will he be my escape?

My finest hour was in 1632 in Bamberg, Germany. The do-gooders had to campaign to stop me. They came from a great distance – all the way from the Vatican. Yet where my essence now exists proves I had been right all along. Did I take pleasure from burning hundreds of witches? I did everyone a big favour ridding society of Satan's spawn. I, Gottfried Johann Georg II Fuchs von Dornheim am proud of my achievements. Critics say most, if not all, I executed were innocent. I say this: why then, was wizardry gone when I had finished? Also, God took care of the innocent – no problem. Others said I only accused the wealthy to enrich my estate. It would seem like that, but I had many expenses; travelling and accommodation; equipment such as screws, spikes, vices and expanders; plus accomplices. Anyway, the more cunning witches tend to be wealthy because the gullible paid them for sorcery. Had I had a more substantial stipend as the Witch-Bishop and I would not have been tempted to steal this damned silver spoon nearly five hundred years ago.

How could I know this fucking spoon had more than ancient Greek silver in it? Everyone has silver in them, an amount so tiny it took the screaming bodies of five thousand Persian heretics to squeeze out one gram. Other metals went elsewhere but the silver became one with molten rings to make a set of spoons. The other spoons? They're out there, around the planet – I can sense them.

One of the five thousand making up the silver in this spoon must have been so evil his essence remained. It lurked through the years while ephemeral satanic fragments were absorbed, making it stronger. It couldn't escape its molecular prison until the surface was buffed shiny. Removing the outer patina, exposing pure silver, created a window for the being to exude but only by exchanging with the unfortunate soul without. In Bamberg in 1632 that soul was me. Maybe this will be my lucky day.

The victim sits. He's alone at the table laid for six. A young adult with a little wickedness. Easy meat. He sees me and contorts his face with disgust. Look at him: a quick surveillance; that's right, no one else around. His hand reaches out making me quiver with anticipation. Now I am moved up towards his twitching nose. He's expecting the worst olfactory experience ever – at least from cutlery.

Disappointment there then. I maybe coated with bits of food stuck in grooves and microscopic pits and holes, but they are ancient. All the volatile cruddy bits evaporated centuries ago. So the larva, since that's the boy's condition, is sniffing. But for all the wrinkling and jerking his head backwards, he's not smelling anything except a little silver oxidation. Ha! He swaps me for a gleaming model at the next place setting. It won't work, Larva. Do you think the hostess put me at your seat accidentally? I am a test, you fool. He hasn't twigged.

The door swings open and in spill the diners, eager for their banquet; equally eager to feast on their daughter's young man. They seek to discover with what metal his nerves are constructed. I

pick up his panic as they advance on him, poor sod. He realises his error; heightened as the overbearing mother of his fiancé prepares to sit beside him. He panics as he reaches in front of her to replace me with another spoon distracting attention by reaching for the red-wine carafe. Alas, it spills creating a travelling scarlet stain but he grabs me amidst the cries and I am plunged into a pocket while the etiquette fracas settles.

I hear his fiancé whispering: “Where is it?”

“What?”

“The silver spoon, it’s a family heirloom.”

“Valuable?”

“What?”

“Haven’t seen it.”

It made an unpleasant change being in a dark pocket inhabited by a revolting unwashed handkerchief, but its rough surface helped clean me a little. All I need is for the Larva to start polishing me properly; no Aladdin’s lamp quick rub here and I’m no beneficent genie. There are lesser evils in here. Some were innocent when they arrived, but that was before my time and they are innocent no longer. I am the only prisoner eager to get back out there. The other entities in here are resigned to remain – habituated, even dependent on the evil company in this piece of silver. They long only to be rid of me and in my place fresh blood to work on. I have an auspicious feeling I can arrange it with this one.

The idiot’s brought me to a pawnshop. I hear loud music; crashing and beating. It tramples contemplation, no doubt the intention. The proprietor has a turn at nose wrinkling but he brandishes a silver polishing velvet. Excellent. Bah, he stops short. I am insufficiently buffed to affect an escape.

“There’s no hallmark, sir.”

“But it is silver isn’t it? My friend, you see, she needs the money.”

“No doubt. I can offer you five pounds.”

“You’re kidding me? Just the silver in the thing must be worth more than that.”

“It’s fifty grams. I doubt it’s pure silver ...” *Oh, so true.* “Take it or leave it.”

The broker had another suggestion: “You could take it to a museum. The lack of a hallmark could suggest it’s very old.”

“Would they pay for it?”

“You’d get a thank-you letter.”

“Thanks.”

I guess he isn’t going to the museum. I’m back in his pocket. The same handkerchief; there comes a point when a rag adds more scum than it cleans. I’m out. On his desk in a bedroom – aargh! A bright flash of light. I appear to be in a mirror – window box with the word Ebay. Why doesn’t he take me to another shop? My patience is so stretched. Come on Larva, clean me up properly, buffed to glory.

This is more like it, I have the pungent odour of silver polish on me; good lad. Please, damn you, I’m not sufficiently cleaned, just a little more to change our lives. Curses, he wraps me in cotton wool and I’m stuffed in a small bag and jiggled. But an hour or so of this fluffy friction might be enough to finish the buffing.

And it is. I scintillate and quiver through the membrane. No effort required, it merely needed the optimum condition and now I make room for the Larva. A charge of electricity buzz as our

essences brush by. The exchange complete, Larva is in this envelope I'm holding. I am free. Feeling weird since the lad is clean shaven and of smaller stature than I was.

A woman behind a desk speaks to me.

“Put it on the scales, dear, let's see if you've put enough postage on it.”

So this is one of those postal services I've heard of from time to time. I have to be careful here. No ordinary package. I smirk with the malicious thought of the Larva adjusting to life with the others. I must be cautious, he is young with energy; he might escape too soon. So, what is this label? I see a return address, New Jersey. It must be Larva's house, which will be mine for a while. I'll amend it to P.O. Lost Luggage. I should ensure the destination of this precious post is somewhere remote. Maybe the Antarctic. Where is the intended destination? Perfect. I'll leave it as it is:

The Museum of Witchcraft, Bamberg, Germany.

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