

FEED A FEVER, STARVE AN ARTIST

Chapter 14: Sweet Treats and Dark Desires

14.1:

AUTHOR

It's been a few years since the whale exploded near Castle Clinton. Eugene and Anjus' new private detective business was a middling success. They called it Elemental Investigators. But tonight they were not detecting. Rather this night they were guests at the inaugural ball of the new New York governor -- Theodore Roosevelt!

EUGENE

This is a top shelf soiree.

ANJUS

Diplomats and dignitaries from the city, state and even the wider world.

EUGENE

Look at these hobnobbers hobbing knobs all over the place. Who's that fella?

DUKE

I'm Duke Roch Von Vinderland

EUGENE

Yipes, you can hear us?

DUKE

I'm standing right here.

EUGENE

But I had put my hand to the side of my mouth. In a most discreet manner.

DUKE

But you're actually very loud.

ANJUS

He suffered ear damage during the war.

DUKE

Ah war, where boys become men and men become graves. A truer test of one's meddle doesn't exist.

ANJUS

Which war did you fight in?

DUKE

What? Me? No, no, I'm royalty. Though I am an official ambassador of our color.

ANJUS

Color?

DUKE

It's why I'm here. Most of these royals and rutters are here for the great Exhibition. We all have national pavilions at the Fair of Past and Future. It's going to be quite the event. Since we were already in town we were "obligated" to come. At gunpoint.

ROOSEVELT

That's right! I had the local militia threaten them! I wanted a big party for my inauguration! Bully! Good to see you Eugene and Anjus!

ANJUS

Governor Roosevelt!

ROOSEVELT

How is the private detective racket?

ANJUS

We think of ourselves more as personal assistants to those in need. Detective implies a certain level of ... skills that would be ... unfair to apply to Eugene.

EUGENE

Mostly we pester and bug people. We bug them so hard. We're a couple of buggers.

ANJUS

Stop.

EUGENE

We practice buggery so much. Bugger them all. We can be a real pain in the rear.

DUKE

Well I think that's great. I'm a fan of buggery. What? Don't be such Americans about it.

EUGENE

Have one of our cards. In case you need some bugging.

DUKE

It's oddly moist.

EUGENE

Big pores.

ANJUS

Anyway. Governor Roosevelt, do you think the Big Stick will be here? His endorsement really sealed your victory.

ROOSEVELT

He's ... busy ... doing something ... unrelated ...

AUTHOR

Of course as we all remember Governor Roosevelt was secretly New York City's first costumed crime fighter - The Big Stick!

ROOSEVELT (cont.)

But it wasn't just his endorsement. My heroics during the Spanish American War are legendary. Eugene knows, he was there ...

EUGENE

I was ...

AUTHOR

Eugene then recalled the charge up San Juan Hill ...

#### **14.2:**

*Cuba, during the war.*

EUGENE

Help, I'm stuck in an ant hill!

ROOSEVELT

Come on Rough Riders! CHAAAAAAAAAAAAAARGE!

EUGENE

The ants - they're biting! So much biting!

**14.3:**

*Back to the ball.*

ROOSEVELT

So many memories.

EUGENE

I still have welts from the bites. After that they put me on a ship and had me sail to the South Pacific because of my quote "gross ineptitude."

ROOSEVELT

You captured that island.

ANJUS

A month after the war was over.

ROOSEVELT

Details! That war was great; best three months of my life!

EUGENE

I wouldn't have even served it wasn't for that mummy ...

AUTHOR

Eugene then recalled the mummy from the end of Volume one -

**14.4:**

MUMMY

Revenge! Revenge!

EUGENE

The mummy!

ANJUS

Yipes!

MUMMY

Revenge! Revenge!

ANJUS

He's going to kill us.

MUMMY

Noo! Noo! Revenge ... on others. Hire! Hiiiire!

ANJUS

I think he wants to hire us!

AUTHOR

In fact he did. There were several people having illegal mummy parties where they'd buy a mummy from Egypt, unwrap it as a joke and then grind up the mummy into powder and snort it. That's what happened to this mummy's friend and so he hired Anjus and Eugene to bring the culprits to justice. They did, and this brought them the esteem of the mummy community and other mummies sought them out, including a mummy that was part of the collection of the Havana Museum of History.

*Back to the present*

**14.5:**

EUGENE

That mummy was radicalized by Jose Marti and wanted me to go to Cuba and help free them from the yoke of spanish rule.

ANJUS

Yes, and he didn't want me to go because he was a misogynist.

EUGENE

People are complex. Anyway, I realized when I got there I had no idea what to do. And I was broke because they have different money there. So, I picked up odd jobs fixing this and that. But I wasn't very adept at fixing; For example when they hired me to fix the boiler on *The Maine*. And then the war started and the Mummy was exploded by accident. Again my fault. And then we won the war.

AUTHOR

And that is the end of that regarding the mummy. Also their secretary quit and joined a group of professional calf ropers. That about ties up all that. Rope ... ties up. Still got it.

ROOSEVELT

Anyway, my Duke, you are looking dapper, excited to see your pavilion at the Fair of Past and Future.

DUKE

I have brought my countries greatest treasure, the --

*SHAINDEL enters.*

SHAINDEL

Oy, this dress is pulling my *kishkes* in every direction.

EUGENE

Shaindel!

ROOSEVELT

Former officer doubles! You've made it!

SHAINDEL

Thanks for the invite!

ROOSEVELT

Well you did help The Big Stick defeat the Enigmatist and his deadly riddles.

SHAINDEL

The answer was seven.

EUGENE

That was quite an adventure ....

*Long beat.*

ANJUS

What are you doing?

EUGENE

I thought I'd leave a pause for someone to remember it.

SHAINDEL

Huh, how about that. Anyway this is quite the *tsunoyfkum*. Half of the State Senators are here. And five eighths of the state assemblymen.

EUGENE

I think that's Assemblyman Grooms over there.

ROOSEVELT

Former Assemblyman. Upon election he was given so much graft he immediately retired. It's the goal of many politicians to get enough ill gotten gains to retire before doing anything.

SHAINDEL

He represents my district. Who's going to replace him?

ROOSEVELT

Oh either a corrupt Tammany Democrat or some Hard Money Republican.

SHAINDEL

Or me.

ROOSEVELT

You?

SHAINDEL

Why not me?

DUKE

Can she even do that? You women cannot vote.

EUGENE

There's nothing in this rulebook that says a horse can't play faro ... or whatever we were talking about.

ANJUS

I, for one, think Shaindel should run.

ROOSEVELT

It's legal, because the idea never occurred to the founders since it was so absurd. But these are absurd times and you are just the absurd woman to do this absurd job, former officer Doubles.

SHAINDEL

So you'd vote for me?

ROOSEVELT

Heavens no, but best of luck. Now more mingling. Ah! Senator Thropson how's that goiter! Oh, so round!

*ROOSEVELT exits.*

SHAINDEL

I can do it! I'll be a trailblazer for my people! Like the first Jewish congressman Lewis Levin.

ANJUS

I've not heard of him.

SHAINDEL

He was a staunch anti-Catholic nativist who had a mental break while on a train and later died in a hospital for the insane in Philadelphia.

ANJUS

Oh. Huh. Not a glowing endorsement ...

SHAINDEL

Yeah he was bad, but he was the first. Which is good because -- less pressure on me -- I can't be worse than him. Also, fun fact, he met his second wife when they both were shopping for tombstones for their first spouses.

EUGENE

I guess that's fun.

SHAINDEL

I'm off to start my campaign, after a few laps around the buffet table! *Zayt gezunt.*

*SHAINDEL exits.*

EUGENE

What a pistol. And that dress ... I wish I could pull off an outfit like that.

ANJUS

How do you mean 'pull off' actually don't tell me I don't want to know. But we should also mix, we might find some clients. Our caseload is a bit soft.

*ASA CANDLER enters.*

ASA

Did you say soft, I have just the *soft* drink to help! My nerve tonic!

EUGENE

Nerve tonic, you say?

ASA

Asa Candler, from Atlanta. Georgia.

EUGENE

The lost city?

ASA



The what now?

ANJUS

Don't mind him.

ASA

I bought the recipe from a pharmacist and let me tell you it's ... great!

EUGENE

Really?

ASA

No! Not at all. I'm going broke stuffing it full of kola nuts and cocaine! You want to buy it? I'm selling it, cheap!

ANJUS

A bottle?

ASA

The whole company! Please? Please! Please!

EUGENE

No, you're very clingy, and that's coming from me.

ASA

I was hoping having a booth at this Fair of Past and Future would get my tonic out there but ... with food bigwigs like Mann Valentine and his meat juice and Flavius Flavor's and his assorted candies ... I'm probably doomed. I wish they'd finish building that skyscraper so I can jump off it.

EUGENE

You can jump off the Brooklyn Bridge.

ASA

Brooklyn? No thank you. If you rubes aren't sap enough to buy my tonic I'll keep going. Hey! You! Your nerves look jangled! Please! Don't turn away! No wonder we lost the war!

EUGENE

He seems nice.

ANJUS

Does he?

EUGENE

I said 'seems,' so ... leaving the door open. Like a good bugger.

ANJUS

Let's commingle.

AUTHOR

And so they did. Eugene took some cheese cubes home in his shirt pocket. Which he called his cheese pocket. The next day Eugene and Anjus met up with a client in their offices.

**14.6:**

ANJUS

Madame Chomp, you are the premiere impresaria of the Crockendale theater where you perform an act in which your trained alligators dance across the stage to a live fiddle player. These saurians though recently had their legs broken by a culprit of unknown origin, so you came to us. To solve this little mystery.

MADAME CHOMP

I know this already, why are you summarizing my own story to me?

EUGENE

Because we bill by the hour.

ANJUS

That and I was doing a bit of a dramatic build up. We caught the culprit and he's down at the station house.

MADAME CHOMP

Who broke my dear reptile's extremities?

ANJUS

It was actually a fellow performer in your venue - the armless dancer Ho Ho Higgins. He was afraid your gavotting gators would muscle in on his earnings so he got them in a knee lock and cracked their legs.

EUGENE

But he's been arrested. Case closed.

MADAME CHOMP

What case?

EUGENE

Your case.

MADAME CHOMP

This is a purse.

EUGENE

The case of the dancing alligator leg breaker. A case is what we in the business call your problem.

MADAME CHOMP

Why not just call it a problem.

EUGENE

Huh, yeah, why not? The case of why it's called a case. Anjus -- question -- why don't we just call it a problem.

ANJUS

Because if people didn't have special linguistics and argots for their fields it would make it obvious we all don't know anything. And then society would cease to function.

EUGENE

The case of the case closed, closed.

ANJUS

Now Madame Chomp, our fee.

MADAME CHOMP

As your advert said, you take all manner of payment, so here are some fresh gator skins. Careful they're still a bit bloody.

EUGENE

That's too fresh!

ANJUS

By 'all payments' we meant ...

MADAME CHOMP

Can't hear you, leaving now! Ta!

*Slams the door shut.*

ANJUS

We need to change that ad.

EUGENE

I shouldn't have pre-bought twelve years worth and told the paper absolutely no changes.

ANJUS

Our rent is due and these gross skins won't cut it.

EUGENE

You're right. Job well done! Let's celebrate.

ANJUS

No, Eugene, I'm saying we're in desperate need of --

EUGENE

Can't hear you, leaving now! Ta!

*Door slams.*

ANJUS

Why does that always work!

AUTHOR

Why indeed? But Y is a crooked letter that can never be straightened. Not far from there Eugene and Anjus encountered an odd sight. A long line of people.

**14.7:**

ANJUS

This is an odd sight.

EUGENE

Excuse me sir, what are you on line for?

MAN 1

Shut up!

MAN 2

I'll talk to you! I'm very lonely!

ANJUS

No, we'll stick with this unfriendly fellow.

MAN 2

Shucks.

EUGENE

Listen pal, don't give us the bum's lip, spill the sauce on this line!

MAN 1

I ain't tellin' you nothin'!

ANJUS

I see, a real thugsworth.

MAN 2

It's really not a big deal you see --

ANJUS

(To Man 2)

QUIET YOU!

(Beat. To Man 1)

But you, first guy, you got one last chance before we put the hams to you, what is this line about?

MAN 1

OK, OK! I'll talk. I'll talk! We're on line for a new kind of fried potatoes.

EUGENE

Potatoes? This line is blocks long!

MAN 1

Ain't no ordinary spuds. These are frenched and fried.

EUGENE

French fried potatoes? And they're ... good?

MAN 1

Oily, greasy, salty. They're the best. Well I think ... never had the chance to taste 'em; I've been on the line for four hours but I read in *Popular Things Magazine* that they are a must try. They got six dynamite sticks!

EUGENE

Six! But they only go up to five dynamite sticks!

MAN 1

Exactly.

EUGENE

We must try these fries!

ANJUS

Why wait in line for food! There are plenty of restaurants with no wait!

MAN 1

If you want to miss out on the greatest thing that's on you, toots.

EUGENE

I'm on the line! Here I am! No cuts, no backsies! You know the rules!

ANJUS

I don't have time for this. I have a meeting of my Women's Entrepreneur group. It's for women who run businesses. The two of us are meeting shortly.

EUGENE

I'll stay here. This is important. I must try these potatoes! I don't know why but, I want this more than anything.

ANJUS

Meet back at the office later?

MAN 2

I'll see you there!

ANJUS

Not you. Eugene.

EUGENE

Me-gene?

ANJUS

Yes-gene.

AUTHOR

With that Anjus headed to her meeting. And Eugene stood and waited, and waited. The line barely moved. But Eugene wasn't the only one waiting. At the Ladies' Political Offices Shaindel was trying to get the proper forms to run for state office.

**14.8:**

SHAINDEL

Excuse me? Is anyone at this window? I've been waiting for --

TELLER

No, but have this free ribbon.

SHAINDEL

I don't want a ribbon!

TELLER

You can tie it into a bow!

SHAINDEL

No!

TELLER

You'd be much prettier if you smile.

SHAINDEL

Excuse me?

TELLER

More flies with honey, honey.

SHAINDEL

Isn't this a government office? Aren't you supposed to help!

TELLER

You're funny. This is the government office for ladies. Here you can talk about temperance, discuss war memorials, the things ladies do. And we have nice furniture and plenty of mirrors.

SHAINDEL

I want a form to run for state assembly! Why don't you give me that!

TELLER

Look, women don't have rights and if you can't vote why should we listen to you if you can't help us?

SHAINDEL

Because you're the government! OF the people!

TELLER

Have a ribbon! I already bowed it for you.

SHAINDEL

I'm taking this bow, not because I want it, but because I am angry and want to take something. All this anti-woman *veys ikh vos* is getting old. Real old. And look, this bow matches my eyes and I feel very pretty but that doesn't make it so you can treat me as such!

AUTHOR

Shaindel stormed back to the waiting area and collapsed into a fainting couch.

SHAINDEL

Oy, this isn't even a comfortable chair.

KAME

I know, such a stupid invention.

SHAINDEL

Wha? Who?

KAME

Oh I startled the native. Don't mind me.

SHAINDEL

Are you staring at me?

AUTHOR

Indeed she was. This was Kame, a member of the Japanese delegation. She was a hardline Teiseitō nationalist who viewed it as her personal mission to educate and civilize those she considered lesser, which was anyone who wasn't her. She wore specially made Western "research clothes" to keep her safe from the dirty uncivilized world around her. I haven't been able to find out exactly what they entailed, but they did include a stick for quote 'poking.' At the moment she was very excited to witness Shaindel attempting to navigate the perils of bureaucracy. Kame sidled up next to her and smiled trying to appear friendly to this strange native.

KAME

you are confused. I am Kame, envoy of the restored emperor. Also a researcher of primitive cultures. I was offered a chance to present at your Fair of Present and Future. I am from the land of Japan. It's across the ocean. O-ccean. Big water.

SHAINDEL

I know what an ocean is.

KAME

Of course, you are very smart! Yes you are! But really my goal is to write a self improvement book to improve my people by telling them about your terrible habits. I enjoy telling people what they're doing wrong. You would look much --

SHAINDEL



Enough! And also stop poking me with that stick! It hurts.

KAME

Oh I don't mean any dishonor! Rather ... look at you all. You are barbarians, you wear shoes indoors! You eat with small farm implements, it's fascinating. I hope I didn't spook you so that you run off and hide in your cave.

SHAINDEL

I don't live in a cave! Though ... caves have high ceilings and my tenement room is --

KAME

Yes! Tell me about your silly little world! It's just so, so, so, so stupid.

SHAINDEL

No. Hey! Look at this city, this is a modern city!

KAME

Right, yes, it is. But that's probably because years ago some ancient Japanese people came and built all this and then died and you all just moved in.

SHAINDEL

Our history is filled with --

KAME

I'm sure you have all sorts of myths and legends about how great your old tribal leaders were.

SHAINDEL

We opened Japan to the west! We forced you to sign terrible treaties and exploited YOU! Wait, that's not good ...

KAME

We only signed those treaties to help you. Because you needed so much help.

SHAINDEL

America is --

KAME

Slavery.

SHAINDEL

Yes ... that. But -

KAME

Slavery.

SHAINDEL

Is hard to win the moral high ground with that ...

KAME

You have potential. One day you'll sit on the floor like educated people and it won't be dirty, because you'll learn to take off your filthy shoes and learn that bowing is so much less disgusting than pressing hands together and shaking them for reasons that elude me.

SHAINDEL

You are very ... are all Japanese like you?

KAME

No one is like me. Most of my friends back home don't like me. They say that I'm --

TELLER

Ho! Annoying lady!

SHAINDEL

Yes?

TELLER

We found some papers in the back, you want them?

SHAINDEL

Are they in regards to filing for --

TELLER

What do I look like, helpful? Here.

*Tosses the papers on the ground.*

SHAINDEL

Did you just throw these papers on the floor? Are you--

TELLER

We're closed.

*Slams the window shut.*

KAME

Such fascinating local customs.

SHAINDEL

It's rudeness, not a custom.

KAME

I've found rudeness to be a common custom in this dark continent.

SHAINDEL

Fair.

KAME

I should go, I need to eat. Luckily, I brought my rice from home because this sad land lacks such a wonderful grain.

SHAINDEL

We have rice.

KAME

You have little white bits. But they are not rice. We should meet again; I'm interested in your foolish little quest to become a tribal leader. I'm staying at the little house on 57th street and 5th avenue.

SHAINDEL

That's the Vanderbilt mansion ...

KAME

Is that those people? I just claimed it as my base of operation. It's nothing serious, you know. As a colonialist I need suitable lodgings for my studies and that hovel proved adequate.

SHAINDEL

But people already live there.

KAME

They are happy to share and open their home to a superior culture. It's they who are really benefiting. I'm a great person. Yes. Yes I am.

SHAINDEL

Fine, fine. So when do you finish "studying" us?

KAME

Not til after the Fair of Past and Future. I am to teach you all the art of sumi-e. It will raise up your non volcanic island land to an almost respectable level. Sayonara.

SHAINDEL

Goodbye? I guess. I'm glad that *meshugas* is over, now let's see about these forms ...

AUTHOR

And as Shaindel tried to figure out the intricacies of filing for a political office we move on to another office. I'm really on my segue game this chapter. Anyway this office was the office of the other member of the Women's Entrepreneur Group: Madelynne Elsmere, the fudge baroness. Her office was a riot of fudge themed objects. Fudge colored walls. A muddy brown as far as the eye could see. Currently Madelynne was dealing with a less than pleasant guest.

**14.9:**

MADELYNNE

Tell your boss I'll never sell.

CATO

Mrs. Elsmere if you check the offer packet -

MADELYNNE

Stuff your packet.

CATO

I did. With an offer.

AUTHOR

The man smiled. Though there was no real joy in it. This was Cato Beech, the right hand man to Flavius Flavor the confection baron. Cato was tall and lean, his clothes were perfectly neat but slightly out of fashion. His dark eyes sparkled. Born a slave he'd worked his way up the ranks of society to his current position.

MADELYNNE

Your corporation doesn't understand fudge. Fudge is a women's food. It's a long tradition at Smith and Bryn Mar to cook fudge over the gas lamps. I took that treat and I turned it into a business. But only a girl of breeding and collegiate acumen has fudge in her blood.

CATO

That doesn't sound healthy.

MADELYNNE

Not literally.

CATO

I know.

MADELYNNE

They aren't actually black. Not that. You. I mean.

CATO

What?

MADELYNNE

I don't care that you are. Rather. I supported the 16th amendment. Gave you all the vote. Abolition. I'm for that. I've voted Republican since Grant. You like Grant?

CATO

I think you'll find Onesimus Corporation would be a good steward in regards to fudge.

MADELYNNE

Please! I've seen what you did to crumblies cookies and the malted milk brothers!

*ANJUS enters.*

ANJUS

Madelynne the door was -- oh. Who are you?

CATO

Cato Beech. Onesimus Sweets corporation.

MADELYNNE

A toady for a slick corporate magnate.

CATO

You paint me malevolently. I am but a humble employee. *Legatus non caeditur neque violatur.*

MADELYNNE

What?

CATO

Latin.

ANJUS

Euphemistically translated as "don't' shoot the messenger."

MADELYNNE

I'll shoot whatever I like!

CATO

You do have that bow and quiver prominently displayed ...

MADELYNNE

It's just for show. Twas my late husband's. He was shot with it. By me. Ruled an accident. But I don't plan to use it on you. Yet.

CATO

And with that I go. Ladies.

*CATO exits.*

MADELYNNE

That damned corporation. These businesses are like squids grabbing all they can in their greasy tendrils.

ANJUS

Actually squids are not greasy they're --

MADELYNNE

Why must our every meeting divolve in discussions of the viscosity of animalia?

ANJUS

I'm more partial to flora.

AUTHOR

Anjus brushed some hair from her milky white right eye with her artificial left hand. Both body parts lost to dangerous vegetation. But as we know she was true lover of plants. And I do mean *lover*. But let us continue.

MADELYNNE

I do not mean to snipe. I put up a strong front but I will probably fold.

ANJUS

No! Fudge is your life!

MADELYNNE

Fudge was my life, but Onesimus's latest line of bon-bons has already taken the lion's share of space in penny candy shops across the city. Also bakeries; they've introduced a new cookie -- chocolate chunk.

ANJUS

They sell both candies and cookies? Is that legal?

MADELYNNE

A molasses monopoly. Legal as an eagle. The most legal bird.

ANJUS

Oh I know. Eugene helped push the Legalize Eagles to Be Legal Eagles Eagle Act through the legislature ...

MADELYNNE

In any event it seems businesses can sell as much of whatever they want.

ANJUS

But our group! I can't be a group of Female Entrepreneurs by myself! That'd be like Jim Froom who runs the Popular People Club. Everyone hates him and his one man club!

MADELYNNE

Fine I won't sell! On a completely different, unsuspecting note I won a trip to a secluded cabin upstate. I leave tonight!

ANJUS

Did you enter a contest?

MADELYNNE

I don't think so. But I must have, right?

ANJUS

Congratulations I guess? Now let's talk business.

AUTHOR

And so they did. Madelynne then went on that vacation ... and was never heard from again. And upon looking over the contract for the free vacation her lawyer noticed an odd clause. It said if she were to disappear mysteriously on said vacation her company would be put to auction. And it was quickly bought ... by the Onesimus Sweets Corporation. But that's the future, let us

return to the past which is the story's present. Eugene and the frenched fries, which after many hours he'd finally purchased.

**14.10:**

EUGENE

Hot dilly! These are pipping hot! I can't wait to eat them. But hot! I'll just walk around and the breeze of my quick gait will cool them. There. Nice pace. Steady. Steady breeze. Oooh an alley, the shade there will drop these potato's core temp. Ah! They look quite cooled, now to just slowly ...

AUTHOR

And just as Eugene was about to pluck a golden fry from it's carton a hand appeared from the dark corner of the alley and slapped the fries from his hand!

EUGENE

My fries!

HAWTHORNE

Mourn them not! I've saved your life! For you see those fries were frenched by the devil!

END OF CHAPTER 14