

Chapter 17: Like Gum Stuck in The Hair of the Almighty

17.1:

AUTHOR

We begin with the recently tidied office of Eugene and Anjus professional buggers. Or investigators, depending whom you ask. They are trying to get some new clients as their cash flow is low. Mostly because they'd been spending all their time investigating Onesimus Sweets, candy company with a sour reputation. But that wasn't paying the bills. And money is tight.

EUGENE

Why do I have to wear a tie?

ANJUS

We have to impress them. Give them a sense of grandeur. Which is harder and harder. They shut off our gas so I've had to light our lamps with fireflies. I was up all night catching them. I barely had time to caress a fern. And a woman has needs.

EUGENE

And it's too bad the Ascended Masters of the theosophical society performed that spell that put all the mummies into a 125 year slumber. Look out 2024!

ANJUS

Indeed. Mummies were our best clients and they always paid. In cursed treasure. But at least it was gold and jewels.

EUGENE

There's my war pension.

ANJUS

Spent.

EUGENE

What about that grant money?

ANJUS

Spent. How did you get that grant?

EUGENE

My parents in Delaware, they fixed it so I remotely won a beauty pageant - Delaware's Most Wearable Dela. Dela is Delaware slang for a girl who quote: 'will go ham in the hay.'

ANJUS

That's terrible.

EUGENE

There's no shame in hay hamness, Anjus, don't be a prude. Anyway I won it and I got the cash prize. Though if anyone asks my name is Delagene. Which was my sister's name before she changed it to Brom-Brom when she joined that pottery cult in Oneida. Anyway it's quite --

There's a knock on the door.

ANJUS

Shut up, our first client is here!

AUTHOR

And so they met with Bert Mertle who wanted help with --

BERT

My good friend the Belgian chef *Ornery Henri Ennui* has gone missing.

ANJUS

His name is ... ?

BERT

Ornery like angry. *Henri* like Henry. *Ennui* like the empty feeling inside.

ANJUS

Ornery Henri Ennui.

BERT

Oui.

EUGENE

Wee-wee?

ANJUS

Not in here again.

BERT

Sorry when I said '*oui*' I was speaking French. But I think *oui* should look into it.

ANJUS

You'll help us look?

BERT

No French again. I said: 'But I think yes should look into it.'

EUGENE

That's poor grammar.

BERT

But my heart was in the right place. Ornerly Henri Ennui went to work for a new eatery Oeufs and Boeufs up near Union Square. And then he vanished.

EUGENE

Oeufs and Boeufs. Interesting.

BERT

Help me find him.

ANJUS

We are meeting with a few other possible clients, but we'll let you know by end of day if we can be of service.

AUTHOR

Next they met with the Impresario Aldous Flohwanze about trouble at his Flea Circus.

ALDOUS

You don't understand! They've been replaced! And not with normal fleas! Africanized fleas!

ANJUS

What?

ALDOUS

They are a vicious strain of fleas. More aggressive and prone to unionize! If my fleas unionize I'll be ruined!

ANJUS

So you want us to find out who replaced your fleas?

ALDOUS

No! I want you to infiltrate the fleas and spread pro mercantilist sentiment. And talk me up. Especially to the strong man flea, I would like his respect.

ANJUS

Infiltrate the fleas ...

ALDOUS

Ya.

ANJUS

OK. We'll consider that. We still have another meeting. We'll get back to you by the end of day.

AUTHOR

Their final meeting of the day was with "Reverend" Gulliford Cleaver.

GULLIFORD

Thank you so much for meeting me.

EUGENE

Of course. Who do you want us to bugger?

GULLIFORD

Oh. Goodness.

ANJUS

He means solve your problem.

EUGENE

It's going to catch on.

ANJUS

It's already a thing.

EUGENE

Stoop means bend over and also that little porch in front of buildings. Things can be two things.

GULLIFORD

He's got you there.

ANJUS

Sorry reverend, please go on.

GULLIFORD

Oh it's "reverend." You put quotes around it because it's not official.

ANJUS

Oh ... okay.

GULLIFORD

I do have a clinic I'm building. In fact I'm in a land dispute. They want to steal my land to build the ... something or other. It's a big deal, but I don't care much for deals. Deals are shortcuts and upstanding people can take the long way. Shortcut to long sins.

ANJUS

So this land deal, you want us to find out --

GULLIFORD

No, no, no, oh you women. So chatty. No. Let me talk to you, young man, you seem like a good listener.

EUGENE

Huh what? I was distracted.

GULLIFORD

My clinic does research into the history of crime. My belief is that all crime can be traced to three degenerate families that came over as indentured servants during the late colonial period. These lazy hooligans bred like ribald rabbits and infected people with their weak character traits. I must find these weaker members of the race and then castrate them. Forced castration and sterilization. All of these hill people and dunderheads.

ANJUS

Um.

GULLIFORD

You catch 'em and I -- snip, snip, their drip drip. For the good of the race. Because we are at a slippery slope of racial suicide if they continue to procreate.

ANJUS

We're third wave progressive abolitionists so --

GULLIFORD

Oh I'm not concerned with Coloreds.

EUGENE

That's ... something.

GULLIFORD

They're not people. But these degenerate whites are almost as bad as the Jew. Hebrews have horns, you know.

EUGENE

Shaindel has horns?

GULLIFORD

And a stink of sulfur. Well you have my card. Do let me know if you will help me save mankind. Those slatterns are probably popping out more lazy brigand babies as we speak. Goodbye now.

GULLIFORD exits.

ANJUS

Wow. He was. He was terrible.

EUGENE

Yes! Oh I'm so glad you said it! By gum, in my head I was like 'I think this guy is bad' but then you didn't say anything and I thought maybe I'm overthinking it --

ANJUS

No! He was horrible. Forced sterilization --

EUGENE

And what he said about Black people? Our new best friend Cato would be. It was -- yow. Yow.

ANJUS

Right, so it's obvious which case we take.

EUGENE

(Unsure, testing.)
The flea one ... ?

ANJUS

The chef.

EUGENE

Chef. Yes. That's what I said.

ANJUS

I'll send him word and then we head over to this Oeufs and Boufs place and see what's what.

EUGENE

Also, do you think Shaindel will let me touch her horns?

AUTHOR

Anjus explained to Eugene that Jews didn't have horns except for the shofar which they used during Rosh Hashanah. Shaindel had taught her that when she asked to see her horns. The horns thing was a popular myth then. Anyway! Soon they were on the street heading over to the bistro. But just as they turned onto 4th Avenue they were accosted by an old woman.

17.2:

OLD WOMAN

Mums fer ya mum, mum?

ANJUS

No thank you.

OLD WOMAN

Won't you give 'em a sniffy?

ANJUS

Please we're in the middle of something.

OLD WOMAN

Middle of me flowers ye was. Come now a tuppence for me troubles.

ANJUS

Sorry we're --

OLD WOMAN

You, sir, you seem a squeeze of lemon.

EUGENE

I do?

ANJUS

Don't engage with her.

HAWTHORNE

Engage? You mean engrage! With me! Ha! Revealed!

EUGENE

Hawthorne P. Westwood!?

HAWTHORNE

Verified! I told you I was a master of disguise! So what's the play? Where you headed?

ANJUS

None of your business.

EUGENE

We're going to a new eatery called Oeufs and Boeufs to see about a missing chef.

ANJUS

Eugene! Don't tell him!

HAWTHORNE

I'm already told! Told to the gills!! Don't you see? No. Because you're blind. Oeufs and Boeufs is one of the investments of Onesimus Sweets Corporation. It was in the tax files!

EUGENE

Holy moldy! It's all connected! I bet the fleas are part of this too!

ANJUS

They are not. You read the files on Onesimus?

HAWTHORNE

When you snort snow off a piece of paper you don't forget it. And this mind is like a steel sieve. It doesn't rust. Let's go. Since this is part of my case I get fifty percent of the take.

ANJUS

Don't you have anything else to do?

HAWTHORNE

No! Though the Widow Wainscott will want her dress back at some point. But I tired the old bird out; she won't be able to walk straight for a fortnight! Onward to Oeufs and Boeufs!

AUTHOR

And not much later our group of investigators was meeting with the manager of the eatery.

17.3:

MANAGER

Ornery Henri Ennui?

ANJUS

Ornery Henri Ennui.

MANAGER

Ornery Henri Ennui. Never heard the name.

EUGENE

Don't lie.

MANAGER

Not even in bed?

EUGENE

What?

MANAGER

What?

ANJUS

He is a classically trained chef who --

MANAGER

Nothing classic here. We are a cutting edge establishment. We are experimenting with a portable hamburger steak sandwich on a bun with an egg on top. But the egg doesn't give quite the right mouthfeel.

EUGENE

Mouthfeel? Gross!

MANAGER

It's good but not great. And we strive for greatness.

EUGENE

What's upstairs?

MANAGER

We don't have an upstairs.

EUGENE

What about that staircase?

MANAGER

It's for show.

HAWTHORNE

Then show us.

MANAGER

Do you have a reservation?

HAWTHORNE

With this bistro? Plenty.

MANAGER

I don't have time for this; we have hamburger steaks to grill.

ANJUS

What about your investor, Onesimus Sweets Corporation?

MANAGER

We have a full cover for lunch. I'm too busy to play twenty questions.

EUGENE

How about hopscotch?

MANAGER

No time to hop a scotch. Maybe threesies in jacks once, but not anymore. Now leave or I'll have you arrested for trespassing.

ANJUS

You can't threaten us!

HAWTHORNE

Oh but I do have several outstanding warrants, best we regroup. Outside fellows.

AUTHOR

And then outside the restaurant.

17.4:

ANJUS

What warrants?

HAWTHORNE

Look there! A private telegraph wire running to the second floor.

EUGENE

That they don't have.

ANJUS

Are we talking felonies ...

EUGENE

I bet they are getting all sorts of evil messages from Flavius Flavors via that wire.

HAWTHORNE

If we could read those grams we could break this case wide open. And just mostly light treason and misdemeanors.

ANJUS

Oh that's ... WAIT! Treason?

EUGENE

But there's no way we can get into that office.

HAWTHORNE

But I know ... a Hacker!

AUTHOR

What do they have planned? We'll find out in a bit. First let's check in on Shaindel and her run for state assembly. She was giving a speech at Steinway Hall.

17.5:

SHAINDEL

And if we give up that, then what are we! Thank you for your time.

Light smattering of applause.

EMCEE

Great. That was Shaindel. She was running for something. And now for the act you were all waiting for our headliner! Bobo the smoking chimp!

Audience applauds wildly.

AUTHOR

And so Shaindel with a heavy sigh went backstage to find her campaign manager Dora Lopez.

17.6:

SHAINDEL

Why do I bother?

DORA

You really reached them. Some of them.

SHAINDEL

I'm opening for a monkey.

DORA

Hey no! An ape. My candidates don't open for things with tails.

SHAINDEL

Monkey, ape, what's it matter?

DORA

That chimp sold out the place. You were able to get out your message! People don't have to settle for corrupt officials and machine politics! You're a real honest voice!

SHAINDEL

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

DORA

And on that cheery note! We have to be open to alternate opportunities.

SHAINDEL

I'm like a door for Elijah on Passover. Wide open.

DORA

Great, because I may have a possible sponsor. This is Asa Candler from Atlanta, he has a nerve tonic he's trying to promote.

ASA

Don't mind me, just lurking in these here shadows. Yes. It's quite the drink. Cocaine and kola nuts. None of that alcohol. I know you skirts hate the hotch. Temperance approved!

SHAINDEL

Really? This?

DORA

Open mind, Shaindel.

ASA

It's got a fizz! Please, I'm desperate, ladies.

SHAINDEL

We'll consider it. Come on Dora, let's go pass out buttons to the audience before Bobo finishes that stogie.

AUTHOR

And pass out buttons they did. Not too far away in a flophouse on the lower Bowery Hawthorne was making introductions.

17.7:

HAWTHORNE

Here he is my Hacker. Mike Hacker. He's a rogue telegraph operator. He once hotjacked a line and sent a dirty limerick to Queen Victoria.

HACKER

"There once was a boy from Ealing." She fainted for three days. I can splice a line and false send with the best of them. Also double relay and skipjack. But I'm not here to dit my own dah.

ANJUS

So you can intercept the messages sent to Oeufs and Boeufs?

HACKER

Simple as dit-dah-dah-dit dit-dit dit.

EUGENE

Great let's go to --

HACKER

Hacker don't work for free.

ANJUS

Money is a bit tight.

HACKER

Ha. I like you. That eye you got is pumpkins. Real slick.

ANJUS

It was from the poisonous spray of a spitting orchid. My hand I lost to the Uzbek snapper.

HACKER

Fizzin. Where did you find these freaks, Haw?

HAWTHORNE

I am a terrible judge of character. So what do you want Hacker?

HACKER

I got bit ... by the love bug. I've been trading grams with this dame up in Spuyten Duyvil. We gram back and forth. She's the real deal. Best operators are women, cause they're so good at myriad-tasking. Mabel Bridge managed to gram the whole King James Bible while giving birth and doing laundry. But this kitfox is a real stickler. She's up in Spuyten Duyvil because of the Cecil Grunt expedition.

HAWTHORNE

Oh. Tough one.

ANJUS

Cecil Grunt? Isn't he that idiot who went looking for the true source of the Hudson River by tunneling under Canada because he believed there was a secret lake built by the Lost Tribes of Israel below Ontario?

HACKER

That's the one. She was his communications officer. Her job was to stay at her post in Spuyten Duyvil until he telegrams back that he found the lake.

EUGENE

But that was two years ago.

HACKER

She's devoted. Part of what I love about her. That and she can dit the most carnal ... well. I don't dah and tell. Unless you want me to tell. But be warned it gets filthy.

ANJUS

Pass. So what exactly do you want?

HACKER

She won't give up her post until she hears back. But she will take a break if another operator covers the post.

EUGENE

I get it. You'll cover her post.

HACKER

No! I want to go on a picnic with her! I can't do that if I cover her post.

HAWTHORNE

Here's what we do. We get a picnic together, take you up there and old Gene here pretends to be an operator.

EUGENE

Why don't you do it? You're the master of disguise.

HAWTHORNE

I'm not some trick horse doing dress up for nothing.

ANJUS

It's for a case.

HAWTHORNE

I'm far too insulted now to dress up.

EUGENE

I can do it. But I need to come up with an alias.

ANJUS

No you don't. She doesn't know you're not a --

EUGENE

I'll be Fettuccine Al Dente, the haughty operator with a heart of gold. Ciao. I also say that a lot.

ANJUS

(Sigh.)

Let's picnic.

EUGENE

Ciao.

AUTHOR

And so this stupid plan seemed like the best course of action. A picnic was packed and they headed up to Spuyten Duyvil at the northern tip of Manhattan. They hired a guide and after a day or so of travel they made it the 12 miles and arrived at the remote relay station where this telegraph operator waited in vain for a message.

17.8:

HACKER

There she is ... Hilda Swunglow. Even more beautiful than her dashes would indicate. She has very delicate dashes.

ANJUS

I'll start setting up the picnic. You fellows go speak with her.

EUGENE

This looks like a job for Fettuccine! Ciao, bella!

HILDA

Who's there? Please go! I have important work to do.

HAWTHORNE

Madame we come on business more important than your mere tap tap picadillo. Right, Mike?

HACKER

Um.

HAWTHORNE

Say it, boy!

HACKER

Um.

EUGENE

Ciao. It's me Fettuccine, don't gawk, I know I'm a most impressive. Ciao. Ciao. I'm here to take over, give you a break.

HILDA

Break? I don't need a break.

HAWTHORNE

But you do. Tell her why Mike.

HACKER

Um.

HAWTHORNE

Dear boy is struck annoying. This is Michael Hacker, you and him have -

HILDA

Oh. The telegrapher of -- oh.

HACKER

Um.

HILDA

Oh.

EUGENE

We got you a nice picnic outside. You go. I'm a famous telegraph operator according to our scheme so you can trust me. Right Mike?

HACKER

Um.

HILDA

Oh.

HAWTHORNE

That's the spirit! Outside you two! Go be like lovebirds and peck each other apart or what have you!

HACKER

Um.

HILDA

Oh.

They exit.

HAWTHORNE

Look at them awkwardly go. Now, since what's-his-face is long dead you don't need to worry about any of this equipment, Gene. Just stand there and don't touch anything. I'll go see how Angus has bungled her job.

HAWTHORNE exits.

EUGENE

It's all going according to plan. Wait. Did he say don't touch anything or do touch everything? Hmmm.

AUTHOR

I'm sure you can guess which way Eugene chose to go. But before we get to that let's get some fresh air. A picnic. A cloth on the grass, a wicker basket. A nice assortment of cured meats and cave aged cheese. But what Anjus didn't know when she procured the sundries was both Mike and Hilda were members of an odd sect of Christianity called Curd of the One True Whey and thus they didn't eat cheese. So the big hunk of cheese was left untouched. But even worse was the fact that Mike and Hilda were not really communicative.

17.9:

Um. HACKER

Oh. HILDA

Um. HACKER

Oh. HILDA

ANJUS
What is going on, they're just staring at each other.

HAWTHORNE
The Devil if I know! But we brought them together. That's enough to get the deal done. So bored. I'm going to try this new heroin everyone is talking about. I'll be injecting myself over there. Rouse me when it's time to return to civilization.

ANJUS
You can't just drug yourself out of -- and he's gone. This is so ... I should intercede.

AUTHOR
And so she first pulled Mike aside.

ANJUS
What's going on?

HACKER
I'm just ... it's ... she's there! It's her!

ANJUS
That's why we're here!

HACKER
I could telegraph her a thousand words of love but here I can't even meet her eyes. I feel so oily.

ANJUS
Stop eating so much salami.

HACKER
I'm nervous and it's a salty relief.

ANJUS

Let me talk to her and see what's what.

AUTHOR

And so Anjus pulled Hilda aside.

ANJUS

Do you not like Mike? Too oily?

HILDA

Not at all. His oiliness is appealing to me. I was raised by oilers.

ANJUS

Oh. OK. But you haven't even looked at him.

HILDA

I'm a bit of a wallflower. My mind races with scenes that would make Rosa Coote blush. But my tongue is stuck fast.

ANJUS

You're both shut-ins.

HILDA

You must think me an abhorrent monster being so outside the main street of life.

ANJUS

No. Not at all. I understand the peculiar love. The love that dare not chlorophyll its name.

HILDA

And so you just shut yourself away, locked your legs tight and forgot all passion?

ANJUS

No. I leaned in toward my proclivities because I wouldn't have the norms of society ruin my esteem. One can live in society and still be free from it's rigidity.

HILDA

But how?

ANJUS

We need to have you embrace what brought you both together!

AUTHOR

And so back on the picnic blanket Anjus spoke to them both.

ANJUS

You both are mad for each other. But you both are paralyzed with fear and lack socialization. You're grammars. You need to speak in your language.

HACKER

Um.

HILDA

Oh.

HACKER

Um.

ANJUS

Close. But try. Dah. Dit.

HILDA

Oh!

HACKER

Um?

HILDA

Dah-dah dit-dit dah-dit-dah dit STOP dit-dit-dit dit-dit-dit-dit
did dit-dah-dah-dah-dah-dit dit-dit-dit dit-dah-dit dit-dit
dah-dah-dit dit-dit-dit-dit dah dit-dah-dah-dit dah-dit-dah-dit
dit-dah dah-dit dah-dit-dit dah-dah-dah dah dit-dit-dit-dit
dit-dit dit-dit-dit STOP.

MIKE

Dah-dit-dah-dah dit dit-dit-dit STOP!

They dit and dah to each other.

ANJUS

This younger generation is doomed. They can't even speak face to face. But it's nice to see that -- ooh they're going at it now. And right to heavy petting. I'm going to look the other way.

HILDA

(Orgasming.)

Dit! Dit! Daaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!

AUTHOR

In the glow of post coital telegraphic glee the two young lovers laid on the grass the picnic blanket covering them. There was only the hunk of cheese left.

ANJUS

I suppose no one wants this cheese. But I won't leave it here. It's cave aged.

HAWTHORNE

I am back to report that heroin is wonderful and everyone should be doing it.

ANJUS

Let's go back and see what Eugene -- I mean Fettuccine Al Dente is up to.

AUTHOR

And what they found in the relay station was quite the scene:

17.10:

Sound of telegraph beeping.

EUGENE

It's making all sorts of noises and I touched everything and it's all terrible! Help! Please! Ciao!

HILDA

What did you do! I knew I shouldn't have left my post even for love! What's going on let me see. It's a message! It must be from Cecil! What's it say? Ah, found the line. Here. Right. The message: S-P ... spiders. S-E ... send help. Spiders. Send help. On a loop. Oh he must have found the secret lake and it's guarded by evil cave spiders! I must save him!

HILDA runs out.

HACKER

Oh she's gone and all I have left are them memories of her soft mammaries against my hands. But ... how could there be a message? The chances would be ... wait. Here. Wait! You've opened the key line.

EUGENE

So much touching.

HACKER

You're pressing the input left trip switch, and you're nervously tapping your foot against the receiver cable ...

EUGENE

I'm a nervous tapper.

HACKER

And your nervous foot taps at exactly the Morse code equivalent of "Spiders. Send help." How strange.

EUGENE

So it was a false message? She's run off for nothing?

HACKER

Looks like. Well it's better to have loved and lost.

EUGENE

All this goofery has me starving, is there any food?

ANJUS

Just this cheddar hunk.

EUGENE

Oh it looks good. But I like my cheese a bit warm. I'll put it in my dedicated cheese pocket and let nature take its course.

ANJUS

Your shirt pocket is not a cheese pocket.

EUGENE

Any pocket can be a cheese pocket if you do it right.

HAWTHORNE

Speaking of doing it right. Mike we got your wires greased so now you need to snipe that message line for us.

MIKE

A deal is a deal.

AUTHOR

And with that they headed back to Manhattan. Which was also where Shaindel was. She was going over her campaign materials.

17.11:

SHAINDEL

Is it a good slogan? Shaindel: Shain does! Does that get across that I'll do things?

DORA

Mostly.

SHAINDEL

Dora.

DORA

Yes?

SHAINDEL

Be honest. Do I have a chance?

DORA

Always there is a chance.

SHAINDEL

The tiniest *vant* sized chance.

DORA

There's a Sephardim saying: *Djente de piron*. It means literally: 'people of the fork.'

SHAINDEL

So I'm forked?

DORA

No, you're not a fork person. The people of the fork are the rich. It's a phrase used to talk about those rich corrupt bankers and robber barons. Because once it was such a dream to have both a fork and spoon. Now you can go to Grossman's and buy a bundle for not so much.

SHAINDEL

I don't follow.

DORA

Once it seemed crazy to ever dream of owning a fork. Now it's practically taken for granted. And so it is for you to be elected: a crazy dream. But then one person got a fork. And then another. But someone has to be the first crazy person to say "I deserve a fork!" Forks for everyone. And then here we are. A crazy chance is only crazy until it happens. Then it seems inevitable.

SHAINDEL

That should be the slogan. Shaindel: Fork Yourself!

DORA

Let's keep workshopping.

SHAINDEL

We might never get that fork. I might even lose the spoon and knife and the plate.

DORA

Tikkun olam. It's the best we can do.

SHAINDEL

Tikn oylem.

AUTHOR

Tikkun olam is the Jewish idea that our mission is just to leave the world a little better than how we found it. That's the basics, It's more ... but for the sake of this story that's how we mean it. We don't have to radically reshape the world, we don't have to destroy mountains but just try to leave this place a little bit better than how we found it.

SHAINDEL

Then let get to work. Oh! I know! What if we hand out forks?

DORA

You're too hung up on the forks. You know how many people speak Ladino? Who even knows the idiom?

SHAINDEL

There's a Yiddish phrase: *Heng dikh oyf a tsikershtrikl vestu hobn a zisn toyt.*

DORA

What's that mean?

SHAINDEL

Hang yourself with a sugar rope and you'll have a sweet death. My bubbe always said it.

DORA

I don't think that's the message we're going for.

SHAINDEL

Eh, could be worse.

AUTHOR

Dora smiled and put her hand on Shaindel's shoulder. And they continued to tilt at political windmills as Eugene, Anjus, Hawthorne and Mike Hacker arrived back at the restaurant.

17.12:

ANJUS

That's the telegraph wire there.

HACKER

This looks like a job for Hacker.

AUTHOR

And soon they had a tap line set and intercepted the incoming messages.

HACKER

Huh. Odd they're from that chef. He's sending them recipes from somewhere upstate.

EUGENE

Ornery Henri Ennui isn't missing?

MANAGER

No he's not and never was. He's working for us.

HAWTHORNE

Gadzooks! The manager of Oeufs and Boeufs!

HACKER

I'm out of here! I can't stand confrontation!

HACKER runs off.

MANAGER

It was his idea to put the egg on the hamburger steak sandwich. But it's a failure, no matter the type of egg, see?

ANJUS

Looks pretty good.

MANAGER

Good isn't good enough! Get out of here egg!

Throws the egg away.

EUGENE

Whoa, you tossed that egg like a champ.

MANAGER

I was once. But that was a lifetime ago! Why are you bothering us? We are a simple hamburger steak sandwich and egg eatery.

ANJUS

We were trying to find that chef, his friend said he was missing. He's not. He's at our farm upstate in Blue Hill.

ANJUS

Then why did Bert hire us?

BERT

To find him!

EUGENE

Bert Mertle!

BERT

The same! I wanted Onery Henri Ennui found because he ran away with my wife Myrtle!

EUGENE

Ornery Henri Ennui got down and dirtle with Bert Mertel's wife Myrtle?

BERT

And now I've found their love nest! I'll go up to Blue Hill and kill them both! And all of you!

ANJUS

Why us?

BERT

No witnesses. Come on knife, let's stab these guys!

AUTHOR

And Bert Mertle pulled a knife and charged at Eugene. Eugene grabbed the Hamburger steak sandwich to protect him but it was no help.

EUGENE

Sandwich you have failed me!

AUTHOR

Instead Bert swung the knife and sliced right through Eugene's cheese pocked and slashed off a slice of the cave aged cheddar!

EUGENE

My cheese!

AUTHOR

And the slice of cheese landed right on the hamburger sandwich!

MANAGER

Whoa! Cheese on a hamburger?

BERT

I'll get you!

AUTHOR

But before he could, Hawthorne grabbed Bert, and beat him to a bloody pulp!

HAWTHORNE laughs.

ANJUS

That's ... where did that come from?

HAWTHORNE

I've been injecting goat testosterone directly into my scrotum. Gives me crazy angry.

EUGENE

My cheese ...

MANAGER

My burger.

REPORTER

Wowzers, look at that dish! Howdy, I'm a reporter for Popular Things Magazine I was just perambulating by and I saw this amazing concoction! I'm going to put it on the cover of the next issue! But it's got to have a name! What is it?

EUGENE

Well I accidentally invented it so I guess a ... Geneburger?

REPORTER

Did you say Cheeseburger?

EUGENE

No, I said --

REPORTER

Cheeseburger it is! This will be the biggest thing until they figure out how to make sliced bread! Hubba! Hubba! What a scoop!

MANAGER

There's already a line forming around the block for these new Cheeseburgers!

ANJUS

Well looks like we're not getting paid for this case, but Eugene should be compensated for sort of creating this sandwich!

MANAGER

We don't want some lawsuit. How about I give you this coupon for pantaloons?

ANJUS

There's no way that is --

EUGENE

Deal!

MANAGER

No backsies! But we need a new name. I'll name it after my favorite color and my favorite place to live: White Castle! Now to get grilling! Cheeseburgers for all!

AUTHOR

And that's how that happened. Back at the office Eugene inspected his coupon.

17.13:

EUGENE

Oh it expired! Oh well. What's in the newspaper?

ANJUS

Nothing good. White Castle is now selling those frenched fries. Oh look that sterilization guy was murdered and his land was

given to the Fair of Present and Future to build the Rhombus of Prhogress. Huh. Oh and there's apparently an African Flea Trade Union now. Also carrot season started.

EUGENE

That's odd.

ANJUS

That all our possible cases are mentioned in the newspaper?

EUGENE

No, it's far too early for carrots. But I do think all this is connected.

ANJUS

Why?

EUGENE

Because it all involves us. What's the chance we'd work on a series of unrelated mysteries. It must be one big mystery.

ANJUS

Cheeseburgers, fleas, chocolate, the Rhombus of Prhogress all related? Really?

EUGENE

And other stuff too, it's all connected! Mr. Darwin has his natural selection. We use our unnatural detection!

ANJUS

It's not all connected.

EUGENE

Sure it is. I'll pick another story at random: here! It says that the easel of Edmond Weasel was stolen by a stitched together cliché spouting Franken-thing. I bet that's also related.

ANJUS

Then I got a bridge to sell you.

EUGENE

Will you take an expired coupon?

CATO

The coupon is not all that's expired.

EUGENE

Cato! What's happening, my man. Sorry just trying to sound hip to the streets.

CATO

What? Why?

EUGENE

(Sad, apologetic.)

No.

ANJUS

It's good to see you.

CATO

I have reflected on our conversation. And like the Argo on a roiling sea the ship of my soul is battered about. But I cannot stand idly by. Lest I end up like an Achaemenid at the Battle of Gaugamela!

EUGENE

NO! Never!

CATO

I must aid you in stopping Flavius Flavours!

END OF CHAPTER 17