

Descending

By Colin O'Sullivan

*So you're like a real-live hit-man-maverick-kind-of-guy then yeah, out on the street?
Yeah.*

And not just pretending to be all murky and moody and mysterious in the hope that I'll drop this cocktail and lug you straight back to my apartment for a night of electric sex. I was thinking nothing of the sort. Believe what you like.

I have a pain in my stomach, or maybe where spleen is. I think it's an ulcer – my stresses – but I like to think it's where I was shot. Some have guns here, Yakuza, though I've never seen one, certainly never seen or heard one fired. But I like to think the ulcer - if that's what it is, this thing that stings with my thoughts - is the bullet I received while out on the job, while investigating something, checking something out. In the town, in my trench coat, I set about looking at faces on the street, this is what I do now since I lost my job and my wife, it keeps me occupied. My marriage only lasted a year and a half. Everyone's getting divorced these days, it's easy. I put up no arguments. My wife said that having no job meant I wasn't a man anymore and how could a woman be married to a thing that wasn't a man. She was full of these arguments that made perfect sense. So now I wander keeping an eye on things, the pain in my stomach where the bullet pierced through, the pain makes me wince, and in the rains I pull my coat around me like an angel closing wings, resting, until it's time to descend. Some times I rest in bars like this, taking time with a scotch, usually not jabbering like the others, but sometimes girls like this one come up, hoping I'll take them under into some shady corner where I'll do things or have things done and pay. It's all about the paying here like anywhere else.

So, if I asked to see your gun you'd show it to me?

I never produce my gun until I have to.

Is it true that guys like you carry weapons because you are making up for a having a small mister. That you are so utterly ashamed you have to recompense and the gun is some...some what? Some way to assert a kind of machismo.

That's a cheap jibe girl, but I'll let it pass.

You sure your thing isn't small? You want Eri here to take a peek?

I'm happy enough with it.

But would I be happy with it? That's the question. I mean, would it satisfy me, as well as you? Like what if we were to...

I knew it was time to leave then. Money was coming into play. I knew the way things operated. Had been down these crooked lanes many times, can see them coming a mile off. She looked good and all, but I wasn't in the mood, things on my mind. I set out into the night, the streets slippery with rain, people ferreting into shops and bars, the bright lights of the overhead signs menacing in their calls for attention, everything always looking for attention. I had the feeling that someone was following me, but every time I spun around, a shadow seemed to jump into the side streets or duck behind a car. I often have this feeling. In my line of work you get this a lot. Paranoia. Or maybe it's just a heightened awareness. The pain in my belly was acting up. I decided to pay Hide a call

to see how he was doing. In my line you don't get to have many friends. I was glad to call Hide one. He helped out when needed, was good to stitch up my eye if some thug was swift enough to gash. Hide was good like that. Had lots of neat little tricks. Stitching was one of his better ones. Had a lot of property too, derelict places that were easy to store stuff. If you'd a body to hide then he knew just where to put it and pour concrete all over it, quick and easy disposals. He had many places like that. I never minded the fact that he was a porn fiend. We all have our vices. He was saving up to go on a trip to the San Fernando Valley. That's in the U.S.A., where they have the pornography industry. Some people in his bar often tell him about the porn movies that are made there, American drinkers in his bar, describing in terrific detail, not holding back on the nouns or adjectives. He has a good collection, rows and rows of the stuff. I never bother. But he wants to go there, San Fernando Valley, the DVDs no longer enough; he wants to see a movie being shot maybe, real girls and real guys going at it. Take after take. He says he'd like to shoot a film sometime, him as director, calling out the instructions. Doesn't mind starring in it either, he says, with some hot American brunette. He says the Japanese girls...well, he's done enough of them, time to move on. The bar is doing nicely when I go in, not too may around, but enough for him to keep taking bottles off the shelf and keep smiles on faces. He's got some funk music going and is tapping his fingers on the counter when I enter.

Evening Tenshi.

Evening Hide, set me up.

Waste no time do you Tenshi? No time for the small chat.

Sorry. How you been Hide?

Been good. Been saving. Won't be long now.

San Fernando Valley.

San Fernando Valley.

Dreams come true.

They sometimes do Tenshi, they sometimes do.

This whiskey's good.

Only the best for you my friend.

Good to hear.

You hear from your ex? Any luck with finding work?

It's then I sigh and make an issue of moaning, rubbing my stomach, my burden. I don't like talking about my ex, or jobs, jobs people have and are supposed to do, my ulcers start up their bitter dirges. He knows this, Hide knows this, and I'm surprised that he brings it up, he's a barman, should know better. My side is stinging now. When he comes back from serving someone else, he's sharp to change topic.

So you on the rounds then?

Yeah, been looking into a number of things.

And you can't say?

Nope, afraid I can't say. Not yet. You'll hear all about it when the time comes.

Just then the door opens, I can see it in the mirror's reflection, I pretend not to notice but it's her all right. She followed me. I was being followed. Sometimes it's not paranoia. She was still chasing money, maybe no stump of a fool paying her tonight. Sad situation if I am her only hope. Maybe the rain was keeping 'em all in with their wives and their children, their board games or whatever it is they do, TV quizzes.

So you found me.

For a man that sees a lot of crime, you're not that hard to follow.

I'll let that pass. I knew you were on my tracks. Now, you gonna sit and drink or are you here just to stir up some trouble.

Drink and trouble go hand in hand.

Give her what she wants Hide, whatever she wants.

We spend some time looking at each other in the mirror, the bits of face and eye that are afforded us from the spaces between bottles, and then she's whispering in my ear: *It's you that I want, Tenshi.*

I wonder how she knew my name. Had I let it slip back in that last bar? No, I'm never slow.

No other customers, tonight then huh? Rain keeping 'em in. Or you just decided to go after the best?

Customers? How dare you.

Way she said this wasn't at all put out, just light and sniggering, like she knew that I knew all about her.

So you gonna make a woman of me or what?

I gave her the up-down, head to foot real slow investigation, saw the sharp heels, the smooth, muscular legs, thin but sturdy, the short skirt tightly wrapped, the navel on show, the small breasts packed firm, the slender neck and that vixen smile. Her hair was slick from the rain. You'd think a girl on the streets would remember an umbrella in rainy season.

Let's go then. Later Hide.

Later Tenshi.

San Fernando Valley.

San Fernando Valley.

Dreams come true, Hide.

They sometimes do Tenshi, they sometimes do.

When we got to my basement place she was impressed. Rooms small but clean, ordered, like the way I conduct my business.

So I'm finally going to get to see your big gun.

Big gun's only for important business.

And what we're going to do isn't important business?

Well, we'll have to wait and see.

Wait? I'm not in the game of waiting. Come on, show me, let me see.

She was at me then. Kneeling, unbuttoning my pants. She did it slow, smiling up at me, and I was descending to that usual pit of disdain. But she kept at it, mistaking my sneer for cool.

When she pulled it out of my shorts her smile erupted into a soft snigger. She let it flop there... I couldn't even...and so I knew that it was that moment, that moment that I had to take and I did, whacked her one. I punched the side of her face, not getting a clear shot at her nose, and when she fell back I was on her and pounding and pounding until the nose finally cracked and the sound brought tears to my own eyes. She was in such shock, her screams were slow in coming, not even loud. I walked to my desk and took the piece out of the drawer.

This what you wanted to see?

Her throat was doing some kind of gurgling sound, maybe backed up with blood. I slipped the silencer on, smooth as you like, like slipping on a condom, a few neat practiced moves. I stood over her and fired one swift to her forehead. The carpet would be a mess but it's been cleaned before and will no doubt be cleaned again. I called Hide then and told him I needed some space, and a concrete fill. Hide said that he saw that one coming straight off, and apologizes for mentioning the ex and the job.

Colin O'Sullivan is an Irish writer living in Japan. His debut collection of short stories, Anhedonia is published by Rain Publishing, Canada. A novel for teenagers, Majo, is due out in the coming weeks.