



TAKE IT LIKE A WOMAN

BY

JEFF BLECHLE

WHY I LIKE IT: *Fiction Editor JOEY CRUSE writes...*

Jeff Blechle,

Jeff Blechle's "Take It Like a Woman," is as absurd as it is humorous – much like the enjoyment from the holiday that it is focused around.

Thanksgiving tends to be that time of year where Americans (I'm not sure how or if the celebration translates into other countries) get together with their families and either enjoy each other or get drunk enough to hash out all of their insecurities and frustrations around those they know they can't really get rid of.

I laugh when these characters somehow have gotten themselves into a health inspection mob, I laugh when the man checking the quality of the turkeys is blind yet will have those cooking killed, I laugh when the two men at the helm don't have enough balls or coordination to fire the woman who they know will take control of the situation, I laugh. Blechle's story is like a Monty Python holiday special, someone is going to walk funny by the end.

The story here is full of pun and character, of whimsy and the surreal, of what makes you laugh when the insanity sometimes makes more sense than reality.

Full of frenzy and chuckles, "Take It Like a Woman," makes you comfortable with taking it, reminding us that the more stressful times of our seasons are oftentimes what reminds us to smile.

QUALITY QUOTABLE*(for the love of language...)*

A baby pink Shriner's car scrapes out of the elevator, gurgles like a cartoon spaceship around a lounge chair piled high with thawing turkeys. Behind the tiny wheel a bruised and bloody Banyon slaloms furniture, gobbles around a butcher block, sneezes. Chased, Gil and Blip trample Tony Geno twice. Blip jabs the elevator button. The car gurgles around a row of hot ovens, again, swerves left, right, left, right toward Fulga. The elevator doors open. Gil and Blip scramble inside, shouting, poking. Beep! Beep! Fulga rolls out of the way, sits up, and watches juices squirt as the little car ramps over Tony Geno's soles and heels and plunges into the elevator.

Take It Like a Woman

Ding.

As if banished from fiction hell for identifying with readers, Gil dances out of the elevator and through their kitchen office to Recep's, "To Love a Turkey (I'll Take a Breast)," stops at the bar for milk, and says to Blip, who is dressing a turkey on his Queen Anne desk, "When are you going to fire Fulga?" He pulls his fingertip across the bar and holds up a dusted print. "Are you aware that she stacked a ton of cranberry sauce right in the foyer?"

"We both hired Fulga, Gil, and we're both gonna fire her together like we been practicing." Blip almost lights the wrong end of a cigarette. "Anyways, I gave her the day off so we can deal with our other prob, cooking and delivering all these birds by four o'clock to the Tony Geno mob."

Ding.

"If that's Fulga, we're canning her." Gil crushes his milk carton. "I'll coldcock her ass."

The elevator doors slide open, and Chef Banyon swishes in with his silver hair and his empty briefcase. His fez tassel swings as he steps through sun-pierced smoke, unbuttons his powder blue jacket, and sits in a tall chair in front of Blip's desk. "Turkey today, feathers tomorrow, babies. Like, I should demand more than fifty G's for my silence." He looks down at his dangling feet and swallows and sniffs. "And for the children."

Gil lifts his jaw into place. “If you’re looking for your old job, look elsewhere.”

Banyon holds his look of shock like a needle holds its prick, then opens his empty briefcase on his lap and spins it toward Blip. “You didn’t tell your sidekick about this arrangement?” He turns back to the bar, behind it, through the sliding glass doors, a pale leaf scratches up and over the balcony railing. “Listen, Gil man, I could trump up enough violations around here to justify a double lynching. And you can stuff my old job.”

Gil conducts with a milked straw. “Blip, call the police. Our former cook has returned disgruntled, ambiguous, and vaguely suggestive.”

“Do I smell treachery? Threats? Turkey? Look, babies, if I’m not out of here in twenty minutes with what I came for, four incriminating robo-texts go out to four prominent officials, including Tony Geno—and his ma, who has not only learned texting, but has accepted my proposal of marriage. And just maybe I attached a bomb to your grease vat.”

“Subtle,” Gil mutters.

Blip slowly removes an envelope from a drawer and drops it on the front edge of his desk. “There. That should keep your beak shut about our turkey enterprise. For keeps.”

Banyon grabs the envelope and weighs it with his hand. “Feels light.” Nose crinkled, he reaches in and pulls out a stack of five-hundred-dollar bills. “McKinleys? I can’t laund—I told you Grants.”

Milk slicks Gil’s neck. “Is this douche blackmailing us?”

A door labeled ‘stares’ blasts open, and like a comet gunning for a black hole, Fulga Füllung surges into the room, crackles to the bar, discharges Blip into the glass balcony doors (he peeks back over his shoulder in hunched, bleary-eyed anger, as if to say, “I detest stereotypical types,”), then growls in her jagged accent, “Downstairs toilet is backing up again,” before pouring out a glass of Drambuie and snarling it down like an enemy biplane. She tilts her head at Banyon. “I thought you fired thimble head.”

Blip leans right of the half-dressed turkey and whispers to Banyon, “We never told her that.”

Banyon looks at the three of them twice. “What is this?” He flaps the bills. “Exchange these McKinleys for Grants or I bring in Tony Geno—and his ma.”

“Fulga, will you take a powder?” Blip says.

Fulga bellows volcanic, “Morbidly obese chance! You runts not only shorted me on my pay, but you paid me with counterfeit bills.” She fills her mouth with Drambuie and, by some accounts, swallows it. “I tried to blow a twenty at Guy’s Liquor, got fingered, and had to bang out the back way. And there was no back way! Luckily, I was wearing my Pickelhaube.”

“Gil, did you pay her with Monopoly money again?”

“Oops.”

Blip turns to Banyon, whose tassel is spiraling with incredulous force. “Gil made an honest mistake. A real stretch for him.”

“Babies, your comedy act grates.”

“Thanks, Banyon,” Gil says, unbending his glasses. “We’re making it up as we go along.”

Banyon holds a bill up to the light and snaps it. “If you’re trying to double cross the children, in comes Tony Geno.”

“And his ma,” Gil sings, prancing up to an oven and curtsying. He glares at Blip, then opens the oven door and steams his lenses.

Fulga rockslides to Banyon, rips the bill out of his hand, noses and tongues it. “Uh huh. McKinley is phonier than Gil’s cold cock.” She crams it into her cleavage while leering at Gil. “Yes, Gil Green, I bugged this dump, and I have bathroom audio of you not washing your hands before returning to work.”

Blip stands and clears his throat. “Okay, Gil. Ready? One, two, three: Fulga, you are fired!” Apparently, Gil wasn’t ready, even after all that rehearsing.

Banyon lunges for a hassock and snatches a turkey injector. “Right! Everybody pick an oven!”

Fulga snatches the injector, squirts spicy butter sauce into Banyon’s eyes, laughs like a roulette wheel spins, then harpoons his foot. “Dance, Shriner, dance! For the children! Ja (clap) ja (stomp) ja (clap) ja (stomp) ja!”

Ding.

Out of the elevator plumps Tony Geno, chief health inspector, tapping a white stick and sucking a Dum Dum. He knuckles his tortoiseshell sunglasses. “It smells like turkey hell in here.”

Fulga swoops alongside him. “This is because Blip and Gil, who have just raised my pay by forty percent, could not cook a leaf in a forest fire. And Banyon, well, just look at him.” She squints up at Tony’s pile-of-potatoes profile. “T, did you go blind?”

“Chinese cook grease-fired me. Only temporary.” Tony Geno swishes at the air with his stick. “Who’s hopping nearby?”

“You remember our former cook Banyon, Tony,” Gil says, slow-burning Blip. “Apparently, he just popped in to destroy your insurmountable turkey order.”

Fulga cuddles the hopping Banyon onto the balcony and over the railing, then calls after him, “Mind the patio! I just hosed!” She whirls to Blip. “Did I say a forty percent raise? I meant seventy.”

Blip clears his throat. “Pocket your red Sharpie, Tony, all the turkeys’ll be cooked and delivered on time to your cronies and henchmen and their loved ones on The Hill.”

“T, are you seeing this?”

“Who said that?” Tony Geno lobs his Dum Dum, missing the trashcan by twenty feet, then growls out a sweeping gesture of exasperation that whacks Fulga to the floor.

Gil kneels and honks Fulga’s nose. “Great. Now who’ll fix the toilet?”

“Meh, we’ll just keep using these turkey roasters,” Blip says.

“Aha!” Tony Geno tosses his white stick and throws off his dark glasses. His eyes are crossed. “Thanksgiving is out!”

Ding.

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Fulga gathers up the eleven five-hundred-dollar bills, wheezily guffaws at the carnage between gulps of Drambuie, then checks all the turkeys in all the ovens, and after shaking and slapping Banyon out of his sputtering murder weapon and seeing his limbs don’t fit his torso, her image warms. “Run to My Love Spices and get cloves and onions while I man the toilet augur. We have turkeys to cook and deliver. Gott! Why must I work so hard on my day off?”

AUTHOR’S NOTE: *Inspired by a scene from Barnaby Jones or Cannon [that is a credit], Take It Like a Woman is a carrion call to all women who enjoy, like Fulga, smiling at blood on the streets of Vichy (where else?). It is clear to even the most careless reader, like myself, that Gil and Fulga, always taking the stares, are fast lovers, sometimes together, that Blip is a street-dumb daddy’s boy with a fowl obsession—oh my God!— enough about the characters, it is the gimmickry of this overflowing potboiler that repays study, though it may be of interest to some*

pompous windbags that Chef Banyon is illegally blind, unlike Tony Geo, and falls on his neck three times offstage, upstaging his stunt double and ruffling many a feather among the grips.

As for the me, that is, theme, how about . . . fear of trust in the throes of commerce? Is this the reason the chief health inspector is temporarily blind, disappointed, and then dead? Mysteries abound.

Celebrated in story and song, Ma Geo is a classy, sophisticated, good-to-her-son-of-a-bitch fuck of an old goddamn crow if I ever created one. She aims to marry Banyon and bust him down to a quivering pulp, pump a few slugs into him, then crapshoot him into a Yonkers bound cab. Later, if ol' thimble head is up for some honeymoon, well, that depends on how generous Ma is feeling about manslaughter. See, Ma also takes the stares.

AUTHOR BIO: Jeff Blechle, the Bobby Slam dunk Hooper of Granite City, started his storied career at age seven. The scandal fueled something in him, surely, and he now lives in a house with his wife.