

Perfect Patty Party

By Janet Bogle

"To whom do these belong?" Mr Brown said holding the offending article up with the tips of his fingers. Yesterday, when he'd made the same announcement, we looked up and saw a limp condom hanging from a spring onion - which was followed by two hours of deep cleaning. Today, we were relieved to see that he held a black and white photocopy, but it was of the most magnificent pair of bosoms. The men breathed out, and looked on in appreciation as Mr Brown circled us ladies. "You won't get away with this," he sneered, but we knew we would. Just like the condom, a pair of breasts squashed against the face of a copier have universal and anonymous look. They could have been anyone's! Realizing that his method of interrogation was beginning to become highly inappropriate Mr Brown snapped again. "May I remind whosoever did this, that this is a food h'establishment!" he said, and he oh-so carefully folded the A4 sheet and placed it in his apron pocket. Rita, the cleaning lady carried on mopping clean spots on the floor.

This was followed by a series of blows - the Christmas bonus was to be spent on getting stains out of the carpet, cannabis was suspected to have been mixed with coriander, and the person or persons who had used the shared computer to email Mr Brown to inform him that he was a 'bald idiot', had ensured us we would not even be getting free patties from now on!

Strangely enough, Perfect Patties 5th birthday party had been Mr Brown's idea. Mrs. Brown put herself in charge of the food. Though Mrs. Patty Brown was secure in the role of wife, accountant and mother, her face hadn't seen a smile for years, which made her the obvious choice to organize a party. Despite having all those job titles, she was rarely seen in the office and spent all of her time ironing creases into Mr Brown's suit trousers and, from the thickening of her waistline, eating the profits of the business.

The unveiling of the buffet - or rather the opening of the kitchen door, was disappointing. The secretary had put on dangling earring that played a tune when you press them. I had even put on lipstick and for what? The 'buffet' was three trays of sandwiches, 3 bottles of 99p Lambrini (between seven of us), a tray of Patty's Patties (of course) and a limp punch. "Well what you expect?" she said unwrapping the sandwiches, "You tink my name is Ainsley Harriet?"

With smiles frozen on our faces, we politely took a plate and wondered around the buffet wondering what was safe to taste. Mr Brown switched off our reggae station and played a Boney M CD. This was presumably the signal to start enjoying ourselves.

Mr Brown certainly tried. It was funny to hear him croak to 'By the Rivers of Babylon.' One sip of Lambrini and he was pulling one of the secretaries along on her computer chair in a mock Waltz. But a warning look from his wife got him sitting down with the rest of us.

I was wondering just how I would get a piece of flaky pastry out of a keyboard (blow it out or use a paperclip?) when I saw the two chefs giggling. They were draining the last of two bottles of over proof rum and Vodka into plastic cups. I looked on with envy - the evening would drag on more slowly being sober.

Mrs Brown served the punch. No-one actually dared ask her what the 'punch' was, but she had clearly dug out her best glassware. There were two large glass bowls with intricately carved scenes of merriment around the outside, (presumably to inspire us) and glass cups hanging on hooks around the edge. We eyed the red liquid suspiciously as Mrs Brown filled our cups. Some of us were lucky to get a slice of lemon - others just the pips - but we all got a glass to raise a toast. "To Patty's Patties" Mr Brown said, glass in the air, staring at his wife and at the kitchen respectively. We all swallowed, and swallowed.

It tasted pleasantly familiar as it slid down our throats and Patty Brown let us out of our misery. "It's Kool-Aid" she said matter-of-factly - her sister-in-law, the one who works in the Novotel in New York city, had sent it to her last Christmas.

"It didn't have any erm alcohol in it did it?" one of the pastry chefs piped up.

"Oh no, no" she said laughing, and with that reassurance, the designated drivers, held out their cups from another ladle full.

Just half an hour later the ladle was missing - and we just dipped our glasses in, chinking dangerously on the side of the bowl. Mr Brown started telling us about his trainee chef back home in Trinidad. "I tell the fool-fool boy, separate the two eggs, and what the foolish boy do? He say how far apart you want me to put them boss?" It was such a crap joke but we were all laughing, more than laughing, I was doubled up crying. For one moment I saw us as we really were, I smelt the rum on Mr Brown's breath as his dentures dangled in my face, and I realized, the chefs had done the oldest trick in the book - they'd spiked the punch!

"No work to do Julie?" Mr Brown said grimacing. I nodded and busied myself dicing onions, but if I told the truth there wasn't much to do. Since Mrs. Brown had left the business

had really gone down hill. On the face of it Mr Brown was still at the front of the shop, but now he used cracking jokes to cover items missing from the menu and on the kitchen floor we were struggling to keep up the standards. As unpaid bills piled up goods stopped being delivered, the secretary would be drafted in for minor kitchen duties or dispatched to the cash and carry, to buy something which was needed right then.

Mr Brown, who confessed he was not an educated or domestic man, began to get a bit more unraveled. He still wore a suit, but increasingly there was a rather creased shirt underneath, there was no shine to his shoes anymore and a permanent crust in the corners of his eyes and his mouth. Rumors began to fly around – Patty's Patties might be closing down or at least changing names. When Mrs. Brown came to 'clear her desk', we overheard her telling Mr Brown that the name Patty's Patties 'belonged to her' and she intended to take it elsewhere.

"But everyone know de name Pattys Patties" he screamed.

"I don't care," she screamed back, "when Tina Turner lef' Ike, all she want was her name – nothing more!"

"But woman, you're getting the damn house as well!" Mr Brown protested.

"And why shouldn't I? Is you take care of it? No – is me, and you haven't forgotten our children Herbert"

Herbert, another revelation, – no wonder he stuck to Mr Brown.

'Herbert' had clearly had enough. "Michelle is 33!" he screamed after her, "and Pauline is 28!"

She'd said one final thing as she slammed the wooden hatch back down on the counter, "I hope you enjoy being a father again Herbert. But at your age you ought to be ashamed!"

That particular rumor was true, Mr Brown was going to be a father again. Rita, the cleaner, had started vomiting a few weeks ago, good job she had all the equipment to clean up after herself! It seemed Mr Brown was glad that he'd discarded that condom pushed her against that photocopier and let unleash 40 years of frustration of being married to Patty Brown.

Mr Brown just sucked his teeth when Patty walked out and made his way straight to Rita's cleaning cupboard. She stood there shyly, pretending she hadn't been listening, messing with a dry mop. She was as successful with her career as she had been with men, so

a soon-to-be ex-businessman with a good pension was probably going to be her best catch. “What you tink?” he said patting her flabby tummy, “you tink it might be a boy or a girl?” she shrugged and sat down wearily, and we knew immediately we were going to be doing the cleaning again that day.

“I was tinking Patrick for a boy, Tina for a girl.” And sweeping his hand slowly across the air imagining the name in lights, he whispered, “Patrick’s Patties, Tina’s Treats.”

“What about Rita’s Restaurant?” Rita said making her way towards Patty’s seat in the office. Mr Brown pulled it out for her and she sat bolt upright making the most of pushing out her stomach. She pulled Mr Brown down to her level and whispered something in his ears, giggling, he rubbed her stomach. I didn’t blame her. You have to go for what you want in this life and she had to ensure that there would be a real baby in there, not just free patties.

Bev, the secretary came running into the kitchen, “quick get me a bucket,” she said holding her hand over her mouth, “I think I’m going to be sick.”

“Yeah, me too,” I said laughing, “disgusting isn’t it – he’s old enough to be her father!”

But Bev was tugging at my apron, her hand still over her mouth, a look of panic on her face. I ran to get a mixing bowl but by the time I got back, she’d brought up her breakfast over my newly diced onions.

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