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Ryder W. Miller

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*Monsheffa*

# Monsheffa

by

Ryder W. Miller

Manny looked at the computer and began to write after minutes of staring at the screen and out the window. He was having a writer's block and was spending time thinking about going outside now, and the drink he put down at his side beside the computer. It was warm today, and the Kombucca was cold and tart. Sometimes he liked a drink by the computer when he worked to make the experience easier, funner. The writing required concentration. The drink was a treat, but now older, he shied away now from the drinks that could get one in trouble.

His hands now moved over the typewriter:

"It was a time when women were doing their share of the cooking."

He could not tear up the paper on this one. It was on a word processor. He could delete the line though. Manny reminded himself that he liked Science Fiction and he erased it and started typing again:

"It was a future where women were doing their share of the cooking."

He did think part of romance had to do with cooking. It was something that people had to work out, preferably before they had children. If he wrote this line maybe one of his readers would think that she could cook for him in the future? Maybe there were still woman out there who knew a man liked to eat. He was worried though that some might take offense. He thought this was no longer a fit subject. He was not a warrior, but he did like some of those tales. He also was no longer a pluckable spring chicken.

Manny thought back to the day when he made a joke to an ex-girlfriend of his. She could be so serious sometimes. Things though had changed, especially with inflation and the high cost of living. It was not funny anymore. He realized he was not eligible and practical. He did think of himself as fun, but that was not enough.

There was that fateful day where he made a joke and it was too much. He did have the comeback ready, but it did not work out as planned. He wasn't being serious, but who would know. He was older than the woman, but he did not think of himself as older.

There they were in the supermarket and he said "With me you can do the cooking."

Betty gave him an angry look.

Manny replied "With me you cannot do the cooking."

This was the men-are-always-wrong joke. It also was self-deprecatory so someone else did not have to say it. Later he thought that this kind of joke could backfire and he and the guys would have to take a cooking class. That might not have been why they broke up, but he thought she would laugh. He was trying to be brilliant about it. He was trying to be funny, but this was dark irony for her. This was also the good' ol days and he did not want to move forward. Did everything, especially the tangles of romance, have to make sense? Were they still co-dependent? Were they not passive aggressive?

He was now trying to write a story, and he was not sure if it was about her.

This though was a fantasy story and maybe he should better stick with the first line. He could not write anymore now, but liked the later line better even if he was not going to use it. He could give a girl a hint that he wanted cooking, but such an interest was not in style now. It was funny now thinking about cooking when there was once a time where some woman pursued a man's heart through cooking. Now it was fashionable to be gay, it was part of the movement politics, and wanting food could be consistent with being gay. Maybe that is what would attract a gay man to a woman? It was amusing to look back and wonder if these old guys were going through this same thing also as he was going through now. He wanted an old fashioned wife he thought, but just was not eligible to be a father. He was not really ready yet to be a bread earner. He would have to write a best seller to buy a house for her to live and raise a child probably, but he was probably just not that good of a writer and he was not really with the times.

Things sure seemed to have gone sour. He though was still processing the past.

Manny would write later. For now he would go for a walk in the park and take a nap under a tree. There were usually women at the park, but he usually could not talk with them. He was a bit big to be a stranger and also a little old. In the big field he would rest and think of how to proceed. He loved the park in all seasons, and especially liked watching the buds come out of the trees in the spring. The park reminded him of Narnia with fireflies, lamp posts, stately buildings, and amazing birds and trees. Magical and with splendor.

He was resting now under the blue sky and in the warm sun. There were wonderful bubbly cumulous clouds in the sky. Maybe

things would be different when he woke up later.

He found himself now in a boat. He was shaking off the sleep while the boat shook in the water. He did not know how he got there. In the distance was an island and he would have to row there. It might be more than a mile.

There was a smell though that he did not understand. It was the smell of women's perfume. He was wearing it. Suddenly he grabbed himself to find out what was going on. The boat was shaking again. Manny was quite surprised.

He noticed that he had a set of breasts. Not man breasts, but women breasts. He reached down and it was gone. He reached down again and they were gone and something else was there. Manny did not know what to think. He was in shock. He was now a changed person. He was not really *really* a woman, and he was in a warrior's dress. He was a warrior woman on his way to an island. How can this be, he moaned to himself? He tried to see his reflection in the water and could now make out that he was a blond. He, no she, had red lips and large eyes. Her breasts were full sized and she smelled of flowers. What did he do to deserve this? He just also wanted cooking? Maybe this, though, would be an adventure with lessons to learn? He was never strong about writing about women. Did this make him Trans?

What should she call himself, oops, herself? Manny, or Amanda. People would hear that. He reached down to the side of her leg and realized she had a sword. There was also a little gear in the boat.

Amanda grabbed the oars and started rowing towards the island. The water was flat and there was not a lot of wind. The waves were small and did not hold back the boat which he, no she, propelled with her

oars. Amanda wondered if she could be a lesbian. From the looks of her garments he figured that these were medieval times. Sappho from Lesbos would now be at least 1000 years old here probably.

This though could be anywhere back then. It also could be a created fantasy world. Maybe he was on the shores of Middle Earth. Hopefully she was not on the way to forbidden Numenor. The island though was not that large. Amanda wondered what sort of people and creatures she would find there.

It took her, she guessed, a few hours to make it to the island. It grew big before her on her journey there. Most of what she saw was green. There were not a lot of trees, but there were some shrubs and some grassy areas.

There was also a dock with a few boats. There was probably an attendant there, and she would have to go search for him. Amanda drew the row boat up to the dock and decided to stop there. She could have docked off the side elsewhere, but she was very curious to see where and when she was.

This could be an adventure he could write about if he could return. He did not relish here seeing how the other side lived. Amanda though was a warrior who could carry a blade, and probably knew how to defend herself. There might be other pleasant surprises in store for her here also.

Amanda walked up and down the dock to see what was about. She had made good timing and there were a few more hours of daylight left. She did not have a lot of provisions, she could find something there, but wanted a good meal. She was also tired from the boat trip across the water. She would have liked to have seen fish or marine mammals, but was happy to recognize the birds she saw. The seagulls were elegant, but

rowdy. This seemed like she was on Earth or at least a world in the imagination of an Anglophone writer. She also had some coins in one of her "pockets". She might need to pay to dock here, but she would also find out what was going on sooner if she landed.

Looking around the dock she noticed that much of it was empty and some of it was damaged. There was area that was caved in. It almost seemed as if someone had stomped on it and broken it to pieces. She would be careful to watch for such spots and avoid the area. It was not very well made, but by the look of the ships it appeared if the people had not a lot of knowledge about how to use metals. All this was made of wood.

After a bit she found a gazebo of wood with a man sitting at it. He was wearing leather and hides, and had a long beard.

"Who might you be?" he said warily, but welcoming anyway.

"Why I am Manny," Amanda said by accident.

"Mandy? Amanda? Is that what you said? Did I hear it right?"

Amanda smiled at herself and indicated yes to the latter.

"Welcome Amanda. Nice to see someone like you on a visit. What brings you here?"

"I was lost and did not know where I was. Where am I?"

"Why this is Monsheffa. Not quite as bounteous and populated as it once was. We have fallen on bad times."

"What has happened? And who might you be?" Amanda responded with a sigh.

"Why, I am Tolen, and we had a bad visitor who decided to stay."

"I am from York," said Amanda realizing that this was shaping up into an adventure. She reached down to see that she still had a sword on her hip. She realized she must be in her mid-thirties. She might not find a mirror here, and figured she would come across as a

dyke. They probably did not know of such things here though.

“I want to hear more about it, but now I am hungry and tired. I have coin. Can you feed and house me?”

“We don’t always like visitors here. You might do well to sleep in your boat tonight. I can give you a hide to sleep under. The Inn might be dangerous.”

“What un-welcomed guest do you speak of? Was it a dragon?”

“No. We were lucky that it was not. It was Trontasora. She came here to ‘grace’ our shore. Very large actually and bit bossy. She ate our old Mayor, broke down areas of the dock with her wonderfully large legs and could show up anytime at the Inn with all sorts of culinary requests. Not a very big eater for her size, but she does get angry and hungry.”

“She is a giant?”

“Yes, she chased away a lot of the resident here. They no longer wanted to live here when she decided to stay. Not that many boats left here.”

“Why did she come?”

“Don’t know. I guess she was a conqueror of sorts. She decided not to eat me. Might want to talk with the folks at the Inn. The new Mayor and their child is still there. The Island is a bit abandoned now, but the Mayor is still a functionary. They will have better food up there.”

Amanda liked that Tolen was very straight forward with her, but there was more to find out. She would leave her boat here and be on her way for what seemed like was going to be an adventure.

She found that she had firm footing despite the time on the water. The island was luxurious with green places and streams. There was a bit of mountain in the center and some some abandoned villages. There were

people who used to live here and some still did, but there were still empty dwellings.

Amanda followed the road to a central village. There was an odd shaped building there which he gathered was where the Mayor now resided. She did not see that many people along her way, but she was more interested in food now.

There was no doorman at the Inn and she let herself in. She quickly found the Tavern and restaurant. There was a man surprised and annoyed standing behind the bar.

“Who might you be,” he said to her.

“Why I am Manny,” she said by accident.

“Is that Amanda?”

“Yes,” she smiled at herself this time.

“What brings you here?”

“Not sure. I guess I am here for an adventure? Wondering first though what has transpired here?”

“Well this giant moved in. She chased many off the island. She took over. I am the new Mayor. I have a child, Geroso. I am still the Mayor, but I have to cook. Now. I am Lasko or I used to be. Now I cook not to be eaten. And Gerosa, who should have Divine Right does not have the destiny he once had.”

“Divine Right you say?”

“Yes. Bloody right. That is why I cook for Geroso and hope. I figure he is the one who is smart enough to get someone to cook for him. He is also innocent so far. In a man’s life he usually has done a thing or two. What has Geroso done wrong? Nothing. Meanwhile this giant Trontasora has to be fed or people will be eaten. I have not been required to cook people, but I am sure the thought has crossed the mind of the giant.”

“Can you feed me now. I have been on the water the whole afternoon.”

“Sure, I can feed you. What will you have?”

“Whatever you offer.”

“I might be smart enough to be Mayor, but that doesn’t mean you will like everything I have to make.”

“I don’t have discerning tastes. A piece of meat, some potatoes and vegetables will be fine. I don’t wish to deprive Geroso.”

“You won’t. We are regularly supplied with swine and wonderfals from the fields.”

They sat down for a meal and Lasko brought the food. It was a large portion of meat and vegetables which Amanda was happy about.

Amanda was impressed by Geroso, who was polite and already a bit of gentleman, He was not puckish, but grateful.

“Why are we so lucky to have you here visiting us?” he asked.

“I was given an adventure.”

“We could sure use a warrior. Things have been tough since the giant moved in,” said Geroso.

Geroso smiled at her.

Amanda found it charming. Someone had taught him right. She was not sure now what she would need to do. She did want to meet this Trontasora. Geroso was smart enough to have someone cook for him Amanda thought in a sly way. He should be obeyed someday. There were all sorts of things he had not done yet.

Amanda would have to wait until after her encounter with the giant to decide what to do. For now, food, thanks to Lasko, and a warm smile from Geroso.

They offered her a place to stay for the evening and she would be off the next morning on an adventure. Amanda figured that if she woke up as a woman warrior then she would probably know how to use a sword. This might be a fantasy, but it sure seemed as if she was a part of destiny now. She was here for a reason.

When she woke up the next morning there was fruit and milk by her door. She ate it quickly and was on her way. Through the village and then up the hill she would have to go. She had sturdy boots, but the way would be tiring. She now had a lot on her shoulders and would probably remember this one for the rest of her life. Maybe this experience would make him a more attractive man, thought Manny, but he was scared that he would be stuck in this woman’s body for the rest of his life. He might have been happier if he was a red head also. Right now, though, he was wondering if he was going to wind up as someone’s lunch.

She found a path leading out of the town. It let up into the hills. It was not a very pronounced path, but she should be able to take it to where the giant rested. There were also the marks of giant footsteps along the way. There were also a few dead animals and people. When examining the bodies she noticed that there were bite marks and pieces of the bodies were missing. There was a dead horse with a missing stomach. A soldier without legs.

Gruesome, Amanda thought. She took out her blade and felt the edge to see that it was still sharp. It was. She would rather talk to the creature, but it did not seem like there was a chance to do so.

Trontasora was her name. Amanda wondered who she would be. She would probably find out today. Maybe there would be a conversation. This would be different than a brusque conversation between a woman and a man who wanted to air some stuff he had on his chest. Manny liked to say what was on his mind and he liked to make a joke, he was impressed by irony, but now things were different that he was Amanda.

He had reached the upper areas of the trail and was happy that his feet were not

hurting. Amanda started looking for a structure where Trontasora would reside. There were some trees at the top here and some stony outcrops. There was probably a cave out there somewhere.

Amanda walked into the rocky outcrop and decided to yell for her.

“Trontasora, where are you? Come out.”

Amanda decided to walk further and try again.

“Come out Trontasora.”

Amanda heard a loud sound and suddenly there was a large form before her.

Trontasora was three times as tall as her with a large face and scary teeth. There even was some paint on her face. She walked with a limp, but the ground shook below her. There was a pained and angry look on her face.

“Who are you?” the giant asked angrily.

“I am Amanda. I am here to set things right.”

“Oh, really? So thought I.”

“What?”

“Did you ever think about how Giants were treated?”

Amanda was surprised that she was taking this tactic with her. She might not have talked to a man this way.

“You eat people with that painted mouth of yours,” Amanda said.

“There used to be more of us. We were spread all out over these islands.”

“You are vile.”

“We were hunted. You never have been hunted despite your pretty dress.”

“You caused chaos here.”

“I was widowed and not understood.”

“Sorry about that Trontasora. It has turned you vile.”

“Who are you to talk with me about this?”

Amanda pulled out her sword, which shone in the sunlight.

“I am here to protect the island. I am here to restore the monarchy.”

“I demand chaos,” said Trontasora.

“Life does not give us everything we want.”

“Nor does death,” Trontasora said. She picked up a large rock and threw it at Amanda, who stepped out of the way in time.

“Stop that,” said Amanda. “Let us talk further.”

Maybe there is a way to stop this she thought. Amanda had an idea. Maybe if she decided not to eat people she could live in peace on the island with other people.

“Before this turns into bloodshed I have an idea.”

“What if I have an idea?” said the Giant.

“I will hear your out.”

“I don’t have one yet, but I may.”

“If you eat me things are not going to change here.”

“What if I don’t want them to change?”

“What if you give up eating people?” asked Amanda.

“What will I eat?”

“Livestock, food off the trees, vegetables from the farm.”

“Who will give those to me?”

“Why if you provided some service to the island they could be given to you as a tribute. You could also grow your own food and keep your own cows.”

“I ate them because they hated me.”

“You acted out your anger, but you are not alone here. I could probably make an arrangement with the Mayor and his next of kin.”

“What will I get?” asked Trontasora.

“You will get a home. You will need to help protect the island if necessary. Otherwise we might need to duel,” Amanda put the sword in its sheath. “You will also have to stop breaking things.”

“What do you get from this?”

“It will be a peaceable kingdom for me. I can barter the peace and then I might be out to sea for more adventures. Come with me now to the Inn to make the peace. There is someone special I would like you to meet. I don’t think you would mind listening to him. He is innocent and still worthy of being cooked for.”

“It is a good thing they sent a woman to do this. I would not have listened to a man.”

“I think you will listen to this child. His island was ruined, but you can save it. His father will cook for you also if you stop wrecking the place.”

Amanda realized that there were things that a woman could just do better.

Amanda did not know what was next after this or what to think, but she could not think about it now....

## The New Apartment

by

Holly Day

The tiny lizard runs up the wall, disappears into a dark corner driven in by the rain. I contemplate getting up finding the lizard and putting it back outside but decide to be charitable, let it stay inside.

Weeks later, I find its desiccated corpse curled into a fetal knot behind the moving boxes trapped, perhaps, by the cat, or dead from the heat I pick it up by its brittle tail and toss it outside wonder why so many of my kind acts

end in tragedy. .