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The Secret Sauce

By Angela Rolph

Day broke; the sun shone like a beacon on the island of Sicily, Italy, where a little pizzeria, known as The Little Joy, shone with a radiance all its own. The townspeople moved with one fluid motion like a river that sifted throughout time. Each morning they prepared their business shops for tourists, local and abroad. The crowds jumped like huge trout when they mated.

 The Little Joy was no exception. You had to get up earlier than the crack of dawn to fool its two co-owners, Francesca Ramona, and Cecil Panesco. They had been chefs together and part co-owners for five, long years. They both bid on a seedy rundown building because they dreamt of making it world-renowned with their pizza skills. They didn’t count on sharing the limelight. Neither one had the heart to buy the other out, so they compromised. Their characters never blended well together. However, they had the dynamic selling power of peanut butter and jelly. Their skills were more potent as one, like a tantalizing double glass of red wine.

 Francesca was thirty-two years old. She was short and thin as a rail. Francesca had long, sleek, black hair. She was as attractive as an old Hollywood movie star, and she was always clean. She was an entitled woman. Francesca was lazy and didn’t like to work for her money. She wanted everything to be handed to her on a silver spoon. She was wealthy, and she loved to flaunt it around town. When she didn’t work, she could be seen as she strutted like the model Tyra Banks in name-brand everything. She had a small inheritance, and she didn’t let anyone forget that she was classy and sassy.

 Cecil Panesco was Francesca’s co-owner. He was a diligent worker. Cecil was a charismatic and attractive, wealthy 59-year-old Italian man, who was a native of Sicily, Italy. He had black, curly hair and brown eyes, and was well-groomed. Both co-owners spoke Sicilian heritage and were Roman Catholic. They both grew up going to Pagan myth and religious events-including country fairs. Some of the events they went to were Easter, Carnival, and the Patron Saints Day feasts. He was a hard worker who loved to make pizza but didn’t always enjoy his business partner, Francesca. He was envious of her because she always had fewer duties than him and she made him do most of the work. He had a work-for-everything-you-earn mentality, even when you were wealthy.

 Ignacio Fontelli was fifty-five years old. He was a tall, heinous, heavy-set man. He had black hair and dark black eyes. He was a filthy man and kept a repulsive hut that had bacteria over every surface. He grew up in Sicily, Italy. He had a criminal and psycho-personality trait. Ignacio used to be Roman Catholic. He quit the church when he was ten years old. He did not attend the Sicilian festivals and feasts anymore. He denounced his religion at an early age. Both his parents died after they were killed like savages by a house thief. Ignacio was the only one who survived. Most of his hate and distrust came from his parents being murdered before his eyes on his mother’s birthday. He became homeless after that, and he turned to a life of crime. He watched the news for years about the pair’s fame and grew envious of their wealth throughout the years. He devised a diabolical plan to steal their sauce and fortunes.

 Francesca and Cecil created a name for their pizzeria, The Little Joy, with their world-famous secret sauce. The Little Joy had brought them great fortune and great fame. Their pizzas were always fresh and delectable. They had a unique flavor that many other pizzas lacked. People had given them rewards, and they were on the cover of every magazine and internet blog. They came to work each day and worked ten times harder. Cecil devoted himself to the day’s work, and Francesca rode piggyback on his hard work ethic.

 On June 12th, 2023, while Francesca and Cecil argued over how much of their sauce to garnish on one of their pizzas, the evil Ignacio cooked up his saucy plan. He sauntered into their threshold, and they both jumped out of their skin. Ignacio tried to make friends with Francesca while Cecil garnished a couple of warm, fresh-from-the-oven, pizzas. Francesca cut Ignacio a luscious slice of pizza and the smell infiltrated his nostrils. Ignacio raved about the taste of the sauce. It was sweet with a bit of tang. He asked her what the sauce recipe was. She wouldn’t tell him.

He said, “I must have the answer to this question anyway!”

 He stomped out of the threshold as if his boots combusted. Something broke in Francesca at that moment. Her instincts took flight to protect The Little Joy with her life like it was her baby. She would sever her right arm to save her business from going under. She gave Cecil a look. Cecil looked at her intensely.

 She looked at him as if he were a mind reader. Francesca arrived late to work on January 13th. As she stepped across the kitchen, she jumped ten feet her boot crunched down on Cecil’s outstretched arm on the cold ceramic tile. She crouched down and checked his head for blood stains; She sprinted to the kitchen to grab the smelling salts. The lavender scents wafted up to his nose. Cecil woke from his premature slumber in an instant. She guided him to the kitchen table. He felt his head with his unstable hand.

“That tile sure does pack a punch! A stranger passed by the door and threw in a stink bomb. He trapped me inside.”

 “He saw that I was going to pass out, and that’s when he ran in and started to trash the place. I know he looked for the recipe, but he couldn’t find anything. I blacked out after that,” said Cecil.

Francesca wailed like a newborn babe. She wrapped her arms around him like a tidal wave that first kissed its shore.

“He didn’t know that I kept a copy of the recipe in my chef’s hat. I’d like to see him find the other copy,” said Cecil.

Cecil cackled as loud as a rooster crow. Francesca pecked him on the cheek. He grinned and pointed again to his face. Francesca giggled like a child who eyed a brand-new lollipop. She then told him they would call the police.

 The police never showed up. They both searched for clues around their pizzeria for hours, like Scooby Doo, but they didn’t find anything. As they came back, they discovered a black felt fedora at their doorway. They took it down to the police station to have forensic analysis done. They found a hair on the inside lining of the hat. The police said it would take two weeks for the testing to come back.

 On June 14th, around 11 a.m., Francesca waited an hour for customers to call the pizzeria. She walked away from the phone when it rang passionately. A strange man, with a distorted voice, said,

“If you don’t give up your secret recipe, the Little Joy will be a pile of ashes,” said the man.

Ignacio sounded like the fuzzy, distorted end of a receiver.

Francesca said, “We will comply if you meet us around the back of the pizzeria in ten minutes.”

 Ten minutes came and went. The duo waited in the back lot like a cat who wanted to stalk out its mouse in the dead of night. They saw a dark figure in the distance who approached them without warning. The strange man’s face was masked. He demanded for them to hand over the recipe. He pointed the cold, metallic gun through his ratty trench coat.

Ignacio shouted, “Give it up or you’re dead!”

 Francesca snuck up behind him like a ninja and lunged for him. Ignacio ducked for cover like a spy with a mission. Francesca and Cecil raced back to The Little Joy to call the police again when they heard open fire behind them. They both ducked behind a large block of cement at breakneck speed. They heard the man flee on a large Harley-Davidson motorcycle, which whizzed by like a ball of thunder. They turned to each other and breathed a huge sigh of relief. The space around them was filled with their hot and heavy breaths, and they backed away from each other with their heads turned in disgrace. They ran to The Little Joy. After trying to squeeze each other out of the threshold, they landed on top of each other.

“We can’t keep bumping into each other like this,” said Cecil.

 Francesca said, “I have something I’ve been meaning to tell you.”

“It can wait until after this little disaster,” said Cecil.

 As soon as they got there, they realized they still didn’t have enough evidence to nail the man. Ignacio disguised his voice again.

 Francesca arrived at work early on June 15th.

“Cecil, I had a bizarre dream last night that we had been poisoned by someone today. The dream didn’t reveal who it was or when it happened.” Cecil stared, as he chopped his parsley. He stared at a package that was placed at the front door.

“It looks like someone has gifted us with a present, my dear.”

 Francesca raised one tall eyebrow in worry. She opened the box and saw the two wine bottles tucked away inside. There was also an Italian Crème Cake with a note. The note read, " Pizza is the best, put your service to the test, let's not forget the rest, the secret is in the sauce. -IF”

“Cecil let's put this wine to the test,” said Francesca.

 Francesca uncorked one bottle and poured it into the second kitchen to the plants on the windowsill. She poured the whole bottle on every plant. All the small plants wilted and died in sorrow before their eyes.

“All the evidence we need is in the fingerprints on this wine bottle. I bet he forgot to wipe them clean,” said Francesca.

 Francesca dialed the cops on their slim white cord telephone. As soon as the cops arrived, Francesca pointed to the wine bottles. The cops arrested Ignacio nearby because they recognized him from Francesca and Cecil’s outside security camera. After the cops left, Francesca grabbed Cecil’s face and planted a big, fat juicy kiss on his lips. They embraced until she let go of his shocked face.

“My dear, I did not know you had it in you! I no longer see the entitled little girl that I have worked with all these years. I see before me a grown woman who knows her mind. You’ve done so much in our aid to save The little Joy and you have become my little joy.”

“My chef it was always you, we’ve saved the store!” said Francesca.

“No, it was all you my dear,” said Cecil.

 Cecil grabbed Francesca’s hand and kissed it with a hunger from the depths of his soul. Francesca and Cecil gazed out their pizzeria window as Ignacio was hauled off as if he were a stray dog into the police car nearby. They both waved through the window and started to chortle amongst themselves.

“Who was that guy anyway? His motives were evident, but I didn’t think it was necessary to kill us off in the process,” said Francesca.

“Killers and psychos have no motives, my dear, or sense either,” said Cecil.

 The two decided to take a break from the kitchen and they joined some tourists who walked in the park. Francesca held Cecil’s hand and he rubbed hers gently in his. Cecil intertwined his muscular fingers into hers and squeezed her delicate ones. Soon after, they sat on a nearby park bench. They talked, for the first time about one another’s lives.

“Why do you think people love our sauce?” asked Francesca.

“My dear I only have one thing to say about that, and these are my final thoughts on the matter.” Francesca became beady-eyed as she stared at Cecil like a young girl who received a newborn kitten. Cecil leaned in and whispered in her ear.

“The secret has always been in the sauce!”

 Both laughed and smiled as they gazed into each other’s eyes with a newfound hunger for life, each other, and food. They headed back to the pizzeria.

“Let’s go get a gelato instead. I want to know what makes your engine fire up, my chef,” said Francesca.

“Pistachio gelato’s one of them my dear,” said Cecil.

 They spent the remainder of the day at a mom-and-pop gelato shop named Giuseppe’s Love and Ice Crème. The waiter served them pistachio and chocolate gelato. The lovebirds talked until it was almost nightfall. Francesca clung to his words like misty dew on the bean vine. His eyes were infused with hers; they fell for each other long ago. The two were glued to each other like a fly to honey. Both were unaware of the time. It stood still for them. Francesca’s watch buzzed for an alarm to close the pizzeria.

“It's nightfall, my chef; we’ve been away from our Little Joy all day. We’re awful business owners,” said Francesca.

“We can afford to be that way; we’re rich and now even richer because we’ve found one another,” said Cecil.

 Francesca grinned like she had been named the beauty queen of Italy.

“I can think of a place where no monsters can get us, my chef, unless there’s one hiding under the bed,” said Francesca. She kissed him as she shoved him out the door.

 The following day was June 16th. Francesca gingerly sat at the edge of her California king-size bed. Cecil snored like a freight train losing tracks in his sleep. Francesca was smitten. She adored this man for so long, and now he was hers. She would keep him forever, and she wouldn’t share with anyone. He was her chef, and she was quite proud of him and all their accomplishments together.

“My chef you have slept your alarm, for the first time!” said Francesca.

“I thought you were my alarm, my dear,” said Cecil.

“I may indeed bring you cause to alarm, baby. We must get moving,” said Francesca.

“Now you are the early one my dear, and I’m the lazy entitled one,” said Cecil. Francesca chuckled to herself.

“You’re full of yourself today, my loveliest,” said Francesca.

“No one could be any more lovely than you my little joy.”

 Francesca arrived at work ahead of Cecil. She felt joyous. Cecil walked in ten minutes late for a change. He walked like a proud rooster who was king of the walk. He got his instruments out of the cupboard, and he smiled like a Cheshire cat. The two love birds thought they were safe and secure. They had no idea how bad their day would get. Midway through the day they took a short break from work. Cecil held Francesca’s hand and kissed her with gusto. After Cecil was satisfied, he pulled away from Francesca.

“My dear, I have ruined your makeup,” said Cecil.

 Francesca giggled and headed to the bathroom to fix it. As she got there, she noticed the back door to the outside of the bathroom was cracked. She decided to go to the restroom first. After she was done, she opened the door, but it was jammed. A hand reached in and yanked her out onto the floor with a violent crack that sounded like a skull being shattered as it split the white tile. Two muscular hairy arms reached around her neck and tried to strangle her from behind. She gasped for air and cried out, but her voice was gone, like an old television that was muted on static. Her arms were dead weight as they hung stiff around her. Francesca’s feet kicked the cold white tile as her body struggled in vain. She felt her life force almost leave her like a flame being snuffed out. Cecil busted down the bathroom door and thrust Ignacio into the bloody white tiles. Blood leaked into every crack of the spotless bathroom tiles. He gave him an aggressive boot stomp to the nose. Cecil noticed the man was as still as a freshly frozen lake. He checked the back of his head, and it was bloodstained. Warm, deep red, thick blood ran into the cold, white tile cracks. The mysterious man was stone-cold dead. He was never to haunt them again. He would no longer hurt Francesca on his watch; no one would again. His little joy had become the love of his life, and he would die to protect her from that moment on.

 Cecil scooped Francesca in his arms like a little child and ran out to his Fiat. He obeyed no traffic laws in his plight for Francesca’s safety.

“Ti Amo, I love you and I always shall. Please don’t leave me, not now, not ever.”

 Cecil spent two days by Francesca’s hospital bedside. He told the nurses to go as he would take care of her for the rest of her stay. He doted on her night and day. He didn’t sleep for two days. His mind was tormented as he watched her sleep and remembered how he almost lost her. He took a vow from that point on. He would always be devoted to her, in every sense of the word, from now until forever.

 On June 19th Francesca checked herself out of the hospital, and the two headed to Francesca’s secret vault at her high-secure bank in Ireland. They went inside the bank and headed up to the bank teller. He told them someone had broken into her vault. The teller told them it would take a year to recover Francesca’s money, if at all.

“It's time to pickpocket a dead man today, my chef,” said Francesca.

“Good thing we stuffed the poor sap in the deep freezer next to our secret sauce, my little joy,” said Cecil.

 Cecil chuckled like the cat that swallowed the canary. The pair headed back home for a brand-new life together. Around 11 a.m., Francesca fell asleep as her hand slipped out of Cecil’s.

“Cecil,” she moaned in her sleep.

 As he trekked the lengthy drive, he knew his drop-dead gorgeous bride was already beside him, forever. A lifetime of new adventures awaited them.