

The rube at the Garden.

Inspired in part by Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Rappaccini's Garden."

AGENT JOHN Ruben's two new friends, Peter Baglioni and Nate Wilson, took him to the Garden for a beer and a few laughs. All three were agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and all three wore dark sport jackets. Agent Ruben had recently finished training in his hometown and was newly assigned to the Detroit office. He was looking forward to some fun after work.

The full name of the Garden was Rappaccini's Garden, after the owner, but nobody called it that except the police and the prosecutor. The flashing neon sign over the door simply read "BAR." It was on Third Avenue. Parked in front of the door were a late model Cadillac and a silver 1979 Anniversary Edition Corvette. The Garden faced west, so on a sunny day in the late afternoon, whenever anyone opened the door, sunshine slashed through the smoky interior. The floor was cracked linoleum on which sat tables fit for a cafeteria.

"Thanks for taking me to a high class joint! What do you call this style? Detroit Industrial?" Agent Ruben laughed at his own joke. Agent Baglioni, the oldest and most jovial of the three, returned the quip. "It's on us!"

They passed a shuffleboard table and found seats in back next to a pinball machine and a Top 40 juke box. Blondie's "Call Me" filled the bar. Agent Ruben wobbled the table.

"There sure are a lot of women here," Agent Ruben observed. "I think I'm going to like Detroit."

Written by K.G. Jones.

© 2020. For copyright permission, go to [codelldetroitfiction.com/about](http://codelldetroitfiction.com/about)

“They’re the flowers in the Garden,” Agent Wilson said, and winked.

The waitress came over. She was as wide as the shuffleboard table and waddled when she walked. “What can I get for you,” she said. Her voice said, don’t mess with me.

Agents Baglioni and Wilson ordered drafts. Agent Ruben asked, “can I start with water and a menu?”

“We don’t serve water. Don’t have a menu.”

“No menu? I never heard of that one!”

This isn’t a restaurant. You have to order a drink if you want to sit here.”

“Really? Guess I’ll have a Schlitz if you got that in a bottle.” The waitress left.

“That reminds me of a joke,” said Agent Baglioni. “What do you call 24 naked women upside down in a box?”

“Case full of slits!” said Agent Wilson. They told a few more jokes until the waitress returned with their beers.

“Three bucks for the drafts. Two for the bottle.”

“One fifty for a Schlitz?” asked Agent Ruben. “Are you kidding?”

“Big city prices,” said Agent Wilson, putting down a five spot. “We got you covered.”

“You’re not from around here,” the waitress told Agent Ruben.

“Oklahoma City. My first week here.”

“You?” she asked the other agents.

“Detroit.”

“Oohhh.” The corners of her mouth turned, and you couldn’t tell if it was a grin or a grimace. “Oh, I see.” To Agent Ruben she said slowly, “welcome to Detroit. I’ll make sure you have a welcoming committee.” Agents Baglioni and Wilson laughed heartily.

The waitress went behind the bar and Agents Baglioni and Wilson got up to play some pinball. Agent Ruben quaffed his expensive cheap beer and took it all in. He hardly had a start on the Schlitz before three women came their way. The all wore dresses and matching heels. Up close, it was clear that their youth flowed from bottles and tubes. Two of them sauntered up to Agents Baglioni and Wilson at the pinball machine. The third repositioned a chair next to Agent Ruben and sat down. “Big Beatrice,” she said, indicating the waitress, “thought you might like some company. Care if I join you?” She smiled and glanced at his crotch.

“Please do!”

The two women near the pinball moved close to Agents Baglioni and Wilson. The woman sitting next to Agent Ruben became more familiar with him as well. She had adventurous hands.

Agent Ruben made small talk with her. Amidst him telling her about the corn in Oklahoma, the woman pulled her hands back from his leg, and the smile dropped from her lips like rose petals. “Powder room” was all Agent Ruben heard as she abruptly left

her seat. On her way she said something to Big Beatrice. The other two women also headed for the powder room. Agents Baglioni and Wilson sat back down with Agent Ruben.

“These women sure are friendly!” Agent Ruben said. His friends exploded in a paroxysm of laughter.

“What’s so funny?” Agent Ruben looked around. All the women in the bar had disappeared. Only Big Beatrice remained, her head down, nonchalantly wiping the bar.

“That is so strange,” he said, looking right and left. “Where’d all the ladies go?”

“John,” said Agent Wilson. “Are you wearing your piece?”

“Yeah. Why?”

“On your leg?”

“Yeah. Is that a problem?”

“Not for us, but it is for them. She found it, that woman with you.”

Agent Ruben looked perplexed.

“She told the waitress. The waitress let everyone else know. We put them out of business.”

“At least while we’re here,” snickered Agent Baglioni.

John Ruben huffed. “I don’t understand what’s going on.”

“C’mon, Rube, get with it!” Agent Baglioni said. “Why do you think they all left? It’s not like whores go on strike in a recession!”

#