

Cuisine

by Aaron Mancuso

FIVE YEARS AGO

UnitedHealthcare CEO Brian Thompson was killed on December 4, 2024, in New York City.

The shooting happened around 6:45 a.m. near the New York Hilton Midtown, where Thompson was set to attend an investor meeting. Authorities say a masked gunman shot him several times in what they're calling a "brazen, targeted" attack.

DINNER

She had invited her boss, Matt, to dinner.

She sat next to him, smiling intently, though, to her, it was just another meal. A week's stay was perfect—just enough time. Her plans were in place. The husband is blissfully ignorant. The ultimate revenge. She was glad she was considered beautiful, straight from Japan, with elegant,

soft features. You couldn't tell if she was mad or happy. She missed her though. The endless upon endless nights thinking about her. The sweet child, now gone from her life forever.

The anger, the constant nightmares, her daughter dying—bones frail, eyes wide with fear. Yuri could still see herself sitting there, by the hospital bed, powerless. Back then, she didn't have a great job, and no education to fall back on. And after Ellen died, she blamed them. The evil corporations. The system.

Oh, the hate had festered, growing like a sickness inside her. She had to do it. She just had to. Her mentors would agree. She and her brother's plan was coming together like a Lego set, each piece falling into place with perfect precision. The table was quiet, the man's children downstairs, playing in the game room—elegantly designed like a child's fantasy: arcade machines, free soda, and a closet full of toys. Possibly hundreds of them. The CEO of Karmack Health Insurance Company—newly established in 2024—didn't realize that his two children wouldn't ever leave the mansion.

“How is it? I told the chef to cook every day this week while you're here. Are you sure, um—”

How gullible some men are, Yuri thinks.

In his mind, she was just some foreigner from Japan. Little did he know, she was perfectly fluent in English. She had pretended for five years—the one who killed her baby girl, her first child. Denied. Denied.

“Yes. Gorgeous baby. Can't wait to eat and go upstairs.”

“Oh, baby. So excited. In Japan, it’s an honor to have sex with someone of your status. I’m glad my butler can take care of your kids while you stay. Amazing how she thought you were going to Disneyland! I hope I’m... I’m not doing anything, you know, wrong?”

“Oh, babe. Not at all. A lot of men do this,” Matt replied.

He was a bit overweight now, once a handsome devil in his youth, perhaps. She didn’t know—and didn’t care—what this evil man looked like. The last meal would be the true test. The real question was: Could her brother do the deed?

BASEMENT

Jay rubbed his shining, balding head. His Japanese features mocked him from all three mirrors in the game room. Soon, they’d be moved into the back room.

Everything—the arcade machines, the soda dispensers, the gigantic television—had been set up to put the kids at ease.

But the back room told a different story.

A kitchen waited there. A secret one. Unknown to the monster upstairs—the CEO of Karmack Health Insurance.

The same company that had denied Ellen, his sister’s firstborn.

After she was diagnosed with cancer, they refused a claim that could have saved her life. Without it, she never got proper treatment.

He remembered standing beside the hospital bed, Yuri weeping, the little girl already fading.

That poor girl, he thought.

It was a different time now.

Evil had a way of ending itself—sometimes through lethal means.

“Woah. Look at that, Danny!” the oldest brother exclaimed.

“Mortal Kombat!” Danny replied, his excitement noticeable.

A row of arcade machines lined the wall—each one part of Jay’s personal collection.

The stereotype might’ve fit him, he supposed, but his Japanese background had nothing to do with his love for fighting games. Mortal Kombat was one of his favorites, and he felt a twinge of sadness knowing he couldn’t enjoy the fun with these kids.

But he’d made a promise to his sister.

The anger still burned deep—the injustice, the abuse of power, the bottomless wealth that shielded the guilty.

They were rich now, too, but they’d earned it honestly.

He and Yuri lived together under one roof: a two-million-dollar mansion with exquisite amenities—a true Victorian masterpiece.

They’d come a long way from the life they’d left behind in Osaka.

Back then, they were poor, forced to leave loved ones behind in pursuit of something better.

Now, both were successful accountants.

But this mission wasn't about success.

This was for Ellen—and for everyone who had died under the cruelty of the American healthcare system.

Jay was one of the best accountants in New York City, though he now lived on the outskirts in a gorgeous Victorian mansion perched on a hill—just thirty minutes from the Big Apple.

Outside of work, he had plenty of hobbies to keep him busy.

Today, however, he was known simply as the butler.

He chuckled at the thought.

By the end of the week, he was confident the meal he planned to prepare would be perfect for the CEO.

She and Jay both worked for Karmack Health Insurance Company—they'd had a plan all along.

Even their education and careers had been shaped by the memory of the little girl who had died but didn't have to.

This plan had been years in the making.

And now, their chance had finally come.

Yuri was an accountant too, and they both excelled with numbers. “Not the typical Asian stereotype at all,” Jay joked to himself.

“Son of a bitch,” he whispered, his thoughts consumed by Matt upstairs—a real pig of a man. A real piece of shit.

The children didn’t hear him. The youngest, he assumed, sat on a beanbag, engrossed in the PlayStation 5 hooked up to a massive ninety-inch Vizio. The display was breathtaking as the boy played God of War. The other two were huddled around the Mortal Kombat arcade machine, their laughter and cheers filling the room.

At least they could enjoy the last fleeting moments of their childhood, he thought bitterly, wishing Yuri’s daughter could have experienced this same breathtaking environment. What a shame.

Jay didn’t look nervous—not at all—but inside, he sure as hell was. He knew the consequences, knew the risks, but it had to be done. Their mentors would have agreed. CEOs were terrible people, all of them, and the world would be better off if they were wiped from the planet. But this man—this evil creature—was going to pay dearly for what he’d done. No one let one of their own die the way Ellen had. She shouldn’t have.

Everything is perfect.

“Kyle! Come check this out! Mortal Kombat! Look, see!?” Henry, the oldest, yelped with excitement.

Three boys:

Oldest – Henry

Middle – Danny

Youngest – Kyle

Jay was getting to know their names. By the end of the week...

...their names would mean nothing.

Not anymore. Not much was in store for them.

The feast went exactly as planned. On the evening of Thanksgiving 2029, the CEO of Karmack Health Insurance Company unknowingly ate his children. The back room—the hidden kitchen—had been made for one purpose: to cook them.

“I’ve never had stuffing like this before. This is amazing!” he’d said, savoring every bite.

Little did he know—until it was too late—that something else was in that stuffing.

Something close to him.

As close as Ellen had been to Yuri and Jay.

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