

This piece was a featured story in the 'Further Confusion' 2016 convention book. The theme of the convention was a 1950's Classic American Diner. This was definitely the first time I've ever tried to write on that subject!

A Burger By Any Other Name

by: *Kilted Jackalope*

In all her years of being a waitress, Sheila had seen any number of strange requests and odd proclivities of her customers. Squirrels tended to order too much coffee for their own good; raccoons rarely ever used silverware and preferred to eat with their hands; pandas took forever looking over the menu but always ordered a salad; and foxes tended to be more interested in flirting than eating.

Being a fox herself, she felt she was more than clever enough to deal with most anything that walked into the diner. However, on this particular day that sentiment would be put to the test thanks to a group of gazelles and another table of wolves who just happened to be seated next to one another.

Sheila had only just greeted the gazelles and asked to take their drink order when the craziness started.

"We were wondering why you do not have a section specifically for meat-eating customers."

The fox waitress grinned and laughed off the comment. "Oh, shucks – ya'll don't have to sit nowhere special. I'll bring you whatever you want to eat no matter where you're at. Now, what'll ya have?"

"No, no. Not us. Them," The perturbed gazelles gestured to the table of wolves seated beside them. "We don't want to have to be exposed to their secondhand meats. It's well known that the presence of 'peripheral meat' is very detrimental to those with - uh, shall we say - more civilized palettes."

The waitress stared, perplexed at this while one of the wolves leaned over and smirked, "Hey, there's no need to worry. It was probably no one you know." The rest of the wolves howled and laughed.

Sheila quirked one eyebrow and forced a smile. "Well it's like this - see, we're all full up and it's pretty crazy in here what with all the folks wantin' lunch and all. So, how 'bout ya'll just ignore the wolves and just tell me what I can bring you from the kitchen. Bert's a right fine cook and he'll fix you up right!"

The gazelles shot looks of disgust at the rowdy wolves and sighed, "Fine. Whatever. Just tell them to keep their disgusting carnage confined to their area. So, we'd like to hear what you

have for vegetarian entrées. Do you have hummus? Or perhaps some squash risotto? Oh, some pissaladière would be delightful. We'll just take one of each of those."

Sheila popped her gum and flicked her ears. "Hon, take a look at the menu. We've got Burgers, Hot Dogs, Fries, Coleslaw, and Salads. Oh, and ice cream floats too! Now tell me which of those sounds good to you?"

The gazelle looked down her nose at the waitress and shrugged. "I'm sure your head chef will have no trouble at all making any of the things we requested. Why not ask him to try anyway?"

The table of wolves proved to be no better at understanding the menu than the gazelles did. Several wolves all spoke at once, peppering her with all manner of questions.

"So this meat you have – is it free range? Was it raised on corn or grass? Is it real Kobe beef or some cheap knockoff? Do you use hormone infused beef or is it all natural? Was the pasture GMO-free and are pesticides used? Is there an ultra-lean option since I'm trying to slim down for bikini season? It is gluten free, right?"

The fox stared back in disbelief, waiting for them to quiet down. "So... that'd be burgers all around, right?" Without waiting for a response, she scribbled down the order and disappeared off to the back.

Sheila slapped the tickets on the kitchen counter and cried, "Order up!" while ringing the bell. A large bear paw reached over and grabbed the tickets. She waited patiently for the inevitable and a few seconds later, a bear wearing an apron and a confused look stuck his head out.

"Are you kidding me? 'Free range, non-hormone, organic, fat free, all natural, no pesticide, corn fed, grass raised beef' and just what exactly is 'gluten-free, squash... hummus with' - okay, I can't even pronounce that last one. Is this some sort of actual food or am I going crazy? Someone actually tried to order all this nonsense?"

Sheila nodded. "You know how the owner is about the customer being right and all. Hey, that's what they told me and I wrote it down. All I said was I'd see if you could accommodate. Don't go gettin' your apron in a bunch, I'll go back out there and tell 'em - again - all we got is..."

Bert grumbled and snatched the tickets back up. "Don't bother. And don't say nothin' except the cook is preparing something special just for them."

Sheila looked worried. "Are you sure?" Bert shot her a serious look that meant 'get out of my kitchen' and off she went to refill glasses with a smile.

After several minutes of anxious anticipation, the kitchen doors flew open with a clang and a metal cart filled with covered plates came rolling out. Quiet filled the diner. Everyone stopped

and stared at the sight of the rather large bear wearing a neatly pressed chef's coat and slicked back fur strolled out of the kitchen pushing the cart. Sheila couldn't help but notice that whatever Bert had slicked his fur back with smelled oddly of bacon grease. He positioned the cart in between the two tables and started with the group of wolves.

"Gentlemen. Today I present you with one of our finest signature dishes. Minced 'eye of round' that has been seared and lightly seasoned. It is garnished with a hint of salad fixins and served warm on a toasted yeast-and-flour roll. It is complimented with a serving of julienned 'Yukon Gold' tubers."

Having laid out all of the plates on the first table, he then turned to the gazelles and continued his ostentatious display. Sheila stifled a giggle at his performance.

"For mademoiselles, I have prepared the finest, rich assortment of hand-tossed sprigs of chopped greenery from around the country. It is highlighted with roots, berries, nuts, and bathed in a spiced 'Oil de Elaia' from a Grecian recipe."

Having left the two tables speechless, Bert retrieved the final two large covered plates and placed one on each table.

"And to top everything off, I have prepared my signature dish: Russet strips lightly seared in oil, seasoned, and garnished under a blanket of Wisconsin's finest fermented curd, and a beef au jus reduction sauce. It is guaranteed to fill you with a powerful feeling that the Spanish call, 'Aroma del baño'."

The bear took a large bow to each table and left them to their meals. Both tables began to curiously lift the covers off the plates, murmuring to each other, and all asking if anyone had any idea what he had just said.

Sheila followed Bert back into the kitchen with her paws clasped firmly over her muzzle to keep from laughing out loud.

"Oh, you are too wicked! What exactly did you make for them anyway? What is 'minced eye of round, lightly seasoned on a yeast roll' anyway?"

The bear smirked and tossed the chef's coat off to the side and retrieved his apron. "Burgers with a side of fries. Oh, and the gazelles all got salads with olive oil dressing. And the last one? My favorite: Chili cheese fries!"

Sheila peeked through the swinging door and smiled. "Well, from the looks of things they seem to love it. I guess it really is true what they say - *Haute Cuisine* is just 'grub' with a fancy name."