

Waiter From Hell

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Remember when eating out was a relaxing experience? Someone else cooked for you, served you and cleaned up after you. All you had to do was chew, swallow and pay. No longer, though. Today you feel like a laboratory rat that has to struggle through a maze every time it wants a chunk of cheese.

"Good evening," the maitre d' said.
"Table for four?"
"Yes, thank you."
"smoking or non?"
"Nonsmoking."
"Would you prefer to dine indoors or outdoors this evening?"
"I guess indoors would be good." "Very well, sir," he said, "Would you like to be seated in the main dining room, the enclosed patio or our lovely solarium."
"Uh, let me see ... uh ... "
"I can give you a table with a lovely view in our lovely solarium."
"I think the solarium would be lovely," I said. We followed him there.
"Now, would you prefer a view overlooking the golf course, the sunset on the lake or the majestic mountains to the west?"
"Whatever you recommend," I said. Let him make a decision for a change, I thought.

He sat us by a window facing the golf course, the lake or the mountains. I couldn't tell which because it was dark outside.

Then a young man better dressed and better looking than any of us presented himself at our table. "Good evening my name is Paul, and I'll be your waiter this evening. Would you like a few minutes before I take your order?"

"No," I said. "I'm just a meat-and potatoes guy, so I'll have the filet mignon and a baked potato."

"Soup or salad?"

"Salad."

"We have a mixed-green salad, hearts of palm or a very fine endive salad with baby shrimp."



"Just a mixed-green salad, okay?"
"Whatever you say, sir. Dressing?"

I didn't want to make another decision.

"Whatever you've got will be fine."

"We have creamy Italian, blue cheese, vinaigrette, Thousand Island Honey Dijon, Ranch."

"Just bring me one. Surprise me."

"Creamy Italian is our house specialty.

Would that be all right, sir?"

"Yeah." I was curt. I was done with civility.

"And your baked potato ... "

I knew what was coming. "I just want the baked potato dry, you understand? I don't want anything on it."

"No butter? No sour cream?"

"No."

"No chives?"

"No! Don't you understand English?" I shouted. "I don't want anything on it. Just bring me a baked potato and a steak."

"Would you prefer the six-, eight-, or 12-ounce steak, sir?"

"Whatever." "Would you like that rare, medium rare, medium, medium well or well done? Or, if you prefer, we can butterfly it for you."

"Pauly Boy," I said, "you are really starting to get me steamed."

"Which brings up the vegetables, sir. Would you like steamed broccoli, creamed corn, sautéed zucchini, diced carrots-"

That did it. I threw my napkin to the floor, stood up, put my face right in his arrogant kisser and said, "How'd you like to settle this outside?" "Fine with me, sir. Would you prefer the parking lot, the side alley or the street in front of the restaurant?" "I prefer right here," I said, and sucker-punched him. He ducked, then countered with a left hook right under my eye. It was the first time all night he hadn't offered me a selection. I collapsed semi-conscious into my chair, as someone in authority rushed over and berated Pauly.

I felt my tie being loosened, my collar unbuttoned, hands slapping my face. When I regained my senses, I saw the very concerned maitre d' right in front of my nose. He apologized and offered to buy me a drink, call the paramedics - what I wanted. "No, no," I said. "I'll be all right. Just bring me a glass of water."

"Yes, sir, right away," he said, "Would you prefer imported mineral water, sparkling water or club soda with a wedge of lime?"