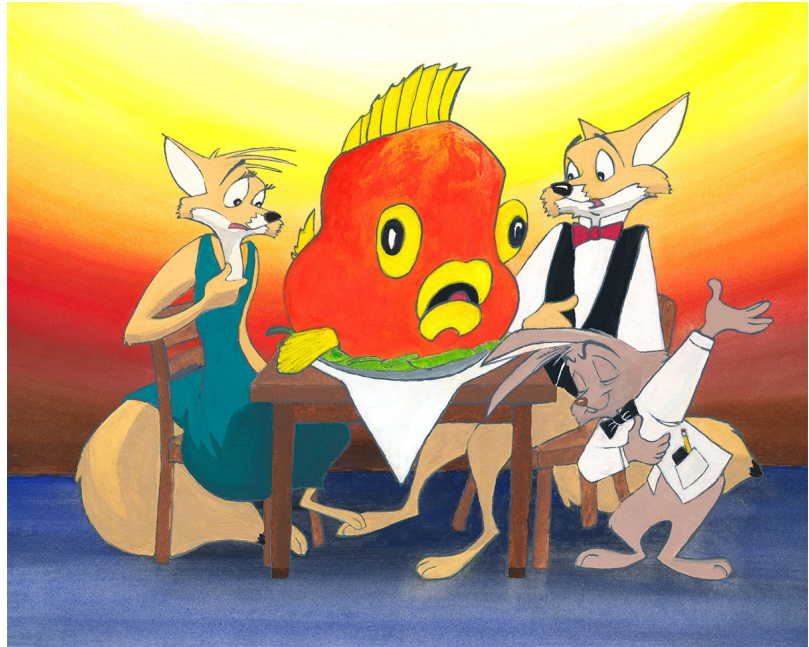


Kit and Kitty in Love – Intimate Life Flash Fiction Series by W.C. Fielstra

Entry 5: Order Something Exotic

Ordering something a little exotic and getting a trifle more, quite the surprises just a little daring can bring.



It was a long drive across town and it took a few passes at a confusing new interchange before we finally came on the old country club restaurant by the golf course.

Pulling up to park, we saw the old signboard was still there, announcing *the Bramble's Thorn at the 19th Hole*, but it was accompanied by a smaller sign proclaiming, "Under New Management." The parking lot was near empty, only three other cars, and it was tough to tell if they belonged to the guests or staff.

Kitty and I looked at each other with questioning expressions.

"We'll, it's not quite as I remember," said Kitty.

"You think it's still formal night?" I asked.

"I'm wondering if its even a night - like even open, the webpage says it should be."

"There are some lights on back there."

"We're here at least, let's give it a try."

We locked the car and walked up to the door. The main door was shut but unlocked, we opened it easy enough, only to find an empty foyer waiting on us and another sign saying, "Please Wait to be Seated."

We waited...and waited.

I finally called out, "Hello!"

All was silent.

Kit and Kitty in Love – Intimate Life Flash Fiction Series by W.C. Fielstra

"Hello!"

"Maybe we shouldn't press our luck." said Kitty.

Just then, a small rabbit in a white jacket looked out through the separation in a curtain that covered what seemed to be a hallway leading to another room.

"Ah, customer!" He disappeared again and next we heard. "Mr Claywood, Mr. Claywood! We have customer!"

We heard some faint commotion in the background, something about the ninth inning and a full hand, then an older feminine voice nagging something about, "I told you so! Get on out there!" then a set of footsteps, and a grumpy male voice saying, "I know, I know!"

"Ah, good evening, your reservation?" From behind the curtain came an old ox finishing off the last strokes of a half Windsor knot on his well crinkled tie.

"We need a reservation?" I asked.

"No, no, I'm certain we can find you a table." replied the ox.

"No, no, table no problem...cook problem. Please come, this way, this way, this way," said the little rabbit.

"Cook problem?" I asked.

"No, no, no, problem, our second *sous chef* left, ah, called in sick you know, but the rest of our staff is whipping up a delightful spread for your enjoyment this evening," said the ox with an air of confident stuffiness.

"Please come, please come, you want table for two?" asked the rabbit.

"Ah yes," Kitty replied.

"No problem, you have dining room for two!" exclaimed the rabbit as he gestured us to follow him through the curtain.

"You sure this is a good idea?" I asked Kitty.

She answered, "Gee, I'd hate to disappoint the little guy, he even has the white tux you asked for!"

The little rabbit lead us through a dark and deserted dining room to a table against the wall, but in clear view of a large picture window opposite the entrance. He blew some dust off the table and hurriedly wiped the tableware, before pulling back a chair and motioning Kitty to take a seat. For her part, Kitty gasped and held her breath, she wrapped her new gown about her legs and tail, dusted the seat with her hand, and settled into the chair.

Next, the little rabbit went about turning on some soft orange lights and then scrambled for some matches to light the candles.

"Well, at least its quite..." remarked Kitty uneasily.

"Do you think my tie will make me stick out in this crowd?"

"Mangi!" Came a loud scream from the kitchen.

Kit and Kitty in Love – Intimate Life Flash Fiction Series by W.C. Fielstra

“Excuse please!” The little rabbit ran back to the kitchen and disappeared behind a set of swinging double doors.

We heard some broken shouting from the ox we met earlier.

“The menu...refrigerator...I don’t know...Where is the list?... How?... Next week! Well, heat that up...Give me that pen!”

The little rabbit, returned with a single menu, which he gave us to share. As he handed the menu to us, he took a bow and said, “I am Mangi, and I will serve you tonight.”

Kitty and I were a little disquieted at the offer, but said thank you all the same.

Inside the menu, there was only a single hand written specials page.

Soup: Bean

Aperitif: Bread and Olive Oil

Entrees:

Sea Snails in Salted Garlic Butter

Seared Shrimp with Sea Salt

Baked Snapper Rouge

Fish burgers

Vegetables: Sauteed Leeks or Salad

Nut and Cheese Selection

Dessert Tray

“Looks a little limited,” observed Kitty.

“I think we need to be thankful that it’s something to eat.” I said.

“The bean soup and burgers seems a little out of place.”

“Maybe it’s leftovers from last night.” I speculated.

“Entree very good,” said Mangi. You two anniversary?”

“No, we’re not married,” we said in unison. Kitty going on to add.... “yet,” under her breath.

“Oh, I see, this no problem, I get you nice champagne - on house!” he said, cocking his head back toward the closed kitchen doors.

We both were feeling ever more ill at ease about the setup, but as Kitty and I looked into each others faces, we knew neither of us could let down our determined little waiter.

“That’s rather generous, is that OK?” I questioned.

Kit and Kitty in Love – Intimate Life Flash Fiction Series by W.C. Fielstra

“It no problem, it not be missed, boss cooks with lot of wine, sometime he even put some in food.”

Kitty smirked, “This could be interesting, let’s do it.”

I got the point, time to throw caution to the wind and enjoy the ride. I asked her, “What would you like?”

She looked at the menu with a mischievous glare, “The snapper rouge looks like a challenge, let’s give it a whirl.”

The little rabbit looked suddenly worried.

“Is there a problem?” I asked.

Mangi nervously said, “Oh, no, no problem, ah...take while drink champagne, you in soup, no problem. You like wine with fish?” he asked.

“What do you recommend?” I enquired.

“I get you red champagne maybe you try white wine?” proposed Mangi.

“Would you have a Pinot Grigio?” I asked.

“Probably, boss have everything, don’t worry you not like - he take care.” Mangi jotted down the order and headed back to the kitchen.

A few minutes later we heard more muted shouting from the boss, “Snapper!....Back freezer. I don’t know ... no it’s not bad yet. Where’s the corkscrew? Get that out of the microwave!”

Out of the shadows stepped a young girl rabbit with a pitcher of water, she looked a little like Mangi. She placed two large goblets on the table and filled them with ice water.

She was silent and I uneasily said, “Hi.”

She said only “Hi,” in return and went off to the shadows once more.

Mangi returned carrying a bottle under his arm and two champagne glasses on a tray. As he walked up to us, he set this collection on our table. The bottle quivered for moment, faltered, fell over, rolled, and then dropped right off the edge of our table, bouncing off the floor.

He gasped, “Oh my, not good sign for boss. So sorry.”

The girl ran out of the shadows and grabbed up the bottle to stop it from rolling further. She handed it back to Mangi. He said something to her in Chinese. She smiled and ran back to the shadows.

Kitty and I looked at the bottled worriedly.

I started to ask, “Is she your...”

“Ah yes, she is most precious one.”

Mangi took the wrapper from the cork and began to untwist the wire cover. Kitty and I looked worried. He then began to work the cork and we began to cower behind the cover of the table. Not wanting to be intruding, I asked, “Are you sure you ah....you want to do....”

Kit and Kitty in Love – Intimate Life Flash Fiction Series by W.C. Fielstra

Just then, the cork rocketed from the bottle top, its carbonated propellant streaming toward the ceiling and falling across the floor. The cork took a trajectory bouncing off the wall behind our table and grazing the light positioned over the next table, before hitting the next light beyond, shattering one of the electric bulbs and sending some shards of glass to the ground.

“Oh, that good one...nice and fresh!” Mangi grabbed the glasses and began to divide the bubbling contents between them, most of the foamy champagne spilling to the floor.

I was rather shocked, transfixed by the whole incompetence of the incident, but I looked up to find Kitty amused by Mangi’s antics, struggling to politely veil her entertainment. “Well, to us!” she pronounced, holding up one of the dripping glasses of red champagne to me.

I picked up the other overflowing glass and joined her in a toast, “to us.”

“May our every memory be ever so well accented,” she giggled, “I hope you have more good suggestions for nights out!”

Mangi left the nearly empty bottle with us and headed back to the kitchen. His daughter must have collected a broom and dustpan, for we heard someone who seemed to be cleaning up the remnants of the exploded light off in the shadows. More sounds of what seemed frantic activity, from our ox chef, drifted our way from the kitchen. “No, the big one!..Where’s my glass!....Whose ahead now?..... It’s over there....Get that out of here!”

Mangi returned with a tray, from which he served us two bowls of rather plain looking bean soup, a large loaf of bread, and a big dish of olive oil with garlic. The soup was notably unimpressive, and seemed to be at least a few days old. Kitty and I both opted to not press our luck and left it aside, focusing instead on the stale french bread and olive oil dip, which we took down with our champagne and water.

As soon as I took a sip from my water glass, Mangi’s daughter came out of the shadows, stepped up to the table, and topped off the glass, and again disappeared. Kitty took a sip from her glass with the same result a few minutes later. After several rounds of this, we began to notice the pattern. We knew we would not be alone, our every action was being observed, at a distance, by the attentive girl.

We kept our conversation light, focusing on the meal and the surroundings. Soon, it became a bit of a game, we took a sip of water and out of the shadows she came to refill the glass. It brought a smile to our faces that she seemed to enjoy the overly dutiful interaction. She seemed to be seeking something to do. I tried to say something else to her, but she only smiled as she filled my glass once more and went off to her station in the shadows.

Mangi returned to check on us, looking rather visibly worried, but trying to keep an air of calm. “How everything?”

“Very well, thank you,” Kitty replied.

I took that as signal to not pry into what was taking place in the kitchen.

Mangi held up a bottle of Pinot Grigio to me and asked, “You like try?”

I could not tell one vintner from another, so simply and politely said, “Yes.”

Mangi’s daughter appeared again, this time with two wine glasses she set on the table, as her dad plucked a

Kit and Kitty in Love – Intimate Life Flash Fiction Series by W.C. Fielstra

corkscrew from his pocket and began to struggle with the bottle. She looked worried, but we all knew this one was not carbonated. She silently motioned to help him. Mangi said something to her in Chinese and she replied with a couple of words. Mangi handed her the corkscrew and he wrapped both of his arms about the bottle. She took the cork screw and in a few motions quick motions had it open.

Mangi filled the glasses and again left for the kitchen. Kitty and I let the contents set for the coming dinner. The wine glasses sat for a long while as the loaf of bread became smaller and the last of oil was wiped from the bowl. Kitty and I stuck to the champagne, finally finishing it off, and our conversation went from some bit of illogical nonsense over the origins of the five course meal to why nuts proceed desert. We steered clear of anything more substantial, as our water glasses remained constantly within two millimeters of overflowing, no matter how much we drank. Several washroom breaks later, our topped off and waiting wine glasses looking more tempting by the second, we heard a significant commotion in the kitchen.

“Mr Claywood.....Mr. Claywood, past time!” Then there was a moment of silence before, “Mr Claywood! What I do? Mr. Claywood!”

Seconds later, Mangi poked his head from the swing doors of the Kitchen and yelled in Chinese to his daughter. She responded and ran back to the kitchen. We then overheard the universal tone of panic in both their muffled voices.

After a few minutes, and some clanging of pans later, Mangi’s daughter came out of the kitchen to our table and began clearing everything but the cloth from the surface. She said in almost unintelligible English, “Dinner ready!” We were especially disconcerted when she picked up the wine glasses, tableware, and plates. She was effective, no doubt, but they do use plates and utensils in China right?

She ran back to the kitchen and disappeared again through the swinging double doors. Minutes later, she and Mangi came back through the doors carrying an enormous tray with something sprawled over it like a corpse on a litter, in seconds we knew what it was, as the consequences of Kitty’s daring order came to haunt us through rigor mortis but thoroughly baked eyes.

Sliding the big tray onto the table, Mangi stepped back, took a bow, and said “Bonee Patiee!”

Kitty looked ready to give up her bread and olive oil, I did not know where to start, without even a knife, plate, or napkin in sight. What to say that could be remotely diplomatic?

Mangi, panting from the excitement, still looked ready to please. Our silence was getting deafening. He opened with a shy, “You like?”

“Ah it’s not quite...” I struggled to reply.

“You no like?” his expression sank and so did our hearts, “Problem?”

“It’s a bit more than we were expecting,” said Kitty, holding down her appetizer, that was now acting as anything but.

“No problem, you take away leftover in box.”

“Mangi, I couldn’t fit the leftover in my little car, even if I could figure out how to take a serving!” I replied.

“Where’s the chef?” Kitty asked.

Kit and Kitty in Love – Intimate Life Flash Fiction Series by W.C. Fielstra

“Boss not well.” said Mangi.

That seemed obvious enough at that point. “What’s wrong with the boss?” I asked.

“Long cook and he not put much wine into food.”

“Oh dear, is he OK?” asked Kitty.

“He sleep well.” answered Mangi.

“Mangi we can’t....” I tried to say.

“No like?” he disappointedly interrupted.

“No, we would like something but not..uh...” began Kitty.

“Not big dead fish?”

“Yeah...” I added

“No cook....” said Mangi perplexed.

Then Kitty sweetly asked, “Mangi, what are you having for dinner tonight?”

“Ah, precious one cook *lard na* with shrimp,” he stopped to think a moment, “very good,” he interjected.

“Shrimp sounds like something we could handle,” I added, looking into the gigantic baked eye staring back at me.

“Do you have any left?” Kitty asked.

“No, but make more!” answered Mangi.

Kitty and I smiled at each other.

“Mangi, can we have some *lard na*?” I asked, looking at his daughter.

Mangi broke into a broad smile and called to his daughter in Chinese. They had a brief exchange, then both of them took the giant fish from our table and ran back to the kitchen.

Mangi returned with a bottle of Riesling and said, “Boss be OK and not want this in morning. It on house too.” The bottle had been opened already and partly drunk. Mangi grabbed some glasses from an adjoining table and filled them. Next, he gathered our plates, scrounged up a couple of bowls, and pulled two sets of chopsticks from his inside jacket pocket for us.

The clatter of pans crescendoed behind the swinging double doors. Mangi headed back to the kitchen and returned less than a minute later with two skewers full of shrimp and some sort of peanut sauce to go with them. Kitty and I hungrily took these down with the Riesling. The time began to fly.

After less than twenty minutes, Mangi brought forth two serving trays from the kitchen and set before us a large steaming kettle of rice and a big bowl of colorful shrimp and pepper filled *lard na*, garnished with some flower petals.

Kit and Kitty in Love – Intimate Life Flash Fiction Series by W.C. Fielstra

Kitty and I applauded and took to devouring the setting with our chopsticks, sniffing as the spices bit at our noses. We paired this with the Pinot Grigio of earlier and were delighted with the mix.

The nut plate never came, instead for dessert, we were given a small bowl of lychees and two tall mango shakes.

In the end we applauded and called out “Bravo! Bravo!”

Mangi beamed and went back to the kitchen to retrieve his daughter.

She had put on a pretty little white smock with an embroidered Asian collar. She smiled shyly, bowed, and took a courtsey.

Just then we heard someone call out from the hallway, “Is there anyone here?”

“Oh, forgot to turn on closed sign!” exclaimed Mangi, “Busy night!”

Mangi ran out to greet the callers and returned with two large families of Otters.

I picked up our check and left an oversize tip, while Kitty typed something into her mobile. I asked what she was up to and she said something about an Asian restaurant review page.

As we passed the new guests and Mangi, we said, “Try the *lard na*.”

Mangi looked at his tiring but proud daughter and said, “It very good.”

We checked the website a few weeks later and there was an all new menu, the place was called *the Blooming Lotus* and reservations were highly recommended. Mr. Claywood was listed as co-owner and manager of the wine cellar.