

Wilderness House Literary Review 13/2

David S. Atkinson

In the Interests of Flame-Broiled Disclosure

SUSAN ONLY HAD ANOTHER HOUR remaining in her shift at the Crawling Burger Maw. She could pass that time thinking about how she was going to shave the sides of her head later and dye the untouched parts emerald green. However, Greg, the assistant *manager*, hung out at the counter. That made one hour take forever—not that she wouldn't be at that crap job forever anyway.

"One number two, extra pickles," a sheep who approached the counter ordered. He wasn't bad, but a bit too cowboy.

"Care to try our new griller double-decker hotdog burger?" Susan asked with a minimal amount of feigned enthusiasm.

"Just the number two." The cowboy smiled.

"Seven forty-two."

"Sue," Greg whined after the cowboy sheep walked off with his meal, "you're supposed to upsell the new items. We need to push those if we're going to make our numbers."

Susan looked at Greg. Stringy hairs grew down his neck past where his bowl cut stopped, like always when it'd been more than a week since he got his haircut. Why didn't he shave that? It made him look like a candy-van man instead of *management*. There was no management in burgers anyway, not anyone who still worked a fryer any significant amount of time. Real management was always in a headquarters somewhere, suits and fancy, or at least rust and Bondo® free, cars. Store managers were conned worse than anybody else.

"I did, Greg."

"You've got to tell them, I mean really *tell* them. Sell it—make them want it like they've never wanted anything in their lives. Tell them, somehow, that they can't afford to live any longer without trying it."

Susan tried to keep just looking at Greg without hearing, but his inane words kept getting through. Didn't he think she'd have gotten a better job if she could do that kind of selling? Something with commission? The only ones that good at the Crawling Burger Maw were the ones who'd sold Greg on his job to begin with.

"Can I have a small fries and a vanilla Chiller?" a young sheep mother who'd walked up while Susan was turned asked. "Light on the salt?"

"If you want light on salt," Susan responded, facetious voice in full swing, "you ought to try our new griller double-decker hotdog burger. It has fifty percent less salt than getting both a hot dog and a burger because it's only one thing! Can't get much less salt than that without eating tempeh.

"Um, no thanks."

"Five twenty-five."

"Not like that," Greg yelled as soon as the sheep mother was gone.

Wilderness House Literary Review 13/2

Susan rolled her eyes. "None of that makes any difference! You have to tell them something they don't know about the burger, so they want it more. Don't just talk to be talking."

Though this was passing the time, Susan really needed this garbage to stop. She had to take this nuclear to get Greg to back down and go away, but what would be nuclear? Was there even anything that could get him to cease?

She waited for the next customer.

"Ah," she exclaimed as the sheep mother returned to the counter, "back to hear more about our new griller double-decker hotdog burger? I can imagine why, it being quite the culinary taste treat. What else combines the tenderest portions of both cows and pigs, that being the mouth and anal tissues, so almost no chewing is required? Could another food be blackened by scorching the same way so as to almost certainly kill any remaining parasites that the country's meat industry can't seem to eradicate? Combine that with a bun who's flour we so thoroughly and chemically bleach so absolutely no natural grain flavors interfere, instead entirely soaking up the mouth watering palate party of gristle and fat, how could you not desire it? Shall I fetch you several so the two-thousand calories each, without counting sauces, will make it so you won't need to eat again for several days at the earliest?"

The sheep mother blinked. Greg's jaw hung open.

"I only wanted some napkins. Your holder on the condiment bar is out."

"Oh. Of course. Here you go."

Greg was livid, sputtering. She needed to push him over the edge.

"What?"

He grabbed a swath of receipt paper and started frantically scribbling. "Tell them this! Tell them exactly this, nothing more, nothing less. Can you do that?" He tore off his insane note and threw it at her.

Precisely at that moment, an immense sheep waddled up to the counter and Susan handed him the note. Then she took his order. After he left, she turned to Greg.

"You should have made copies of that. Now I need another before the next customer comes in. Maybe you could just write it on the main doors so I don't even need to hand them anything. What do you think? It'd save paper. Remember the ecology thing in the core values section of the employee handbook."

Susan was guessing about the handbook. She didn't even remember if there was a core values section, but there probably was.

Greg fumed. "What time is your shift over?"

"Eight."

"It's eight now. Go clock out."

Susan smiled. She took off her dumb blue apron and stupid painted

Wilderness House Literary Review 13/2

paper cap. Then she wandered into the back, humming, to punch out and leave. It was over.

Greg watched her go before picking up the phone to headquarters, the red phone. "Sir, A-M-1390 here. Colfax location. We've got another one we'll need to transfer to *raw materials*...What? Oh, yes." Greg grinned. "She'll be a much more efficient employee as a griller double-decker hot-dog burger than as counter staff. I guarantee it."