

Employee of the Month

By: Donna Ison

Harold prided himself on being able to predict his customers' orders, down to the condiments, before they ever spoke. He assessed the man approaching the counter. With polo shirt and pressed khakis molded around muscle, he reminded Harold of an action figure.

Grilled chicken sandwich, side salad, and Diet Sprite.

The man stepped to Harold's register. He smelled of soap and spearmint.

"Welcome to Burger Bonanza, may I take your order?"

"Three double bacon cheeseburgers, four large fries, vanilla milkshake, and thirteen ketchups," the man answered in a deep, measured voice.

Perhaps Harold's inaccuracy could be attributed to the fact that he'd only been working at the downtown D.C. location for three months...still, he'd never been so far off.

Taken aback, Harold stood silent while the order was filled. He tossed the baker's dozen of ketchups into the already bulging bag, and muttered, "Come again, soon."

And, the man did. For the next month, during each of Harold's shifts, the man showed up, placed the same order, checked it thoroughly, and left with a single nod.

Then, on a rare day off, Harold was sitting in his studio apartment, calico cat purring at his feet, painting a miniature model of a battle troll. The TV was on to block the shrill shrieks of the couple arguing next door.

"We interrupt this programming for a special report..."

Harold looked up to find the President, with his signature crow-black pompadour and smirk, standing on the White House lawn denying the latest sexual misconduct claims against him to a cadre of carefully vetted reporters. Just the sound of his voice made Harold feel nauseous, as if he'd gulped grease from the deep fryer. He hated this president, with his penchant for fast food and foreign dictators and unbridled ignorance—*there is no pandemic.*

Just as he was about to turn off the TV, something caught his eye. In the background, off to the left, was the man in the pressed khakis. Suddenly, the double bacon cheeseburgers made complete sense.

Harold knew what he must do.

First, he researched poisons and found the process of gleaning arsenic from antique flypaper. He purchased a pack of 200 sheets on eBay. It arrived a week later, on a drizzly Wednesday morning. After steeping the toxic tea, Harold carefully filled ten insulin syringes bought from Walgreens, with cash, and injected each of the borrowed ketchup pouches with the lethal liquid.

That night, despite the task at hand, Harold waited on customer after customer without error. Then, right on time, the man entered. Just before handing him the bag of burgers, Harold fished the prepared packets from the pocket of his pristine apron, and dropped them in.

“Come again, soon.”

Two days later, at 6:45 am, the president was announced dead. A portion of the population wept. The rest took to the streets in the kind of celebration usually reserved for Mardi Gras and Super Bowl wins. That afternoon, at the Burger Bonanza, Harold was awarded “Employee of the Month” for the third time.