

SALAD PLEASE

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St Patrick's Day, Three A.M. in the morning, the air is still and the streets are finally quiet. A full moon illuminates a small town as two werewolves stroll into the local diner. Their tattered clothing and odd appearance barely catch the attention of the few patrons trying to ease the buzz of their night out.

The pair slide into a booth table opposite each other. A small placard on the table reads: "Werewolf rights are everyone's rights. We run with the pack." A St. Patrick's Day menu sits beside it.

"I hate St. Patty's Day. Bunch of stupid people drinking disgusting green beer. That shit will cause cancer," Gary, the larger wolf, says.

"It's just food coloring," Theo says.

"Might as well cause cancer. I'm going to have green liver stuck in my teeth for weeks," Gary says. He picks his fangs with one of his claws. A look at his fingertip causes a shudder, a small piece of green flesh hangs off the end. "Must be the drunk from McTafferty's. Want some?" He holds out his finger.

Theo gags. "That's gross."

"Well, excuse me, Mr. Fancy Pants."

The Fry cook behind the counter bobs his head to the tunes playing on the jukebox. He places two strips of bacon on the griddle. The bacon **SIZZLES**. He wipes his hands on his grease

stained apron. A server in her mid 50s, salt and pepper hair in a bun, stands beside him and prepares a fresh salad.

“MMMM, bacon,” Gary says with drool sliding down his chin.

“MMMM, salad,” Theo says.

Gary cocks his head to the side. “What? You don’t like bacon?”

Theo’s lip curls in disgust. He fidgets with the placard. “I.. I’m a vegan, Pop.”

A DING from the entrance catches Gary’s attention. A middle-aged man with disheveled hair and a “haven’t showered in a week appearance” limps into the diner. He takes a seat at the counter and signals for coffee.

Gary’s mouth breaks into a werewolf smile, all teeth no comfort. He licks his lips and grabs his son’s arm. “Look! Aged meat!”

“Not another one, Pop. You’ve already ate two drunks and a chihuahua tonight.”

Gary slams his paw on the table. “I put the chihuahua out of its misery! The shaky little bastard was an affront to our kind.”

The disheveled patron jumps at Gary’s outburst. He power-limps out of the diner.

Gary watches as the man retreats. “Look what you did! You cost me my jerky with your vegan nonsense.”

“Nonsense? I never asked for any of this. I just want to be normal and get out of this stupid town!”

“This stupid town, as you put it, is the only town that halfway accepts us.”

“And why is that, Pop?”

“Because we keep the things worse than us out of town. Politicians, Catholic priests, and the IRS. We eat people, but we don’t make a habit of screwing them.”

Theo slumps back in the booth and crosses his arms. “I still want to leave.”

“And how do you plan on doing that? Most places would notice a giant wolf that whines too much.”

Theo throws his arms out in exasperation. “I’ll shave! No one will know.”

“That only worked for Ron Perlman, son.”

“What about Hugh Jackman?”

Gary snarls and points his index claw at his son. “Huge Jackass is just a hairy tap dancer that sings show tunes. He’s not a wolf... or a wolverine.”

“So, I’m just stuck here? What kind of life is that?”

Gary leans forward and bares his fangs. “A short one if you don’t show some respect for your alphas.”

“Respect? You “alphas” are the reason things are so screwed up right now.”

Gary points his right thumb at his chest. “We screwed things up? What exactly is your generations addition to society? Gourmet Tide pods? Short attention spans? Bitching about every little feeling you have?”

“Do you really think I’m dumb enough to do all those things?”

“You’re bitching now aren’t you?”

The server approaches from behind the counter. She sees the argument, turns on her heels, and retreats.

“I just want to be accepted, Pop. Why can’t I just be who I am?”

“Be whoever you want as long as you keep that hippy shit to yourself.”

“That’s just it! I am who I am because of a hippy!”

“I’ve warned you about them. It only takes one to ruin your life.”

Theo's claws tap nervously on the table creating deep ridges in the cheap wood with every strike. Splinters and wood dust pile up on the table forming a temporary monument to his anxiety. "I was hunting and found one in the woods. I started chewing on his leg and all he kept saying was "Whoa, man. Like chill, dog dude.""

"Chewing on his leg? You're not a house mutt. Go for the throat!"

"I tried that with his girlfriend. She just kept saying "Choke me, Daddy. Choke me!""

"Some women are nothing but fun and trouble."

"I had the munchies for a week," Theo says, dropping his head.

"Oh, son..."

"I still have the smell of patchouli and sandalwood in my nose. Since then, I just haven't been able to look at meat the same way."

Gary reaches across the wrecked table and pats the back of Theo's paw. "I don't like it, but I can't say that I blame you."

Theo's eyes light up. "You mean I can leave town?"

"No, dumbass. Eat grass if you want to. Be different. That doesn't mean deficient. Just stick around town. I'll take you out when you turn 18."

"Really?"

"Yeah, yeah. Now where's our server?" Gary snaps at the server behind the counter.

She saunters over and gives a smile. "Berta" is written on her name tag. "What can I do for you tonight?"

"Steak with a side of bacon. Coffee as a drink. Just brink the pot."

Berta jots down the order and nods. She turns to Theo. "For you?"

Theo glances at his father. Gary gives a wink. Theo puffs out his chest, throws his shoulders back, and sits up straight. “Salad, please.”

END