

## Mystery Meat 13: The Friar's Tuck



With three abbeys located in Fond du Lac, Manitowoc and Oshkosh, Friar Tuck's radiates the monastic solemnity of an Elks' Lodge circa 1983. It is a flat shingled windowless box enlivened by ye olde-timey lanterns and the grinning specter of a monk bearing the twin riches of God's cornucopia: beef and ale.

I order the Little John, a foot of grilled and seasoned Angus patty heaped with sautéed mushrooms, sprinkled with cheddar cheese, and served on a sourdough roll. The bread is fresh baked at the establishment each day, so their signature Focaccia, light rye twist, brat buns, Kaisers, and onion cheddar loaves softly draw in the juices of a ribeye cube steak sandwich smothered in crispy onions.

"Do you want something from the Deep Friar?" my waitress asks. I wince at the wordplay. She is dressed in the themed convent's signature attire, a burlap monk's robe secured with rope. It resembles a clergyman's cassock designed for a Britney Spears comeback tour (short, sassy, and extra large).

"I'll have the potato wedges with sour cream," I say, "and an order of Hot Scoops." The second appetizer is poetically described as "spiced battered onion petals." Only in Wisconsin are fried food stuffs immortalized in haiku.

I spread out my case notes and review the suspects in the Fox Valley Butcher case. For months, chefs, busboys and servers have been sliced up and left for dead behind the dumpsters of local eateries. I had been hired by a regional restaurant investor named Raymond Brawn to solve the case. A waitress called Betty told me her disgruntled ex-

boyfriend might be the culprit. When she left him, a body turned up every place she worked.

I had staked out and interviewed the burly woodsman known as The Logger, but after vetting him thoroughly, I conclude he is a heartbroken sap who always seems to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. I also learned his beloved Miss Betty is having an affair with my client. This creates a quadrangle of epic dimensions as I am not only sleeping with Raymond Brawn, but have recently taken The Logger's disposition between the sheets.

My next move is to follow my client and his paramour to see where the night takes them.

"Waitress!" I snap my fingers as fast as Carmen Miranda playing the castanets. "I changed my mind. I'll have a Sherwood Forrest instead of the Little John." I need something filling. The Sherwood Forrest is a massive marble rye sandwich with shaved roast and turkey coated in Swiss cheese and drowned in Thousand Island dressing.

Usually I opt for a crab croissant, a little seafood stirred into bubbling cheddar and gently pressed between two flaky crescent rolls, but I know I will be working late and little girl finger food doesn't feed a private dick.

The repast at Friar Tuck's is always ample, fresh, and fattening in the glorious way that an unrepentant use of sauces and breading can enhance a dish. After a fulfilling platter of animal carcass and potato pairings are washed down with beer, the staff will place a doorstop between your teeth to shove in a massive triangle of chocolate cake.

One can understand why Robin Hood's merriest of men with his ironic tonsure and sloshing stein of mead would make the ideal mascot for this family restaurant. The regular patron has perfected a method of eating called The Friar's Tuck that allows one to maximize the amount of food within the limitations of one's mouth space. Place the end of a sandwich midway along the tongue, use the top teeth to brace, and fold it accordion-style into the gullet.

A thin woman with pallid cheeks blows in the place on the breeze of a swinging door. Her shirt reads "Meat is Murder." She slips into a booth like an envelope sliding into a mail slot.

"Do you have any vegan options?" she asks her waiter.

"Indeed we do," he says self-consciously adjusting his faux-jerkin, "Might I suggest the raw vegetable platter?"

A Vietnam veteran removes a ball cap embroidered with his infantry coordinates and hangs his head to the imaginary sound of taps playing in the distance. A small child crawls under a table quaking as a tray of greens is served. Somewhere at Wounded Knee, a transparent Native warrior on a ghost stallion weeps.

A Packer fan still spry from the sports bar wears a foam hat formed in the image of a wedge of cheddar. She lifts her chin from the foam head of her beer long enough to place an order, "Gimme a double burger with extra bacon and an' two helpings o' Cheese Pleasers." With her words, the cosmic order of Friar Tuck's is restored.