

## Mystery Meat 6: Pulchritude at Pilora's



A breathless platinum blonde bombshell in a sea-green waitress uniform opened the door of Pilora's Café and looked around nervously. A starched white napkin frilled above her name tag and she wore the sensible shoes that carried her through the night shift. She inhaled the scent of percolating Alterra and closed her eyes. Both lids were swept with blue shadow. She was a radiant pin-up version of a diner waitress who might fill your cup to the brim and ask, "Is it hot enough for ya, big boy?" Every man in the joint was mesmerized.

The coffee shop was a refurbished 50s gas station. Decorated with colorful panels and a seashell pink sign featuring a giant cup of Joe, it had the feel of an old drive-through or the scene of a parking lot sock hop. The outdoor patio that bustled with students in the summer was covered in mounds of icy Oshkosh snow. Inside, the atmosphere was warm and inviting. A sofa reading lounge, walled studying enclave, several small tables, and a stainless steel coffee bar offered room to quietly converse. I traced the letters printed on my table "Knock and the door will be opened. Seek and you will find." I hoped my meeting with Miss Betty Wellington would help crack the case of the Fox Valley Butcher.

She sauntered across the room and a gentleman's tongue unfurled into his corn bread pancakes covered in toasted pecans and Door Country cherries. My man secretary, Jimmy Brisket, was stricken with lycanthropy. His slavering mug morphed into a wolf's

face and his eyes bugged out in a manner that could only be described by the blow of an ancient bicycle horn. Arrrrrooooooga!

He was eating Eden's Garden, a sandwich of cheddar, lettuce, red onion, tomatoes, red & green pepper, and cucumber sauce on whole grain. Enter Eve with the apple, or at least Betty with a Waldorf salad of Red Delicious smothered in cream. I dabbed drool off Jimmy's chin with my napkin and smacked his jaw shut. The corners of his mouth continued to froth from the head of his root beer float or the rabid foam of his lust.

"I'm so sorry to be late," Betty drawled, "I just had a devil of a time straightening these stocking seams."

The already friendly staff at Pilora's tripped over themselves to fill her order. She selected The Greek, and for a moment a hopeful cook named Stavros lingered in the back doorway. Alas, she yearned for 1/3 pound of ground Angus burger on rosemary sourdough slathered in a unique green olive cream cheese. Like any decent deli, there was a selection of spirits. Betty perused a menu collaged onto a wine bottle.

"Would you be a dear and grab me an Irish Stout?" she purred.

A portly red-headed gentleman bussing tables squared his shoulders and rounded out his barrel chest in her direction. He slumped when the waiter served Betty a Murphy's beer.

I handed Jimmy a pad and pen, "Take notes." If I was lucky he would document my conversation with a woman who had dated one of the prime suspects in the murders of local restaurant employees. She called me at my office and informed me she had gone steady with The Logger. I followed the red and black clad woodsman for weeks, but nothing happened. He ate, he slept, he felled trees.

"My client, Raymond Brawn, is looking for any information leading to the capture of the Fox Valley Butcher," I said.

"Oh, isn't it awful?" she shuddered.

"How did you learn about the case?" I asked.

Betty batted her lashes, "Well, hasn't everyone heard of it? You don't waitress 'round these parts without learning all the local gossip. I wanted to help any way I could."

I looked over at Jimmy's notebook where he was sketching a cartoon image of an hourglass broad composed of a figure eight. It looked like she was smuggling bowling balls in her sweater.

"What do you know about The Logger?" I asked, cutting to the chase.

Betty looked over her shoulder as if she was afraid to be heard, “He’s a very dangerous man. I stayed with him out at the old shack for some time. When I couldn’t take his brooding and strange ways anymore, I made a run for it. That’s when I started waitressing.”

I slowly spooned my homemade mac & cheese bake, savoring each bite. The crusty top and hot soupy center were just like mom would make if she hadn’t been a drunken harridan with three inch long press-on nails who regularly mistook a casserole dish for an ashtray. Private investigators swill booze when they’re shaking down a witness and need to be whisky-mean, but when it’s time to listen, we always order comfort food.

“I think he was mad on account of my job. The tip money I get on a good night is more than enough to take care of myself. I rent a little place on Main Street and take home food from the restaurant. I’m afraid he might be killing people everywhere I work so that I get scared and come back to him.”

Betty talked and talked while Jimmy drew and drew. Something about the girl struck me as disingenuous, but I was willing to hear her out. Clearly I was on the right track following The Logger. I would keep stalking and wait for him to slip up. Midway through our interview Betty was still hungry. She requested a Moroccan Ham. A dishwasher wearing a fez began telling jokes tableside.