

Homicide and Haute Cuisine in Galena

“I’m going back to the restaurant to kill Bridget,” I heard LuAnn say.

These are not words I am accustomed to hearing first thing in the morning when I wake up. I blink the sleep out of my eyes and turn over in bed to see LuAnn lying next to me staring at the ceiling with her eyes wide open.

Something’s amiss, and as I look around the room I realize that we are in a hotel room – specifically at the Chestnut Mountain Lodge in Galena, Illinois.

The fog in my brain is clearing. We came here for a couple of days to ski. As it turned out, we probably picked the two coldest days of the January – we skied the previous day in 20-below wind chill.

The brass monkeys were definitely complaining. Fortunately, it was sunny and the runs were short. And the food was good.

The previous night we had dinner at a fabulous restaurant called “Fried Green Tomatoes” just outside Galena. It’s one of those places that is difficult for two people to get in and out of for less than \$150 - if they drink a decent bottle of wine.

It’s in a really neat 1871 brick building that was formerly the Jo Daviess County Poor Farm and Insane Asylum. It was mildly disconcerting to see remnants of shackles used to restrain the inmates hanging ominously on the walls in the remodeled 8’ by 8’ cells.

The name of the restaurant was taken from the 1991 movie, and fried green tomatoes are actually listed on the menu as an appetizer. We gave them a try, and they tasted to me something like eggplant.

It was hard to tell, as they were breaded and under several layers of Parmesan, mozzarella and tomato sauce (which was fine with me). I honestly think that I would eat *anything* that is smothered in tomato sauce, and it need not necessarily be organic in nature.

Oh yes, about Bridget. That was the name of our server. She was actually very good – chatty, sincere, attentive. Just what you would expect in a classy restaurant.

Our five-course meal progressed smoothly until dessert, when we chose to split a lemon tort, and we ordered one cup of decaf coffee. I never order coffee for myself, although I usually sneak a couple of sips from LuAnn's while the server isn't looking.

Somehow, I don't mind paying \$150 for two meals but I refuse to pay \$1.50 for two sips of coffee. Go figure.

LuAnn drank her first cup unassisted by me, and Bridget came back shortly thereafter to see if we needed a refill. "Regular, right?" she asked brightly.

I remember thinking at the time that it was a rookie server mistake not to remember what kind of coffee someone is drinking, especially in a high-class joint that wasn't very busy on a Thursday evening.

Later, LuAnn became convinced that her first cup was actually caffeinated because she ended up tossing and turning all night. Usually when she can't sleep, she claims it's because *I'm* the one that's tossing and turning. Or snoring.

She keeps threatening to send me to the UI sleep disorder clinic, which makes no sense to me. I sleep fine – dead to the world for seven hours every night. The only thing that would enhance my slumber is if I wasn't getting an elbow in the ribs every few hours from someone claiming *I'm* the one with the problem.

LuAnn is not a vindictive woman, but she does believe in reciprocity. Don't ask me what the difference is. I think she keeps a mental list of people who cause her to suffer needlessly, and I find myself on it every morning after she endures another sleep-impaired night.

Anyway, Bridget owes me a favor because I pried the car keys from LuAnn's hand and convinced her not to deprive Bridget of the opportunity to make some future invaluable contribution to society.

And I suppose I owe Bridget a favor for (temporarily) replacing me at the top of LuAnn's list (just kidding, dear).