

Salad

by Jaroni Lan

Jane

The big overhead board read: "Tuesday, May 16, 13:43:23".

Jane Adeline Jones was 27 and has already been evaluated as an adult by both State and Federal governments. Not a probationary adult. Full adult. She was even allowed to drive during the day. As a Level 4 Artificial Learning engineer with Gamazo people always assumed that she was a Perfect. She wasn't. She was a hard working proletariat.



"That's actually a funny way to put it," she thought to herself as the words almost came out of her mouth. "Hard working proletariat." Not perfect. Just hard working. "Interesting concept," she thought and stuck a fork in a salad bowl.

The salad was a 13 out of 10. The restaurant could do better. The sauce was a solid 15, the bread here was always over 100. But the lettuce was soggy. Could it evaluate to less the 100%? She, obviously, wasn't certified to evaluate that but Danny was. "Danny, what you think of the lettuce?" she asked. Danny looked up from his own bowl of salad and gave her a thoughtful stare. She put her head down and picked the last bite.

It was a nice day. The sky was blue. The sun was warm. Warm but not too warm. "72f, +121 ISO weather." Jane cleared her mind and laid back as she waited for Danny to answer. "Life was good with high probability of getting better," she thought, smiled, and closed her eyes. When she opened them again, Danny has yet to answer. Instead there was a man standing there right in front of her.

Her system flashed a red "Unrecognized" and made a faint beeping sound. Then the man moved and the sun got in her eyes. She blinked. Then Danny said: "Awesome, 12 out of 10 will eat daily," and as her eyes moved down to an image of romaine lettuce head. Regularity required information followed. It flowed and Jane gazed. It was grown in Alberta she realized. Canadian. A surge of joy filled her. "Canada is such a wonderful thing." Last year it was awarded the "Most Desirable Country Ever" award for 7 days in a row. Jane didn't know that before. Now she did and it made perfect sense. Wonderful country. She looked up. "I'm Kevin," said the man. The system immediately registered that along with Danny's ranking and all available data. Jane made a personal note. "Cute." Her heart beat elevated, Swipe Mode was auto enabled.

Kevin

The man was dressed professionally in all white. His name tag read 凱文  . With a steady step he walked up to the table and said "I'm Kevin." He wanted to add "I'm a certified Salad Maker," but he didn't. The girl distracted him. Her eyes, her little smile, her hologram. It read "Gamazo: ALE4". He felt insecure. "She was a Perfect".

"I'm not perfect but I'm 32 and I'm killing it," he reminded himself. "I own the

Vegetable and Avocado franchise for the southern patio tables," he again wanted to say and again didn't. Instead he just asked "How was the salad?"

Getting into food preparation is hard. It is an exclusive profession. One has to get a BSc Magna Cum Laude++, score 102% on both the FCAT, FSAT, apply for at least 2,718 kitchen jobs and hope to win the Federal Job Lottery. Kevin met all requirements.

"The training." Kevin twitched a little as the thought crossed his mind. "I was so close to ringing the bell," he remembered, and unconsciously slid his left index finger over his left thumb, feeling that old scar he had from that time his knife slipped and he cut himself. "Blood!" the instructor shouted. He was immediately medevaced, the bio hazard team came in, everyone and everything was decontaminated. He got two Purple Stars that day.

He snapped back to reality. The girl hasn't answered yet. Maybe she knew, he knew it was a ceremonial question. The lettuce was soggy. He knew that when he made the salad, and he knew that they noticed when he overheard the girl's companion saying "Awesome, 12 out of 10 will eat daily." "That was unnecessarily harsh," he thought, "Not my fault." It was Canadian. From Alberta. "Such an overrated country." he said to himself "Patriot lettuce is way better." And with that statement crossing his mind, his confidence was suddenly back. The sky was blue. The sun was warm. He was a business owner. He looked at the girl and quickly tapped his tag to enable Swipe Mode.

Tip

"We liked it," Jane said noticing Kevin was looking directly at her while touching his tag, and wondering if it was the sun or was she blushing, and did he notice.

The salad was paid by Gamazo but the tip was up to her. Her eyes hovered over the tip options. Those were Tuesday options she realized. A nested menu, six options wide and three levels deep was hidden behind the first "Tip?, Yes/No" question. I can "do that in a blink," she thought and felt her lips curl into a tiny smile. "Literally." She choose "Yes."

Kevin saw Jane's eyes move and that charming smile appearing again. It was Tuesday. "Yes, 4, 2, 3 included a hug. "She could do it." He nervously shifted his weight, slightly. "Will she?"

Jane looked past the menu options and something in how he stood there made her uncomfortable. Going for a hug now seemed a little too much. She made a quick choice: 238% tip + equal share of the bowel and utensils recycling refund. "That's appropriate and well-mannered," she thought. She, paused, and then righted herself up, "just what a responsible adult would do."

Kevin saw her stiffen up a little. There will be no hug. "I'm too busy," he thought, touched his tag and swiped left.

"Should we get back to work?" Jane asked Danny. He nodded. "I'm good," she said to herself and swiped left.

The big overhead board read: "Tuesday, May 16, 13:45:38".

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