

Aged Beef on the Senior Meat Market

by Con Chapman

*Burger King has rekindled Flame, its \$4 broiled-meat-scented spray.
Boston Herald*



Naples, a sun-drenched town on the west coast of Florida, is the retirement home of more former Fortune 500 executives than any other spot on earth. For gigolos like me, looking to find a slightly-tarnished trophy widow of a guy who died of a heart attack from too many fancy closing dinners at Ruth's Chris Steak House (try saying *that* five times fast), it is quite simply—Mecca.

I drive up to the entrance at Pelican Boca Vista, a golf community where even the caddy shack has a gated entry, fer Christ's sake. I'm wearing a standard-issue delivery man's uniform with "Chuck" embroidered on my pocket over a white tuxedo. I will try to crash the luxurious clubhouse dining room, but first I have to make it past the security guard.



"Howdy!" I call out in the most innocent tone I can muster to the uniformed attendant who looks like a slight upgrade from a mall cop

in terms of physical fitness and general intelligence. "Meat delivery to the main kitchen."

The guy looks into the car and gives me the once over. His native skepticism fades when he gets a whiff of my Flame, Burger King's broiled-meat-scented spray.

"Um—umm!" he says with gusto. "Man, could I go for one of those babies!"



"Sorry pal," I say, with professional reserve. "If I let you have one, we'd both lose our pathetic minimum-wage jobs, and you don't want *that* to happen—do you?"

"No, you're right," he says. "Still, I wish I'd been an avaricious greed-head when I was younger, so I could retire to one of the many luxurious models available in this exclusive +55 enclave!"

"You and me both pal," I say with commiseration as he waves me through. "Have a good one!"

I make my way to the clubhouse, where preparations for "Show Tunes & Steaks" night are in high gear. I shed my uniform in the back parking lot, smooth my tux, spritz on another shot of Flame and head for the buffet line.



This, I say to myself as I survey the room, is the style of life to which I'd like to become accustomed! So many men on oxygen tanks and walkers, so many women just waiting for them to die! I grab a plate and cozy up to a lovely young lady of sixty or so who's

spooning some green beans with cream of mushroom soup and bread crumbs on to the plate of her octogenarian sugar daddy.

“Do you want some onion rings, Claude?” she asks the old man.

“You know onions give me gas, Paula,” he replies with a cranky tone as he shuffles down the line. Probably forgot his prune juice this morning.

“Nothing like steak and onion rings,” I say to the woman, whose perky, artificially-enhanced boobs look like the baby bumpers you used to see on Cadillacs in the '50s.



“Paula” gives me a smile as she looks me up and down. Her nostrils flare—a sign of arousal according to animal behaviorists—as she sniffs my Flame. “You're pretty lean,” she says. “Tennis?”

“Nope,” I say with false modesty. “Just twenty minutes a day with my Richard Simmons exercise tapes!”



“Cool,” she says. “I admire a man who takes care of himself—instead of sitting around all day playing whist then gulping down steak at night.” With this last implied criticism, she nods her head sideways towards Claude, who is asking a woman in a lunch lady outfit to give him an extra scoop of potatoes *au gratin*.

“Are there any open seats at your table?” I ask with the upraised eyebrow that sends the subliminal signal I'm more interested in her than proximity to Merv Norton and His Swinging Showmen.



“I’ll make room for you,” she says with a look that speaks as many volumes as an encyclopedia.

We move to the table and I’m introduced to their friends. The Mulcherman’s, Everett and “Teeks”; the Schusters, Bud and Lorinda; the Finegolds, Barry and Marcia. How-do-you-do’s all around. Lorinda Schuster gets a whiff of my Flame and is on me like a dog on a bone.

“What’s that after shave you’re wearing?” she asks as she pours some A-1 Steak Sauce on my hand.



“Flame, by Burger King,” I reply as she takes an exploratory nibble.

“Very nice,” she says. “I can’t get Bud to give up his Old Spice.”

“Some people get stuck in their ways,” I say with a leer.

The band launches into “Tomorrow!” from “Annie”, and everyone joins in good-naturedly—except Claude. He’s wolfing down his steak, his appetite whetted by the scent of flame-broiled beef that oozes from my every pore. I’m watching him like a hawk, ready to pounce on his chick at the slightest heart palpitation.

“The sun'll come out tomorrow—bet your bottom dollar that tomorrow there'll be sun!” we sing. Paula gives Claude a nudge, urging him to join in the fun. He starts to sing but almost immediately begins to choke on a chunk of steak he'd been chewing.

“I'm a former Eagle Scout!” I yell as I stand up and move behind Claude to apply a Heimlich at a slightly higher level—around the neck—than is recommended. You can never be too sure.

“*Gargalarga-gock!*” Claude screams as he projects a piece of gristle across the table, hitting Marcia Finegold's designer knit sweater, where it promptly becomes lost like a golf ball in the rough among the colorful doo-dads that are festooned down her front.



The steak is in there somewhere.

Claude is barely conscious, and I signal for the wait staff to bring over a defibrillator. “I think he's having a heart attack,” I say as they bring the Healthtronics Big Red Machine up to the table.

The busboy and the *sous chef*—two “lay responders” in medical parlance—rush to apply the pads to Claude's body.

“One goes on the heart, right?” the busboy says. I stand back and let the experts work. “Where does the other one go?”

"You take over—I've got to go check on the tapioca pudding."

"I don't know, try the head," the *sous chef* replies. All that stands between me and a life of idle luxury is a 1,000 volt jolt.

"Okay, let her rip!" says the busboy, and before you can say "cardiac arrhythmia", Claude's goose is cooked, and the gander is mine.

"Crap," says the *sous chef*, as he notices the smell of singed flesh rising from Claude's *non compos* head. "Maybe we should've checked the owner's manual first."

"It's all right," Paula says to the two amateur physicians. "You did all you could."

"We're real sorry, ma'am."

"Please everybody," I say to the room at large. "Let's not let this spoil Show Tunes Night. Strike up the band!"



And with that, Merv Norton and His Swinging Showmen launch into a medley from *Sweeney Todd*.

