

AND JUAN MAKES THREE

Ristorante Giannino's. Harvard Square. Set back in the glorious courtyard of the four-star Charles Hotel. The off-street location especially ideal for the frequent business of famous persona. No sidewalk passersby or paparazzi to worry about. Also intended for the illustrious patronage, a waitstaff manager adamant on forcing her employees to pretend they don't even notice (other than the hand-over-feet slave servitude) when they're waiting on someone that carries a buzz. No chatting, no questions, and absolutely NO AUTOGRAPHS. Ever.

Of course, it's understandable why. Brenda (bitch manager) did have a point: it's only because of the no-hassle service the eminent guests receive with their gourmet Milanese cuisine that they keep coming back for more and spreading the word within their highly acclaimed circles. Perfectly sensible, perfectly respectable. Right.

I never had a problem with it. Rather, I actually enjoyed the practice of speaking with the rich and famous as if they were no more special than any of my other "guests" (as Brenda forced us to call customers). The only problem with this protocol being the undying love and adorable fanaticism of a young busboy named Juan.

He was a thin, baby-faced teenager from Brazil whose mother, Fatima, worked in the kitchen. Juan had an explosive infatuation with all things U2. Everyday sporting his black baseball Bono cap (oversized picture of Bono's face, mid-sing, in the spacey Star Trekian shades that seem to have been glued to his face for the last four decades) and one of his many rotating U2 tees.

And so one bright Sunday morning, who should stroll into Giannino's for an early afternoon brunch but Bono, his wife, and a small entourage of important U2n-ian faces.

Nicest couple ever. He didn't want tomatoes on his Frittata del Giorno and one of his legs was noticeably longer than the other (made apparent by the different size heels of his platform sandals). She didn't wear any make-up and helped bus the table after each course. He ate with his shades on. They were casual, friendly, and as sharp as the cheddar they grew up on. Completely unpretentious and engaging, which promptly caused me to stop any and all shit-talking about U2 I might have been inclined to indulge in, considering I hadn't liked anything they'd put out since *Achtung Baby*.

Juan wasn't there that day - cruel plight of humanity - but every one of us knew someone had to call him.

As a matter of fact, about two seconds after Bono and company walked in and were seated and brought specials and menus and fizzing glasses of Pellegrino,

all on-duty waitstaff and busers met together in an empty side room.

Nearly in unison, “Holy shit, we’ve got to call Juan!”

Manager bitch knew right away what was happening. An instant later she found us. “If any of you call Juan, that will be your job. And I mean it.” Evil serious eyes scanning our faces until satisfied with her imposing threat. Exit Brenda.

“Ahh fuck her. We’ve got to.” We were all in agreement. Quickly deciding that there was no question about it, he had to be called. We made a pact that when confronted we would each say we did it. Like in some strength in numbers scene from a heart-tugging high school drama where everyone joins forces to overcome the corrupt fascist authority. There was absolutely no way she could fire all of us. She would be forced to swallow her own ugly foot.

So Max did the deed. Less than five minutes later, Juan showed up. Bouncing with joy. Complete with his hallmark Bono hat, Bono t-shirt, rolled-up Bono poster, and ridiculously large camera hanging from his neck. I’d never seen anyone gleaming with more excitement in my life.

But Brenda saw him coming. She met him in the doorway with a broiling glare and grinding teeth. Smoke escaping through reddening ears. “Go away, Juan.” Through the tightness of her clenched jaw, “Go away right now or YOU ARE FIRED.”

His face filled with terror. Mouth dropped. Eyes searching the dining room for just one tiny glimpse of his long time hero. “Go away NOW, Juan,” she repeated.

With panic and agony, he turned himself around like a kicked puppy, continuously looking back over his shoulder for any possible sign of pity. But there was none. Not from Brenda. Rejected, he had no choice but to retreat. Forced his deflated cheer to walk back across the vast courtyard. Our hearts sank.

After a long and leisurely brunch, the Bono party finally finished. They playfully bickered for a moment over who was going to pay the bill and then, after one of the managerial men won the battle and an excessively generous tip was left for yours truly, they headed for the door. Brenda, myself, and several other starry-eyed waitstaff casually walked them out of the restaurant and across the outdoor patio. They turned around to wave one last goodbye. Six of us were standing there smiling, waving, a happy family, back at them.

We stood frozen for several seconds watching as they made their way across the fifty or so yards of exquisite flowerbeds and exorbitant roman pillars of the courtyard. And then, just as they were almost to the end, only ten or fifteen yards to go, out from behind a large well-pruned bush, popped our beloved little Juan.

We could hear Brenda boiling under her skin, mumbling curses and threats under hot held breath. Every one of us stunned by his audacity.

But, after leaping out, Juan did nothing. He stood in utter shock of his own impulsiveness. Staring. Wide-eyed. A frightened fawn.

Then suddenly, aggressively, Bono stepped forward and tore the camera out of Juan’s trembling hands. He looked pissed. I imagined Daddy Warbucks violently hurling the camera of his nameless reporter into a cold marble stairwell. I was so

appalled by Bono's hostile behavior. We all were. Poor Juan. Out a job and a hero the same day. Devastating.

Then Bono jerked the camera away from Juan. He held it up high over his head and looked as if he was two seconds away from throwing it to the ground. Instead, he pulled the neck of his shirt open with his other hand and, much to our surprise (especially Juan's), shoved the camera down his shirt and began snapping away. He took a couple more shots of his naked chest then threw an arm around Juan to bring him in for a picture of them together. Bono took it at arm's length.

His wife joined on the other side of elated Juan. Speechless elated Juan. They did a series of pictures with Juan in the middle, including one with both of them kissing his cheeks. Then hugs and signatures and witnessing heaven on earth for this little busboy angel. Brenda let out a deep and constipated sigh followed by a few more breathy grumbles before turning around to go back inside. After a few more minutes of jovial attention, Bono bowed his goodbye and continued on his way.

Juan looked up at all of us watching him, his face white and exuding shock, and then he leaped off the ground. Entire body. Both feet. Smiling with an oversized open mouth pounding thumb-up fists into the air in sailing victory. Long live U2. Long live the sunglasses.