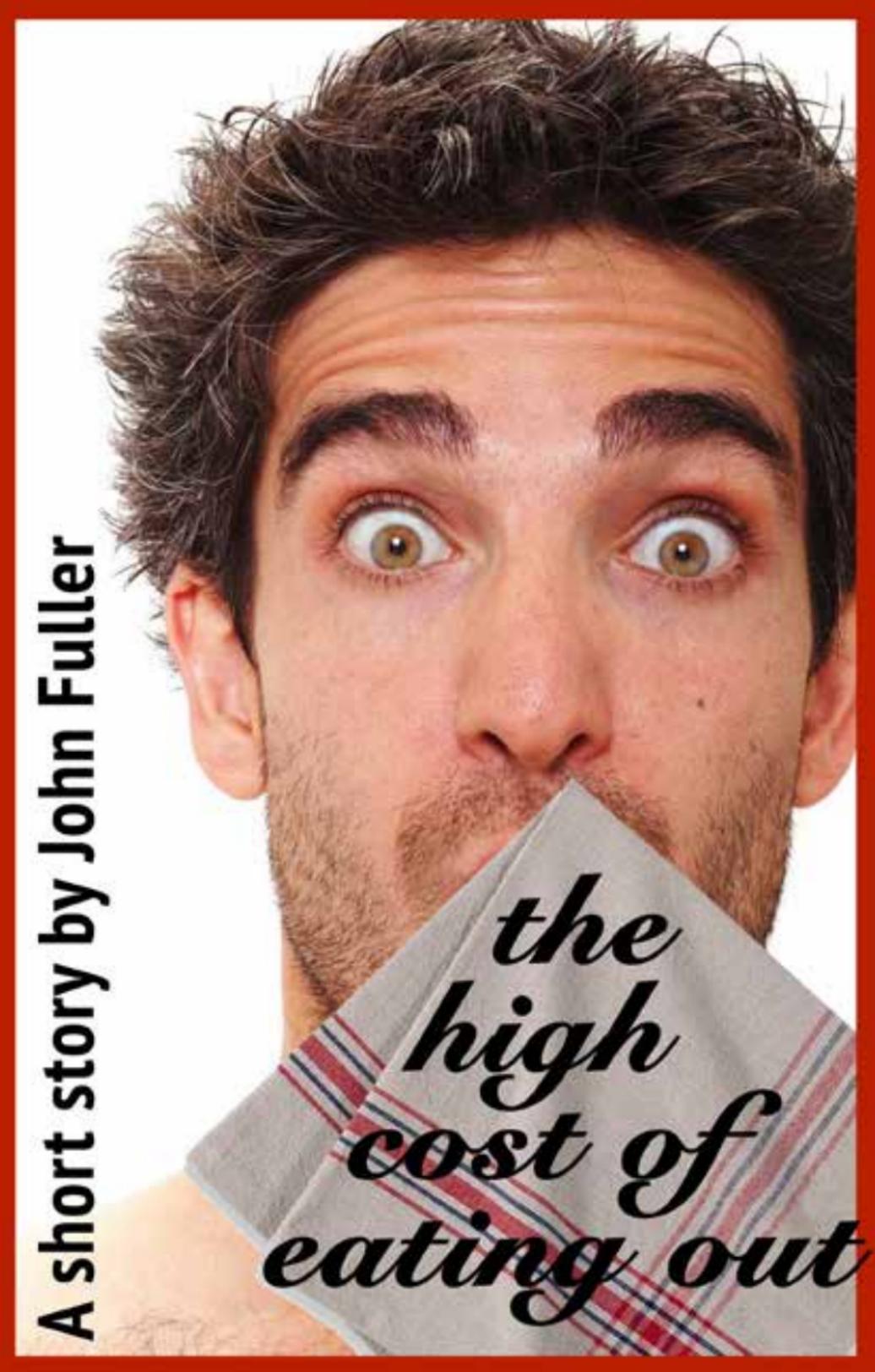


A short story by John Fuller

A close-up photograph of a man with dark, curly hair and a wide-eyed, shocked expression. He is holding a grey napkin with a red and blue striped pattern over his mouth. The background is plain white.

*the
high
cost of
eating out*

I KNOW, A FEDERAL LAW PROHIBITING eating out sounds ridiculous. *What coward would obey such a law?* you ask.

When we first heard about it, we laughed, too. Rodolfo threw a party the night of the first televised hearing, and we eagerly encircled the television.

Who could resist listening to a bunch of Senators discuss banning cunnilingus?

We invented a drinking game: Everyone drinks whenever anyone —

- utters the word “cunnilingus”;
- uses a euphemism like “the rec room in the basement”, “work out down at the Y”, “clean the drapes”, etc.;
- if female, refers to women’s equipment as though she’d never encountered same;
- if male, clearly has never encountered same.

Until that evening, I feel safe saying I had never consumed six alcoholic beverages in 45 minutes, and even those more used to binge drinking admitted they'd die of alcohol poisoning without stricter prompts.

So we eliminated the first requirement, but too late : everyone was completely schnockered by an hour in, incapable of taking anything seriously — even something as draconian as the Lingually Intimate Carnal Knowledge Enjoinment Decree. Celeste and Terry had reached that low existential point where something seemingly ludicrous sets you off laughing, but you find yourself incapable of stopping, which makes you weep. Then you're crying uncontrollably because it hits you that what seemed ludicrous at first blush is in reality deeply vicious and dangerous, which your fear combined with abject incredulity can find absurdly funny in a way. Then it just goes in loops, until you are really, truly weeping at

the realization that even when they inform you of their plans to control you, your response is to make guacamole, eat duros, and go numb.

You dull yourself to face their gleaming razors.

So, eating out your girlfriend (or someone else's, or no-one's) is now covered by the Depravity Statutes, and can get you arrested. And of course the law isn't applied evenly, so a Black man going down on his wife of twenty years gets his tongue run through with a hot poker as the law stipulates, while the daughters of the 1% can blow the entire field hockey team and the cops turn their heads.

It did give cunnilingus the cachet of the forbidden, and the reverence it always deserved but had never quite achieved. That part is good, especially for someone like me, who makes his living 'picnicking at the bottom of the hill' as we like to say. Still, the stress of living in the shadows, slipping the clandestine Munch-House key from person to person makes us all more than a little paranoid. Not to mention trying to weed out collaborators —

women who will happily let you do them, then turn you in once they've gotten a nice Double or Triple. That happened to Celeste, and nearly happened to me twice.

It's your classic Catch-22. They expect us to be law-abiding citizens, and provide for our families.

When we don't even have enough to eat.

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The High Cost of Eating Out