The Early Bird Dinner

*Mitch has come to visit his parents who left NYC 12 years ago and came to live in a retirement community in Florida.*

At 4:30pm, my parents and I drive to nearby Century Village to pick up their friends who are joining us for Early Bird dinner.

We are dining at »Antonio's «, one of the area's popular places. The restaurant is full of senior citizens, bald men wearing checkered pantsand white patent shoes and women with stiff white hairdos.

»Hello, I'm Roland and I'll be your waiter this evening. Would enyone care for a drink?« All at the table shake their heads no.

»I'll have an Amstel, please.«

»You know beer is not included in the dinner«, my mother whispers to me. »If you want, I'll buy you a bottle at the supermarket.«

»But I want a beer with dinner.«

»You can wait until we get home.«

»Yes...no?« asks the waiter.

»Yes, please.« I say. My mother flashes me a look.

»I'll pay for it myself, OK?«I say.

»Don't be such a big shot.«

My parents study the menu as if they're investing money into their life savings. After several minutes they all begin calculating the options. »Are you ready to order?« asks the waiter.

»We need a little more time«, says my mother. They finally decide upon »Consumers Best Buy« and are ready to place their orders.

»What's the weather been like in New York lately?« asks my father, who seems to have a never-ending fascination with the subject.

»Seasonal. You know, 30s, 40s.«

»Well, looks like you bought the cold weather down with you. It's been sunny until now.«

»Speaking of cold , there's such a draft here you can lose your head. Mitchell if you don't put on your sweater, you'll catch a cold. Please, could you lower the air conditioning« she asks the waiter.

Later in the meal my mother informs the waiter that » The last time we were here, the portions were much larger«. The waiter walks away rolling his eyes and ignores us for the rest of the evening.

As the dinner concludes, the waiter appears with the check which my father microscopically inspects. »You have to be careful, because they often make mistakes.«

The waiter delivers a doggie bag of leftover fish and string beans to my mother, who then wraps the uneaten rolls along with a handfull of sugar packets in napkins and places them in her purse. This is for you later, she tells me lovingly.

Actually, I couldn't wait. I awake hungry in the middle of the night and butter myself some of those hard rolls. No wonder, we finished dinner at 6 o'clock.