

Edith is visiting Julia at La Flava Floro. They are eating lunch in the Modern Art Room, which is located opposite the Incunabula Room, accessed from the same corridor.

“Do you remember,” asks Edith “that I told you about my experiences when I tried to buy a gluten-free vegan meal at that hotel in that town where I went with Jane and two others to view that art exhibition.”

“Yes.”

“Well, I went there again the other day. There was an exhibition that I wanted to see, not really related to work so I had a day of holiday and drove down. Well, it was different from before. I went in and the Maitre d’Hôtel recognised me, and, not whispering, asked me if I would like to see the gluten-free vegan menu.”

“Ah.”

“Well, I was very surprised - I had gone there thinking that I would discreetly ask if I could have a word with the chef - he made me a meal to suit my diet the previous time - and there I was being invited to view the gluten-free vegan menu! As I say I was very surprised, I hope that I didn’t show it, I just said ‘Yes please’ and he showed me to a table, where I sat before actually so he had remembered that too, and then he went and brought the menu.”

“Ah.”

“Well, there was a choice of five different meals, I chose one and it came and it was absolutely delicious, almost as good as you produce here. I had this wonderful meal that was a pea purée with a tomato purée sauce with some tiny basil and oregano pieces in it, served with white long grain rice.”

“I am pleased you liked it.”

“What?” says Edith, picking up on Julia’s intonation and smile and wondering if there is something going on.

Edith continues “Was it one of yours?”

“Yes. Unless they have also started making their own as well.”

Julia continues “We were doing very well with supplying the café at Jardins sans Château and the café at the heritage railway centre and we had spare capacity and so I placed an advertisement - just a small classified advertisement - in a catering trade magazine offering free delivery within a fifty mile radius, and on the very morning that the magazine arrived here I got a telephone call from the Maitre d’Hôtel of a hotel seventy miles away offering to pay for delivery if we could go that far.

“Well, it was the first response to the advertisement so I said that we would deliver free anyway and he placed an order for two dozens meals so as to try them out. When I got there I noticed the French windows and the blue irises and I thought that it might well be the same place as where you went, but I made no comment about that at all. What you had was one of our new range of recipes, which is why you did not recognize it as being from here, we had made up a batch the day before I placed the advertisement,

just in case we got a run of calls. In the event we have only had a few calls, the first one is the biggest order thus far, I am hoping that he will reorder sometime, but who knows ... But please tell me about the art show.”

“Well, as you may know, a lot of art shows ask people to pay a fee to submit an entry and then not every entry gets shown, decisions are made and some get in and others do not. The idea behind this particular exhibition is that everything submitted gets shown, as long as it is not unsuitable for a family audience. That is done by only showing each entry for part of the duration of the exhibition. Now this has some interesting implications. Have you ever been to one of those motorway cafés where they are open all day and all night continuously and arrived late at night?”

“Yes.”

“Well you may have seen how they rope off part of the café while they clean it, so that they can get the cleaning done yet still keep the café open”

“Yes.”

“Well, the exhibition is sort of like that in a way. From on-the-hour to a quarter past the hour the whole area is open, then from a quarter past the hour one half of the area is roped off and the curators change some of the pictures in that area, then at half past the hour the whole area is open again and then at a quarter to the next hour the other half of the area is roped off and the curators change some of the pictures in that area. What is really good is that it is all in one large exhibition room and people can watch the curators working, seeing how they handle the pictures and so on.

“Also, what is good is that when sending in an entry an artist can request a time slot when his or her painting will be on display. It might be on display for longer, but people visiting from a distance can know one time when they can plan to see their work on display. Indeed, they can also request that the work is added into the display in the quarter of an hour before that time slot so that the curating process can be observed. Some pictures were there for long periods and some were being put up for an hour and then later put up for another hour. It was all very fascinating to watch.”

“Did they have many more pictures than they could have shown all the time?”

“Well, certainly they had some more, but whether they had many more I do not know. I went in the morning and I went back after lunch and I went and had afternoon tea in their café and each time I went back the display was significantly different, though some pictures were there all the time.”

“How did the tea go?”

“Very well in fact, I asked the lady if I could have an empty cup so that I could add a peppermint tea bag and could she then please add hot water and she was very good about it - it turned out that that happens a lot, not just with peppermint tea but with other types of herbal tea too.”