

The woman was in her thirties, but she felt a thousand years old, her joints creaking and popping as she shuffled from one nondescript room to the next, carrying a notepad with a stack of forms, wishing desperately that the senior researcher would discover the existence of tablets within this century. She had evidently seen too many spy films, when she started on her career path. There was the idea of creating cutting-edge technology that remain hidden in society, waiting to change the world when the timing was ripe that enticed her. She wanted to work on a secret science project.

Now that she had gotten her wish, her job was to ask a test subject how their meal went.

Opening the door to her side of the room, she was reminded why she hated this place when she looked at the content of the food trays, and the hostile glass pane that separated her and a perfectly normal young man, like he was a leper or a criminally insane lunatic. This was the sort of thing that make people distrust scientists.

The silent tapping on the table stopped when the man had noticed her. He grinned amicably.

“So, doctor, was this an experiment on how well a person follows cryptic orders? Because you know that’s been done to death already, right?” the man said.

The researcher mentally rolled her eyes, though she outwardly smiled. She was going to have to deal with a talkative test subject, then. Something that she would have welcomed in literally any other circumstances except this. She would rather get this batch of interviews done with and get away from the hellish drones of wings that assaulted her senses.

“Oh, no, it’s really just is about the food,” the woman said, “If it was about obedience, there would be more chocolate. Besides, it’s no longer allowed for research projects to lie -Well, most of the time, anyways,” she hazarded some truth to get the conversation going.

“Well, yeah, I know that, but generally you hire professionals for these sort of things, right? Because I don’t see how a layman like me can discover the uh, minutiae of your canned foods. These are canned, right?”

“What makes you think that?” she asked, clamping her mouth shut slightly in surprise at her own raised tone, “The chefs would be offended to know that!” she said, hoping he’d buy her excuse for her tone.

“Whoops,” the man chuckled, “I’m really sorry I said that, then.”

“So, does that mean you wouldn’t eat them if they were on the shelves?”

“No, no, I think they’re pretty much like any ready-made meals I have eaten. Didn’t mean to imply it was bad. I still don’t see why you need to experiment.”

“It’s just to be sure,” she answered, pushing the form in a slot, as an unnecessary automatic system slid the stack of paper to the man.

This seemed to startle the content of one of the the food trays, and for reasons she couldn’t fathom, one decided to fly through the opening. Without breaking stride, she grabbed hold of it and tossed it in the nearby bin, the force of the impact seemingly killing it.

As she wiped the ketchup off the table, she hoped the test subject didn’t notice that. His calm expression as he scanned the form suggested that he was none the wiser.

“So... this isn’t the point where you tell me that the meat in the spaghetti was actually made out of bugs, right?” the man quipped suddenly.

There was almost a hint of sincerity in her fake laughter.

“Ah, no, of course not. They’re not insects...”

As she watched the creatures squirming in the trays, their hallucinatory patterns shifting like a Rorschach inkblot, she wished they were insects. The man impaled one with his fork, twirled it in his delusion that he was eating spaghetti, and bit off its head.