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A difficult client

When I was nineteen I worked in the kitchen of a Creole restaurant in Panama City, Florida. The word "Creole" refers to people who are descended from settlers in the colonial French Louisiana (before it became part of the USA in 1803). And Creole food is great. It is a blend of French, Spanish and Caribbean styles. I used to knock up fantastic fresh salads, filet and fry grouper fresh from the harbour. I made vast vats of red beans and rice and tureens of gumbo. I boiled great pans of fresh shrimp and cracked open and then fried Oysters in white wine. The odd thing is that I am not a trained chef. Every single recipe was based on a mixture of measures in the recipe book. So many cups of this, shakes of that, tablespoons of Tabasco or citrus, jugs of cut celery, etc. But every meal turned out perfect so long as I followed "the book" to the letter.

I worked in the kitchen with a rather strange guy from Los Angeles called Scott. He had a strange haircut and was disconcertingly crossed eyed. But the waitresses were cute — especially Suzie with her long curly brown hair.

One day we had a bit of an episode. A woman in the restaurant started screaming and demanding to see the chef. I could hear the commotion from deep within the kitchens and began to look for somewhere to hide. Scott was out that day and there was nobody else in the kitchen. Suzie caught me as I tried to hide behind the rice sacks in the larder. "You've got to come out John. She's gone absolutely mental. The other customers are gonna call the cops if we can't sort this".

Feeling terribly afraid and inadequate I was led out to the woman making the noise. She stopped screaming but continued to shake as she eyed me up and down. Because she'd asked for the "chef" I guessed I must have made a terrible mistake in the kitchen. I was alone down there that lunchtime so whatever was wrong it must have been my fault. What would she say if she discovered I wasn't a chef at all but doing a holiday job making recipes from a book?

The truth eventually came out. I had served her a basket of whole boiled shrimp. According to the lady, the little devils had little " faces" and "eyes" , "stared at her" and had completely freaked her out. I spoke to her very softly and sat down next to her. I told her I 'd take them away and if she still wanted shrimp I 'd peel them myself and bring them to her. She thanked me

very much. Seemed very happy and after a short while consumed the shelled shrimp and left. Afterward I was again called to the front by Suzie. But this time I got a round of applause from the other customers and \$120 were the tips.