

## *Tailpiece*

### *More or less English*

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Some people collect ashtrays, clothes' hangers and other souvenirs on their trip(s) abroad. I collect the wording of curious or funny signs. My first overseas trip ever, apart from my initial incoming one by stork — was to Israel. Two signs in Jerusalem rather took my fancy. The first one read, 'Doctor So-and-so, physician of women and other diseases'. The other read, 'Certified Midwife: Entrance Sideways'. That set me going. Ever since, over five (or is it six?) continents, I have acquired more and more strange signs, not the actual signs or notices themselves, but the text of same. They're much more portable that way, occupying no more than a couple of lines in my notebook. So, here are a selection of 'Signs with a smile' that I have collected. For something to chew on, a few helpings from menus where the scribe was not quite the English linguist that he or she imagined:

Foul Breast of Chef  
Fish Rape in Cream Sauce  
Fried Lover and Mushed Potatoes  
Boiled Chicken with Horns  
Muscles in Sailor's Sauce  
Hen Fried with Butler  
Prawns in Spit  
Utmost of Chicken with Smashed Pot

In Beirut, (before the recent civil war) I found these notes in one of the passages. 'All water used for cooking in this hotel has been passed by the manager personally'.

In Istanbul I had a good laugh at these notes. 'You cannot fail to remark from the window the odours of the pine trees and our swimming pool'. 'If you wish for breakfast, lift the telephone and our waitress will arrive. This will be enough to bring your food up'. 'Our hotel is well-placed, being situated in the shadiest part of town'. 'Ladies are kindly requested not to have their babies in the cocktail bar'.

A few years ago, I visited East Berlin and we stopped at a hotel in mid-afternoon for a cup of tea. The sign in the cloakroom said, 'Please hang yourself here'. I've always known that things behind the Iron Curtain weren't so hot, but that's going a bit far.

I cannot quite remember where I found these notes, which is just as well once you read the text ... 'Visit our restaurant where you can eat the mid-Eastern foods in the European ambulance'. No thank you! Apparently they don't play around in Istanbul. One of the bell-pushers in my bedroom read, 'If service is required, give two strokes to the maid and three for the valet'. Rather drastic punishment, I might say.

Yet another example of Talking Turkey is this sign spotted in a hotel in Ankara. It politely requests guests, 'To please hang your order before retiring on your doorknob'.

Two final examples sum up this whole subject of signs and notices, in what has come to be known as 'Gringlish' (a combination of gibberish and English). Year ago now, near the Place Pigalle in Paris, my wife and I spied a bistro which proclaimed on a large sign above the door: 'More or less we speak English'. The second is the wording on a notice I spotted in a Stockholm hotel lobby for a tour group. 'Your helpful tour guide is Dotti'.

It could have happened to any one of us!

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