

Martin's Moment

Martin opened his box of Sweety Puff cereal and poured it into a old bowl. A single pair of puffs fell out and rattled around in the cheap plastic.

"Jesus Christ", he thought to himself as his stomach pretzeled itself with hunger to the point of nausea.

He didn't know why, but something about that Sweety Puff cereal had always reminded him of his childhood. It was the most comfortable of his favorite comfort foods. His tried and true prepubescent treat. Something he could always rely on at the end of a long day to make him feel better, even young again, if only for that moment.

But now, sitting by himself in his mangled apartment on the corner of nowhere in particular and some number over 50th, the two lonely puffs at the bottom of his lonely bowl looked up at him like two little sugar coated eyeballs. Staring at him as if to say, "Eat us or fuck off, we have better things we'd like to be doing too." Martin sighed an unconvincing sigh and reluctantly picked the puffs out with his fingers and ate them. His stomach winced as he suddenly realized just how sugary they actually are.

He shuffled over to his refrigerator to open it for the fourth time in four minutes. He knew there was nothing in there, yet every time he opened it he had always managed to convince himself of possessing detective-like intuition and hoped he had overlooked some crucial piece of evidence that actual food had once been inside it.

Martin had always made a point to save a decent percentage of his food for consumption at a later date. On a ordinary day he would at least be looking at a black and blue bite of sandwich and possibly some popsicles, but none such prospects presented themselves.

Perhaps he would find the rotting remains of leftover take-out, or the last long lost string cheese that may have rolled to the back of the bottom drawer, hiding away from Martins greasy, ripping fingers and finding a nice quiet spot where it could finally mold into oblivion in peace. At this point, he'd be happy to find a stray grape.

But that grape wouldn't be there.

Nothing was there.

Nothing was ever there.

In fact, the consistency of things not being there had gotten to the point that Martin started to think that the only reason he ever even opened his refrigerator to begin

with was because that was what respectable people with actual food do, and to not look at all was confirmation of the fact that he never had any in the first place.

The only thing staring back at him was the clearly spoiled splash of milk at the bottom of a quarter gallon jug, a green nickel for some reason, and a dark ominous substance of unknown origin in the back corner of the bottom shelf making its way up and down the seams of the walls and drawers. The milk was beginning to stink and burn Martin's nostrils. He pocketed the oxidized coin, of course, and after surveying and shuddering at the ambiguous black patch, he figured he better delete that out of his memory bank for now, it was doing nothing promising for his appetite and would have to be taken take of later. Martin's procrastination was in top form.

Martin also noticed a few various crusty shapes where once sat the containers of different consumable food stuffs. There was a pinkish-red circle where a plastic cup of sweet and sour sauce used to be, next to it a yellow square that must have been the perimeter of a Chinese noodle take-out box, but what confused Martin the most was what was at the back of the top shelf. He bent over and shoved his head into the fridge to get a better look.

Written in what appeared to be chicken gravy, the words, "Lick Me" were scrawled out and stuck to the plastic. Had he written this himself? Couldn't be. He never made a point to make himself feel worse about his living in squalor. He chalked it up to one of his so-called friends opening the refrigerator on some drunken night and leaving him a sarcastic reminder to nourish himself the next day. He considered actually licking it to appease his screaming stomach, but decided against it as to not give the culprit the satisfaction of actually obeying their command. He looked at the milk again...not a chance. He lobbed the white puddle into an overflowing garbage can.

Looks like he couldn't have eaten the Sweet Puffs even if he did have enough of them. No man of any respectable nature would keep so little milk for so long.

Though Martin, being somewhat cunning in his own self-proclaimed way, had thought a long while ago that leaving just a small amount of milk at the bottom of a jug was a great way for any guests he might (but probably would never) have over to think that he was indeed a completely normal grocery-affording man and that he just hadn't made it to the store quite yet. "Purchasing your own groceries is clearly the mark of a stand up guy. This person can obviously afford an entire assortment of other meal-making amenities, and I'm entirely sure that this is what Martin

does on an almost regular basis. No doubt in my mind at all", they would think to themselves as they were being entertained by the fictitious tales of Martins past adventures and mishaps, that he would most likely be making up on the spot.

And if that didn't work, the amount of milk left wasn't enough for anyone to, god forbid, ask to drink any of it. Thus, this would leave Martin in a neurotic state of self-assurance, knowing full well he would be able to cover at least seventeen Puffs with that amount of milk the next morning, had he had either at the time.

He decided after heavy consideration that scrounging for crumbs under the couch or the possible option of eating one of his shoes would probably only end with disastrous results. All that rubber probably wouldn't be good for his digestive track anyway, so he went to his freezer to eat some ice.

There wasn't any.

He remembered he was going to open the fridge to look for anything worth eating when he also remembered that he had just done that a moment ago. There could have been a secret something behind his milk decoy, but it was an almost definite impossibility.

He took a peak just in case.

Not used to being awake so early in the day, and eventually coming to terms with the fact that there were such people very much healthy and alive at this hour, Martin grabbed a jacket and threw up the hood to cover what one might call a slowly zombifying face. Most likely because he hadn't slept in what felt like weeks or eaten in what felt like...well...just as long. The five day sprint of his oncoming beard covered up most of what looked like cheek bones that could very well poke the eye out of an unsuspecting passerby.

His eyes had long since sunk deep, and the bags under them looked like someone who had put all of their heaviest groceries into one plastic sack and let it stretch to the point of snapping. His skin was glossy and discolored from the lack of fresh sunlight or a healthy shower, with nicks here and there on his cheeks and neck from attempting the noble act of shaving with a rusted razor the week before.

His pant leg patchwork looked like he had made them out of the overcoat of three separate homeless men. Not to mention his jacket was stained, torn at the sleeves, and was just about as old as he was, which in his case was becoming

more and more indecipherable every time he looked in the mirror. 28? Really? Had it been so long? Each chance he got to actually look at himself, he was surprised at how much age his job was really putting on him. It didn't help that his hygiene took a back seat to his survival while trying to live on such meager wages.

Martin walked to and stood at his cracked and water-smudged bathroom mirror. He looked himself up and down with a furrowed brow knowing full well that he had to have at least some modicum of decorum at his job. Martin pulled his hood strings tighter and threw on his work boots. He left his hunger behind, kicked the last of his self-respect over the curb to wade into the sewer with the rest of the city's street trash, and walked through out the front door of his apartment into the blinding morning light and towards destiny.

Not any particularly grand destiny, but destiny nonetheless. For once in his life, Martin had made a clear and definite decision. One that could shape his future and his entire life indefinitely. A decision that would shake Martin's world to its very foundation. That was because,

Martin Oswald Scattergood,

was going to quit his job.

He had thought of this nearly every day for the past year, but lately it had been eating away at him with the same chomps that the guests of the restaurant in which he was employed used to tear apart The American Dream. Not THE American Dream, but that was the name of the largest meal on the menu. A roasted chicken, deep-fried whole, cut in half, put on either side of a 22oz Porter House steak as "buns", all this is drizzled with on ungodly amount of gravy and placed onto a "plate" made out of ribs, and not just any ribs, but Big Rig's famous "Blazin' BBQ Gut-Busters", a name that brought a shutter to Martin's spine. The meal of heathens.

This time was different. It had infiltrated his mind like a virus. Penetrating every thought and coursing through his every vein. Enough was enough. Watching the countless gluttons in the midst of a beast feast every night had come to an end. His life as a modern slave, shoveling food into the massive mouths of the country's finest obese and obscene patrons, would be no more.

Martin practiced his soon-to-be famous last words as he walked to work. Ten blocks of split sidewalks and shoddy suburbs. He did find it hard to concentrate though, as his ear drums would periodically be overwhelmed by the growling

of gas guzzlers awakening from slumber. They rolled by him with authority, peeling off to the left and to the right and out of sight.

Breaking free of that auditory oppression, Martin found himself downtown and began to wade through a river of men and women walking by in meticulously crafted business ensembles. The men with necktie nooses cutting off the circulation to their brains, and the women in either formal suits or modest dresses. They all strode by unaware of each other or even themselves.

*So many people*, he thought, taking his mind off of his upcoming momentous occasion, as droves of walking and talking humans all bobbed along past him in a bubble of predestination. It made his own head start bob when he really thought about it. An ocean of heads and hair. What were they *doing*? Where were they *going*? Most likely towards whatever place of employment held their very important and highly esteemed careers, Martin figured. It was all so mechanical, he thought. It's a wonder they had any autonomy left at all.

A man with a plastic haircut and a smile full of shit bounded forward with his head down, texting. Meanwhile, Martin stared at the sky. His head full of his upcoming achievement and the how the one cloud he happened to be staring at looked a lot like a chicken on a skateboard, among its other similar nonsense. He was also thinking of how good it felt to be on the opposite side of the work force spectrum compared to these people. And just as the forces of light and dark are destined to collide, Martin walked directly into the man, who dropped his phone on the pavement.

"What the hell, asshole?" the man barked at Martin as he bent over to pick his phone up. "Open your fucking eyes. You better hope this didn't break."

"Sorry, I wasn't looking." Martin said. "Maybe you shouldn't text and walk. It can be pretty hazardous for some people"

"Or maybe you could just watch where you're fucking going! Some of us have places to be, jackass. Not like you would understand that I'm sure." the man said, his elevator eyes reaching Martin's top and bottom floor.

Martin thought about that and laughed, "Yeah, I bet you do." His smokers cough kicked in and he started hacking in the man's face, which he thought was even funnier, and in turn threw his coughing fit into a frenzy. The man scoffed at him in disgust as Martin wheezed and gagged and guffawed, violating almost all of the man's senses.

"Get a job." he said just as some stray spittle arced through the air and onto the man's pressed suit. "What the- Are you serious?!"

"Oh, wow, looks like I got ya there. Here, let me just-" Martin said, reaching out to rub the spit splatter of the guy's shoulder.

"No! Don't touch me! Do you have any idea how much this suit cost? I could sue you, do you know that?" Martin stood with his mouth open eyes wide, not in surprise, more in confusion at the words themselves. He saw a trash can with some napkins hanging out of it and went to grab one.

"Here, let's just use one of these bad boys and you'll be fit as a fiddle in no time."

"What? No! That's disgusting! Just get away from me you fucking bum!" the man said, shoving Martin aside.

The man turned and began to hustle away, stumbling and mumbling in disbelief at his mornings turn of events. Other people on the street watched him in annoyed confusion and he tripped over himself trying to get away from Martin and looking more like the crazy one at this point. "God damn hobo piece of shit! I can't believe this!" Martin watched him walk away, his hand still holding the napkin at arms length.

"Ya know," Martin shouted at the man, "This didn't have to be so bad! This could have been the start of a blooming friendship! This napkin could have been the very paper we signed over our devotion to each each other! You and me against the world! What do you say?"

The man, distraught and steaming, hollered back, "Don't come near me again you fucking homeless degenerate or I'll call the cops!" Martin looked down at his clothing and realized that he could definitely pass for homeless, or at least jobless. And knowing what he had planned to do that very day, he started to cackle like a madman. Mr. Shit Smile glanced back with caution, as if he thought Martin's laughter-filled lungs were contagious and he didn't want to contract any such joy. Martin shook his head, "Fucking prick." he said and continued walking.

Just what he needed, Martin thought. Affirmation from the enemy that his intentions were pure. All of these cruising suits on cell phones couldn't bother him today. The day of all days. His crowning achievement. He thought of the glory ahead and bounded forward towards his place of employment, Big Rig's Bovine Barbecue, and for once, instead of dragging his feet and being practically on the verge of tears, he held his held high.

He turned onto the street that the restaurant was on when Martin realized that he needed a plan of attack. Not a physical attack, he wouldn't do anything unlawful, of course. He wasn't a crook by any stretch of criminal crookery, but he felt he did need some sort of exit strategy for his momentous moment. So, for the time being, he decided to take his mind off of the babbling business brook in front of him and move on to think about more pressing matters.

So he thought. He was staring at the ground watching his feet as he did so. On and on he thought until his furrowed forehead couldn't take any more contemplation. He realized he hadn't actually come up with anything better to say than, "I quit". This wouldn't cut it, but before he got a chance to start thinking some more, his lowered head ran straight into a cow.

Not a real cow, a man-made metal cow. It sat outside the front doors of the restaurant and held a steak dinner in its hands. It had the eyes of a lunatic cartoon and was apparently fairly eager to cannibalize its own kind. Or perhaps realizing the taboo it had committed is what made it go crazy in the first place. Either way, Martin despised it. He rubbed his head to try and stop the pain that the hoofed heifer had caused his head.

Over the door and behind the metal mascot was a sign. A flickering cracked sign, each letter the size of the cow. The sign was so large, in fact, you would think it belonged on the side of a sports arena and not the bottom-rung steak house over which it resided.

The size of the sign was most likely suppose to be an indication of how large the portions of food inside were. "Big Rig's B-B-Q" the sign read, with a caption under saying, "Come in, you must! Give that gut a bust!" Martin's gag reflex tested his patience every time he read it. He took the side door instead.

Martin opened the first set of doors and pushed through the second set, which were made in the style of old swinging saloon doors, and snuck into the side room where employees clocked in and where the take-out orders were handled. There was also usually, at least Martin usually hoped, one of the hostess girls on take-out duty back there. If he was lucky enough that one of the girls was, in fact, back there, he would then proceed to unfurl his self-proclaimed silver tongue in an attempt to woo them to the best of his abilities.

He had no such luck.

The person who stood there in place of a pretty, bubbly hostess, was Martin's good friend, Matt, or Mamu to his



close friends. Actually, people who didn't know him called him Matthew, his friends called him Matt, his closer friends called him Mamu, and his closest friends ended up just calling him Matt again, with his family using anything they saw fit in the moment.

Matt, or Mamu, if you so desire, was tit for tat disheveled, with wildly long curly hair, glasses, and the sort of beard that puts all of those fellows unlucky enough to find themselves locked away in a Dark Age dungeon to shame. He walked in looking as classically strung out and joy-stricken as everyone in the kitchen does after a few months of working there.

Both Martin and Matt looked at each other and sighed an exaggeratingly long sigh. Words were never necessary at times like this. They both knew the kind of torture they were about to endure, and verbalizing the situation in any way would do more harm than good they had come to realize.

They both punched their numbers into the computer to clock-in and were turning to head into hell when the man they both despised even more than the job itself burst in through the door they were about to enter, the side of the door almost hitting Martin in the face.

It was Reggie Lynch, or, "Big Rig" as he so elegantly named himself. The man was a walking personification of everything the boys hated in this world. He was pushing over 400 of the most greasy, unhealthy pounds Martin had ever seen, all of which was somehow balancing atop two narrow legs, which always seemed to be on the verge on snapping under the pressure and splitting him open like an inbred humpty dumpty. His neck looked like he tried to swallow an entire pan of jello that never quite made it down his throat, so it just set up shop in his esophagus to continually wiggle and jiggle at every word Rig spoke as if it was trying to wave to the rest of the homeless jello pans out there to invite them to move in. All in all, he was atrocious. The very sight of the man made Martin want to skewer him, shove an apple in his mouth, and slowly roast him rotisserie style over an open flame.

"Boys! How are my chipper chaps this evening?" Rig jiggled out. The guys looked at each other with deadpan stares. They couldn't help but fight back a smirk. They could never really look at each other for too long without making themselves laugh just a little. They each were the others saving grace in this place.

"Great Rig! Great! If I was any better I'd be radioactive!" Matt said, puffing out his chest and raising his hands to the heavens.

"Well that there is fan-fish-fryin'-tastic! Am I right? Haha!" Rig said, the jelly rolls on his neck and stomach bouncing so much they could have fallen off and been sold at a local bakery. He turned to Martin, "How 'bout you, Marty? Ready to kick ass tonight?"

Martin looked at Matt, his eyes straining out of their sockets to say, "*My god, how does this creature even exist?*" His mouth reluctantly saying, "Definitely! Another day in paradise!"

Rig stared at Martin intensely, "There ya go! Bet ya can't wait to get your hands on some of those prime cuts!" Matt's jaw was on the floor, but Martin could never pass on an opportunity to improvise a little Texas twang.

"Damn straight!" Martin said, "Ya know what they say, 'The better the cut, the bigger the gut!' And you know I'm workin' on mine!" Martin leaned back and smacked his starved excuse for a gut. "Boy howdy!" he added for good measure. Matt hid behind Rig out of sight convulsing with his fist over his mouth.

"Haha! That's what I'm talkin' about! Good to hear it, boys! Now get out there and cook up the King of Meats! There's a reason they call it *Sir-loin!* Get it? Haha!" Rig said, bounding off back into the kitchen to ruin someone else's day. Martin looked at Matt with wide eyes and shaking his head. Matt looked at Martin looking the same with his mouth still agape. Once again, no words were necessary. They laughed in utter disbelief as they did every time they encountered that bumbling walrus of a man.

Martin's shift being officially started, he began working as normal. He walked over to the dishwashing area. The incessant clanking and splattering were already making Martin rub his temples.

A familiar smell stormed into his nose. A smell known by restaurant workers everywhere. A smell that could only come from the dish area in said restaurants. It was the smell of almost every food known to man, or at least known to the establishment, all mixed together and soaked with water, soap, and bleach. In this particular establishment, it was the smell of every inch a cow had to offer, every different cut, every organ, wrapped in miles of bacon strips and dipped in old barbecue sauce, new barbecue sauce, spicy barbecue sauce, mild barbecue sauce, watery barbecue, firey barbecue sauce, 'gut-bustin' barbecue sauce, Texas Twister barbecue sauce, grilled chicken shreds, chicken stock, chicken guts, chicken gravy, breaded beaks, fried feathers, toasted talons, chik-on-a-stick dipping sauce, 'Howdy Pardner' Potatoes, Snake Skin Sweet potatoes, Fat-Fanny

french fries, barbed wire curly fries, green beans, baked beans, tried and true beans, fried beans, dyed beans, black and blue boo-hoo beans, Wonderland mushrooms, Crybaby onion soup, fried bloomin' basketball onions, fried bologna rolls, fried cock-eyed cow eyes, rattlesnake spaghetti, tumbleweed tortellini, "Next-to-Nothin'" lizard tongue knots, Cock-a-Doodle-Dumplings, Bambi's Bloodbath bread rolls and blood butter, the three ring chicken wing circus with on-the-spot anything goes sauces, concocted from any ingredient the customer wants from anything the kitchen has to offer, critter fritters of every fruit, choco-lava hurricane helmets, any ice cream on a tornado cone, every salad dressing under the sun, a hundred different seasonings, melted cheese, moldy cheese, burnt cheese, fresh cheese, grilled fish, rotten fish, fish from deep freeze(which usually smelled no different), every conceivable combination of those things, and then again deep fried, along with the greasy fryer crust itself, and all washed down with a few dozen buckets of bovine blood and some delicious fountain soda.

All of these ingredients lay on the floors and drains and at the bottom of a wet metal tray over which the dish sprayer sprayed away. And let's not forget how it was also squished into every nook and cranny of the entire kitchen where no man ever dared venture to clean. The substance stuck to the bottoms of your shoes where it would seal itself until the end of time. The stench stuck in your clothes like the smell of an ex-lover, always there to remind you of where you have to go back to, instead of who you want to come back.

Two of the new young dishwashers were back there, washing their hearts out. They were soaked from head to toe with wet food stuck to their clothes. Dishes were building up and towering over their heads. The floor around them was essentially a lake due to the pile of sopping slop clogging up the only drain. The new guys would eventually get used to the mountainous piles of kitchen ware and dirty dishes soon enough, just as Martin and Matt had to at one point, but for now they'd have to stick it out in the trenches until they proved their worthiness to work on the line. They seemed to be working as hard and as fast as they could. Although, you couldn't tell if it was sweat on their heads and shirt, or just the splashes of dirty water.

"How's it hangin' men?" Matt said to the kids, walking up behind Martin to grab an apron. The new guys didn't answer and continued washing their asses off. They also most likely couldn't hear over the howling hissing dish machine. Matt walked over to a stack of clean dishes and grabbed a plate. One of the new guys noticed him. "Missed a spot" Matt said, spitting on the plate and holding it out to the guy.

The kid clenched his jaw, but trying to keep up with the fast pace he was working at, hurried over to take the plate and wash it again. Just as the kid reached his hand out to take the plate from Matt's hand, Matt let it drop to the floor where it shattered into a hundred pieces. "Uh oh." Matt said. "Bu-bu-butter fingers." Martin buckled over.

Matt had a real knack for physical exaggeration and demonstrated it whenever possible to make a point. This especially was the case with new guys.

"H-hey now." Martin said between gasps for breath. "You-you can't just start throwing dishes around all willy nilly just because you're busy." Matt nodded in agreement, "He's right. Why would you do such a thing?"

"Shit! Come on!" the kid said, looking around to see if anyone had seen that happen or was going to say anything about the broken dish. He bent down to pick up the pieces. "Listen." said Matt, "You too, get over here." he called to the kid's friend, who was still spraying away with his back turned, barely paying attention. The sprayer kid looked over his shoulder and saw them. He stopped spraying and came over.

"Okay, what's your name?" Matt asked the first kid, whose shirt was so small is barely covered his belly button.

"Tyler" he said.

"And you?" Matt asked the sprayer kid.

"Corey" said the second kid, whose shirt was so big is could have passed for a dress.

"Alright, Tyler and Corey. Two things you need to learn real quick. One, don't let guys like us shit all over you. I mean fuck, call me an asshole for Christ's sake, or it's gonna happen more. And two, don't start giving a shit about this place or it'll suck out your soul through a fuckin' swizzle straw. Got that?" Matt looked at them both seriously. Tyler and Corey both looked at a loss for words. All Tyler could get out was, "Uh...". Martin looked at Matt trying not to laugh. "Nah! Just fuckin' with ya. Back to work, dicklick." Matt said. Martin's stifled laugh breaking free. Matt laughing right along with him.

"You're such a dick." Martin said, still laughing.

"Shit, somebody's got to fuck with them. And what are you talking about? You do the same shit." Matt said.

"Yea, I suppose you're right." said Martin. With that, Martin grabbed a small bowl from another stack and tossed it towards Tyler, whose back was turned at that point. "Catch!" he yelled, while the bowl was clearly already on its way to the ground. Tyler turned and pathetically put out his dripping hands, but it was a lost cause. Another dish bit the dust.

"Oops!" Matt yelled out the rest of the kitchen, a few of the guys on the line yelled back, "Uh oh!" and, "What is this, your first day?" Matt and Martin looked at Tyler who was starting to get fed up.

"What the hell, asshole?" Tyler said to them.

"Hey! Now your gettin' it!" Matt said as he and Martin walked away.

"Seriously" Tyler said over his shoulder, "Cut the shit or we're gonna have a problem." Martin and Matt's eyes caught each other.

Martin walked over to Tyler, "Is that so? And what kind of problem will there be exactly?" Tyler turned and looked back and forth between him and Matt, suddenly losing his gusto.

"Don't worry about it, just stop." he said.

Martin put his hand on a stack of clean plates. "So, you wouldn't want to me accidentally slip and topple over this perfectly clean pile of dishes would you? That couldn't end well" Martin started to shuffle his feet as if he was about to fall.

"Stop! What are you doing?!" Tyler yelled, running over to the stack. Martin's feet were picking up speed. "I- I can't- it's just- too- s-s-slippery!" he said, holding onto the stack to keep from falling.

"Come on, stop!" said Tyler, also holding the stack. Martin stopped shuffling and stuck a foot out behind Tyler. He kicked Tyler's leg out and Tyler fell on his ass, taking a few plates with him. Luckily, the plates hit the rubber mat by the dish machine that was there specifically to prevent such catastrophes.

"Oh, down he goes!" Martin said, standing over Tyler "Watch where you're walkin', man! You could break a leg! Wouldn't want to do that, especially not today. Why, it's the day of all days!" Martin said, pointing a finger upward. Tyler looked up at him, even more wet now that his ass hit the floor. He got up and picked up the dishes in frustration.

Martin wagged a finger at Tyler and walked off. Matt shrugged and followed.

Martin walked over to the soda dispenser and poured himself a large root beer. Matt walked up beside him. "What did you mean, 'the day of all days'? What's today?" he asked Martin. Martin shrugged, "Nothin' just fuckin' with him, don't worry about it."

They both made their way to the grills, Matt opened up a drawer under the grill that held the steaks to make sure they were stocked up. Martin inhaled until he was about to burst and sighed nice and slow for a good twenty seconds. He looked out into the dining room where the first few of the oncoming dinner rush were being sat, zoning out before he actually had to start using his brain. He snapped out of it.

"So, what's goin' on?" Martin said, grabbing some tongs and ripping a ticket down from the printer that sat on top of a shelf and that the orders came out of. Matt sighed a long and equally exaggerated sigh.

"Oh, you know. Same shit-" Matt said.

"Mamu! I need those re-cooks! What the hell?" A server named Krystal yelled from the down the line at the servers station.

"They're fuckin' comin', bitch! I just got here! Jesus Christ!" Matt yelled.

"Well, maybe if you got it right the first time, you wouldn't have so many re-cooks, asshole!" Krystal yelled back.

"I didn't even cook them the first time! Are you retarded? You should have told that stupid ass Carl to do it! Good lord, you're already giving me a headache!" Matt said.

Krystal's calloused emotional exterior took the verbal torment like a champ. She put a hand over her heart, "Aw, you poor baby. Do you need me to tickle your balls for you? Would that help you, baby? My poor sweet baby boy? Just fucking do it!" she said and walked back out to her tables. Martin, being both blind and deaf to this sort of back-of-the-house banter, stood there patiently, the orders hanging out of the ticket printer like a perforated paper tongue.

"-different day." Matt said, turning back to Martin.

"Did you just finish the same sentence that..." Martin trailed off with his head cocked. Matt looked at him as if

to say, "Yeah? And?". Martin need not bother. He tore the ticket tongue from the mouth of the machine, grabbed a few steaks out of the drawer under the grill, and threw them on with a smacking sizzle.

"So, Mamu." said Martin, getting ready to reveal his big surprise. Matt kept his eyes on the grill, but he was listening. "So, yeah, just so you know and, ya know, so you're not surprised later, I'm--"

"You're quitting?" Matt said. This threw Martin off a bit. "Um, yeah." Martin said. "How do you know?"

"Because you say it every day." Matt said, flipping a burger.

"What? I do not." Martin said. Matt stared at Martin with an eyebrow raised. "You have literally said that every day this week." Matt said. "And that's not counting the weeks before, but God knows I can't remember that far back."

"Well, whatever." said Martin. "This time it's happening. I can't take this shit anymore. I'm done. I'm out."

Matt laughed and pulled down another ticket, "Alright, man." he said, "Just let me know how long you'll be gone. We got a 30-top comin' in at nine and I'm not doing that shit myself."

"Well you better find someone, 'cause I'm sure as hell not gonna be here." Martin said, searing an 8 ounce sirloin and throwing it up onto the grease-ridden tray for steaks and pushing it through the window. "Food up!" he called to the people on the other side.

One of the guys on the other side peaked his head over and pulled the steak down. He disappeared just as quick. The static from the grills filled the air. Martin watched as the red meat before him slowly turned brown. The stink of raw chicken and the dust of steak seasoning swirled around Martin's head.

Matt looked down and shook his head, chuckling, "Oh yeah? And what time are you going to be leaving exactly? I should probably know so I know when I gonna get fucked."

"Pretty soon probably." Martin said boastfully, stretching his arms upward. "Should be drunk by nine."

"Right, like you bought booze." Matt said.

"Whatever, man." Martin said, "You know what? I think I'll take off after these orders, actually. Wouldn't want to

leave ya hangin' or anything, I'll finish 'em. But it's not like I put my two weeks in or anything. I'm just walkin' out, so be ready."

Matt chuckled and shook his head, "Oookay. We'll see."

"Yes, we will." said Martin, smirking. "Yes, we will."

Martin looked at the clock. 4:30 p.m. Any moment now, he thought. A couple 8-tops came and went, a party of 12, two 10-tops, and a little league team. They didn't really count though because they mostly ordered fried stuff. He looked back to the clock after what felt like 40 minutes, 8:30 p.m.

"But- but how?" Martin said.

Matt didn't look over, "What did you expect? That's how it always goes." Martin stood wide-eyed. He's always been used to the time flying by while working, but this was different, he had a deadline tonight. This was the only thing Martin and Matt had said to each other this entire time other than the usual work related jargon because they were so busy, but still, Martin was beyond flustered. The vision in his head was not anything like this.

When Martin had pictured it, he had just finished a few easy orders and was looking around at the people eating in the dining room. It was a slow night and he made himself a nice, juicy steak, he cooked up a few veggies and maybe a tasty fried something or other. He would finish eating, walk slowly out into the dining room, and make a fantastic speech to the people of the restaurant. It would be honest and heartfelt and witty and hilarious and gut-wrenching and everyone eating would be so surprised and appalled that they would spit out there food or drink in shock. All the guys in the kitchen would be hootin' and hollerin' and applauding his courage to stand up against 'the Man'. Meanwhile, Some old lady in the dining room would say, "Well, I never!" and some other guy would stand up and say, "Now, you listen here, Buster!" Then, everyone in the place would start yelling out, "I want to see a manager!" and, "This is outrageous! I want my money back!" and the whole place would be in an uproar. Some people angry, some clapping, others fainting and choking and throwing up all over the place. The guys in the kitchen would rip off their shirts in a fit of victory and swing them over their heads. The entire staff would start running to the tables and slamming their faces into the guest's dinner, snorting and slobbering all over the pitiful pig people that sat there. Martin would walk to the door, triumphant. He would take off his apron and throw it in the face of the guy that called him "Buster", whose face would be so red that another patron might mistake it for a rare fillet and try to slice a cheek off. Then, Martin



would rip the greasy, crusty, bloody shirt off his chest. He would laugh wildly and scream, "Fuck you all! Fuck this food! Fuck these people! And most of all, fuck Big Rig! I quit!" He would then bow a gentleman's bow, and leave.

A man from The National Badass Society would be waiting at the front door to congratulate him and would hand him a platinum trophy which would be a sculpture of Martin with eyes like a wild tiger and his face having the fierceness of a heroic legend. One of the trophies hands on its waist and the other pointing a knife to the sky, at the end of which would hang an actual cooked steak that Martin would take a bite out of, spit into the air, remove the rest of it, and slap the NBS man in the face. The blood from the steak splattering onto the wall creating a dripping red stain that would say, "I Ain't Yo' Prized Pony, Bitch." The whole foundation of the restaurant would be shaking from this victory over his oppressors. He would stride in confidence out of the front doors and they would close behind him like a curtain coming down on the most historical play ever conceived.

After that, well, Martin hadn't thought that far ahead, but nothing he could think of would even matter if he could succeed in burning out in such a fantastic fiery blaze of glory. But alas, instead of his mortal coil disintegrating into oblivion by such a phenomenal inferno, Martin was still stuck with his arm hairs and eyebrows being singed off behind the grill. He was cooking and flipping and searing as fast as he could, burns and cuts all over his arms and sweat dripping from places he didn't know existed.

Suddenly, Martin stopped. He looked out over the display window where the people could see into the kitchen to watch them cook. He saw the hungry faces, all waiting to devour his tiny soul. He felt the overwhelming feeling of despair and terror and somehow just knew that they would eat him alive if he stayed there for one extra second. That was not about to happen. Something had to be done.

This was it. He saw it now. This was the moment. HIS moment. He shook his head out the sizzling, steaming haze and turned to face the evil in front of him.

He dropped his tongs on the ground and walked out of the kitchen.

"What the hell, man? Your food's gonna burn. Where are you going?" Matt called after him.

Martin walked, almost automatically, into the depths of the enemy. Into the swarms of drooling, snarling animals. They all stared at him as if he was an absolute madman, completely out of his depth.

Martin stood in the midst of them all. This was it. The only thing that existed was this moment and the rest of all time. He was ready for his salvation. He took a deep breath and bellowed, "Ex-". "Excuse me, everyone!" a voice yelled from the other side of the dining room, cutting him off. Martin tried to see through the mass of heads to who the voice belonged to. He saw a guy with shaggy hair standing in the middle of the dining room. He was tall, so tall that his shirt looked small. Really small. So small in fact that it barely covered his belly button. Wait. Tyler? Martin thought, tilting his head. But, how?

"Thank you." Tyler shouted out, "I've gotten your attention here today to say something that I've wanted to say ever since I started this shit job." Tyler looked around at the puzzled patrons. "Don't you want to know what it is?" Martin looked back at Matt who was watching Tyler with little to no interest. Once Matt saw Martin's dumbfounded face, he started pointing at him and slapping his knee, his mouth forced open in hysterics.

Martin looked back to Tyler, who had his arms out and was turning on way and the other, waiting for a response to his previous rhetorical question. "Well?" he asked, "I'll tell you what it is, I fucking quit motherfuckers!" He shot two middle fingers into the air and started walking towards the door, straight at Martin. Tyler was pointing his middle fingers at individuals on the way. "Fuck you, fuck you, fuck you, fuuuuck yooouuu!" Tyler found his way through the passive onlookers and to Martin, whose mouth was still hanging open. "And especially, FUCK YOU!" Tyler yelled into Martin's baffled face as he strode through the field of dinner guests and out the front door, slamming it behind him. "Asshole!" a random guy yelled from across the restaurant.

The noise level returned to normal as Martin slowly regained consciousness. Guests went back into their humming conversations and Martin walked back to the grill, looking at the ground.

"I-I just-" Martin said.

"Ha! Did you see that shit? That was epic!" said Matt, slapping Martin's back, "Tyler has some fuckin' balls! I wonder if it's because of what we did earlier." Matt squinted upward as if he was actually contemplating this, "Nah! Doubt it. Whatever though, that dude's badass!"

Martin picked his tongs up off the ground and dipped them into a bucket of sanitizer to clean them off, "Yea, yea I don't know." he said.

"Oh, come on." Matt said, "It's not like you were actually gonna go through with it."

Martin looked up and stared at Matt. "I uh- no, I guess." Martin shook his head, "I mean no! Pfft! I mean, shit, I'm gonna quit alright, but it'll be way better than that!" Martin thumbed backwards, "Talk about booring."

Matt's face light up at this. "Were you even here a minute ago? That kid fuckin' burned you! He burned this whole place! Don't even tell me you could do better, that's bullshit!" In the meantime, cows continued to crackle and poultry prickled on the grill.

"Well, not tonight, of course." Martin said, "People'll just think I'm just trying to copy whatshisdick."

"Oh, right, totally. Yea, you wouldn't want to copy the most bad ass quitting I've ever seen." Matt said.

"Nope." said Martin, "Mine will be way better, trust me."

Matt snickered and tossed a steak into the window. "Oh, I trust you alright. I trust you talk out of your ass until the cows come home and throw themselves on this grill." Martin's eyes hit the back of his skull, "Jesus, who are you? Fucking Rig?" he said, slapping a chicken breast onto the flat top.

"Ha! wouldn't you like to know." Matt said. Martin squinted his eyes at him, "Wha- what does that even mean?" Matt, still shaking from his giggle fit, said "I dunno, man. That kid got me pumped. I'm all giddy now."

"Whatever." Martin said. Matt smacked Martin's shoulder, still laughing, "Aw, don't worry, you'll get 'em next time, tiger. I'm sure of it."

"Oh, I'll get 'em, alright." Martin said, "I'm gonna get the fuck out of 'em."