

THE BEAR

"101"

Written by

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A CAGE

Directly in the middle of Orleans Street. Something trapped, locked away. A CREATURE whimpers, cries from inside. It moves only in a SQUARE, BROWN FUR sweeps between metal bars, body too big for the cell. Silent between whines. STEEL slivers of CHICAGO in the distant night. Nobody around until--

CARMY "THE BEAR" BERZATTO, 25 years old, strung out, apron around his waist, slowly approaches the cage...

CARMY
Shhh.... Shhh... it's okay...

The cage begins to ROCK back and forth with the CREATURE'S weight. Carmy nervously, slowly undoes the latch, opens the CAGE DOOR and QUICKLY BACKS UP. Then. After a moment...

CARMY
Come on... go...

The CREATURE emerges. A MASS OF DIRTY, MATTED HAIR. FOUR STOUT LEGS STRETCH, GRIME AND GORE AFFIXED TO SHARP CLAWS. MOUTH BLEEDING and ILL. Dog? Coyote? Whatever it is stands, shivers. Carmy bends to the ground. Stares at the creature. Silence. Then, the creature moves, walking only in a SQUARE.

CARMY
It's okay... it's okay...

The Creature stops, looks at Carmy, reveals sad, abused eyes. There was a cute animal in there once. Carmy nods...

CARMY
I know.

Carmy reaches to pet it, FANGS JUT FROM THE CREATURES MOUTH, GROWS INTO A NIGHTMARISH MONSTER, LUNGES AT CARMY JUST AS--

He wakes up violently, panting. Sits up, we're in--

INT. THE BEEF/KITCHEN - MORNING

The kitchen. He fell asleep on the prep table. Surrounded by STEEL. Stoves. Ovens. Pots. Pans. FIELDS of TOMATO CANS. SPEEDRACKS. Plates. Bowls. A BUZZ AT the front door, Carmy bolts up to the STOVE, STIRS A BOILING GRAVY POT, EXITS INTO--

INT. THE BEEF - CONTINUOUS

Threads the narrow pass between deep FRYERS, CONDIMENT STATIONS and CASH REGISTERS.

On the other side of the COUNTER resides old booths, RIPPED VINYL SEATS, BRIGHT OVERHEAD LIGHTS and CHECKERED FLOORS -- almost cute, save for the ULTIMATE BALLBREAKER arcade games in the corner screaming profanity. Carm opens the front door.

CARMY

Yo.

DELIVERY GUY

(hands Carm a receipt)
Wrigleyville Meat.

CARMY

25 pounds? Supposed to be 200.

DELIVERY GUY

Take it up with Lu.

TITO - 50s, MORRISEY POMP - enters from the back with
EBRAHEIM - 40s, HAIRNET, WHITE TANK TOP - as they CLOCK-IN.

TITO

What happen now?

CARMY

Nothing--

EBRAHEIM

Carmen, don't mess up our place.

CARMY

I got it.

Tito and Ebraheim quietly talk shit and laugh.

INT. THE BEEF/OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Carm's eyes LOCKED on an **EXPENSES SPREADSHEET** gripped by his TATTOOED fingers. Circled and underlined phrases like **LABOR, PAST DUE, OVEREXTENDED TERMS**. Phone to his ear, surrounded by FAMOUS CHEF ARTICLES AND COOKBOOKS, a framed picture of his **MOTHER** - smiling as she cuts the ribbon of "THE BEEF"...

CARMY

That's really nice of you,
Luanne, but--

BALLBREAKER (O.S.)

ULTIMATE COCK ROCKER!

CARMY (CONT'D)

Sorry about that, we're grateful to
still be open after everything --

BALLBREAKER (O.S.)

YOUR BALLS ARE MY BALLS NOW!

CARMY
 (covers phone)
 CAN SOMEBODY SHUT BALLBREAKER
 UP?... Look this is my second week
 and I'm still figuring out how
 Michael was doing everything. I
 know it's late and I want to make
 it good... Are you sure? There's
 nothing I can do? Not this one
 time?... I understand... I miss him
 too, thanks anyway.
 (hangs up)
 Fuck.

BALLBREAKER (O.S.)
 YOUR BALLS HAVE BEEN BROKENNNNNN!

Carmy, pissed, explodes off the chair--

INT. DINING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Carmy storms to THREE MACHINES, about to unplug them--

BALLBREAKERS
 ULTIMATE BALLBREAKER!!! AHHYOOKENN!

TITO
 No unplug! Ever.

CARMY
 It's so loud--

TITO
 You unplug, won't work again, too
 much people play.

CARMY
 (beat)
 When was the last you emptied this?

LATER

Carmy unscrews the CHANGE RECEPTOR, THOUSANDS OF QUARTERS
 SPILL OUT. PILES and PUDDLES of quarters. Then, an idea.

**A TWEET: BALLBREAKER TODAY @the-beef!!!! WINNER TAKE ALL
 TOURNAMENT! AN INSTA POST: TOTAL BALLBREAKER machines: "ONLY
 SPOT IN CHICAGO TO PLAY! TODAY ONLY"** (filter shifts)

EXT. THE BEEF - MORNING

Carmy sprints out, "THE BEEF" written above in BLUE, AN ANIMATED PHOTO OF **MICHAEL BERZATTO** (Carmy's older brother) next to the door, STAINS and TAGS on the windows.

CARMY (V.O.)
*Chi-Chi, it's Carmy, you still got
 the connect at Premiere Meat?*

EXT. WELLS ST - MORNING

Carmy runs, winded, L TRAIN WHIPS ABOVE HIM--

INT. CARMY'S APARTMENT BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Sprints up the stairs--

INT. CARMY'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

Busts in through his EMPTY studio and B-LINES to the closet, unlocks the door with a key to reveal STACKS OF SHOE BOXES.

EXT. ORLEANS STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Carmy whips around the corner lugging two GIANT GARBAGE BAGS over his shoulder, like a deranged Santa Claus--

EXT. ALLEY - LATER

Carmy stands as CHI-CHI, jumpsuit & Jordans, white gloves, pulls SHOE BOXES from the bags, rapidly removes LID AFTER LID AFTER LID: YEEZY'S/UNION'S/JORDAN'S/etc, intensely inspects.

CHI-CHI
 We got issues. Where's the limited?

CARMY
 You're lookin' at the limited.

CHI-CHI
 Lookin' at reissues and samples.

CARMY
 Since when?

CHI-CHI
 Since these got *reissued* in 2012
 and these say "SAMPLE".

CARMY

Add this...

Carmy hands him a giant CRYOVAC'D sack of QUARTERS--

CHI-CHI

What am I am a Coinstar?

CARMY

Chi-Chi, that's like 4 hundo--

CHI-CHI

Okay, so that bullshit plus two Off-White 1's and a pair of Union 4's.

CARMY

Or a pair of the "Duck 3s"?

CHI-CHI

You got Oregon Duck 3's?

CARMY

I got Duck 3's.

CHI-CHI

Boom.

CARMY

Boom.

Chi-chi opens the trunk, pulls a HUGE COOLER-- IT INSTANTLY FALLS, HITS THE GROUND, BLOOD SPRAYS SHOE BOXES--

CARMY (CONT'D)

Whoa! Watch it, asshole.

CHI-CHI

Who cares? They're just reissues.

INT. THE BEEF/KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

STOVE TOP FLAME ignites. Carm FLIPS open the coolers, BLOODY MEAT inside. He lifts RIBS, slams 'em to the butcher block. SHITTY KNIFE pulled as Carm performs surgery. Quick strikes, precise carves. Shapeless heaps transform to GORGEOUS ROASTS--

Carmy does a hundred things at once; CHOPS onions, carrots, and garlic, stirs a GIANT GRAVY POT, breaks down celery and herbs, POURS RED WINE BOTTLES into ROASTING RACKS, BOILS VEAL STOCK, STIRS GRAVY POT AGAIN. ROASTED BONES & APRICOTS thrown into the ROASTING RACKS, SEARS MEAT in the pan, OVEN doors OPENED, hotel trays SHOVED IN, oven doors SHUT, timers turn.

SEARED BEEF scraps land into the GRAVY POT, Carmy doses it in water, flame goes to high. He grabs the phone, dials--

CARMY

Sugar, I need help. Not like that... I need the shoes Michael gave me... I gotta show a collector that's in town. Not Chi-Chi. Can you bring em to The Beef? I can meet ya halfway... Please? I promise you it's not what you think... Thank you.

He hangs up, then--

SYDNEY (O.S.)

Hello?

Carmy startled, SYDNEY at the kitchen entrance. 30s, knife bag around her shoulder, chef-whites.

CARMY

Scared me.

SYDNEY

I'm sorry. Carmy?

CARMY

Yeah, what's up?

SYDNEY

I'm Sydney. I called about the Sous position. You said I could stage--

CARMY

Oh my god, of course, sorry, I forgot. Nice to meet you.

SYDNEY

(hands him a resume)
You asked me to bring this...

CARMY

Thanks... Alinea, Smoque, Avec. Wow, those are serious spots... So what are you doing here?

SYDNEY

Not many spots left.

CARMY

(off resume)
Where's UPS? Chicago?

SYDNEY
United Parcel Service.

CARMY
That UPS. What'd you do there?

SYDNEY
Driver.

CARMY
Bet you know the city well.

SYDNEY
Too well... but it paid for
Culinary School.

CARMY
CIA?

SYDNEY
CIA.

CARMY
Heard... we're open 3-10 everyday.
In the shifts from 6 to 9.

SYDNEY
Heard.

CARMY
You know the drill, make family?
Meat plus 3 or one and a half. We
eat around 2.

SYDNEY
Yes, Chef. You ran EMP right?

CARMY
Yep.

SYDNEY
What was it like running the best
restaurant in the world?

CARMY
Like dismantling a bomb on a tilt-a-
whirl.

SYDNEY
(understands)
So what are you doing here?

CARMY
Hopefully the opposite.

INT. THE BEEF-- MOMENTS LATER

Carm storms in, the door chimes. Tito refills SODA machine. Ebraheim diligently wipes down the counter...

EBRAHEIM
Carmen, where is beef!?

CARMY
Relax, it's in the oven.

Carmy leaps over the counter, TRIPS, FALLS TO THE OTHER SIDE.

SHIT!! CARMY (O.S.) (CONT'D) TITO
Need more fennel.

CARMY (CONT'D)
Yes, Chef. Can you start a new giardinera?

TITO
Later.

CARMY EBRAHEIM
We won't need it later-- Carmen, when beef ready?

CARMY (CONT'D)
We're doing things a little differently today, okay? Beef's almost done, cut potatoes, please, Chef--

EBRAHEIM
Carmen, onions first, we have system.

CARMY
But you gotta soak the potatoes and then freeze em--

EBRAHEIM
Carmen, after onions, don't mess up our place--

Tito goes to move CARMY'S GRAVY POT--

CARMY
CHEF, NO! DON'T TOUCH THE GRAVY, PLEASE? I don't care if you don't listen to me about anything else, please don't touch that, I've been reducing that for 12 hours.
(MORE)

CARMY (CONT'D)
 (moves through swinging
 doors, SHOUTS)
 CORNER--

Enters into the--

INT. THE BEEF/BAKERY - CONTINUOUS

Bakery. MARCUS - 20s, gold chains and a beanie - kneads...

CARMY
 Marcus, we're gonna need a double
 order of bread today, okay Chef?
 (no response)
 Hello?

MARCUS
 Yes?

CARMY
 Did you hear me?

MARCUS
 I've been tellin' you for two weeks
 the mixer's fucked and I gotta mix
 all this shit by hand--

CARMY
 We're not meeting dailies, vendors
 are cutting us off and I don't have
 the money to fix it right now. I'm
 gonna get you a mixer, I promise--
 (BUZZER sounds)
 That's the beef. Give me a hand?

Carmy turns back through the counter doors, Marcus follows--

INT. THE BEEF/COUNTER - CONTINUOUS

They weave between Tito and Ebraheim. Sydney puts on a fresh
 apron near the back.

CARMY/MARCUS
 CORNER!/BEHIND!/BEHIND!

Carm straightens HOT DOG BOATS, EYES THE CLOCK...

CARMY
 Smaller fry scoops today, Chef.

TITO
 No. Not system.

EBRAHEIM
Carmen, there is a woman.

CARMY
What's this system?? That's Sydney,
she's working with us today.

MARCUS
It's Michael's system.
(to Sydney)
I'm Marcus, nice to meet you.

SYDNEY
Nice to meet you.

CARMY
Michael's system makes no
sense.

MARCUS
So say something.

CARMY
Isn't this saying something?

EBRAHEIM
Marcus, I say something-- you are
my favorite bitch.

MARCUS
English is gettin' tight, Zeeks.
You kidnapping ship Captains?

Sydney tucks herself into a corner, sets up a cutting board.

EBRAHEIM
Marcus mom teach me as we sex.

MARCUS
OH SHIT YES! PLAYA'S
LEARNING!

CARMY
Tito, cut the bread one inch
shorter please, Chef.

TITO
No. Not system.

CARMY (CONT'D)
(to Sydney)
I'm sorry in advance for the
people that work here.

GARY SWEEPS, 50s, homeless, enters, ties on an apron...

SWEEPS
YAH, YAAAH, YAAAAH! WOOH-HA!

ALL
What up, Family/Yo, yo,
Sweeps...

Sweeps hugs Marcus, then the crew, but not Carmy...

CARMY
Morning, Chef, do me a favor? Set
up a compost next to the trash?

SWEEPS
I need my grease-cutters first.

CARMY
Tomorrow, tomorrow--

SWEEPS
I heard that song yesterday.
Motherfuckers be careful in front
of the stove, family. Shitload-a-
grease in that bitch, gonna get HOT
HOT HOT!!! Carmy's got no problem
with that.

Carm and Marcus exit through the KITCHEN DOORS.

CARMY/MARCUS	SYDNEY
CORNER!	(to Tito)
	Chef, is there a family shelf?

Shelf?	TITO	EBRAHEIM
		(moves SPEEDRACK)
		BEHIND.

SYDNEY
Like a... comida extra que usa para
la comida familiar?

TITO
Si, en el cajon inferior del
frigorifico.

SYDNEY
Gracias, Jefe.

TITO
(nods)
Jefe.

INT. THE BEEF/KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

The oven & prep room. Carm and Marcus slam on OVEN MITTS.

CARMY
1... 2...3..

Oven doors fly open, lightning fast, rack after rack pulled,
quickly, efficiently, it's almost beautiful...

MARCUS
 (off heat)
 Fuck/fuck/fuck/fuck.

CARMY (CONT'D)
 (off heat)
 Fuck/fuck/fuck/fuck.

Racks laid on the stove top, each ROAST A BEAUTIFUL
 CARAMELIZED BROWN. They shut the BLAZING HOT oven doors...

CARMY (CONT'D)
 Tent it quick, Chef.

MARCUS
 This doesn't look how it normally
 looks.

CARMY
 Trust me...

RICHIE (O.S.)
 CORNER.

HUGE sheets of TIN FOIL ripped, TENTED over the beef. RICHIE
 KALINOWSKI, 40, ASSHOLE, BEEF t-shirt, enters, hugs Marcus...

MARCUS
 Yo, family.

RICHIE
 Cousin, you fuckin' up my program?

CARMY
 Thought you'd be here 4 hours ago.

Carm fastens foil to the pans, glances at THE CLOCK. Richie
 kisses Marcus's cheek. Richie gives no love to Carm.

RICHIE
 Had the kid all morning. My Insta's
 blowing up, what are you up to with
 Ballbreaker?

CARMY
 We need business. Nerds come here
 from Rockford to play it--

RICHIE
 In 1987, when you weren't alive.
 You have to run stuff by me first--

CARMY
 I don't HAVE to do shit--

Carm moves into the--

INT. THE BEEF/FRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

Walk-in fridge. Richie follows--

RICHIE
Yo, I'm talkin' to you--
(off Sydney)
Fuck's this?

SYDNEY
I'm Sydney. I'm Staging.

RICHIE
You're whating?

CARMY
She's helping us out today.

SYDNEY
There's random strawberries, were
you saving these?

CARMY
All you.

RICHIE
Yeah, please, this asshole was
using 'em to make a giant muffin.

CARMY
It was a play on a Pannetone that
woulda been beautiful if you let me
finish it--

RICHIE
And this is a play on fuck you.
(flicks Carmy's balls)

CARMY
COUSIN.

RICHIE
(then, to Sydney)
Richard Kalinoski. Nice to meet
you, sweetheart.

... hi.

SYDNEY

CARMY
Don't say "sweetheart" you
fuckin' weirdo.

RICHIE
You're so woke, Carm. Meant nothing
by it, Sydney. Saying "sweetheart"
is part of our Italian heritage.

SYDNEY
 Heard. CARMY
 You're about as Italian as
 McDonald's.

Sydney exits with a bunch of stuff. Carm grabs armful after
 armful of FRESH PRODUCE--

RICHIE
 Okay, I'm not done talking to you.

CARMY
 I don't have time for this--

RICHIE
 When I'm talkin' to you, stop and
 listen and don't start doin' a
 million things like a smartass.
 The guys are texting me you wanna
 cut the bread shorter. If you wanna
 stretch ingredients, use more gravy
 and less beef. The bread is cheap
 and the gravy is easy, understand--

CARMY
 That's incorrect--

RICHIE
 Don't go around fuckin' their heads
 up and doing weird shit and hiring
 women without asking me. I'm the
 general manager and this is your
 brother's house.

CARMY
 Why didn't he leave it to you then?

That stung. They stare, Marcus enters, kills the tension.

MARCUS
 Low on olive oil, fyi--

CARMY
 Heard.

Carmy shoves an armful of vegetables into Richie's chest,
 escapes the fridge. Richie and Marcus follow into the--

INT. THE BEEF/KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Prep area, armfuls of VEG spill on to the table. Richie and
 Marcus rinse produce, dry and then peel 'em.

CARMY

Can somebody grab me a knife? A sharp one, please! TITO, WE NEED A POT FOR THE GIARDINERA, CHEF!

RICHIE

"Chef". Kill me. I wonder if Bobby Flay here wasn't runnin' around the farmers market like a nouveau-riche-ass-bitch, we wouldn't be having money problems--

CARMY

Tito-- did you take my knife!?

TITO (O.S.)

Yes.

CARMY

Why??

TITO (O.S.)

System.

RICHIE

System.

CARMY

(to Richie)

Don't call me Bobby Flay. SYDNEY!

SYDNEY

Yes, chef?

CARMY

(grabs a shitty knife out of a drawer)

Stir that pot for me?

SYDNEY

Yes, chef. Want a cartouche on it?

CARMY

Please. Thank you, Chef.

RICHIE

What in the fuck is a cartoonsh?

Carmy starts chopping vegetables without looking down. Sydney cuts a PARCHEMENT cartouche, places over GRAVY.

CARMY (CONT'D)

What's our best day here?

RICHIE

Like 5. It's making me feel crazy watching you, slow down--

CARMY
If we did 6 today that'd get us
through the week. Hence,
ballbreaker.

RICHIE
Hence, eat shit.

Carmy watches Sydney swiftly break down the strawberries,
fennel and onion. Impressive. TITO sets a POT on the counter.

TITO
BEHIND, BEHIND, NO TOQUE,
CALIENTE.
(exits)
CORNER.

RICHIE (CONT'D)
Why don't you make it easy on
yourself: make the spaghe--

*

CARMY
Don't say the spaghetti.
(throws knife in sink)
All these knives are dull.

MARCUS
What's the spaghetti?

RICHIE
Before your time. Spaghetti was our
biggest seller forever. Mikey was
the only one that could make it but
I suspect Carm *can* but he's too
fancy now so he won't--

CARMY
I won't make it cuz I don't know
how to make it--

MARCUS
How hard is spaghetti, Carmy?

RICHIE
Yeah like for real.

CARMY
Do you know how it make it?

*

RICHIE (CONT'D)
I'm no "chef" but it can't possibly
be that hard.

CARMY
I didn't say it was *hard*, I said I
didn't know how to make it and I
say "chef" because in real kitchens
it's a sign of respect for staff to
address each other as "Chef".

Richie grabs RENE REDZEPI'S NOMA cookbook off the counter--

RICHIE

This crap is making you delusional
and pompous and a gayrod. Learn how
to cook with ants all you want but
if don't know how to make pasta--

CARMY

You guys just can't listen to me?

MARCUS

I mean, you probably should learn
how to make pasta, Carmy--

CARMY

Fuck the spaghetti, Fak's gonna
raise BALLBREAKER plays to a buck.

Carmy sees Sydney HUSTLING, appreciates the work ethic...

MARCUS

Who's Fak?

Carm moves the HOT POT, BURNS THE SHIT OUT OF HIS HAND---

CARMY

FUCK. SOMEBODY GRAB ME A
KNIFE??

MARCUS (CONT'D)

What's "Fak"?

*

RICHIE

Neil Fak. This stroke's friend.
(holds hand over BEEF)
Whoa, whoa, why's the beef so hot?

MARCUS

Cuz we just took it out--

RICHIE

2 hours late?! It's gonna be dry--

RICHIE (CONT'D)

You're striking the fuck out
today, batter.

CARMY

It's not 2 hours late, it
takes 2 hours longer and if
you would have let me explain
before you got in my face
about it, Wrigley didn't
deliver enough this morning--

RICHIE (CONT'D)

Why didn't they deliver enough?

CARMY

Because we're short. *That's why* we're doing the tourney. The only beef I could get on short notice was short rib and you can't roast short rib, you gotta braise it which takes longer--

RICHIE

Which is not at all how we've ever made a beef here.

TITO (O.S.)

System.

RICHIE

System, baby.

Tito hustles in, dabs Richie. Carmy glances at THE CLOCK.

CARMY

BUT it's three dollars less per pound and I can stretch it, which is why I wanted to use smaller pieces of bread so the sandwich looks fuller and we aren't wasting gravy, which is actually more time consuming to make and more expensive because we're using twice the amount of produce and labor--

RICHIE

Don't talk to me about labor, Noma--

CARMY

Thought it was your house.

RICHIE

Fuck all this. YO LISTEN UP! Nobody cut bread shorter. We're using MORE gravy, LESS bullshit beef. Don't listen to this fuckface.

Richie exits. Carmy sinks, his eyes meet Sydney's. She politely looks away, pretending not to have overheard.

Carm peels back the TIN-FOIL to reveal the braised beef, grabs a FORK, pulls the beef APART beautifully.

CUT TO:

AN ELECTRICAL PANEL slammed shut. BLUE TAPE TABS labeled "one buck" cover ".50" slots.

NEIL FAK - Dickies Jumpsuit, Hackman's glasses from THE CONVERSATION, 25, CIGARETTE IN HIS MOUTH - turns his head from the TOTAL BALLBREAKER machine...

FAK

Buck won't get them very far.

INT. THE BEEF/DINING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Carm and Fak in front of the BALLBREAKERS. Sweeps whistles, wipes the cafeteria table in the middle of the small room.

CARMY

(already annoyed)

Fak, that's the point! This game is already ultra confusing.

FAK

Exactly, it's a Norwegian knockoff of Mortal Kombat that they never finished properly, part of why they recalled these machines, aside from the excessive violence, was that it's too hard to play because it makes little sense story-wise. Also, d'you get the flowers my family sent--

CARMY

(impatient, off clock)

How long is this gonna take?

FAK

Hour?

CARMY

Gotta be faster than that. Sweeps, can you get the back windows when you get a minute, Chef?

SWEEPS

Grease-cutters. Then the windows.

CARMY

K, do whatever the fuck you want.

SWEEPS

Chill.

FAK

Carm, you're bleeding.

Fak nods to Carmy's finger -- which is GUSHING BLOOD.

CARMY
 (suddenly hurts like hell)
 SHIT! It was that dull-ass knife.

FAK
 I'm getting woozy looking at it.

Carm grips his hand, stands, quickly turns a corner -- SLAMS INTO EBRAHEIM, who drops a tray of sausage.

CARMY
 GOD DAMMIT, GET THE FUCK OUTTA THE WAY, EBRAHEIM.

EBRAHEIM
 CARMEN! Your fault! Say "Corner"!

INT. THE BEEF/STAFF BATHROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Carm, wraps a band-aid around his cut, glances at a FRAMED BLUEPRINT hung above the toilet. A REINTERPRETED VISION OF THE BEEF, A HIGH-END DINER, the restaurant of Carmy's dreams. A sketch on the window, an animal's face. The CREATURE from the opening, now clearly seen as a BEAR.

Carmy combs his hand through his hair, wipes FLOUR from his cheek and arm. He looks tired and fried, glances at THE CLOCK. We HEAR it tick, tick, tick, tick. Drown out ALL other noise. Carm momentarily frozen. Then. A text BUZZES, SUGAR: down the street.

INT. THE BEEF/KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Sydney breaks up GROUND BEEF in a mixing bowl, seasons it, rapidly adds five eggs in, SEASONS again with BREAD CRUMBS, PARM and CHOPPED PARSLEY...

RICHIE (O.S.)
 ... Marcus, why don't you shut the fuck up and suck my dick....

Richie moves directly to Sydney's work station, stands right behind her, reaches above her for a MIXING BOWL--

RICHIE (CONT'D)
 Excuse me, doll--

Richie moves his hand to her waist to guide her out of his way, SYDNEY INSTANTLY and STARTLINGLY BLOCKS it with her elbow, meatloaf flung to the wall.

RICHEL (CONT'D)
 (laughs, grabs bowl)
 Easy tiger, just grabbing a bowl...

Richie exits whistling. Sydney wipes the wall off.

EXT. CORNER OF ORLEANS & DEARBORN - EVENING

SUGAR - 20s, business suit, CHICAGO NATIONAL BANK PIN - stands, AIR JORDAN box under her arm, tiniest amount of a TATTOO near her neck, JUST ABOVE her collar. Carmy turns a corner, sees the SHOE BOX, instantly upset--

 CARMY
 You're carrying those around like
 that?? Come on, Sugar--

He grabs them, PULLS THEM CLOSE to his CHEST, his baby...

 SUGAR
 That's how you say hello?! You know
 how ridiculous it is that I'm
 carrying around shoes for you--

 CARMY
 I'm sorry... Hi. Hello.

 SUGAR
 Hi. Hello.

Quiet. Thrilled to see him, destroyed by his appearance, including his bloodied hand. They hug, she doesn't let him go. After a moment.

 SUGAR (CONT'D)
 You look terrible, are you on dru--

 CARMY
 Don't start with that shit, Sugar,
 like you're a god damn angel.

She turns, walks away. Carmy paces with her...

 CARMY (CONT'D)
 Wait/wait/wait... I'm tired.
 Restaurant's kicking my ass. That's
 it. I swear. I'm good... Okay?

She stops. Beat. She combs his hair back, lovingly.

 SUGAR
 I've been calling you.

CARMY
I know, I just...

SUGAR
It's okay... I hate your tattoos.

CARMY
Thanks, sick Celctic Knots.

She smiles, about to come back at him, then--

PASSERBY #2 (O.S.)
HOW MUCH FOR THEM Js YO??!!

CARMY
How about 60 pounds of prime rib!

PASSERBY #2 (O.S.)
What?

SUGAR
(shakes head, off shoes)
"Just showing my collector friend".

CARMY
Thank you for bringing them, I
really appreciate it, I gotta--

SUGAR
Wait, I have to tell you something.

CARMY
What?

SUGAR
Cicero called.

CARMY
And?

SUGAR
He wants to buy the restaurant.

CARMY
It's not for sale.

SUGAR
That's what I wanted to tell you.

CARMY
That it's not for sale?

SUGAR
That you should sell it to him.

CARMY
And he flips it into an Applebee's?

She takes a second, fights back emotion.

CARMY (CONT'D)
Are you okay?

SUGAR
Why happened at EMP?

CARMY
... Pay was bullshit, I couldn't
afford to work there--

SUGAR
I was your emergency contact. They
said you had a breakdown and
punched somebody??

CARMY
That's not at all how it went down--

SUGAR
*And put his clothes on an anti-
griddle?*

CARMY
I gotta go--

SUGAR
They were worried, Carmy. Wait, I
know how hard the last couple of
months have been for you.

CARMY
And for you--

SUGAR
What is an anti-griddle?

CARMY
Freezes instead of heats.

SUGAR
Makes sense.

(beat)
I'm not sure the restaurant is the
best place for you. I know what it
did to Michael and I don't want--

CARMY

That won't happen. First off, I'm not on drugs and secondly no one that works there listens to, like, literally anything I say.

SUGAR

That's probably a good thing, means you're not screaming and throwing tantrums like an infant.

CARMY

Was Michael like that?

SUGAR

He was a maniac. That place is contagious and vile and there's so many weird, bad vibes pumping through it. That shit gets into you. Let it go.

CARMY

Natalie, I'm good at this.

SUGAR

I know you are, honey.

CARMY

And I'll fix it.

SUGAR

Nobody's asking you to.

CARMY

I gotta run. Thanks for the shoes. I love you, Bear.

SUGAR

Love you too, Bear.

INT. THE BEEF/OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Richie scans the pantry, which has been BEAUTIFULLY ORGANIZED and labeled with perfectly CUT STRIPS OF GREEN TAPE.

RICHIE

Fuck are these labels. Marcus?!

MARCUS (O.S.)

What?

RICHIE

Where are the chili flakes? This is the most Polish shit ever. Cousin organizes and it's more confusing--

MARCUS

(enters, points)

There. Labeled "Red Chilli Flake".

Richie storms out, knocks a book over on the way out. Marcus picks up the book, it's the FRENCH LAUNDRY cookbook, a photo slides out and on to the floor: Carmy, then 21, in a white apron, proud, holding an EATER RISING YOUNG CHEF award, embraced by THOMAS KELLER. Marcus delicately puts the picture back, adds the book to the stack.

INT. THE BEEF/KITCHEN - LATER

Carmy enters, reties his apron, glances at Sydney's pan -- the strawberries have reduced into a dark red molasses.

CARMY

Strawberry Sofrito?

SYDNEY

Yes, Chef.

Carmy grabs a TASTING SPOON, dips it in, tastes it, nods.

CARMY

That's fire, Chef.

He throws the spoon in the sink, moves deeper into the kitchen. Ebraheim, Tito, Marcus and Richie bullshit around, occassionally stirring pots. Carmy pulls a pencil from behind his ear, jots a couple notes down, looks at THE CLOCK--

CARMY (CONT'D)

Alright team, let's do a line up, service in a hour. We need to dedicate a garde manger--

TICK TICK TICK. KITCHEN NOISE swells around it--

RICHIE

... and like who gives a shit really but the guy's in my face and, Tito, you're gonna love this, I look at him--

CARMY (CONT'D)

Tick, tick tick...

RICHEL (CONT'D)
And i'm like if you pull that
shit again we're gonna have
real problems-

 CARMY (CONT'D)
Yo... seriously... I want to
start defining roles a little
bit more clearly around
here... hello?... Guys--

Tick, tick, tick...

 MARCUS
And was this the same guy
from the hot dog stand--

 CARMY (CONT'D)
Marcus--

 RICHEL
Turns out it was his twin brother--

Tick, tick, tick...

 MARCUS
Word???

 CARMY
Guys, seriously--

 RICHEL
Cousin, we're trying to get some
real work done here bro, capiche?
We don't need a speech, dipshit.
 (then)
So the fuckin' guy comes back with,
like, a revolver, and I'm like,
what are you a private detective--

Carmy looks above the stovetop, a framed photo of Michael
cooking, he moves his eyes down into the GRAVY POT. RAGING,
BOILING BEEF FAT has soaked into the CARTOUCHE. Tick, tick,
tick, tick. THEN...

CARMY PICKS UP THE GRAVY POT AND THROWS IT AT THE WALL.
SCARING THE SHIT OUT OF EVERYONE. HOT GRAVY SPRAYS EVERYWHERE

 ALL
WHAT THE FUCK/JESUS, CARMY!

A DEMENTED SMIRK ON CARMY'S FACE AS HE KICKS OVER A PREP
TABLE, UNHINGED.

 CARMY
NONE OF YOU MOTHERFUCKERS WANNA
LISTEN? YOU WANNA RUN THIS PLACE
LIKE SHIT? YOU WANT THE FOOD TO
TASTE LIKE SHIT? YOU WANNA BE
FUCKIN' LAZY? FUCK YOU. NONE OF YOU
FUCKIN' LOSERS HAVE ANY SENSE-A-
FUCKIN-URGENCY!

(MORE)

CARMY (CONT'D)
 YOUR SYSTEM IS FUCKING STUPID. I
 CAN DO THIS SHIT IN MY SLEEP. YOU
 DON'T WANNA CUT THE BREAD SHORT?
 YOU WANNA USE MORE GRAVY? WELL
 GUESS WHAT, FUCKOS? NO MORE GRAVY.

Gets right into Richie's face. Carmy looks different. Is he enjoying this? Scary. Rabid. An animal. Richie terrified, but hiding it.

CARMY (CONT'D)
 So, now, we have to cut the fuckin'
 bread shorter and we're gonna use
 more beef and you're gonna clean
 that fuckin' shit up.

Carmy blows out in a huff. The crew is silent, stunned. Then.

MARCUS
 That was like seeing an 85 pound
 white dude on meth lift up a car.

RICHIE
 (quiet)
 Baby.

He goes to pick up the gravy pot, burns his hand.

EXT. ALLEY - MOMENTS LATER

Carmy vomits behind a dumpster. Breathes, leans against the wall. Sydney exits the kitchen, hands him a DELI of water.

CARMY
 Thanks. I'm really sorry.

SYDNEY
 Nothing I haven't seen, nothing I
 haven't heard. Get the reaction you
 wanted?

CARMY
 We'll see I guess.
 (beat)
 What was your favorite route?

SYDNEY
 Route?

CARMY
 Like when you were driving, did you
 have a... route or road you liked?

SYDNEY

Sheridan Road. Along the Lake. When
Rogers Park turns into Evanston.
Near Northwestern. Very chill.

Beat. Carmy nods to the kitchen.

CARMY

I don't wanna be like that.

SYDNEY

In my experience, either you are or
you aren't.

CARMY

Heard.

She walks back to the restaurant. Carmy takes a sip.

INT. THE BEEF/KITCHEN - LATER

Richie cleans the wall. Tito and Ebraheim start service prep.
Sweeps wipes the tables. Sydney takes a BEAUTIFUL meatloaf
out of the oven. Carmy storms in, Richie doesn't look at him.

SWEEPS

Damien's back.

Carm's voice hoarse, he tries to keep control, momentum--

CARMY

We're testing the new sandwich!

picks up the roasting rack of Beef, quickly exits into--

INT. THE BEEF/COUNTER - LATER

The counter, slams the rack into the STEAMER--

CARMY

MARCUS, ROLL, PLEASE, CHEF!

A ROLL FLIES into frame, Carm inspects, feels dense.

CARMY (CONT'D)

CRUMB'S TOO SMALL, IT'S HEAVY!

MARCUS (O.S.)

DOING IT BY HAND!

Carmy looks into the ROLL, pokes his finger into it, rips a
piece off. It CRUMBLES. He runs to the back door...

INT. THE BEEF/BAKERY - CONTINUOUS

And pokes his head into the bakery...

MARCUS

It's the mixer--

CARMY

Shut up, it's not the mixer.
 ----- There's no chew, it's crumbly. -----
 Oven's too dry. Fill a baking sheet
 with water, put in on the oven
 floor, throw a new batch in. DO IT.

Carmy grabs a new roll and runs back to the--

INT. THE BEEF/COUNTER - CONTINUOUS

Carmy pulls the roll open, forks SHORT RIB on the roll, DIPS
 THE SANDWICH INTO THE JUS, SPOONS CELERY-GIARDINIERA ON TOP.

CARMY

YO, somebody try this. Richie?

RICHIE (O.S.)

Shove it up your ass.

MARCUS

(runs in, takes a bite)

Holy shit. Sweeps, hit this now!

Carmy looks at the Clock. Then Sweeps takes a bite...

SWEEPS

Yoooooo... Tito? Ebra?

Tito and Ebraheim run in, both take bites.

CARMY

What do you think?

EBRAHEIM

Carmen, you threw gravy like baby.
 The beef be better with gravy.

CARMY

Heard. Tito?

TITO

(eyes wide)

New system.

Tito high fives Carm. Richie watches from the bakery window.

INT. THE BEEF/KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Sydney spoons STRAWBERRY SOFRITO over a SIZZLING MEATLOAF, GLAZING it. Sweeps brings her some of the sandwich.

SWEEPS
Try this business.

SYDNEY
(takes a bite)
Oh... WOW.

SWEEPS
You know that's *bangin*.

SYDNEY
Bangin.

SWEEPS
How you gonna pass the family test, kid? Delicious or impressive?

SYDNEY
Delicious is impressive.

SWEEPS
Word.

Then, Sweeps sees FIVE GIANT COSTUMED ADULTS out the window.

SWEEPS (CONT'D)
What... the... sweet hell...

EXT. THE BEEF/COUNTER - MOMENTS LATER

Richie makes sure no one's looking, takes a bite of the sandwich. His face drops, pissed it's DELICIOUS.

RICHIE
Fuck me.

He angrily throws the sandwich in the garbage, then, looks out the window and sees a LONG LINE OF COSPLAYERS forming...

EXT. THE BEEF - MOMENTS LATER

Carly worried, looks at A TWO BLOCK-LONG LINE OF HEADBANGERS, GANGBANGERS, AND COSTUMED DWEEBS (WIZARDS/DEMONS/DRAGONS). Fak, Sweeps, Marcus and Tito appear at his side...

SWEEPS
Shit yes...

TITO
That man look like a carrot.

FAK
Is it a carrot?

MARCUS
Or an orange dick?

CARMY
That's too many people. We're gonna
need more bread.

INT. THE BEEF/BAKERY - AFTERNOON

Fak stands with Marcus in front of the MIXER...

MARCUS
It's all fly until it starts doin'
this Gugguggugug, know that sound?

FAK
Yep. Classic sound. How long have
you worked here?

MARCUS
About a year.

FAK
So you knew Michael?

MARCUS
Yeah. You knew him well right?

FAK
Really well before...

MARCUS
Before what?

FAK
He started selling drugs.

The door WILDLY swings open.

RICHIE
CORNER MOTHERFUCKERS--
(storms in)
We close on the bread?

MARCUS
New batch coming out in a minute.

Richie pulls the EMPTY RACKS toward the cooling station...

RICHIE
BEHIND! Get outta my way, Fak.

CORNER. RICHIE (CONT'D) CORNER. CARMY (O.S.)

Richie wheels the racks out. Carm FLIES IN--

CARMY (CONT'D)
CORNER
(into phone)
Chi-Chi, come get your kicks.

FAK
Carm, I think I can fix the mixer.

Sydney flies through the door--

SYDNEY
CORNER. Chef, any stale bread?

MARCUS
Above the oven.

SYDNEY
Thank you, Chef.
(exits)
CORNER.

CORNER. RICHIE (O.S.) CORNER. CARMY
Fak, I can't pay you.

Richie returns with empty racks, loads more bread--

FAK
Pay me in sandwich.

CARMY
Deal.

RICHIE
(exits)
No shit, "deal". CORNER.

MARCUS
Richie always an asshole?

FAK
Yes.

INT. THE BEEF/DINING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Sydney and Ebrahiem set up the family meal station. Slices of meatloaf, potato and salad next to plates and silverware.

SYDNEY
Family's up, crew.

The crew enters, all grab plates. It looks beautiful.

MARCUS
Damn, Sydney!

RICHIE
Fuck. Yes.

*

SYDNEY
Meatloaf with potato gratin and a bread salad.

They all sit at a dinning table, eat together. Carmy stares out the window.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)
Chef, want me to make you a plate?

CARMY
I'm good, Chef, thanks. Nice work.

RICHIE
(wolfs it down)
What the ass kinda ketchup is this?

SYDNEY
Strawbery and fennel.

RICHIE
(despite himself)
Insane. Just bonkers good.

Carmy see the line has formed into an unruly mob...

CARMY
Fuck...

COSTUMED NERDS shove each other, devolves into a fight, CROWD noise grows louder and louder--

CARMY (CONT'D)
Cousin, we gotta go outside--

RICHIE
For what?

CARMY
This shit is outta control--

RICHIE
This is your plan. You know
everything.

CARMY
I need your help--

RICHIE
I'm just a fuckin' loser.
(then)
How 'bout this gratin, Tito?

Carmy looks at Richie, eyes plead, fully in over his head.

EXT. THE BEEF - MOMENTS LATER

Carm walks out, alone, moves into the crowd--

CARMY
Guys, guys, KNOCK THAT SHIT OFF OR
I'M NOT GONNA LET YOU IN--

GUYS IN BIZARRE BALLBREAKER COSTUMES CIRCLE AROUND HIM, CARM
tries to break up a fight between A ROBOT and AN EVIL CARROT--

CARMY (CONT'D)
WHOA, WHOA, WHOA--

EVIL CARROT
GET OFF ME, DR. SCIENCE!!

ROBOT
FUCK YOU, CARROT!

CARMY caught in the crossfire, GETS BELTED BY THE ROBOT,
TRIPS TO THE GROUND, KNOCKING TWO FIGHTERS INTO EACH OTHER AS
A BRAWL BREAKS OUT ABOVE HIM, GROWING EVEN MORE OUT OF
CONTROL UNTIL--

A GUN GOES OFF, LOUD, ECHOES.

EVERYONE STOPS, CARMY TERRIFIED. SUDDENLY, SILENCE. REVEAL,
Richie, in his apron, GLOCK in one hand, BULLHORN in the
other. The crowd rises, stares at Richie.

RICHIE
(though bullhorn)
Merry Christmas, Lizards. Sounds
like we have a real problem out
here... Any-a-you Incel-4Chan-QAnon-
Synder-Cut motherfuckers wanna get
outta line now? Didn't think so.
Cousin.

Nods to his side, Carmy gets up and moves to Richie's side.

RICHIE (CONT'D)

We're gonna have a tournament here today. And we're gonna be on our best behavior. And we're not gonna scare the regulars or touch 'em or look at 'em weird or do any kinda spectral shit. You're gonna purchase one Italian Beef combo to enter. It's a single elimination tourney, so you lose, you get the fuck out. You win, you get free Italian Ice for a year. Also, I hate litter. So you cocks are gonna pick up after yourselves and god damn recycle.

INT. THE BEEF - MOMENTS LATER

Door chimes. Carm and Richie run in. Carm exhales, smiles, grabs Richie.

CARMY

Dude, how dope is that??

RICHIE

(bats hand away)

Not dope at all.

CARMY

Fuck are you talking about? I brought that crowd in, that's a shitload of money out there!

RICHIE

That we're not prepped for. You're in here screaming at people like a god damn hotshot and *that's* what the shit happens. I shoulda let those turkeys eat you. Today was not the time to introduce a new psychology.

CARMY

It's not a psychology, it's a philosophy.

RICHIE

Both. I don't care what you do in Napa with your fuckin' tweezers or your "FOY GRASS", you got no clue what you're doing here.

(MORE)

RICHIE (CONT'D)

We're gonna stick with what works
and we're gonna do whatever the
hell we gotta do to make sure we
got enough food for these fuckin'
dorks. So get your ass back there
and make the god damn spaghetti.

Richie grabs a can of tomatoes from above the door, shoves it
into Carm's chest--

RICHIE (CONT'D)

And Cousin... you ever throw gravy
at me like that again, i'm gonna
put you through the fuckin' wall.

Richie takes off to the kitchen.

RICHIE (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Sydney, sorry about the gun, babe,
had to get real.

SYDNEY (O.S.)

All good. I'm from Bridgeport.

Carm stares into the tomatoes.

INT. THE BEEF/KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Carmy SMEARS garlic with the back of his knife, forms a
paste. Marcus enters with a FRESH ROLL...

MARCUS

Yo, Carm. Check it.

Marcus throws the roll to Carm, Carm opens it -- gorgeous, a
beautiful, airy crumb.

CARMY

Perfect. Can you tell the
difference?

MARCUS

Yeah. Big time. Steam tray. You
were right.

CARMY

I'm right sometimes.

MARCUS

You can throw down, huh?

CARMY
Does it matter? Grab me a fresh
parm brick and more basil?

MARCUS
(exits)
Yes, Chef.

Beat. Carmy takes that in. Respect.

Then, looks to THE CLOCK...

Tick, tick, tick...

Then at the tomatoes...

Tick, tick, tick...

After a moment, he throws the tomatoes in the garbage.