

THE DEVIL'S FOOD

Written By

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INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - NIGHT

Flames leap off glowing wood coals to singe a RACK OF RIBS.

MATTHEW (32), the restaurant's trim and impatient owner, hovers behind the counter.

MATTHEW

Chop, chop, people. We've got hungry customers out there.

TRE (29), an intensely focused and well-built grill chef, scoops the ribs off the grill and onto a plate.

TRE

All good, Matthew. Got ribs here!

CLAIRE, a petite salad chef barely in her 20s, grabs the plate and slaps on coleslaw, potatoes, and beans. Ultimate, down-home southern comfort food.

CLAIRE

Just the way you like it, Chef!

Claire hands the plate to ANGELO (32), the kitchen's head chef, scruffy hair and a stained chef's jacket. He brushes on rich, plum-colored barbecue sauce. Sets it on the counter.

ANGELO

Table five's up!

JESS (28), a confident waitress sporting casual clothes and a dove tattoo, reaches for the plate. Pauses. Winks at Matthew.

JESS

Is Angelo changing his style?

ANGELO

Wait!

Angelo ladles on a mess of extra barbecue sauce.

ANGELO (CONT'D)

Send it.

Jess grabs the plate and hurries toward the dining room.

INT. RESTAURANT DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The place is a quarter-full with elderly DINERS. Walls covered in outdated decor. Not exactly a trendy hot spot.

A portrait on the wall features a younger Matthew, plump and happy, flanked by Angelo and Angelo's Colombian grandmother ABUELA, proudly displaying a large platter of meats.

Jess serves the dish to OWEN (30s), a tall, unconventionally attractive customer seated by himself and wearing a pinstriped blazer over a red T-shirt.

JESS

This is worth the wait, I promise.

Owen looks down at his food. Leans back in his seat.

OWEN

Let me ask you something...

(checks her name tag)

Jess? Are you happy serving this?

Owen wipes runaway barbecue sauce from the rim of the plate.

JESS

Trust me, when you taste--

OWEN

--Tell your chef that when I wait this long for food, I want it professional. Not this slop-house, prison-style, clumsy mess.

Owen waves Jess's concerned look aside, smiles.

OWEN (CONT'D)

It's not your fault. I just want my money's worth.

Jess takes the plate, turns, and leaves.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Jess sets the plate down hard on the counter.

JESS

Table five sent it back. He said it's...

Angelo looks up from his prep. Raises an eyebrow.

ANGELO

It's what?

JESS

A clumsy... mess.

She cringes and waits for the explosion.

Angelo straightens up. A smile creeps onto his face... Then vanishes. He scrambles to remove his jacket.

ANGELO  
Let me see this idiot!

MATTHEW  
Whoa, whoa! Dial it back, Angelo.

ANGELO  
Some maniac just called my food clumsy.

Matthew looks at the barbecue-covered plate.

MATTHEW  
So re-dish it and send it back out.

Angelo picks up the plate. Drops it in the garbage.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)  
That was four bucks worth of meat!

ANGELO  
Clumsy mess, my butt. Tre, Another rack for the pretentious, no palette, insult-to-America snob.

TRE  
Yes, Chef.

Angelo grabs a clean dish and makes sure it's spotless.

Tre lifts his cleaver then catches Owen staring in through the little window of the kitchen door. Looks back down at the cutting board. Instead of a rack of ribs, he's holding down a writhing THREE-HEADED SNAKE with huge fangs.

TRE (CONT'D)  
Agh!

He chops the snake! Looks around at the others.

TRE (CONT'D)  
Did you all see--

Everyone stares at Tre in shock.

He looks back down. There is no three-headed snake; just a rack of ribs and his severed thumb.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - NIGHT

Matthew sits between a LARGE LADY with serious sinus issues and an angry BIKER DUDE holding a bloody rag to his head. Tries not to make body contact with either of them.

Matthew jumps out of his seat as Tre walks in with his bandaged hand held up.

TRE  
They sewed it back on.

MATTHEW  
Hey. At least it wasn't your chopping hand, right?

Tre's eyes water.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)  
Let's get you home.

INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - NIGHT

Service is over for the night. Claire finishes scrubbing grease off the grill.

Angelo places leftover bread and veggies into a cardboard box. Saves the last three buns for plates of pulled pork.

Matthew enters. Tired.

MATTHEW  
Where is everyone?

ANGELO  
Home. Slow night. Jess said she'll see you for coffee in the morning.

CLAIRE  
How's Tre?

MATTHEW  
Great. Really good. Except for chopping his thumb off and getting it sewn back on. He seemed pretty bummed about that.

ANGELO  
Who's going to cover the grill?

MATTHEW  
Oh, he'll be back on Monday.

CLAIRE  
You're not giving him any time off?

Matthew shrugs.

MATTHEW  
He's got tomorrow off.

CLAIRE  
We all do. It's Sunday.

MATTHEW  
Who am I to tell him what to do?  
He's got his thumb back on. So...

Angelo carries two plates of food out the back door.

EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Angelo hands one plate to a HOMELESS MAN.

HOMELESS MAN  
Bless you.

Angelo places the other on the ground for a hungry alley cat.  
Pats its head and heads back inside.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

MATTHEW  
Why do you do that?

ANGELO  
Because that little guy's  
irresistible.

Matthew shakes the box of food.

MATTHEW  
No, I mean give all our food away  
every Saturday night.

ANGELO  
I don't want it to go to waste.

MATTHEW  
So freeze it, like a normal chef.

Claire removes her apron and hangs it up.

CLAIRE

As much as I love watching you old ladies bicker...

ANGELO

Get some sleep, Claire. Great job tonight.

CLAIRE

Thanks, Chef.

Claire heads out.

Angelo sits up on the counter. Breaks his bread roll in half and hands a piece to Matthew. Pats the box of food.

ANGELO

Do you know how many meals this will make at the shelter?

MATTHEW

I know exactly how many. I count bread rolls just to stay afloat.

Matthew uncorks a bottle of red house wine and pours two glasses. Hands one to Angelo.

ANGELO

Well, selling leftovers won't help. I can tell you that.

MATTHEW

We have to do something. I'm barely hanging on here.

ANGELO

Says the guy who just bought a new car.

MATTHEW

A new...? It's a used Astro Van. I didn't invest my life and all my savings into this restaurant for a frikkin' Astro Van. There are restaurants in town that are wastes of space, and their owners drive BMWs. I should be driving BMWs!

ANGELO

At what cost? Frozen food? We're not savages.

Matthew holds up a piece of pork. Sauce drips onto the plate.

MATTHEW

That customer was right, you know?  
This is a mess.

Angelo snags the meat from Matthew and pops it into his mouth. Chews.

ANGELO

A delicious mess.

MATTHEW

I'm serious. Would a garnish kill you? Maybe, like, a dash of color?

ANGELO

This isn't hipster cuisine. It's simple, fresh, and classic food.

MATTHEW

It's outdated.

ANGELO

Barbecue has survived through every culture in history. Even God loves it. "So heap on the wood and kindle the fire. Cook the meat well, mixing in the spices; and let the bones be charred." Ezekiel twenty-four, verse ten.

Matthew Sighs. Defeated. Finishes his wine.

MATTHEW

Who am I to argue with God, right?

Angelo slaps him on the shoulder.

ANGELO

Come to my abuela's for dinner tomorrow. It'll remind you of our roots.

MATTHEW

Can't. I promised Jess a night out.

ANGELO

Bring her along. She'll love it.

MATTHEW

Last time I ate there, I had to spend a week in the gym.



ANGELO

Too late... I'm posting it.  
(types on his phone)  
Done. You and Jess are coming.

MATTHEW

Your abuela's on Facebook?

ANGELO

Everyone's abuela's on Facebook.  
It's all abuelas on there now.

EXT. ABUELA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Matthew and Jess walk up to the front of a modest townhouse.  
Matthew rings the doorbell.

MATTHEW

A quick meal and we're done, but  
remember, eat everything...  
EVERYTHING! Angelo's cousin left  
some salad on the plate once and he  
still hasn't lived it down.

Angelo answers the door, super casual in a cardigan.

Matthew heads straight past him to ABUELA, Angelo's sweet  
Colombian grandmother from the portrait at the restaurant.

INT. ABUELA'S FOYER - NIGHT

Matthew hugs Abuela. Kisses both cheeks.

MATTHEW

Abuela! Wow, you gorgeous thing,  
you don't look a day over forty.

Abuela smiles and brushes him off. Shy. She shakes her head  
when Matthew hands her a bottle of wine.

ABUELA

Oh, no, no. It's okay.

MATTHEW

I insist. Thank you for having us.

ABUELA

Gracias.

MATTHEW

Mucho gusto. This is Jess.

Abuela pulls Jess in for kisses on the cheeks.

ABUELA  
He's so full of sugar, isn't he?

JESS  
Sure is.

INT. ABUELA'S DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Matthew, Jess, and Angelo sit in a cramped room that hasn't been updated in 25 years. A crucifix hangs on the wall. The judging eyes of Jesus stare down at Matthew.

Matthew sits up straight and fixes his collar.

Large bowls of rice, beans, and salad crowd the table. Abuela carries a huge platter of Colombian fried chicken to the table. Heads back to the kitchen.

MATTHEW  
She knows about my diet, right?

ANGELO  
One meal won't kill you.

JESS  
(laughing)  
I'm the one who has to hear him  
moan about feeling fat.

Abuela returns with a plate of fried plantains and Matthew's bottle of wine.

MATTHEW  
Oh, no. The wine was for you.

Abuela waves his objection off. Motions for them to start.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)  
Aren't you going to eat with us?

ABUELA  
It's for you, skinny boy. Eat. Eat.

MATTHEW  
Please?

Jess kicks him under the table as Abuela heads back into the kitchen. The sound of a Colombian TV drama turns on.

They dish up. Matthew takes a huge bite.

ANGELO  
Forgetting something?

MATTHEW  
(mouth full)  
Oh shit, sorry. Uh, thanks for the  
meat, good God, let's eat.

Angelo shakes his head as Matthew and Jess dig in.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)  
Oh man. I missed this.

JESS  
Wow. Incredible.

Angelo stabs a piece of meat and holds it up.

ANGELO  
Simple. Unpretentious. Delicious.  
This is what people need.

MATTHEW  
Sure. But we're not going to get  
rich serving Grandma food.

ANGELO  
Who said we have to get rich?  
You'll do fine with an ounce of  
faith and patience.

Matthew continues to eat. Talks with his mouth full.

MATTHEW  
I'm sick of patience.

He glances up at Jesus. Looks away.

INT. RESTAURANT DINING ROOM - NIGHT

LEWIS (24), the overweight and scruffy but lovable host, pops  
several dinner mints into his mouth and discards the wrappers  
onto a large pile on his counter.

Lewis leans down to greet a lovely old ROMANIAN HUSBAND and  
WIFE. Age seems to have shriveled them to a smaller size.

LEWIS  
Let's see if we can squeeze you in.

He checks the dining room. It's not even a third full.

LEWIS (CONT'D)  
And... yes we can. Right this way.

INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - NIGHT

Tre is back at the grill, careful with his bandaged hand.  
Angelo and Claire prepare dishes.

Matthew hovers around behind them, getting in the way.

ANGELO  
Excuse me.

Angelo reaches past Matthew to grab a plate. Cuts a large piece of black forest chocolate cake, adds whipped cream and a strawberry.

Matthew sneaks in to drizzle chocolate sauce on the plate.

ANGELO (CONT'D)  
The chocolate-frosted chocolate  
cake wasn't chocolaty enough?

MATTHEW  
I'm adding some character.

Matthew reaches for a powder shaker.

ANGELO  
And now you've got the chocolate  
dust. Great.

Angelo shakes his head. Sets the dessert up on the counter.

ANGELO (CONT'D)  
Dessert for table six!

Jess comes to whisk it away as Matthew dusts it.

JESS  
Ooh. Fancy.

Angelo tries to focus on his cooking as Matthew tosses a sprig of parsley on top of a bowl of chili.

ANGELO  
That's it! You finish the orders.

Angelo throws a towel down.

MATTHEW  
Where are you going?

ANGELO

For a walk.

MATTHEW

You can't walk out in the middle of service!

ANGELO

Don't see why not. Seems like we've got plenty of cooks in the kitchen.

MATTHEW

You don't have to take this so personally. I'm just trying to improve the presentation.

ANGELO

Improve the... My food's not good enough? By all means, improve away.

Angelo removes his chef's jacket.

MATTHEW

Angelo...

ANGELO

You know. I'm glad you're taking an interest in the food. I haven't had a Monday night off in years.

Tre and Claire pause to watch the argument.

MATTHEW

You leave like this, you're not welcome back.

Angelo stares at Matthew. Stunned.

ANGELO

After all these years? After my family basically raised you like my brother? I helped you build this restaurant from the ground up.

MATTHEW

Then stay, but I need you to swallow your pride and help make this restaurant a success. It's my ass on the line, and I'm sick of just scraping by.

Angelo throws his jacket on the counter. Storms out through the back door.

Matthew stamps off the opposite way to the dining room.

CLAIRE

So... Tre and I are cooking  
everything then?

Jess tries to stop Matthew, but he brushes past.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT - LATER

Matthew, now wearing a suit, weaves around the tables.

SARAH (22), a sweet but flustered waitress, barges past and bumps into him. Matthew saves her plate from flipping.

SARAH

Oh my gosh, I'm so sorry. I totally  
forgot my bread.

MATTHEW

Save the sorries for later. Can't  
let the seniors go hungry, right?

Matthew stops at the Romanian Husband and Wife's table.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

How are we doing? Can I offer you  
something from our wine menu?

ROMANIAN HUSBAND

We're tired and hungry.

Matthew looks back at the kitchen. Muffled shouts come from Claire and Tre as they scramble to keep up.

Jess rushes out with two plates. Narrowly dodges Sarah. Jess shoots Matthew a frustrated look.

MATTHEW

We're juuuust a bit short staffed  
tonight. Your food will be right  
up. I promise.

An IMPATIENT FATHER with a family of SIX waves at Matthew.

Lewis approaches to whisper in Matthew's ear. Points to crabby old DELORES (86) who is poking at her food.

LEWIS

Delores wants to talk to you about  
her pork chops.

MATTHEW

Tell her I'll be right there.

The Impatient Father waves his napkin in the air.

Sarah trips on her way back out of the kitchen and drops her order. Dishes crash to the floor.

A baby cries. The Impatient Man gets up to leave.

DELORES

Yoo-hoo. Matthew, dear?

Matthew gives up. Turns and walks straight to the...

INT. DINING ROOM BAR - NIGHT

KEITH (52), an older, but still innocent and energetic bartender, hands a Manhattan on the rocks to a PATRON.

KEITH

Are you sure? I honestly thought  
Delaware was a city.

Matthew plops onto a stool. Interrupts.

MATTHEW

Vodka soda on the rocks.

Matthew reaches over and grabs a handful of pretzels from the surprised Patron's snack bowl.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Actually, hold the rocks. And the  
soda.

Jess gives Keith a questioning look as she rushes around.  
Keith shrugs as he pours Matthew a shot of vodka.

LATER

Matthew stacks a fifth shot glass on top of a pyramid.

MATTHEW

Another.

KEITH

You sure, boss?

MATTHEW

I busted my butt for years on this  
restaurant, and it's going nowhere.

(MORE)

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Just once, I wish I could be  
successful.

Keith pours the shot, which Matthew promptly downs.

HAPPY CUSTOMER (O.S.)

Now that looks delicious!

Matthew perks up. Spins on his stool to see Jess serving two old LADIES. The food looks different.

Matthew stumbles over to the table. Kneels for a closer view.

The food is immaculately presented. Instead of a full rack, one plate just has a few individual ribs with the meat cut in rings around the bone, resting on a bed of crisped onions.

The other plate has four small, round potato cakes, each topped with a mound of different pulled meats. Barbecue sauce decorates the white space in an intricate pattern.

Matthew looks at Jess, who points to the kitchen. Matthew heads in that direction. Passes Sarah, who carries out two more equally impressive dishes.

INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Matthew enters to find Owen, the former customer, behind the counter in a fancy red and black chef's uniform. Steam rises around him.

Owen leans down to dress several plates like an artist.

OWEN

Claire, do you know how to make an  
apple pie?

Claire hesitates, confused by the whole situation.

CLAIRE

Yes?

Owen pulls down a cast iron appetizer dish from a shelf.

OWEN

Fantastic. Prep me some apple  
slices. I'll teach you how to make  
it irresistible.

(spots Sarah)

What's your name, hun?

SARAH

Um, Sarah.



OWEN

Lovely. Grab me a bottle of bourbon  
from the bar.

(To Matthew)

It's Matthew, right?

Matthew nods, dumbfounded.

OWEN (CONT'D)

Go have a seat in the dining room.

MATTHEW

But--

OWEN

--Relax. It's all under control.  
The last orders are almost out.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Matthew waits at a table. Still confused.

The last diner enthusiastically shakes Lewis's hand, and  
thanks him on the way out.

The kitchen door bursts open. Owen walks out with a cast-iron  
dish on a platter. Blue and orange FLAMES rise.

He sets a perfectly cooked apple pie topped with a ball of  
vanilla ice cream before Matthew. Creamy rivulets run into a  
sizzling caramelized bourbon sauce.

Owen WAVES HIS HAND, and the FLAMES die out.

MATTHEW

That's... amazing.

OWEN

Try it.

MATTHEW

(pats his stomach)

I can't. I'm on a sugar ban.

OWEN

Just one bite. Aren't you curious?

Matthew digs his fork in. Takes a bite. His eyes glisten.

MATTHEW

Incredible.

OWEN  
Would you put that on your menu?

MATTHEW  
(take another bite)  
I'd love to. But our customers  
don't buy the pricier desserts.

OWEN  
Oh, believe me, they'll pay. Want  
to know the best part?  
(leans in)  
It's ninety percent apples, flour,  
butter, and sugar. The cheapest  
ingredients in the kitchen. And a  
tiny bit of this to give it a kick.

Owen sets the bottle of bourbon on the table. By the time  
Owen finishes speaking, Matthew finishes the dessert.

MATTHEW  
Who are you?

Owen reaches out his hand.

OWEN  
Name's Owen.

Matthew shakes his hand.

MATTHEW  
But how... Why are you here?

OWEN  
I just saw an opportunity.

Owen pours two glasses of bourbon. Raises his for a toast.

OWEN (CONT'D)  
What do you say? Cheers to a  
successful night?

Matthew clinks his glass with Owen's. They drink.

MATTHEW  
I don't even know what to say. You  
saved my butt tonight.

OWEN  
I know.

Owen stares at Matthew. Waits for a response.

Matthew finally laughs.

MATTHEW

You're like a gift from heaven.

OWEN

I wouldn't say that. But I would say this place could be the hottest place in town if you want it to be.

MATTHEW

Yeah? And what would that take?

OWEN

Just ask for my help.

MATTHEW

Done. You're hired.

OWEN

Don't you want to know my terms?

MATTHEW

Of course. Sorry. What do you want?

OWEN

Equal partners. Sign over fifty percent of the restaurant, and we're bound together. What do you say? Let's do it.

Matthew gulps his drink and sets down the empty glass. Looks around the dining room.

MATTHEW

I... I put my soul into this restaurant. I didn't even give Angelo an ownership share.

OWEN

And where is he now? It's your choice. Do you want to scrape by, feeding crusty old folk on the way to their graves, or do you want to be rich?

MATTHEW

Look, I'd love to hire you. I'll even pay you twice what I gave Angelo, but this restaurant is my life. I can't just sign it over.

Owen stands up.

OWEN

Call me when you change your mind.

Owen hands Matthew a black-on-black business card. Walks out.

EXT. RESTAURANT - DAY

Matthew and Jess cross the park with two takeout coffees and head toward the restaurant. An ugly, weathered restaurant sign above the door reads:

"MATTHEW"

Matthew unlocks the door.

JESS  
Just call Angelo. You know we can't  
do this without him.

MATTHEW  
How hard can lunch be?

INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - DAY

Tre barbecues burger patties for the lunch menu while Claire preps soup and Matthew assembles burgers. The bun falls off a tower of meat, lettuce, tomato, and bacon.

MATTHEW  
How the hell are these supposed to  
stay together?

Claire stabs a long toothpick through the burger.

CLAIRE  
Too much lettuce. Too much  
everything, really.

MATTHEW  
But it looks fantastic.

TRE  
How's anyone supposed to eat it?

Jess brings a dish back.

JESS  
Table twelve asked for a rare.

MATTHEW  
Come on, Tre.

TRE  
You told me a medium.

MATTHEW

No, it says right here.

Matthew shuffles through discarded tickets.

Tre pulls down a ticket in progress.

TRE

Here's the rare burger.

MATTHEW

Yeah, that's... Okay. No problem.  
Cook a new rare and we'll send the  
medium with table three's order.

Matthew scrapes a side salad from the dish.

CLAIRE

You can't re-serve a burger that's  
already been out.

MATTHEW

Fine! Rush on two burgers; one  
rare, one medium. I'll get the  
fries.

Matthew grabs the fry basket handle.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Agh!

CLAIRE

Careful, the handle's hot.

Matthew wipes sweat from his forehead. Turns and bumps into a  
trash can, knocking it over.

EXT. RESTAURANT BACK ALLEY - DAY

The back door flings open. Matthew throws the whole garbage  
can out into the alley. Food scatters across the ground. The  
alley cat jumps out of the way. Matthew SLAMS the door.

The cat returns to eat scraps.

Owen leans against the wall at the entrance to the alley.  
Hands in his pockets. A grin on his face.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

The service is down to two tables finishing their lunches.  
Matthew and Jess sit at the bar, drinking pints with Keith.

KEITH

I'm sorry, man. I have to agree with Jess. We need Angelo back.

MATTHEW

He chose to leave.

JESS

Did he really, though? Cause, I was there, and it sounded kind of like you gave him an ultimatum.

MATTHEW

Whatever.

JESS

You're acting like a kid who just got in a fight with his BFF.

MATTHEW

Ex-BFF.

KEITH

You know. The one thing I've learned about relationships is that everything's always your fault. Swallow your pride and say sorry.

JESS

I hate to say it, but I think Keith's actually right for once.

Matthew sighs.

MATTHEW

You all suck.

INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - NIGHT

Matthew watches with his arms folded across his chest as Angelo walks back in and picks up his chef's coat and hat.

The kitchen and wait staff CHEER.

CLAIRE

Welcome back!

TRE

Hey, brother.

ANGELO

I missed you guys.

Matthew puts up his hands for quiet.

MATTHEW

Okay, okay. We're all glad Angelo is back. But I want to be clear. Things are going to change around here. I've seen what irresistible food looks like, and that's what I want to serve. And the organic crap has to go. Too expensive. You know what diners want in their food? Butter and salt and spice.

Angelo crosses his arms and glares at Matthew.

ANGELO

I thought you wanted me back?

MATTHEW

And I do. But on my terms. This is my restaurant, and we'll run it like a real business.

Angelo holds out his chef's jacket and hat and drops them to the floor. The staff GROANS as he walks right back out.

Lewis pokes his head into the kitchen.

LEWIS

Customers arriving. Anyone want to serve them?

As Sarah and Jess head to the dining room, Jess looks back at Matthew. Disappointed.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Matthew rushes out the front door past a line of customers.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Matthew runs across the street to the park. Stands beneath a streetlight and pulls out Owen's black business card. Squints to read the numbers as he dials his cell.

OWEN (V.O.)

(over the phone)

Matthew.

MATTHEW

Owen, okay, look. People are already asking for the food you served last night. Now, I can't just give you half my restaurant--

OWEN (V.O.)

--Well, nice to hear from you--

MATTHEW

--Wait. Wait. I'll give you forty-nine percent. That's almost half. But I keep control. Okay?

Matthew waits. Silence from the other end of the phone.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Please? I need you.

OWEN

I'll be right over.

INT. BACK OFFICE - NIGHT

Owen and Matthew crowd into Owen's tiny office. Owen unrolls a single-paged legal document.

Matthew looks it over.

MATTHEW

How did you get this so quickly?

OWEN

Wonders of the internet. Download a standard agreement, fill in names and numbers, and Bob's our uncle.

MATTHEW

Looks pretty basic.

Owen hands Matthew a pen.

OWEN

I know, right? Initial here where it says forty-nine percent...  
(Matthew initials)  
...and here, by the name of the restaurant.

Matthew initials by the name "Matthew."

OWEN (CONT'D)

And... sign and date here.



As soon as Matthew signs his name, a hot red glow shines in from the kitchen. Matthew jumps and looks through the window.

Flames leap up from a grease-filled frying pan. The smoke alarm goes off. Tre dunks a towel in water and throws it over the pan to douse the flames.

EXT. STREET - DAY

A beautiful morning. The sun shines. Birds chirp. Kids play.

Matthew and Jess emerge from the local coffee shop with their coffees. They stroll across the park.

MATTHEW

You know, if we keep having crowds like last night, we'll finally be able to buy a place together.

JESS

A nice condo down by the river.

MATTHEW

Maybe even a house.

Matthew's hope-filled smile disappears.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

What the...?

A freshly printed banner hangs over Matthew's old restaurant sign. Red flames on a black background frame the new name:

"BRYMSTONE"

Matthew runs to the front door.

INT. RESTAURANT - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Matthew enters to find the restaurant staff lined up behind a table, looking tired and confused.

Owen places a grey slate with three meat dishes before them.

MATTHEW

Brymstone?!

OWEN

Matthew! Just in time. Jess, please join the group.

JESS  
What's he doing here?

MATTHEW  
Meet our new chef.

Jess joins the rest of the confused staff while Matthew steps up to Owen's side.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)  
What are you doing here so early? I wanted to tell everyone first.

OWEN  
You wanted change, and here it is.

Owen proudly shows off three dishes. Points to a tall, open-faced burger. The sides have been trimmed to a squared shape.

OWEN (CONT'D)  
Craft-style, Kobe beef burger topped with onions, a deep-fried Camembert wheel, and back bacon.

KEITH  
Looks like a fancy heart-attack.

LEWIS  
I think it looks awesome.

Owen smiles. Moves to the next dish.

OWEN  
I knew hungry-boy would like it. Next, we have our delicious hoof-to-table, gluten-free, Sinful Meatloaf topped with catsup, colorful sprigs of parsley, yellow peppers, and grilled okra.

It's a cylinder of mashed potatoes and four wedges of meat (reclaimed from the squared-off burger.)

TRE  
That's just hamburger slices.

OWEN  
Keen eye. You just know Matthew was wondering where the extra meat the burger eaters paid for went. Well, here it is. Total additional food cost, a buck-fifty. Price on the menu, eighteen dollars. Push this one. It's almost pure profit.

Matthew grins. Tre rolls his eyes.

SARAH

The brisket looks raw and burnt at the same time.

She points to a pile of meat. Small-cut strips, charred black on the outside, but so rare inside they almost glow red.

OWEN

I love skeptics. Blackened, sous vide smoked meat. Everyone taste.

CLAIRE

I'll get forks.

OWEN

This is meat. We're carnivores! Eat it with your fingers for a true primeval experience. Dig in.

Everyone grabs a piece and tastes. Their eyes light up.

LEWIS

So good.

OWEN

Come on, someone with a palette.

MATTHEW

It's amazing. People will line up for this.

OWEN

Exactly! That's why we'll charge a fortune for it.

KEITH

Okay, I'll play the idiot here, but... this doesn't taste like beef. What is it?

A hint of irritation flashes across Owen's eyes. He smiles.

OWEN

If you don't know, I'm not telling.

KEITH

Lamb?

OWEN

I more of a goat person than lamb. No, this, my friends, is the taste of success.

(MORE)

OWEN (CONT'D)

The old, boring home-style cooking is gone. These dishes will be on our new menu tonight, and I've invited several important guests for their debut. Are you all ready to blow this town away?

The staff nods with excitement as they greedily finish off the rest of the meat.

OWEN (CONT'D)

One more thing. We're closing for lunch today. This stodgy old dump needs a complete overhaul.

SARAH

Hold on. I need those tips.

OWEN

A small sacrifice now will reap rewards tonight. Trust me. Now let's drag this place kicking and screaming into this century. Starting with that depressing old portrait.

Owen walks over and takes down the portrait of Matthew, Angelo, and Abuela.

OWEN (CONT'D)

Come on, man! Help me out here.

Matthew grabs one side of the portrait. They walk it outside.

The staff follows out of curiosity.

EXT. RESTAURANT - DAY

Owen and Matthew step onto the sidewalk. Staff behind them.

MATTHEW

I've had this portrait on the wall for years.

OWEN

Two of these people don't even work here. Do you want a change or not?

Owen sighs. Nods. They swing the portrait together.

OWEN (CONT'D)

One... Two... THREE!

The painting soars through the air, lands in the street, and is promptly crushed under the tires of a restaurant supply moving truck as it comes to a stop.

Owen CLAPS his hands and laughs. Shakes Matthew's shoulder.

A smile edges onto Matthew's face.

INT. DINING ROOM - LATER

Sarah and Jess paint over the rustic, Mediterranean-colored walls with bold, red and black paint.

Keith and Tre place tall-backed chairs around modern tables.

Owen hangs a sensual painting of two apples in the spot where the portrait used to be.

OWEN

What do you think?

MATTHEW

It's crooked.

OWEN

Crooked is the new straight.

Claire pokes her head out of the kitchen.

CLAIRE

Matthew! I need you. Now.

Owen nudges Matthew and winks.

OWEN

Mr. Big Time restaurant owner.  
Already the object of desire.

INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - DAY

Matthew finds Claire pointing at two burly MOVERS as they install a stack of microwave ovens at her station.

CLAIRE

How am I supposed to cook with  
these monstrosities taking up half  
my station?

MATTHEW

I'll talk to--

OWEN (O.S.)  
--Like 'em?

Matthew jumps. Turns to see Owen standing right behind him.

OWEN (CONT'D)  
Top-of-the-line flash heating  
systems.

CLAIRE  
I am not microwaving food.

OWEN  
Call it molecular gastronomy.  
Claire, I know you're a great cook,  
but when was the last time this  
kitchen handled a full dining room?

Claire shrugs.

OWEN (CONT'D)  
Well, tonight we're booked for two  
full turnovers. Packed. I guarantee  
that if you're still standing by  
the end of the shift, you'll be  
making love to those machines.

MATTHEW  
I don't know. Angelo always said--

Owen grabs a large turnip.

OWEN  
Angelo can stick this turnip up his  
greasy old butt. Trust me, with a  
genius like Claire working her  
culinary magic, people will think  
they're at frikkin' Heston's.

CLAIRE  
Ridiculous.

Claire turns to hide her blushing cheeks.

A toilette flushes. Lewis walks out of the staff bathroom.

LEWIS  
No one go in there. For your own  
good.

He grabs two bread rolls on his way to the dining room.

OWEN  
That kid eats like a beagle.  
Exactly how attached are you--

JESS (O.S.)  
--Matthew!

Matthew looks. Jess pokes her head into the kitchen. Motions for him to follow then disappears back into the dining room.

MATTHEW  
Dear Lord. What now?

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Matthew comes out, followed by Owen.

Jess, Sarah, Lewis, and Keith all gather around a table to inspect clothing in a cardboard box.

Jess pulls out a tiny skirt.

JESS  
Is this for a child?

Sarah holds up a button down white shirt that seems a couple sizes too small for her.

OWEN  
Oh good. You found the uniforms.

JESS  
Uniforms?

Jess looks at Matthew, who shrugs.

Owen checks his watch. Claps his hands.

OWEN  
It's almost go time. Everyone get dressed so we can check you out.

No one moves.

OWEN (CONT'D)  
Which is it, people? Do you want to help Matthew with his dream, or watch him slowly waste away in miserable failure?

Owen gives a charming smile.

Matthew shoots Jess a pleading glance. Mouths "please."

JESS

Come on, guys, let's get dressed.

OWEN

Believe me. You're all going to be smoking hot. With our new uniforms and menu, this town will be all over us like donkeys on a waffle.

Owen snaps his fingers.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Owen and Matthew watch from the bar. Dishes CLINK, and happy CHATTER fills the packed room.

Keith, dapper but uncomfortable in his flashy new suit, serves them two martinis.

Owen lifts his martini glass to Matthew.

OWEN

To success.

Matthew clinks his glass against Owen's.

MATTHEW

Success.

Sarah serves a nearby table, almost spilling out of her undersized shirt as she bends over. Glances back at Matthew.

INT. LOBBY - NIGHT

A hungry crowd waits for seats.

Lewis helplessly stares at the table map. Pops a dinner mint in his mouth and chews. The buttons of his tight dress-shirt threaten to pop off his bulky midsection.

Jess rushes over to Lewis.

JESS

Table fourteen is ready.

A BLOND BUSINESS DUDE nudges his DRUNKEN BUSINESS BUDDY. Their eyes molest Jess.

BLOND BUSINESS DUDE

I think we found our new spot.



DRUNKEN BUSINESS BUDDY  
What's your name, Sweetie?

JESS  
It's not 'Sweetie.'

BLOND BUSINESS DUDE  
Ooh. She's a fiery one.

He ribs his Drunken Business Buddy.

Jess adjusts her low cut shirt to cover her tight skirt, but the effort only reveals more cleavage. She leaves.

LEWIS  
Right this way, gentleman.

DRUNKEN BUSINESS BUDDY  
We want her as our waitress.

LEWIS  
Sorry, her section's full.

BLOND BUSINESS DUDE  
Figure it out. Idiot.

DRUNKEN BUSINESS BUDDY  
Yeah, give us the slutty waitress,  
fat ass.

Lewis turns red. Adjusts the stack of menus. Then tackles the Drunken Business Buddy.

EXT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Lewis stands outside in his street clothes with Jess and Matthew. Matthew hands Lewis his backpack.

MATTHEW  
Sorry, you gave me no choice.

LEWIS  
You always have a choice.

Matthew heads inside. Jess stays back.

JESS  
Are you going to be all right?

LEWIS  
Sure. I'd do it again.

They don't notice Owen watching from around the corner. He turns and hands two wads of cash to the Business Dudes.

JESS

You're a good man, Lewis.

Jess kisses Lewis on the cheek before heading back inside. The door shuts behind her.

EXT. RESTAURANT - DAY

Night turns to day.

The front door opens. Owen escorts Matthew out onto the sidewalk and points.

Matthew whistles at a red sports car parked out front.

OWEN

Like it?

MATTHEW

Impressive.

OWEN

A six-point-two liter, supercharged  
V8 engine with seven-hundred and  
fifty horsepower. Give her a spin.

Owen holds out a set of keys.

MATTHEW

Wait. That's yours?!

Owen laughs. Slaps Matthew's back.

OWEN

Don't be so shocked. Stick with me,  
and you'll be driving your own in  
no time.

Matthew beams as he grabs the keys. They get in and peel away down the street.

INT. LUXURY CLOTHING STORE - DAY

The car skids to a stop outside. Matthew and Owen climb out, laughing. The door CHIMES as they enter the shop.

KEYLYNN (25), the store's attendant greets them in an expensive, sleek, black pantsuit and high heels.

KEYLYNN

Owen. So good to see you.

OWEN

Keylynn. Looking lovely as ever.

Owen kisses her cheeks.

OWEN (CONT'D)

Allow me to introduce my new  
business partner, Matthew. Give him  
the full treatment.

KEYLYNN

Right this way, sir.

She winks seductively at Matthew then turns and walks toward  
the back, slender hips swaying.

MATTHEW

I can't afford this.

OWEN

Relax. The owner owes me.

LATER

Matthew stands in front of a mirror wearing a shirt and suit  
coat, but no pants while Keylynn kneels in front and runs a  
measuring tape up to his crotch to measure his inseam.

MATTHEW

How much is this going to cost?

KEYLYNN

Seventeen hundred and fifty.

MATTHEW

I thought you knew the owner?

OWEN

How do you think we're getting this  
fantastic deal? Matthew, listen. If  
you want to be successful, people  
have to believe you are successful.  
You've got to spend to trend.

Owen straightens Matthew's suit jacket. They both admire him  
in the mirror.

OWEN (CONT'D)

But listen. That's not the real reason we're here. I believe you're short one gluttonous host?

MATTHEW

I still feel bad about firing him.

OWEN

You did what you had to do.

Keylynn finishes measuring. Checks out Matthew's butt.

KEYLYNN

Not bad.

OWEN

Isn't he a treat?

KEYLYNN

Delicious.

OWEN

Tell Allen you're done here.  
There's a new hot spot in town.

Keylynn smiles.

INT. SPORTS CAR - DAY

Owen waits for Matthew squeeze into the passenger seat with his bags of new clothes.

OWEN

We need to talk about risk. No one has ever made it to the top by taking the safe road.

MATTHEW

I take risks.

OWEN

Please. You'd have bought your suit at Walmart if I hadn't made you come here. Now, I've got a plan to take us to the next level. But I need you with me. Can you do it?

MATTHEW

Of course. I'm ready.

OWEN

Okay, so here it is. Valentine's Day is the biggest day of the year for restaurants. We're going to hold a banquet so spectacular, that Brymstone will be the ONLY destination in town for the elite. Politicians, stars, crazy rich Asians... Just do everything I say, and they'll be fighting tooth and nail to get in. Do you want it?

MATTHEW

More than anything.

OWEN

Fantastic. No backing out. No baby steps. Everything we do builds to Valentine's day. Agreed?

MATTHEW

Let's do it.

Owen turns the key. The car's engine roars to life. He puts his sunglasses on then stomps the gas. Smoke billows from the tires. They take off down the street, weaving through oncoming traffic.

INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - DAY

Rock music blasts on the radio. Sunlight spills in through the back door. Tre and Claire sweat in the hot kitchen while prepping sauces for the evening service.

Tre peeks outside and spots Owen smoking a cigarette while a shady DELIVERY GUY unloads boxes from the red restaurant supply truck and stacks them by the wall.

Matthew emerges from the office.

MATTHEW

Where's Owen?

TRE

Out back.

Matthew sees him. Calls.

MATTHEW

Owen! Got a second?

Owen hands a stack of cash to the Delivery Guy. Flicks his cigarette and comes in. Follows Matthew to his office.

INT. OFFICE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Matthew sits back down behind his desk.

OWEN

Problem?

Owen shuffles through receipts.

MATTHEW

I keep going over these numbers,  
but they don't make sense. Our  
profit is up four hundred percent.

OWEN

So what's the problem?

MATTHEW

How's this even possible?

INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - DAY

Tre watches the red truck drive away. Checks the office to  
make sure Owen is still busy with Matthew.

Heads to the door and steps outside.

EXT. ALLEY - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Flies buzz around a stack of stained cardboard boxes. Tre  
sniffs and wrinkles his nose.

Flips the lid of a box open. A bag of raw chicken leaks slimy  
liquid. He holds his nose. Opens another box filled with raw  
cuts of unidentifiable meat all jumbled up together.

Tre spots a hoof. Gags and stumbles back. Bumps into Owen.

TRE

What the hell is this?

OWEN

That's tonight's dinner. How about  
using those muscles of yours to  
load it into the walk-in?

TRE

I'm not touching this garbage!

OWEN

You'll touch what you're overpaid  
to touch.

TRE  
We'll see what Matthew has to say  
about that.

OWEN  
Now hold on--

Owen tries to block Tre, but Tre shoves him back and points his finger in Owen's face.

TRE  
Don't you touch me.

Owen grabs Tre's bandaged thumb and twists with surprising strength. Tre goes weak and drops to his knees.

Owen looms over him. His eyes turn red. His voice deepens.

OWEN  
It's time for you to leave.

Tre looks up in fear. Nods his head.

OWEN (CONT'D)  
Say it.

Owen stares into Tre's soul, mesmerizing him.

TRE  
It's time for me to leave. Tell  
Matthew it was nice knowing him.

Owen lets go.

Tre stands up. Removes his apron and hurries away.

INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - DAY

Owen enters, smiling.

OWEN  
Clair, congratulations. You're the  
lead tonight. I'll take the grill.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The Romanian Husband and Wife wait in the lobby.

Keylynn looks straight past them at a hip, young BEARDED  
COUPLE dressed in trendy clothes.

KEYLYNN

Right this way, please.

ROMANIAN HUSBAND

Excuse me. We've been waiting for half an hour.

KEYLYNN

You should have made a reservation.

INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - NIGHT

Various meats sizzle on the grill. Owen flips a steak and grease flames leap up. He moves with the grace of a dancer. Whatever the origin of the meat, it all looks amazing now.

Claire rushes around preparing the final dishes.

CLAIRE

Order up!

Sarah runs by and scoops up two plates.

Owen looks up from the grill to see Matthew staring at him. Lifts up a rack of ribs with tongs for a good sniff.

OWEN

Can you smell the money? You should have trimmed the fat earlier.

MATTHEW

Not everyone is happy.

OWEN

Oh, yeah?

MATTHEW

Delores wants to know why we're charging twice as much for half the food.

OWEN

We're doing Delores a favor. Have you seen that big old butt of hers?

MATTHEW

Owen, the customer is always right.

Owen set down his tongs.

OWEN

Claire, cover the grill for a sec.



Claire wipes sweat from her forehead. Looks at the long line of hanging tickets.

CLAIRE

Sure, cover the whole kitchen. No problem.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Owen opens the kitchen door. Puts his arm around Matthew's shoulder and points toward the front.

OWEN

Look at that crowd. Young, pretty and rich. All lined up to eat your meat. Their demand exceeds our supply. Know what that means?

MATTHEW

I understand rising prices.

OWEN

No. It means Delores can suck our big fat--

CUT TO:

CLOSE UP

Of a platter of large bratwursts on the table.

A YOUNG COUPLE looks up at Matthew, who beams at them.

MATTHEW

Bon appétit!

INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - NIGHT

Claire scrubs the counters clean while Matthew watches Owen prepare a dessert.

Owen carefully places green sugar crisps shaped like lettuce leaves onto a white plate. Scoops out three small balls of strawberry sorbet then tops them with baby mint leaves to imitate tomatoes. Sprinkles on white chocolate flakes.

OWEN

Our signature Sweet Caesar Salad.

MATTHEW

Looks like a lot of work.

OWEN

How do you think the top restaurants charge five hundred bucks a meal? By twisting expectations. A strawberry is a tomato. Chocolate is cheese. Luxury is an illusion.

Matthew's phone chimes. He checks the screen.

MATTHEW

Shit. I promised to meet Jess for a drink after work.

OWEN

Blow her off. I want you all to myself tonight.

MATTHEW

Hah. She'd kill me.

OWEN

Uh oh. Is she going to put you in time-out for working too hard?

MATTHEW

No, she's cool. She knows the lifestyle.

OWEN

Then what's the worry? Give me tonight, and you're all hers tomorrow morning. I'll hook you two up at my buddy's diner. Best breakfast in town. On me.

MATTHEW

I don't know...

OWEN

Come on. What's all this for if you can't celebrate once in a while?

Matthew sighs. Then smiles. Texts Jess.

MATTHEW

What's one night?

OWEN

Atta boy. Let's get you dressed.

They head out.

Up above, a stain spreads unnoticed on the ceiling. A fat drip of black slime falls onto the grill.

INT. DROP CEILING - NIGHT

Above the dropped ceiling, a layer of lumpy black mold covers everything. A cockroach skitters by.

INT. NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

Music pounds and lights flash on the crowded dance floor.

Owen escorts Matthew to the bar. Motions to a BARTENDER.

OWEN

Two double scotches. Neat.  
Something smokey and old.

Owen peels a hundred-dollar bill off a roll of cash and slaps it on the counter.

CHIME. Matthew checks his cell phone.

MATTHEW

Jess needs the address for the  
breakfast place.

OWEN

Give me that.

Owen grabs the phone. Texts back. Drops it into his pocket.

OWEN (CONT'D)

There. Now, will you forget about  
her and enjoy one night of freedom?

Owen lifts the freshly poured glasses of scotch. Hands one to Matthew. Raises his glass in cheers. Motions to Matthew's slick new clubbing clothes.

OWEN (CONT'D)

To the new Matthew.

They drink.

MATTHEW

Oh, wow. That's good.

OWEN

Yes, it is. This is what you should  
be serving.

(MORE)

OWEN (CONT'D)

Imagine a full whiskey menu. Priced up to five hundred bucks a pour.

Owen puts his arm around Matthew. Points across the bar.

OWEN (CONT'D)

Check it out. You're already attracting attention.

BRYNN (25), a beautiful blonde woman in a low-cut red dress, makes eye contact with Matthew. She smiles, then turns back to stirring her drink.

Matthew looks around to see who she was smiling at.

MATTHEW

No... women like that don't go for guys like me.

OWEN

We tossed fat Matt out in the street, remember? She sees the new Matthew. Attractive, successful, and oozing style.

MATTHEW

I don't know.

Matthew glances back over and catches her eye again. She finishes her drink.

OWEN

Here's your chance. Go buy her a drink.

MATTHEW

I couldn't do that to Jess.

OWEN

I said buy her a drink, not sleep with her. Prove to yourself you could land her if you wanted to.

MATTHEW

You know what? I'll go get my rejection just to prove you wrong.

OWEN

There's my man!

Matthew makes his way over.

Brynn glances at Owen, who winks back at her. She turns to Matthew as he approaches.

Owen removes Matthew's cell phone from his pocket. Brings up the camera to snap photos of Matthew buying her a drink. Quickly hides it when Matthew sneaks him a thumbs up.

The Bartender pours two shots. Brynn pounds hers and gets Matthew to do the same. Grabs his hand and pulls him towards the dance floor.

Matthew shoots Owen a shocked smile.

Matthew's phone CHIMES with a new notification from Jess.

JESS (TEXT)  
See you at 8. :)

OWEN (TEXT)  
Bright and early!

INT. MATTHEW'S BEDROOM - DAY

Matthew SNORES in a deep sleep. The alarm clock reads 10:28.

CHIME. His phone lights up on his bedside table with a series of texts from Jess. CHIME. CHIME.

Matthew stirs. Blinks his eyes open. Hair a mess. Bed lines cross his cheek. Checks his phone and jolts straight up.

MATTHEW  
Crap!

The hangover hits him. He rushes to the bathroom to throw up.

INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - NIGHT

Owen and Claire fly through orders. Plates of food stack up on the counter while Matthew tries to sort out the mess.

Jess rushes in.

Matthew tries to find her order.

JESS  
I can get it myself.

She snatches up two plates and heads back out.

CLAIRE  
Someone's in the doghouse.

MATTHEW  
Watch it, Claire.

Sarah hurries into the kitchen.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)  
Let's keep it moving! Longer  
turnovers mean fewer customers.

Matthew loads Sarah up with plates. She looks exhausted.

SARAH  
It's ten o'clock, and we're still  
full. I think we'll be fine.

MATTHEW  
You'll appreciate it when you're  
counting fat tips tonight.

Sarah rushes out.

CLAIRE  
Well, I don't get tips.

Claire flips blackening meat on the grill.

MATTHEW  
You'll be making more money soon.

CLAIRE  
I'm finally getting a raise?

MATTHEW  
No. Starting next week, we're open  
on Sundays.

CLAIRE  
Seriously? I'm already pulling  
eighty hours a week. When are you  
going to replace Tre?

MATTHEW  
You and Owen seem to handle the  
kitchen just fine on your own.

Claire slams a pan onto the stove. Owen looks up.

CLAIRE  
Fine? It's sweltering in here, the  
cooler's a mess--

Owen waves his hand.

Claire's apron catches the pan's handle as she turns. Grease  
sloshes over the side of the pan.

PHWOOM! A fireball leaps up.

Claire screams and falls back. Her apron catches fire.

Matthew grabs an extinguisher and rushes around the counter to put out the flames. Claire's uniform smolders. The skin on her arm turns lobster red.

EXT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

The lineup of customers at the front door watch as Matthew comforts Claire on the sidewalk. He holds a wet towel over her arm. Checks his Uber app.

MATTHEW

We're looking for a blue Prius.

Claire sobs.

A DISGUSTED CUSTOMER shakes his head.

DISGUSTED CUSTOMER

Too cheap to call her an ambulance?

MATTHEW

This is faster. There it is.

He waves down the driver. Loads Claire into the back seat.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

(to the driver)

Drop her off at the emergency entrance. Hurry.

The car drives away.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Matthew finds Jess waiting with her arms folded.

JESS

An Uber. Really?

MATTHEW

Don't blame our health care system on me.

Jess walks away.

Keylynn smirks at Matthew.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

What?

EXT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

Matthew brings out two coffees.

MATTHEW

I thought I owed you a little extra  
sugar this morning.

Jess takes her coffee. Nods.

JESS

I hate it when we fight.

MATTHEW

I know. Look, Jess. I'm sorry. It's  
just... Everything is going so  
fast. I get caught up in it all.

They stroll into the park, toward the restaurant.

INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - DAY

Matthew enters to find Owen dancing to loud music, prepping  
large pot of soup. He doesn't notice a cat tail hanging over  
the rim of the pot before Owen knocks it into the soup.

Matthew turns off the radio.

MATTHEW

Seems like everyone's missing  
today.

OWEN

Stir this.

Owen hands Matthew a wooden spoon. Matthew checks the soup in  
the pot. It looks delicious. Stirs.

Owen chops vegetables at a blinding speed. CHK-CHK-CHK...

OWEN (CONT'D)

Claire is M.I.A., and both Sarah  
and Keith called to say they're not  
working on Sundays.

Owen scrapes diced veggies from the cutting board into the  
pot. Starts on the onions.

MATTHEW

So do we close then? Four of us  
can't handle lunch. Even if I cook  
and Keylynn helps Jess with--



OWEN

--Matthew, you're the boss. Do you even want employees that would disobey you like this?

MATTHEW

They're normally really good.

Owen tosses the onions into the pot. Takes the spoon.

OWEN

Are they though? How many dishes did Sarah break last night? Or free drinks Keith gave away?

Owen offers a spoonful of meaty soup for Matthew.

OWEN (CONT'D)

Try this. What does it need?

Matthew tastes. Smacks his lips.

MATTHEW

Mm. More salt?

OWEN

Ah. Where would we be without salt?

Owen adds salt.

MATTHEW

Sarah and Keith are family.

OWEN

They're mutineers.

MATTHEW

The customers love them.

OWEN

Plain-Jane Sarah dresses like a truck stop waitress, and Scruff Ball Keith doesn't even brush his teeth. Our new customers aren't here for a meal. Dining out should be a spectacle. And our staff should be performers.

MATTHEW

Do we have time to find new staff?

OWEN

Say the word, and I'll have replacements within the hour.

MATTHEW

I don't know.

OWEN

If you want to pull off this banquet, you'll need the right crew. What's your choice? Progress or stagnation?

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Owen introduces two new hires to Jess and Matthew; DUSCHAN (22), perfectly coifed, resting douche face, and Brynn, the temptress from the nightclub.

OWEN

Meet Duschan. Recently crowned the hottest young bartender in the state. He can make any drink you can name and a hundred more.

Duschan smirks and spins a bottle in the air.

DUSCHAN

Anyone want a Blackbeard's Nipple?

OWEN

And Brynn comes with her own following. One Insta from her, and we'll be packed till midnight.

BRYNN

With lonely men. Just warning you.

Brynn gives Matthew a knowing look.

Jess notices as Matthew averts his eyes.

JESS

(whispers to Matthew)  
They look like high-priced escorts.

MATTHEW

(whispers back)  
You're not wrong about the price.

EXT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Luxury cars line the street in front of the restaurant. A crowd mills under the glowing red Brymstone sign.

## INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Drunken patrons pack the dimly lit restaurant. ELECTRONIC MUSIC thumps over their loud chatter.

Someone grabs Jess's bum as she carries dishes to the kitchen. She spins around, unable to identify the creep in the crowd.

## INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - NIGHT

Jess dumps the dishes into a bus bin. Spots Owen effortlessly running the kitchen all by himself while dancing to the beat. She steps aside as Brynn carries out armloads of plates.

JESS  
(angry)  
Where's Matthew?

Owen snorts a bump of coke off his fist.

OWEN  
Out back.

## EXT. ALLEY - NIGHT

Matthew sits on a crate. Knees up. Shoulders slumped. Takes a drag of his cigarette as the door opens behind him.

MATTHEW  
Just give me two minutes.

JESS  
Smoking again?

Matthew flinches. Looks back. Caught. Holds up his cigarette and shrugs.

MATTHEW  
Busy night. I feel like I'm wearing concrete shoes. The tips good?

JESS  
Huge. If this keeps up, you'll get everything you wanted.

Matthew refills a wine glass. Hands it to Jess and takes a swig straight from the bottle.

MATTHEW

We'll see. Food cost is down,  
receipts are up, but so far all the  
extra money's gone to renos and the  
new staff. Owen says we'll be in  
the black after the banquet.

JESS

Do you trust him?

MATTHEW

Sure. Why not? He's an incredible  
chef, and he knows business.

JESS

But look at you. You've lost your  
friends. You're smoking again.  
Drinking. And I hate to say it, but  
you're getting a bit of a chub.

She pinches his love handle.

MATTHEW

(laughs)

I'm fine.

JESS

Are we fine? Really? You haven't  
been coming over anymore.

MATTHEW

I'm sorry. I'm just dead after  
these shifts.

JESS

Is there something you're not  
telling me?

MATTHEW

Of course not! Look, I'll admit it.  
Something about Owen brings out the  
worst in me.

INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - NIGHT

Owen leans his back against the wall by the back door,  
eavesdropping.

MATTHEW (O.S.)

Let me get past this banquet, and  
then I'll cut him loose and we can  
hire any chef we want.

Owen pulls out his cell phone. Dials a number as he heads back to the grill.

OWEN  
We've got a problem.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

Owen strolls over to a railing overlooking the water. Stops next to a man standing in the shadows, one hand on the rail.

The SHADOW MAN takes a drag off a cigarette. Its glowing ember lights up the brim of his hat.

OWEN  
Matthew's planning to cut me loose.  
I need to expose those pictures of  
him with Brynn.

SHADOW MAN  
I told you no. You're taking too  
much control. It's too easy for him  
to claim credit for the successes  
and blame you for the failures.

OWEN  
Give me a couple more days, and  
he'll be in so deep he'll never  
climb out.

SHADOW MAN  
You miss the point. I don't care if  
he fails. He needs to fall. A man  
won't truly be corrupted unless the  
choices are his own.

OWEN  
I understand.

SHADOW MAN  
Do you? Sometimes I doubt you  
understand a thing.

OWEN  
I won't fail you.

SHADOW MAN  
See that you don't.

The Shadow Man walks away. Owen looks down at the RED-HOT glowing rail where the Shadow Man's hand was.

INT. RESTAURANT OFFICE - DAY

Matthew adjusts a pair of glasses on his nose. Pushes receipts to the side and counts a stack of cash.

Owen knocks on the door.

OWEN  
How'd we do?

MATTHEW  
Best night yet. Lunch starting?

OWEN  
Yes. And you'll never guess who  
Keylynn just sat.

Matthew shoves the cash into an envelope.

MATTHEW  
Who?

OWEN  
A certain local critic with a  
certain little food blog.

MATTHEW  
Marlene? You're kidding me. She  
roasted us last time she was here.

Matthew gets up and rushes out.

INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - DAY

Matthew and Owen peek out into the dining room. MARLENE (50s) sits at a table, analyzing the menu with a stern expression.

OWEN  
To be fair, she roasts everyone.

MATTHEW  
This is bad.

OWEN  
Nonsense. She'll love her lunch.  
You're going to cook it.

MATTHEW  
Oh, no way. You're the chef.

Owen leads Matthew back to the grill. Points out the ingredients.

OWEN

Sauces are all prepped. Meats are marinated and ready to throw on. I'll walk you through it.

(laughs)

As long as she doesn't order the scallops, we'll be fine.

MATTHEW

Are we out of scallops?

OWEN

No, we've got some.

Jess comes in with a ticket.

MATTHEW

Is that her order? What is it?

JESS

Scallops.

MATTHEW

Of course. Okay. We can do this. I've cooked scallops before.

Matthew heads toward the walk-in cooler.

OWEN

Don't go in there. Uh, the cooler was full. They're out back.

MATTHEW

Out... What?

EXT. ALLEY - DAY

Sun beats down on a soggy cardboard box.

Matthew opens it up. Off-color scallops swim in a slimy soup.

MATTHEW

What are we going to do?

OWEN

Your choice, but you'd better think of something. I've seen her write reviews so scathing that even cooks stopped eating their own food.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Matthew personally delivers a plate to the table and sets it before Marlene. A simple grilled chicken breast.

MARLENE  
This isn't what I ordered.

MATTHEW  
I thought I'd keep it simple.  
Grilled chicken with a side salad.

MARLENE  
Where's the salad?

MATTHEW  
Look under the plate.

Marlene tips the plate up and looks at the envelope underneath. She nudges the flap open and eyes the cash.

MARLENE  
Hmm.

MATTHEW  
Bon appétit.

A rat scurries unnoticed along the floorboards.

INT. RESTAURANT DINING ROOM - LATER

The whole staff gathers by the bar. Matthew checks his phone.

Duschan sets out champagne glasses for everyone. A bottle of champagne to the left, and a bottle of vodka to the right.

DUSCHAN  
Which will it be? Sweet victory or  
miserable defeat?

Matthew holds up his cell phone.

MATTHEW  
Okay, it's up.

JESS  
Quiet everyone.

MATTHEW  
(reads)  
When I reviewed Matthew a year ago,  
The food was tasty, but unexciting.  
(MORE)



MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Despite re-branding with the  
irritatingly trendy name  
"Brymstone," and a newly made-over  
dining room that looks like it had  
been raped by the decorator...

Matthew clears his throat. Shifts uncomfortably.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

...I must say, the new menu is on  
fire. If you're looking for new and  
irresistible delights, this is the  
place to be.

Duschan pops the cork on the Champagne bottle.

DUSCHAN

Victory!

The restaurant phone RINGS. Keylynn gets up to answer it.

OWEN

Get ready for a busy night, people.  
That phone's not going to stop  
ringing today.

Everyone drinks.

OWEN (CONT'D)

Matthew, take a walk with me.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Owen turns Matthew to face the restaurant.

OWEN

What do you see?

MATTHEW

A restaurant that's about to be  
slammed for dinner tonight.

OWEN

Think about the banquet.

MATTHEW

Honestly? Does that even matter?  
We're booked full every night.

OWEN

You've got to think bigger. If we really nail this banquet, it's only the beginning. Think franchise, television, frozen foods.

MATTHEW

I'm sold. What do you see?

OWEN

A for-sale sign next door.

Matthew thinks about it.

MATTHEW

We could double our capacity.

OWEN

Bingo.

MATTHEW

But, we don't have the free cash to make a downpayment. And no bank would make a loan this quickly.

OWEN

Come on, man. Grow some balls and think of something.

MATTHEW

Jess and I have been saving up for a house... but, she'd kill me if I tapped into our joint account.

OWEN

She'll never notice. In a few days, your balance will be five times as big. You can buy two houses.

MATTHEW

We only need one.

Owen laughs.

OWEN

Then buy a mansion! Loosen up. You only live once, isn't that what they say now?

MATTHEW

All right.

OWEN

Hell yeah! Now let's see you strut!

Owen puts his arm around Matthew, and they strut back to the restaurant.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Chattering and laughing diners pack the room. Keylynn seats a group. Jess and Brynn serve. Duschau entertains at the bar by twirling bottles as he makes drinks.

Matthew, dressed in a stylish new suit, chats up a table of six. They laugh along with him.

MATTHEW

Enjoy your meals. Anything you need  
just ask for Matthew.

Jess intercepts Matthew as he moves on.

JESS

Table three's not happy.

Matthew looks over. An UNHAPPY DINER in a silk shirt, wearing a gold chain, sits across from his date, KRISTA. A plate of calamari sits untouched between them.

MATTHEW

Let me handle it.

Matthew approaches.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

How is everything so far?

UNHAPPY DINER

Fine until we came here. Do you  
expect us to eat this overcooked  
crap?

The carefully arranged calamari remains untouched.

MATTHEW

I'll bring you out a new order  
right away.

UNHAPPY DINER

No, forget it. Crystal--

KRISTA

--It's Krista.

UNHAPPY DINER

Whatever. She's not into it. Just  
get our meals out here, now.

MATTHEW

Not a problem. I'll go check--

UNHAPPY DINER

--Did I ask you to check on it? I said I want it now so we can get out of this dump.

Other customers react to the Unhappy Diner's raised voice.

MATTHEW

Of course.

UNHAPPY DINER

And my steaks had better be well-done. I don't want any pink inside.

MATTHEW

Sir, a well-done steak takes--

UNHAPPY DINER

--Are you dense? Stop wasting my time and get the damned food!

INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - NIGHT

Matthew leans over the counter to check the tickets.

MATTHEW

What's the ETA on table three?

Owen points at a rare steak on the grill.

OWEN

Didn't they just get their appetizer?

MATTHEW

The guy's an asshole. Said it was overcooked.

Matthew sets down the calamari plate and shoves it toward Owen. Owen takes a bite.

OWEN

It's perfect.

MATTHEW

He wants his steak well-done and wants it now.

OWEN

The best way to punish someone is  
to give him what he wants.

Owen winks at Matthew. Matthew's face lights up.

QUICK CUTS

- Matthew shoves the steak in the microwave. Power level 15.
- Matthew kicks the steak across the floor to Owen.
- Owen blackens it with a blowtorch.
- Matthew hocks a huge loogie into a side of mashed potatoes.

INT. DINER - ROOM

Matthew sets a salad in front of Krista and steak and potatoes in front of the Unhappy Diner.

UNHAPPY DINER

It's about time.

INT. RESTAURANT MEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Matthew peeks his head into the bathroom. The Unhappy Diner's loud moans emit from a stall, followed by simultaneous BOWEL SOUNDS and VOMITING. Matthew winces with each noise.

The toilet FLUSHES. Matthew hides before the stall door opens.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Matthew watches the Unhappy Diner emerge from the bathroom. Pale and sweaty. Slightly disheveled.

Matthew opens the bathroom door and recoils from the smell. Looks around for help, but the staff is all busy with customers. He groans and grabs a mop.

INT. DINING ROOM - LATER

The dining room is empty. Brynn and Keylynn sit with Owen at the bar while Duschan pours drinks.

Matthew emerges from the kitchen.

MATTHEW

Where's Jess?

Jess arrives from the front of the house.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Ah great. Well, everyone. I just wanted to say what an amazing job you all did tonight. I know it's hard being short staffed, but somehow we pulled it off. I promise that, right after the banquet, we'll be able to afford to hire more help.

JESS

Matthew, I need to talk to you.

MATTHEW

Just a minute.

OWEN

Matthew and I have decided that you all deserve to celebrate. We're taking you out. Drinks on us.

Jess tugs at Matthew's arm.

JESS

Now.

Matthew follows her to the side.

MATTHEW

What is it?

Jess shoves an ATM receipt into his hand.

JESS

Where's our money? There's three hundred bucks left in our joint account. I called the bank, and they said you withdrew it.

MATTHEW

I was going to tell you. I had to borrow a little for the banquet.

JESS

You didn't think to ask me first?

MATTHEW

In just a few days we'll have it all back and more.

JESS  
That's not the point. Half that  
money was mine.

Owen and crew head toward the front.

OWEN  
You two lovebirds ready?

Matthew holds up a finger to indicate one minute.

MATTHEW  
It'll all work out. I promise. Come  
out tonight and have some fun.

JESS  
With who's money?

Owen calls back from the front door.

OWEN  
Train's leaving.

Matthew turns back to Jess.

MATTHEW  
I'm sorry I didn't tell you. I  
promise I won't spend any more of  
our money without talking to you.

JESS  
Go out with your new friends. I'm  
too tired.

MATTHEW  
Will you still meet me for coffee  
in the morning?

Matthew leans in to kiss her. She half-kisses him back.

JESS  
Sure.

MATTHEW  
Jess. I promise, promise, promise  
the money will be spent  
responsibly. Trust me.

EXT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Matthew exits while Jess hangs back to turn off the lights.

Owen hands Matthew a set of car keys.

MATTHEW  
What's this?

Owen points at a brand new BMW.

OWEN  
Your new company car.

Matthew's face lights up.

MATTHEW  
Where did--

He looks at the ATM receipt. Then back at the restaurant.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)  
Let's roll.

EXT. NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

A well-dressed, 250-pound BOUNCER screens a long line of people.

Owen's sports car stops at the valet. He exits with Keylynn.

Matthew's BMW rolls up behind them. Duschan gets out of the back seat. Brynn emerges from the passenger seat.

Matthew steps out and straightens his jacket. Tosses his keys to a VALET.

MATTHEW  
Don't scratch it.

He joins Owen at the front of the line.

Owen slips the Bouncer some bills. Introduces Matthew.

OWEN  
This is my partner in crime. You  
ever need anything at Brymstone,  
just ask for Matthew.

BOUNCER  
Right on.

The Bouncer steps aside to let them in.

INT. NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

Owen guides them back to a booth in a roped-off section. He hands some cash to Keylynn.



OWEN

You three go have fun. I need to talk to Matthew.

BRYNN

Don't hog him all to yourself.

Brynn winks and saunters away with Keylynn and Duschan.

OWEN

I think she likes you.

MATTHEW

Brynn?

OWEN

Get used to it. Success attracts women like moths.

MATTHEW

I don't want moths.

OWEN

Hah. I've seen the look on your face. Admit it. You love the attention.

Brynn and Keylynn grind together on the dance floor. Brynn waves for Matthew to join them.

MATTHEW

Damn right I do.

OWEN

I knew it! You want to own that dance floor, don't you?

MATTHEW

Honestly, tonight I think I could. I feel pumped.

OWEN

Hell yeah. Check you out. Rolling like Scarface up in the club.

MATTHEW

I'm going for it.

Matthew starts to get up, but Owen holds him back.

OWEN

One second. I got something brewing for the banquet, but we're going to need some more money.

Matthew's eyes go wide.

OWEN (CONT'D)

Don't make that face. This is huge. The biggest name in fashion is flying in on Friday. If she makes an appearance at the banquet, it'll be international news.

MATTHEW

How much does she charge?

OWEN

Thirty grand.

MATTHEW

Thirty?!

OWEN

I know. It's incredible what a single, carefully leaked sex-tape can do for one's career.

MATTHEW

Where am I supposed to get that kind of money? I'm cleaned out.

Matthew pulls a contract from his pocket.

OWEN

Give me the word and I've got a guy who'll give us a loan against a twenty percent stake in the restaurant. Ten from my share and ten from yours.

Matthew looks at the paper, incredulous.

MATTHEW

No way. I'm not giving up any more control.

OWEN

You don't have to. We'll pay the loan back in three days and you're clear. Fifteen hundred bucks in interest. It's nothing compared to how much buzz she'll generate.

Owen hands Matthew a pen.

MATTHEW

How long have you known this guy?

OWEN

Forever. Listen, if you don't pull this off, you'll go back to being nothing. Like no record of you ever existed. What do you say?

Matthew hesitates. Sighs. Signs the paper.

OWEN (CONT'D)

Great!

Owen pulls out a small vial and shakes out some powder onto each of their fists.

OWEN (CONT'D)

Now let's seal the deal and go tear this club up.

Matthew hesitates. Looks out at Brynn and Keylynn dancing seductively with each other. He snorts the drugs.

MATTHEW

Let's do it.

QUICK FLASHES

- Matthew pounds shots.
- Matthew dances on the crowded dance floor.
- Matthew sees a tail on Brynn.
- Brynn dances seductively.

INT. MATTHEW'S BEDROOM - DAY

Matthew wakes up with a groan. Holds his hand to his head. He opens his eyes and cringes at the bright sunlight.

The alarm clock reads 10:11 AM.

He grabs his phone. Text notifications from Jess fill the screen. The last one being:

JESS (TEXT)

"WTH are you???"

MATTHEW

Shit!

Matthew sits up.

Someone stirs in the bed next to him. He flips the sheets down to see Brynn smiling up at him.

BRYNN  
Good morning.

MATTHEW  
Ahhh!

KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK.

Matthew jumps out of bed at the sound of someone at the door. Full panic mode.

He quickly covers himself. Tosses Brynn's clothes to her.

Brynn catches the clothes and watches in amusement as Matthew struggles to put on his pants.

Matthew's foot gets caught, and he falls over. He flinches in alarm at the sound of a key in the apartment door. He looks out of the bedroom and sees the apartment door opening.

It's Jess.

Matthew crawls across the floor. Slams the bedroom door shut.

JESS (O.S.)  
Matthew?

MATTHEW  
Just a minute?  
(whispers to Brynn)  
Hide!

Matthew stands and pulls his pants up. Brynn doesn't move.

Jess opens the door. Her face drops in shock at the sight of Brynn in Matthew's bed and Matthew frozen in the act of zipping his pants.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)  
It's not--

Jess slams the door.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)  
Jess, wait!

Brynn laughs.

BRYNN  
Oops.

Matthew runs out after Jess.

INT. RESTAURANT DINING ROOM - DAY

Early customers look up as Matthew storms into the restaurant. Glares at Brynn as she serves a dish.

Matthew stamps across the dining room toward the kitchen.

INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Owen whistles along to the MUSIC on the radio.

Matthew bursts in. He slams his hand onto the radio, turning it off.

MATTHEW

You've finally done it!

OWEN

Done what?

MATTHEW

I knew I shouldn't have gone to the club with you. I should have learned my lesson the first time.

OWEN

What happened?

MATTHEW

You know what! Brynn happened. "Oh Matthew, you're such a lady's man. Ooh, I think she likes you." You probably set the whole thing up from the beginning.

OWEN

I don't know what you're talking about. Did you make a bad choice?

MATTHEW

Agh! You're so infuriating! Ever since you showed up, things have gone wrong.

Owen sets his knife on the counter. Light glints off the sharp steel.

OWEN

Seems to me like you've been  
getting everything you ever wanted.  
I just helped.

MATTHEW

You've only helped with one thing.  
People love your food.

Matthew grabs a big, juicy hamburger off a plate. Takes a big bite from the thick, perfectly cooked patty.

Owen sighs. Throws another patty on the grill.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

(sarcastic)

Mmm. Owen's food is so good. Owen  
is so cool. How do you do it, huh?

OWEN

I told you, salt, fat, sugar--

MATTHEW

--Shut up! You've got everyone else  
fooled, but I can see through your  
tricks and lies. Everything is an  
illusion, you said it yourself. The  
business, the glamour. But the  
food... I can't figure out how you  
make it taste so good.

Matthew takes another huge bite. Talks with his mouth full.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

People can't stop eating it. What  
are you putting in the meat? Drugs?

OWEN

Do you really want to know?

MATTHEW

Yes! I really do.

OWEN

I simply let people see what they  
want to see. If you *really* want the  
truth, all you have to do is look.

Matthew swallows. His eyes narrow.

MATTHEW

What do you--

Matthew looks down at the burger in his hands. Worms wriggle through the bloody patty and maggots tumble off onto the counter. He throws the burger down in disgust.

Matthew looks around the kitchen with fresh eyes. The sparkling clean facade is gone. MOLD covers every surface. INSECTS crawl on the walls. SLIME drips from the ceiling.

Matthew gags and runs to the sink to throw up. The sink is filled with animal bones soaking in a putrid swamp.

Matthew swoons.

OWEN

You've even been fooling yourself.

Matthew looks at his reflection in the polished steel of the microwave. He touches a cold sore on his lips. He looks down at his belly, which appears twenty pounds heavier.

MATTHEW

Oh God.

OWEN

God has nothing to do with this.  
You gave him up.

Rats SQUEAK by the cooler. A line of ants flows from the partially opened door.

Matthew stumbles over and swings it open. Recoils in disgust. Flies swarm out. Rancid food drips from every rack.

Matthew vomits.

MATTHEW

(weakly)  
The customers...

OWEN

Don't worry about them. They're  
still oblivious.

Owen waves his hand, and everything appears clean again.

OWEN (CONT'D)

Isn't the illusion so much better?

Owen approaches and puts his arm around Matthew.

MATTHEW

Don't touch me.

Matthew is too weak to push him away.

Owen helps him to his feet. Guides him toward the dining room as he talks.

OWEN

Matthew. I'm only giving you what you want. Everything you desire is in your reach. So decide. Do you want me to show everyone the truth, or do you want fame and fortune?

They stop at the dining-room door. Owen points out through the window at the patrons stuffing themselves like pigs.

OWEN (CONT'D)

Look at them. Like ticks ready to pop. Engorged on the delights that you served them.

MATTHEW

Go away.

OWEN

You are nothing without me.

MATTHEW

This is still my restaurant.

OWEN

Not if you don't pay back the loan.

MATTHEW

I can do the banquet without you.

OWEN

How? You have no friends. Only me.

MATTHEW

You're the devil.

OWEN

Close. But no. I merely do his work. And people like you make it so easy.

MATTHEW

Just get out. We're through.

OWEN

Are you sure?

MATTHEW

Yes.



OWEN

So be it.

Owen waves his hand. The illusion of cleanliness is gone.

SCREAMS erupt from the dining room. Some diners scramble out of their seats in panic, others retch right at their tables.

Brynn, Keylynn, and Duschan laugh, now older, uglier and covered in sores.

Owen removes his apron and drops it on the floor. Walks out.

Matthew sinks to his knees.

EXT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Cars drive past the lonely restaurant. The "OPEN" sign glows red, but no one lines up outside.

INT. RESTAURANT DINING ROOM - NIGHT

All the tables sit empty.

Matthew sits alone at the bar. Finishes off a glass of scotch. Pours the last drops from a bottle.

The headline of Marlene's restaurant blog on his phone reads:

"BRYMSTONE'S HOUSE OF HORRORS"

Matthew gets up from his stool and walks around behind the bar. Opens up a cardboard shipping case. Pulls out a bottle of 20-year-old scotch and inspects it.

Uncorks it and takes a swig.

MATTHEW

Nice.

Matthew checks his chat conversation with Jess. It's just a series of his texts with no response: "Hey," "Call me," "Jess?" "Where are you?"

He pulls up Angelo's contact and calls him.

ANGELO (V.O.)

(over the phone)

You've got Angelo, please leave a message.

Matthew hangs up. Strolls to the front door.

EXT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Matthew meanders outside. Doesn't even bother to lock the door behind him.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Matthew wanders aimlessly. Drinking from the bottle. A car drives by and splashes him.

INT. FAST-FOOD RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A bored CASHIER mops the floor behind the counter. Sets the mop aside as Matthew stumbles in.

CASHIER

Welcome to Portly's. What can I get you?

Matthew stares at pictures of big greasy burgers on the menu.

MATTHEW

A burger. No. A bacon cheeseburger. And a large chili-cheese fries. Do you have milkshakes?

CASHIER

Vanilla, chocolate, or strawberry?

MATTHEW

One of each. You know how long it's been since I've had a milkshake?

The Cashier shrugs. Rings up the order.

CASHIER

That'll be twenty-eight, fifty.

MATTHEW

Twenty--? I'm in the wrong business.

Matthew pulls out his wallet. Only two dollars in cash. Takes out his credit card instead.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

I own a restaurant, you know? But somehow I don't have a thing to eat.

The Cashier runs the card. BEEP. Frowns.

CASHIER  
Sorry, man. It says declined.

MATTHEW  
What? Here, try this one.

The Cashier runs the second card. BEEP.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)  
Okay, listen. Maybe you don't recognize me. My restaurant is Brymstone down the street. Used to be Matthew's? I'm Matthew. How about you give me that old pre-made burger there, and I'll comp you a meal?

CASHIER  
Nah, man. I heard of that place.

MATTHEW  
Nah? One of my burgers is worth three times a whole meal here! They're gourmet. GOUR-MET!

The Cashier leans forward to loom over Matthew.

CASHIER  
Okay, I'm gonna ask you to back on up out of here now.

Matthew puts up his hands. Makes a show of turning around.

MATTHEW  
All right. All right.

As soon as the Cashier relaxes Matthew lunges over the counter and reaches for the burger.

The Cashier tries to grab him, but Matthew wriggles away. They wrestle, smashing the burger in the process.

Matthew holds the tattered thing up in triumph.

CASHIER  
You just told me your name, dude.

MATTHEW  
So bill me!

Matthew stumbles out.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

Matthew sits on a bench. Clothes torn and muddy.

Unwraps a huge, greasy cheeseburger. Just as he lifts it to take a bite, a seagull swoops by, snatches it from his hands, and flies away, leaving a trail of burger fillings.

MATTHEW

Hey!

Matthew throws the burger wrapper on the ground and licks his fingers.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Damn starving seagull! I hope that  
burger gives you the--

A stream of white bird poop nails Matthew on the shoulder.

BY THE WATER

Owen giggles next to the Shadow Man, watching Matthew.

The Shadow Man shakes his head.

SHADOW MAN

Your childish games do nothing to  
help our cause.

PARK BENCH

Matthew squints through the darkness at the two shadowy figures watching him. Looks around and realizes that he's otherwise alone.

He stands up and casually takes a few steps away. Looks back.

The two remain motionless, staring.

Matthew hurries away at a fast walk.

BY THE WATER

The Shadow Man touches the end of the cigarette. It starts to glow. He takes a drag.

OWEN

He's in our hands now.

SHADOW MAN

Do not be deceived. His soul is more at risk to us now than when he was reaping the rewards of his selfishness. A beggar stealing bread is no lower than the rich man refusing to feed the hungry.

OWEN

There's no way he can repay the loan tomorrow. Then, he'll know he's ours.

SHADOW MAN

We shall see.

A fire glows in the Shadow Man's eyes.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Matthew hurries down the sidewalk, looking back over his shoulder. He spots the glowing red eyes.

Matthew takes off at a run.

Turns onto a new street. Tries to flag down a passing car, but it speeds up to avoid him.

Matthew ducks into the alcove of a church. Breathes heavily. Peeks back around the corner. No sign of the two strangers.

He pulls out his cell phone and opens his contact card. The first number is Angelo's. His thumb hovers over the call button. Then locks the phone and drops it back in his pocket.

Takes a drink.

He heads across the empty street. Halts. Turns to look back at the place he had been hiding and realizes it was a church.

MATTHEW

So where've you been, huh?

He waits. Of course, there's no answer. Matthew scoffs. Turns away. Pauses. Spins back to address the church again.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, okay? Is that what you want to hear? Sorry that I tried to make something of myself. It's not like you were helping. Everything I built I did on my own.

Matthew sighs.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)  
What do you want from me? I've  
never been good enough for you.

The church remains dark and silent.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)  
Whatever.

Matthew leaves.

At the corner of a busy street, he spots a bar with people  
milling outside. Its light promises warmth and safety. Starts  
toward it. Stops.

This time Matthew turns and shouts back at the church.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)  
You know what? This is who I am.  
(motions to his body)  
A dirty, fat, flawed sinner! If  
that's what you want, I'm yours.

Matthew dumps the half empty bottle of scotch into a garbage  
can and heads in the opposite direction of the bar.

His phone RINGS. He answers.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)  
Angelo? Thank God you called. I  
have something to confess...

EXT. NONNI'S TOWNHOUSE - NIGHT

Angelo's car pulls up. He steps out. Matthew gets out of the  
passenger side.

MATTHEW  
What are we doing all the way out  
here?

Matthew follows Angelo up the steps to the front door.

ANGELO  
This situation calls for ultimate  
comfort food. Besides, my Nonni's  
never had a chance to cook for you.

MATTHEW  
Well, I appreciate it. I'm  
starving.

Angelo reaches for the doorbell.

ANGELO

I have to warn you. She's a bit--

The door swings open. NONNI (75), Angelo's short and lively Italian grandmother, greets them.

NONNI

Angie! Why do you never visit?

ANGELO

I'm here now, Nonni.

NONNI

Bless me. Aren't I the lucky one?  
My own grandson graces me with a  
with his presence. Matthew, it's  
about time you came. How come I've  
never had the chance to cook for  
you? Huh? Italian food not good  
enough for a big successful  
restaurant owner?

ANGELO

Take it easy, Nonni. He's going to  
love your food.

MATTHEW

I'm sure I will. Thank you so much  
for--

NONNI

--Nonsense. Come in, come in.

And she's gone.

MATTHEW

She's a ball of energy.

ANGELO

Each visit is worth about five. I  
have to spread 'em out. Okay, so  
some things you should know--

Matthew slaps Angelo's shoulder.

MATTHEW

Relax. I've got this. Grandmas used  
to be half of our customer base,  
remember?

Matthew heads inside.

INT. NONNI'S DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Matthew and Angelo stare at large plates piled high with cheesy lasagna, salad, and garlic bread.

Nonni comes to sit with them.

ANGELO

Nonni, I told you he's on a diet.

MATTHEW

No worries. This is exactly what I needed. Let's dig in.

Nonni pours three large glasses of red wine.

NONNI

To family and friends.

MATTHEW AND ANGELO

Cheers!

A LITTLE LATER

Matthew savors the last bite of lasagna from his plate.

MATTHEW

Oh wow. I needed that.

Nonni scoops another large piece of lasagna from the casserole dish and puts it on Matthew's plate.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Oh, no. I can't--

NONNI

Nonsense. There's plenty.

Nonni stands up.

NONNI (CONT'D)

Wait until you see what's for dessert.

She hurries back to the kitchen.

ANGELO

What are you doing? She wasn't going to make a dessert.

MATTHEW

I didn't ask for dessert!



ANGELO

You cleaned your plate. You might as well have told her you're starving.

MATTHEW

You said it's offensive to leave food.

ANGELO

That's for Colombians. If you leave an empty plate for an Italian grandma, she'll be ashamed that you didn't get enough food.

MATTHEW

What do I do now?

Angelo laughs. Sits back with his wine glass.

ANGELO

Keep eating.

EXT. NONNI'S TOWNHOUSE - NIGHT

Angelo waits on the porch as Matthew kisses Nonni on both cheeks. Smiles broadly.

MATTHEW

That was wonderful. Thank you so much.

Nonni hands Matthew a bag of leftovers.

NONNI

You come over next week, and I'll make you my famous cannelloni.

Matthew looks at Angelo, who shrugs.

MATTHEW

I wouldn't miss it.

Angelo hugs Nonni.

ANGELO

Thanks, Nonni. Now you've got to let us get out of here. Matthew and I have a lot of work ahead of us.

INT. RESTAURANT DINING ROOM - DAY

Angelo, Tre, Clair, Lewis, Sarah, and Keith gather around as Matthew hands them takeout coffees. Everyone except Jess.

Lewis yawns and stretches.

Matthew watches the front door.

ANGELO

I don't think she's coming.

The crew looks around the dining room. It hasn't been cleaned since the night everyone left. Dirty dishes on the tables. Overturned chairs.

MATTHEW

I don't deserve her forgiveness. I don't deserve any of you.

CLAIRE

Yet here we are.

TRE

Yeah, man. All you had to do was ask. I don't even know why I left.

Keith and Sarah nod.

MATTHEW

Well, I sorry. Truly. I behaved like an ass, and I thought I could do this without you. I lost my way, and now it might be too late.

SARAH

Not with our help.

KEITH

Our old customers will return when they hear things are back to normal. It will just take a little time to regain their trust.

MATTHEW

Well, that's the problem. We don't have any time. We need everyone to come to the banquet tonight.

The group shuffles. Alarmed.

CLAIRE

Tonight?! Have you seen the kitchen? It's a nightmare.

TRE

Even if we could get people to come, we don't have any food stock left. Everything is rotten.

Matthew holds up his hands.

MATTHEW

I know. I know. It seems impossible. But if it doesn't happen, I'm done. I took out a loan against the restaurant, and if I don't pay it back by midnight, Owen and his shady partner gain control.

Keith pulls out his wallet.

KEITH

How much do you owe?

MATTHEW

Thirty-thousand just to cancel the contract.

The group looks around, nervous.

ANGELO

We can do it, guys.

KEITH

I don't know man. In one day?

The front door opens. Jess enters with a box of cleaning supplies.

JESS

Sorry I'm late.

Matthew looks at Angelo in surprise. Rushes over to Jess with his arms out for a hug.

MATTHEW

You came!

JESS

Don't get your hopes up. I'm here to get our money back.

MATTHEW

(humbled)  
I'm still glad.

INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - DAY

The staff scrubs everything. Walls, appliances, ceiling. Tre shoves a dark grey sludge out the back door with a mop.

Angelo and Matthew work off to the side at a clean grill. Angelo kneels to inspect a sizzling chicken breast on the grill. Pulls Matthew close.

ANGELO

Cooked meat is genuinely the best  
smell in the world. Scientists say  
the heat of the flames causes  
chemical reactions with the fats  
and flavors, releasing particles  
into the air that we've evolved to  
go nuts for.

Matthew looks at Angelo in surprise.

ANGELO (CONT'D)

But to me, it's proof that God  
loves us.

Angelo sprinkles a pinch of seasoning on top. Gently pokes the chicken breast with the tongs. A small stream of hot grease trickles out. The flames leap.

ANGELO (CONT'D)

The trick is to leave it on just  
long enough to cook it, but not so  
long that it dries out. Ready?

MATTHEW

One sec.

Matthew finishes arranging an artful bed of greens and veggies on a dish.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Okay.

Angelo lifts the chicken breast off the grill and places it onto the bed. Slices the breast open and lifts the top.

Matthew spoons goat cheese and sun-dried tomatoes into the middle.

ANGELO

Happy?

MATTHEW

Wait.

Matthew takes a spoonful of pesto and flings it. The pesto splats across the plate in a messy contrast to the carefully arranged food.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)  
Now it's good.

EXT. FOOD MARKET - DAY

Marlene strolls through the open-air aisles. Picks out a plum. Smells it, eyes closed.

MARLENE  
Mm.

MATTHEW (O.S.)  
Marlene.

Marlene opens her eyes. Turns to look at Matthew.

MARLENE  
Oh no. Starting a new career as a stalker? How did you find me?

Matthew holds up his cell phone.

MATTHEW  
You blog about everything. Your entire routine is online.

MARLENE  
(to Angelo)  
I see you're back with this scoundrel.

ANGELO  
What can I say? I'm loyal.

MARLENE  
So, are you here to bribe me again?

Angelo glances at Matthew, who shrugs.

ANGELO  
We just want one more shot. No tricks or bribes. Owen's gone. If you know anything about me, it's that I only use fresh ingredients.

MARLENE  
You know I am literally the last person who'd be seen at your restaurant after that fiasco.

ANGELO

That's why we want you to try our  
new dish right now.

Matthew reaches into a bag and pulls out a serving dish.  
Lifts the lid to reveal a goat cheese and pesto Mediterranean  
chicken, topped with chickpeas and sun-dried tomatoes.

MARLENE

Mediterranean chicken? I wouldn't  
exactly call it innovative, but I  
see you improved your presentation,  
at least.

ANGELO

Taste it.

MATTHEW

Please?

Marlene sighs.

MARLENE

Fine. One bite. Then I want you to  
leave me alone.

Angelo hands her a fork and knife. She cuts a small piece of  
chicken. Makes sure to get a bit of each ingredient. Takes a  
bite. She closes her eyes and savors it as she chews.

MARLENE (CONT'D)

May I?

Matthew hands the tray to her. She finds a place to sit and  
eat. Talks while chewing.

MARLENE (CONT'D)

Is your whole menu going to be this  
good?

ANGELO

I guarantee it.

She takes another bite.

MARLENE

I've got a slot open next month.

MATTHEW

Well. Here's the thing. We kind of  
need the review today.

She swallows.

MARLENE  
Based on one dish?

Angelo reaches out for the plate.

ANGELO  
If you don't like the food, We'll  
toss it and never bother you again.

Marlene instinctively guards the food. Takes another bite.

MARLENE  
It'll be up by noon.

INT. RESTAURANT LOBBY - DAY

Matthew and Angelo pull the painting of sensual apples down.  
They look at the blank spot on the wall.

MATTHEW  
Sorry about tossing our portrait.

ANGELO  
At least this tacky thing is going.

EXT. RESTAURANT - DAY

They carry it out the front door.

ANGELO AND MATTHEW  
One. Two. Three!

The painting sails out into the street. A car runs over it.

INT. RESTAURANT LOBBY - DAY

Matthew and Angelo return, laughing and brushing off their  
hands.

Lewis answers the phone.

LEWIS  
Thank you for calling Brym-- sorry,  
The Clumsy Mess. How can I help  
you?

ANGELO  
(to Matthew)  
I do like that name.

Matthew shushes Angelo. Listens to Lewis's call.

LEWIS

Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. Well, I hope you have a good Valentine's day anyway.

Lewis hangs up. Disappointed.

Matthew waits for an explanation.

LEWIS (CONT'D)

Another cancelation.

MATTHEW

I don't get it. Marlene's review should be out by now.

Angelo searches on his phone.

ANGELO

Here it is. "Will the second rebranding in two weeks bring Matthew back from the ashes? Check back at noon tomorrow to hear about the Clumsy Mess."

MATTHEW

Tomorrow?! How does that help us? Read the comments.

Angelo scrolls through the comments.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Well?

Angelo shakes his head.

ANGELO

People don't care about the review anyway. They're moving on.

MATTHEW

Moving on?

ANGELO

The trendy are a fickle bunch. How are we looking for tonight, Lewis?

LEWIS

Still half full. On the plus side, a few of the old regulars called for reservations.



ANGELO

There you go. See? Once they see my cooking and your presentation, we'll win them back.

Lewis answers another call.

MATTHEW

We'd better. Replacing the food stock just took every cent we could raise. We'll just barely make it as long as nothing else goes wrong.

Lewis cups his hand over the phone. Looks at Matthew.

LEWIS

Um. Something just went wrong.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

A TRUCK DRIVER paces on the side of the road, talking on his phone.

TRUCK DRIVER

It just appeared out of nowhere... I told you! It was like a giant flaming monster in the middle of the road... No, I'm not high!

The Truck Driver hangs up his cell phone and looks over at his refrigerated truck, which rests on its side in the ditch.

Boxes of food spill out of its opened back doors.

INT. RESTAURANT KITCHEN - DAY

The kitchen is nearly clean. Claire places racks back into a stove. Tre wipes the grill. Matthew mops.

Jess enters the kitchen. A hairband keeps her sweaty hair out of her eyes. Blue and white paint dots her painting shirt.

JESS

Where's Angelo?

MATTHEW

Something happened with the truck. We need to help him unpack the food as soon as he gets back.

JESS

Okay. Come see our new look!

They all follow Jess out.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Keith and Sarah wait proudly. The walls that had gone from stodgy, outdated beige to pretentious flashy red, are now a textured heritage blue with splashes of white.

Simple. Messy. Feels like a cozy modern home.

JESS

It's the best we could do in one morning.

Matthew nods.

MATTHEW

We may not win the trendiest restaurant award, but I love it.

KEITH

I hoped you would. It was the only paint we could afford.

SARAH

By "afford," he means "could find on FreeCycle."

Matthew laughs.

MATTHEW

I don't deserve you all.

They all nod in agreement.

CLAIRE

That's for sure.

Matthew looks at Jess, who averts her eyes. His phone rings. He answers and paces while listening.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

Angelo, cell phone cradled between his shoulder and ear, shoves a box of meat into his small car parked on the shoulder. There's barely room left for him to sit.

Traffic crawls by behind him.

ANGELO

(into his cell phone)  
It's not good.

Angelo cranks the car's air conditioning to full, then backs out. Looks over at the back of the refrigerated food delivery truck. He hardly made a dent.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

Matthew nods his head while the others listen anxiously.

MATTHEW

Uh huh. Uh huh.

(beat)

If that meat spoils, I'm finished.

(beat)

We're on it.

He hangs up.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

The truck's a write-off. Angelo needs help getting the food over here.

KEITH

Where is he?

MATTHEW

Exit thirty-nine. Can you all handle it while I finish up here?

KEITH

Of course!

The crew heads to their cars. Matthew holds Jess back. His eyes brim with tears.

MATTHEW

Jess, hey. You have to believe me about Brynn. I didn't--

JESS

--I do believe you. I shouldn't. Your story's absolutely crazy. But somehow, I just do.

She squeezes his hand and then heads out.

Matthew watches them leave. Heads back to the...

INT. KITCHEN - DAY - CONTINUOUS

...and jumps at the sight of Owen waiting for him. Arms folded across his chest, fully dressed in his chef's uniform.

Owen reaches for a pile of painting supplies. Dips a paintbrush into a can. Wave at the kitchen with the brush, flinging paint droplets in a wide arc across the appliances.

OWEN

I see you got your little minions  
back to work. Too bad you can't pay  
them.

Matthew cringes.

MATTHEW

They're my friends. They  
volunteered.

Owen makes an exaggerated shrug, flinging more paint.

OWEN

Good luck with that. Don't get me  
wrong, I love slavery, but  
millennials just don't want to work  
for free these days. In the long  
run, people only care about  
themselves.

MATTHEW

I'm not worried. I will pay you  
back, and then we'll be back in  
business. Without you.

Owen waves his brush at the walk-in cooler. Paint speckles the door.

OWEN

How are you going to hold a banquet  
with no food?

MATTHEW

It's coming.

Owen scoffs.

OWEN

Not if there was an... accident.

Matthew narrows his eyes.

OWEN (CONT'D)

Didn't you hear? Big delivery truck  
accident on the highway. Turns out  
it was yours. What a shame.

Matthew steps toward Owen, angry.

MATTHEW

I should have figured that was you.  
Every single thing that's gone  
wrong has been because of you.

OWEN

All I did was help you get what you  
wanted. You made all the decisions.

MATTHEW

Here's a decision. Get out of my  
kitchen.

Owen reaches over to flick the handle of a knife on the  
counter. Light flickers off the sharp blade as it spins.

OWEN

Try to make me.

Matthew and Owen both lunge for the knife.

Matthew knocks the knife away from Owen. It slides across the  
counter and CLATTERS to the floor.

Owen grabs a pot handle. CLANG! Nails Matthew upside the  
head.

Matthew staggers back in pain. An orange glow reflects off  
his face. He looks through blurry eyes to see Owen turning on  
the gas burners one at a time. Flames leap up.

OWEN (CONT'D)

Maybe I should fire you.

Matthew backs away, but not quick enough.

Owen grabs Matthew's collar and pulls him toward the hot  
grill.

Matthew struggles to push away. Flames inches from his face.

MATTHEW

You're a monster!

OWEN

I've been called worse.

Matthew gropes blindly on the counter. He finds a spatula and  
starts smacking Owen's face.

Owen lets go of Matthew to block the blows. They square off.

Owen dives for the knife on the floor.

Matthew tries to get there first but is too late. Owen comes up swinging with the knife.

Matthew blocks the attack. The spatula gets knocked from his hand. He backs away, tossing anything he can grab; dishes, utensils, spices, paint brushes.

Owen dodges them all.

Matthew throws a bag of flour.

Owen bats it out of the way. The bag bursts open. A cloud of flour dust hits the flames and blows up into a giant fireball that envelopes Owen.

Owen staggers back. His foot knocks over a can of paint thinner. It ignites. A fireball engulfs Owen and billows across the drop ceiling.

OWEN (CONT'D)

Aeieeee!

Matthew's jaw drops as Owen struggles to bat out the flames.

MATTHEW

Stop moving!

Matthew grabs the sprayer from a sink and turns on the water. Sprays and douses the flames.

Owen's clothing and hair have burned away. Two small horns stick up from his bald head. His scalded skin now a deep red.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

I knew it! You are the devil!

With his disguise gone, the spreading inferno that surrounds Owen no longer bothers him. Owen laughs at Matthew.

OWEN

You know nothing! I am one of his legion, sent here to collect you.

MATTHEW

Well, you can't have me!

Owen pulls out the contract from nowhere and holds it up.

OWEN

Oh, but I can. This contract says I already own forty-nine percent of "Matthew." When you default on our loan at midnight tonight, the devil and I become your majority shareholders. There's nothing you can do.

MATTHEW

I'll get the money! We'll make this banquet work without you.

OWEN

Not without a restaurant.

Owen flicks his wrist, and the fire ignites right back up.

A tub of mustard explodes from the heat of the flames. Matthew tries to knock back the fire with the sprayer, but it spreads too quickly.

Matthew looks around for an escape. Fire blocks the exit to the dining room, and Owen blocks the route to the back door.

MATTHEW

I'll start a Go Fund Me.

OWEN

Hahahahaha! In one afternoon? Good luck! Your selfishness has driven away everyone who ever trusted you.

Burning ceiling tiles crash to the floor behind Owen. Matthew shields his face from the growing heat. Chokes on the smoke.

ANGELO (O.S.)

Matthew!

Owen covers himself as Angelo kicks the back door open.

MATTHEW

(coughing)

I still have some friends.

Owen disappears into the smoke, leaving Matthew alone and disoriented.

ANGELO

Matthew, over here!

Matthew crouches under the smoke and heads toward Angelo's voice. He grabs Angelo's hand and gets pulled along.

EXT. ALLEY - DAY

Matthew and Angelo stumble into the alley. Smoke pours out of the door behind them. Firetruck sirens wail in the background.

They both cough and gasp for fresh air.

ANGELO  
What happened in there?

MATTHEW  
I screwed up, Angelo. I screwed everything up.

Matthew cries.

Angelo puts his arm around Matthew and leads him away from the burning restaurant.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Owen watches the firefighters battle the flames from across the street. A hooded cloak hides his appearance. He speaks into a cell phone.

OWEN  
He's ours now.

EXT. STREET - DAY

Matthew sits on a curb with Angelo by the food packed car.

A PARAMEDIC finishes checking him over. Matthew escaped without serious injury.

PARAMEDIC  
You're lucky. No burns. No lung damage. If you're still coughing tomorrow, make sure you go to the hospital.

Matthew nods.

The rest of the restaurant crew pulls up in a convoy of cars. Each packed to the roof with boxes of food.

Claire and Tre run up first. In shock at the firefight.

TRE  
What the hell happened?



MATTHEW

You just said it. Hell. And I deserve it.

The others join the group.

CLAIRE

So, this is it then?

MATTHEW

Yep. No restaurant. No Banquet. At this point, I don't even care about the money. I just wanted something good to come out of it. The only thing I have left is carloads of meat that's about to spoil and no way to cook it.

ANGELO

What a shame. You know how many hungry people there are in this town?

Lewis looks at the burning restaurant.

LEWIS

We could get some long sticks and barbecue it on the flames.

KEITH

Dude.

LEWIS

I was trying to lighten the mood.

Matthew looks up, an idea forming. He looks over at Angelo, who suddenly gets it and smiles.

LEWIS (CONT'D)

What? Guys come on. I was kidding.

MATTHEW

Lewis. You said some locals called for reservations? You weren't here. How did they call you?

Lewis holds up his cell phone.

LEWIS

They all have my cell in case they can't get through to the restaurant.

ANGELO

How many of them do you think have  
barbecues?

EXT. RESTAURANT - LATER - DAY

The sun hangs low in the sky. Smoke rises from the ruins of the smoldering restaurant. Firefighters poke through the rubble to put out any remaining hotspots.

EXT. PARK - DAY

Out in the park's clearing, several barbecues are already fired up, with Tre, Claire, and Angelo cooking.

Delores and her husband wheel up another propane grill.

ANGELO

Right over there, Delores. Thank  
you.

A stream of neighbors brings tables, chairs, and coolers.

The wait staff busily packs meat from the boxes into the coolers and sets tables.

A homeless man makes his way toward the grill where Angelo is cooking. Lewis rushes over.

LEWIS

Excuse me, sir. Sorry, this is a  
private event.

Matthew jumps in.

MATTHEW

It's all right, Lewis. He's from  
the shelter.

Angelo puts a barbecued chicken breast onto a plate.

ANGELO

We invited him.

Matthew dresses the plate with a green salad and grilled corn. Puts on an extra helping of barbecue sauce. Hands it to the homeless man.

HOMELESS MAN

Bless you.

MATTHEW

Make sure to tell your friends.

The Homeless Man heads over to a table. Jess greets him with a pitcher of lemon-aid. She smiles at Matthew.

Matthew smiles back.

LEWIS

We need money to pay off your loan.  
Maybe we can raise--

MATTHEW

--Lewis. I've made my peace. Right  
no only thing that matters, is  
cooking the hell out of this meat.

EXT. PARK TREELINE - NIGHT

Barbecue smoke fills the air. Visitors continue to arrive for their free Valentine's Day dinner. Couples laugh together. Kids chase each other around. Music plays over a loudspeaker.

Owen watches from a distance with the Shadow Man.

OWEN

I told you we'd win.

SHADOW MAN

Why must you wallow in your  
ignorance?

Owen glances at his watch. Pulls the contract out.

OWEN

But, he can't even sell a meal. In  
a few hours, he's ours. The  
contract--

The Shadow Man snatches the paper from Owen.

SHADOW MAN

The contract is meaningless if he  
doesn't believe it.

The contract burns up like flash paper.

SHADOW MAN (CONT'D)

How long have I tried to teach you?  
And you've still learned nothing.  
Man must damn himself. Nothing he  
does can be unforgiven if he  
chooses the right path.

OWEN

Forgive me then, master. I beg you.

Owen sinks to his knees. The Shadow Man points an accusing finger.

SHADOW MAN

You are already damned.

Owen cowers away.

OWEN

No. Please. It's not my fault!

Flames erupt from the ground underneath Owen.

EXT. PARK CLEARING - NIGHT

A red explosion of fireworks by the trees shocks the crowd. Everyone erupts in cheers and applause.

Matthew turns to Angelo.

MATTHEW

Did you buy fireworks?

Angelo shakes his head no.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Huh.

They continue grilling.

FADE OUT.