

I don't know how to tell you this, but I was stuck inside that house pushing five years - an old brick style off of State Road 23 in northern Indiana, just past the train tracks on the right side of the street. There's a tacky yellow sign as you pull in, the kind you use individual black plastic letters to change for Christmas or Mother's Day promotion. The walls are filled with old toys and decor caked in layers of dust. Patrons get to peer at old timey photographs of super dead Hollywood elites and cheap Hawaiian decorations while sipping overpriced cabernet and gumming reheated prime rib. This circus is one in a million, but in actuality, is a complete ripoff of an establishment in Captiva, Florida. It's still run by the same husband-wife ringleaders, and I don't know how to tell you this, but I will breathe easier the moment I hear she's dead.

I remember on the day of my interview, she pushed it back to nearing 10 o'clock at night. She told me with my height and looks, people would be throwing money at me. It was just prior to my 21st birthday, so I'd start training right after that. I remember on that first day, she immediately sent me back out to the store because my shirt wasn't right. It needed to be an all white, cotton-poly blend, starched and ironed razor crisp in the sleeves. It was to be paired with khakis. *Khakis*. They too, needed a visibly crisp line down the middle of the pant leg. I remember feeling like a dumpy Girl Scout, cleaved in my chubby midsection by an evergreen-colored half apron. I can't remember who brought up what, but she told me to try Lane Bryant for bras, insinuating that's where people "built like me" go. Later on with a new girl, she would do the same thing, only this time it was requested that I drive the new hire to Kohl's and show her the proper attire. I remember the girl asked me if it was okay to smoke in my car. I said yes while internally screaming no. After one night of training, she never came back to the restaurant.

I lost count of how many meals I paid for, often punching in the wrong orders when I first started. All mistakes were rectified out of my own pocket. I could't get the enormous menu memorized fast enough, and the system we used was a completely outdated and overly sensitive Squirrel computer from the 80's. I was like a Pavlovian dog - instead of salivating at the sound of a bell, my chest caved in anxious panic the moment I realized I had done even the slightest thing wrong. I still panic vicariously for other overloaded waitstaff to this day, wondering what their bosses are like.

One thing you have to understand - I'm a lot like the fictional character Amelia Bedelia. In one of the beloved children's books, Amelia is asked on her daily to-do list to "separate the eggs". She then physically separates one whole, unshelled egg from another - placing one on top of the fridge and the other on a nearby shelf. Like Amelia, I take the wrong things literally and the right things in theory. If you tell me to ignore the pounds of mold-covered produce in the walk-in we'll use later tonight, I can do that. If you tell me it's not a big deal that the ice machine is caked in mold internally, I'll pretend to agree to that too. And if there's mold on the dessert tray we show and tell to guests every night, I'll look the other way when you scrape it off and add a new layer of whipped cream that's more palm kernel oil and homemade my ass. With the blatant hypocrisy all lace-covered and hidden with Disney characters and bloated Catholicism and gin and tonics and Fox News, I'll eventually numb to knowing anything any differently anyway.

I can't remember what happened but the customer was so enraged. I think they had been waiting at the bar for a table for far too long. With her back to me she threw me under the bus and blamed me for not telling the host sooner. I remember the customer glaring at me. I remember later that same night tearfully screaming about her to another employee who quickly snatched away the knife I was using to prep fruit slices for the next night's slaughter of triple-sat reservations. I learned later on when working at a cardiology office that doctors will do the same thing - in pursuit of the dividends, they'll double and triple book time slots to see an impossible amount of people in one day.

And yet, I stayed. I even came back after being "fired" once. It was during my senior year of college, when I wanted to attend the winter formal. It would require a Saturday night off, a request she claimed I never made or didn't make at all, but the reason doesn't matter anymore. What matters is how much my stomach hurt when I was supposed to be enjoying a deep tissue massage at the spa the morning of the dance. What matters is how much my heart stopped when paying for dinner, I suddenly remembered I didn't have a job anymore. What matters is how sad I felt at the afterparty at our school's local dive bar, even though I tried dancing and drinking it away. Still, I remembered. By Valentine's Day, she called me and asked me if I could work that weekend. After the night ended, she worked on making the next week's schedule and asked if I wanted to be on it. I remember

smiling and laughing and hugging her. I remember feeling relief. I remember feeling I was back and would always be a part of the family.

Every time I visit my home town, I get the same distinct feeling of dread. It's like suddenly becoming aware that a wasp has made its way into the room you're in with no windows or doors to get it out. I'll round the corner of some random aisle in Target and there she'll be. I'll look sloppy. She'll note how much weight I've gained. She'll return to the restaurant and sit around the same bar I sat at with everyone and drank till 4 in the morning talking shit about every other employee and so then she'll talk shit about me and it will all make all my self doubts solidified.

Forgive.  
Forget.  
Affirmations.  
Release.  
Let it go.  
Therapy.  
Namaste.

And yet I've never had any single person in my life make me feel so dumb, so small, so fat, so unequipped, so insignificant, so dismissible, so inept, so tired, so sick, so significantly insignificant.

WE ARE FINE DINING WITH A CASUAL FLAIR!  
I WANNA SEE BIG PERSONALITY!  
I WANT YOU ON THEM LIKE FLIES ON SHIT!  
TICKET TIMES ARE YOUR RESPONSIBILITY!  
YEAH YEAH, BUT HOW DID SHE *LOOK*?  
IN THIS ECONOMY...  
HA HA HA MICHELLE OBAMA *DOES* LOOK LIKE A KLINGON!  
THERE NEEDS TO BE A SENSE OF URGENCY!  
UNDERSTAND ME! *UNDER*-STAND ME...  
LOVE US ON FACEBOOK!

I don't know how to tell you this, but even though I forget most of the trauma, the trauma doesn't forget me. I don't know how to tell you this, but I'll always hate that fucking mouse. I don't know how to tell you this, but I don't know if I'll ever be able to extract this story from my soul. I

don't know how to tell you this, but when she's dead, only then will I be free. I don't know how to tell you this, but...