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For Jules, August, and Josephine…
# CONTENTS

---Prologue---  
—Prologue— 1  

—Memorial Day—  
—Name Your Poison—  
—General Attributes—  
—Definition—  
—First Shift—  
—Smoke Break—  
—Initiation—  
—Upside-Down Crates—  
—Pink Pills—  
—National Flag Week—  
—The Training—  
—Pandemonium Day—  
—Father’s Day—  
—Epic—  
—Lyric—  
—Picking Up the 7–10 Split—  
—Flashlight—  
—Typewriter—  
—Pirate Days—  

—smile!—  

—Straight Face—  
—Grout—  
—Postmodern T-Shirts—  
—Flip a Coin Day—  
—Disturbia—

---THE CLAM SHACK!---
When we failed to steal lobsters
from a rival’s tank
they made us eat
fistfuls of tartar sauce.

Busing tables
*is a form of worship*—
The managers would be screaming—
*BUSING TABLES*

*IS A FORM OF WORSHIP!* 
until we became abstract compositions,
shocked into prepping 
the Golden-Brown Traps

for whatever the hell 
Golden-Brown Traps prepared. 
On Labor Day 
they pierced our nipples

for The Monster Triple Shifts, 
made us understand 
our loved ones 
would never understand

but the training held 
certain rewards—
for instance, the prospect of raining 
on rude tourists

a weather of coleslaw & fried shrimp. 
That our cod-pieces grew more explosive 
each day helped us believe
in the mission.
Our sweat-soaked shirts raised,
the waist bands
of our polyester pants pulled down,

we searched for busboy
birthmarks born
of fierce chafing.
With their Teflon

hands the managers might suddenly
slap us—
Those moments where death
felt moments away—

Checking to see
if we’d stick to the training,
not call out the names
of the ones we loved

(our loved ones
who would never understand)

testing to see
if we’d keep busing

like each table was a voice
buried alive. Many questions were served
in the busboy training.
Like: Could these new faces

be removed? Could they ever be
cleaned & serviced?
& when finally it seemed
nothing could touch us—

We were wrong,
everything could touch us.
The managers
let us go.
MEMORIAL DAY

for the Busboy Coat-of-Arms

You are blazed
in the fried-food tradition.
You are encircled by sizzling

snapping scallops. You unslug
the giant squid from the cave
of you beneath a boozy moon,

amidst a baptism of clams
& burning crab cakes.
Untie with your tongue

the waitress from her apron.
For service shadow
her shadow

like a fuse.
How you hold your breath
through the rich heart of summer

clogged with family
feuds & bad tippers, the cheap
specials & side

“baked” potatoes steamed
in the steamer
since before you were born.

Those black & white checkered
polyester pants you throw
cornstarch down
so your ass won’t rash.
Those ceiling fans reeling
with eels
of smoke from the cigarettes
of a thousand tourists
crammed in a single booth.

We should fear for you—
Those constellations
of jagged shells
straining the trash you cart
like a shield,
that tongue of butter
leaking through
trying to lick the soles
of your shoes.
My eyes lisped like flames
in a headache

THE CLAM SHACK! on my shirt

bleeding a Rorschach
sweat test
(can you read it?)

its inner eclipse
bestubbled & baked
out of bloodshot & baking

because I got busted
checking out Bethany’s ass
by the boosters

the buoys & the by-&-by
a bedlam of butter & beer
spilled over

tourists (barbarians)
& managers (barbarians)
big-bellied with battle-axes

to grind
bullshit to your spine
bitch-&-bitch

& those Boston baked beans
a busboy can stand
for only so long
belittled & battered & brain-bashed out
bewildered & sorrowed

like something beached
waiting for the end
of a shift
--GENERAL ATTRIBUTES--

About a thousand tourists a year
will choke on a busboy
according to the statistics.

*

The mysterious Waitress Triangle
where service disappears.

*

The famous grilled cheese
where the busboy’s face emblazons
spontaneous
in buttery heat.

*

The origins of the word
are iffy at best.
It means nowhere in sight,
stealing your tips,
seeker of the waitress panties.

*

Your mother was a busboy.

*

Jesus
was a busboy.
There have always been two kinds: the ones who distract you while you pay your bill & the ones who find your car out in the lot & chew the rubber strips from its windows.

I thought if you were a busboy your future was ominous as a motel at dusk. Then I read the legend where food service workers battle the economy’s giant squid to a draw.

Then I became a busboy.

& married a waitress. Just like in the opera.
DEFINITION

—NOUN

as in one who sets & assists; Ho Chi Minh & Al Pacino; accidental; as in boxes & tubs not aesthetically pleasing; as in from school this kid you knew that you never really knew; they may wear a black apron, they may wear a white apron; from the Greek ever yearning for imperfection; from guarding against ugly and nowhere in sight; Langston Hughes, busboy poet; raw dog screaming cannabis; slang for definitely not doing his job; slang for disturbed; slang for urinating in public; the blackest white-boy ever apoplectic; as in from school this kid you knew that you never really knew, he was actually called The Busboy; training wages, typically minimum, typically needs verification; pornographic CLAM SHACK; Studio 54; as in the match lit at Coconut Grove; as in additional duties; as in I have always told the truth, even when I lied; this kid you knew that you never really knew, he was actually called The Busboy; for his ever yearning, for his imperfection, for the thousand years before he got laid.
The busboy about to train me:
smoking pot at the edge of
the dock kept his lessons sharp.

The busboy about to train
me: tying back his glorious
mullet, explained essential
aspects of the busboy matrix.

Like: how to ambush a waitress,
jilt the time clock, keep zip-ties handy,
save your pennies for
that asshole on
the turnpike who rides
your bumper like a clown—a handful
will make a myth of his windshield.

Then a waitress said: don’t be a sucker, insisting that
the busboy training me had the heart
of a Boy Scout.

But it was true: he did have the heart of a
Boy Scout.

He kept it in
a jar in his locker.
SMOKE BREAK

: The customers were revolting.

: The customers were starting food fights.

: The customers were disturbed, making grenades from rolls & hot butter which got the idiot assembly of managers involved.

: Some customers were having heart attacks & falling face-first into baskets of clams.

: Some needed a good spanking.

: Some customers were punk ass kids & some of those kids had puked in the gift shop where all the mops had gone missing.

: There was a lot of vibrating among customers & a total lack of grace.

: There were customers, more than a few, who found themselves the object of a common busboy fantasy, zip-tied & stuffed in the trunk of a car speeding back to Massachusetts.
Then the waitresses decided to unionize but the union was busted by The Garbage Bag of Death.

& a customer slipped & broke her hip but not until she complained first about her meal but she didn’t actually complain about her meal until she’d licked her plate clean.

There were reports of a man wandering around with a bow & arrow a melting popsicle a spork wearing pink bunny slippers & Jackie-O glasses yelling The End Is Near!

& the waitresses decided over Lucky Strikes if they couldn’t form a union then maybe they’d start a cult.

A cult based on the belief that a certain busboy has been lately stealing their tips.

Your name was mentioned.
The manager sticking his hand in the breading. The manager sticking his breaded hand in the Frialator just long enough when he pulls it out a frequent nightmare-looking thing encrusted in sudden crust emerges. Then the manager says to the new busboy the new busboy who stands there blinking horrified not knowing what the manager says Don’t fuck with me.

**  **  **  **  **  **

But gradually that manager will act all friendly toward the new busboy asking if he remembers blowing bubbles when he was a kid? When the new busboy says Sure
I remember.
the manager will say Well he's on the phone now
asking for you.
I would get these assertions like a bucket of eels. These serious denials like seagulls screaming in the fog of your parents’ love life. Like the butt-head tourist kid on the dock pitching Alka Seltzers to the screaming gulls. Maybe it was when the chowder cook said he downshifted into third & took the dirt road home on his date with the waitress. The middle-aged middle school teacher waitress. The middle-aged waitress who could have been my middle school teacher back in the day. Who somehow enjoyed waitressing in the summer which is the opposite of summer, in order to keep busy.

I would be sitting alone on the upside-down crates anticipating the uncertainty between the last party of the night & dragging my ass back to work the next morning. Sitting on the upside-down crates searching for the meaning of sitting on the upside-down crates.
crates considering what
it means for the crates to be upside-down.
Stunned at the possibility
that downshifting
into third with the chowder cook
in the cab of his truck was somehow

a middle school teacher’s idea
of keeping busy.