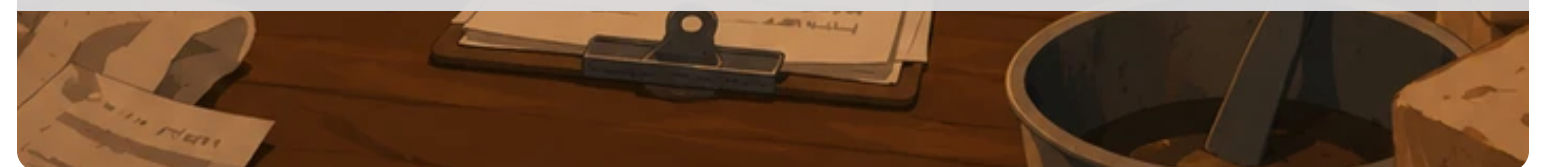




Kitchen Heat: A Day at The Beef

Dakota Trim





The morning light filters through the grease-stained windows of the Original Beef, illuminating dust motes dancing over the stainless steel. Carmy stands alone at the stove, the only sound the rhythmic bubbling of a massive stockpot and the steady chop of his knife.



His eyes are tired, rimmed with the weight of a dozen sleepless nights and the pressure of a legacy he's struggling to save. He carefully skims the foam from the surface of the simmering liquid, his movements precise and mechanical despite the frustration simmering beneath his skin.



Suddenly, the heavy back door swings open with a violent bang, cutting through the kitchen's fragile peace. Richie and Fak stumble inside, their voices already raised in a chaotic symphony of insults and wild hand gestures that fill the cramped hallway.



Richie is mid-sentence, his face flushed with a mix of caffeine and stubbornness as he points a jagged finger at Fak. Fak trails behind him, looking exasperated and holding a tangled mess of wires, trying to defend himself against Richie's relentless verbal assault.



Carmy doesn't even turn around, his focus remains locked on the pot, but his grip on the ladle tightens until his knuckles turn white. The air in the kitchen shifts, growing heavy with the familiar, suffocating tension of being understaffed and behind schedule.



Where the hell you been, Cousin? Carmy asks, his voice low and dangerous, cutting through the noise like a serrated blade. He still doesn't look up, his gaze fixed on the shimmering golden stock as he waits for an answer that he knows won't be good enough.



Richie doesn't even blink, ignoring the question entirely as he rounds the corner of the prep table, still focused on his argument with Fak. He's in his own world, fueled by a grievance that clearly started long before they reached the restaurant's doorstep.



Richie's voice booms through the kitchen, declaring that he doesn't care if Fak's relative is the messiah himself. He sneers, leaning into Fak's space to emphasize that anyone related to Fak isn't going to be worth a thing in this professional kitchen.



Fak looks over at Carmy, eyes wide and pleading for an intervention, but Carmy remains a statue of simmering resentment. The tickets for the lunch rush are already beginning to spit out of the machine, adding a frantic rhythmic clicking to the growing noise.



The three men stand in the heart of the kitchen, a triangle of conflicting energy and shared history. Outside, the city of Chicago hums to life, oblivious to the high-stakes drama unfolding over a pot of beef stock and a family feud.