

H.K. Brady

## serve me to death.



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my 48 year old male coworker tried to backhand me in the face while at work do you think he's



36 votes · Final results

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### **a six-story parking garage I**

It's late on a Monday and Samantha is my server at a chain restaurant on Poplar Street. I'm immediately anxious when she introduces herself because I hate the name Samantha because of my abusive boyfriend's ex. I'm only here because I'm on my way to jump off a six-story parking garage two train stops away and came here to finish writing my suicide letter. I order wings and a drink and keep to myself. Samantha doesn't bother me much, and I see her as a sign that what I am doing is right.

I'm overcome with sadness as I write my goodbyes in a tangible format. I never touch my food and sit there for at least an hour. The tears fall out of my eyes at an uncontrollable rate, but I am silent. I don't want to attract attention, so I wipe my eyes and ask for my check while holding back tears.

Knowing I am going to die, I tip her \$100 and sign my name. I think the least I can do is make someone else's night better, no matter how much I hate her for her birth name. I flip the receipt over and I see Samantha out of the corner of my eye. I start to get up, not wanting the attention of her seeing the excessive tip. She stops me as I stand.

"Hey!" She yells. I turn, thinking I forgot something.

"Are you okay?" She comes up to me, leads me to the table and I let her. I start crying from my overwhelming sadness and shake my head.

I don't know why I did, but I told her everything going on in my life, conveniently avoiding telling her of my plan for the night. She was gentle, understanding, and sweet. She brought me ice cream and held me when I cried. After two hours of talking I realized they had been closed for an hour. "Shit I'm so sorry." I say as I hurriedly grab my things.

"Let me walk you home." She says. I refuse, thank her and rush out of the building. The cold air dries my tears as I take a deep breath. I turn right past the train and walk home.

## **a six-story parking garage II**

It's been two years and I am working at the same restaurant chain just a different location from the one I went to when I wrote my suicide note. I'm happy, free from the abuse and living a healthy-enough lifestyle. We just had a manager quit and so we've been using various managers from different stores until we get a permanent replacement.

Tonight, Josh is our manager and he seems nice. He keeps trying to recruit me to work at his store because he claims it's closer to my house and he needs closing servers.

"The Poplar store? No way." I say sternly, as he tells me the store he works at. I haven't walked in there since that night with Samantha. He's right, it's by my house and the one I currently work at is at least a thirty minute commute each way.

"Why not? You'll save so much time, not to mention, money on gas." I like him enough, but not enough to leave my work friends, plus I have no interest in working at the store I had a complete mental breakdown in.

"How long have you worked there?" I ask. He tells me seven years. I wondered out loud if he always tried to recruit people from other stores.

"You know how quick turnover is. I hire people all the time, but can't get anyone to stay." He says. With turnover like that I am pretty confident Samantha doesn't work there anymore, but ask anyway. I'd like to thank her for helping me that night.

"Does Samantha still work there? She did two years ago." I ask. He looks confused and says "No, I've never had a Samantha. Just one boy named Sam, but no Samantha."

"Are you sure? She was my server one night." I press.

"No, I'm sure. I hire everyone so I would know, especially if she closed. We've had a lot of servers come work from other stores over the years because we are always understaffed so she probably worked somewhere else, but not my store." He explains.

A guest server, working one random Monday night, just happened to be named Samantha, helped me in ways I can't imagine, and I have no way to let her know. She's the reason I became a server, I hoped one day I could pay it forward. I walk away and think maybe I already had helped prevent someone from a six-story parking garage and didn't know it, just like Samantha.

## halloween

It's Halloween and I begin to clock in when I notice an unfamiliar face heading towards me.

"What's up? New here? Or just forced to work holidays at other stores." I ask the cute boy standing across from me.

"A little bit of both. You know if you don't have a girlfriend or kids you get the short end of the stick on holidays." He smiles with a shrug.

"Well lucky you, you're stuck here with me. Rebecca." I smile and reach out my hand to shake his.

"Pickles. Nice to meet you." I'm not sure if that's his real name or just a nickname he's so used to being called that he introduces himself as such. He gives me a smile that radiates through his whole body. The ease in his voice makes me feel like we have known each other forever and I want to keep talking when we are interrupted by a voice behind us.

"Wow Rebecca, already flirting with the new kid. Let him breathe." Mara, another server, comes up to introduce herself to Pickles, clearly enamoured by his good looks and jealous I talked to him first. She's what we servers call a "corporate minion", everything she does is by the book and for the good of the company. Mara is younger than me and does everything she can to be the loudest, smartest, and best at everything. She tries so hard sometimes I can't help but cringe.

Everything has always been a competition between Mara and I, a friendly one, but a competition, nonetheless. But these made-up competitions always seemed to matter more to her than me. So, when Mara swoons over him I let her. She grabs his arm to show him around and I laugh at her hypocrisy. Pickles shoots me a look over his shoulder with eyes that say, "help me." I chuckle, give him a wave and mouth "good luck."

### **the wicked witch**

A short, bald, sweaty forty-five-year-old man in an oversized button up fills the shoes of the Wicked Witch. Besides being inherently racist, sexist, and homophobic he is also perpetually terrible at his job. A typical Friday night usually ends up just like this.

“Okay, we are going down to one server, I cut the togo person and dishwasher.” The Witch says to me and Pickles. Pickles has worked with us for six months now and I’ve noticed that every girl he comes in contact with is bound to crush on him at some point, myself included. Aside from his impeccable good looks he is sweet, charming, caring and unreasonably funny. The perfect reason for girls to love him and customers to request him as a server. So, even though I need his help, that’s not the only reason I don’t want him to leave.

“Uh, we are still open for four more hours?” Pickles says what everyone 's thinking.

“Yeah, I would prefer to be able to get to serve my tables, not run circles trying to do everyone else’s job.” I second.

“You’re what Daniel calls “one of our best servers”, Rebecca, don’t you think you can handle the five tables that are going to come in?” The Witch spat.

“Dude, it’s a Friday night, I’ll have five tables by 9:15, easy.” I say. I’ve worked here for a year and we always close with at least three servers on Fridays, unless of course, the Witch is in charge.

“You’ll be fine. I can help you.” The Witch reassures and Pickles starts to leave.

“I can help you.” Pickles whispers in my ear, mocking the Witch, “but *will* he is the question.” I laugh and lightly punch him on the arm. Pickles and I have a flirty banter that gets under Mara’s skin, but Pickles is a fun-loving twenty-nine-year-old who has made no reference to having any interest in a relationship.

“Well according to last Friday, I’ll be getting my ass kicked *and* have to do dishes all night while he sits in the manager’s office doing ‘paperwork.’” I joke even though I’m pissed.

The night goes exactly as planned, for me at least. I get over forty tables in four hours, host, expo, run food, clean tables and do the dishes while the Wicked Witch lazily walks around yelling that I am not working fast enough. He even has the audacity to say, “How was I supposed to know it would be THIS busy?”

### **everybody else**

*“Okay he’s going to time you, quiz you and watch you. Remember what we taught you and you’ll be fine.”* My boss, Daniel, says as his boss walks through the front door for an inspection. New servers look around nervously, obsessively washing their hands and trying to look busy.

I laugh and remember when I gave a shit about corporate America and their dumb rules. Granted, I still follow them on these days to make my bosses like me more, but I don’t stress out like I used to when I was new.

Leaving the double doors, I walk confidently to my first table. I make eye contact with my best friend and see a man in a suit out of the corner of my eye with a stopwatch.

*Fuck.*

*“Hi there! Welcome to \*insert generic casual sit-down establishment that I can’t mention for contractual reasons\*. My name is Rebecca and I will happily be taking care of you. Just so you know we are featuring our delicious Margarita that I have no idea what it tastes like because I’m twenty, but I trust the corporation’s opinions on taste! What can I grab for you to drink?”* I stare my friend of three years in the face as she looks at me in shock and bewilderment. The man in the suit stops his watch, writes a couple of notes and walks away.

*“Dude I’m so sorry. What’s up?”* I saw as I knelt down next to her. We both break out into laughter and she says, *“What the fuck was that?”*

*“He’s evaluating us, and we have to say a bunch of bullshit or we fail.”* I explain as I point to the man in the suit.

*“Jesus, well I’ll take a Pepsi and my friend back. Not this corporate minion. Also, wouldn’t they like it if you knew your customers by name? Like if you came up to me and talked to me like a real person, not just any other asshole that walks in here. That makes no sense to say the same shit to every table.”* She asks and for once, I don’t have a sarcastic response or a response at all. All I say is:

*“I’ll be right back with that drink.”* And walk away from her like I do everybody else.

## **server nightmares I**

*It is midnight and we are closing. Last call for the kitchen happened fifteen minutes ago and we just did last call for the bar.*

*The Wicked Witch has yet to lock the door so a stray couple walks in. "We're closed, sorry." I say.*

*Behind me I hear him say matter of factly "No, we don't close until the customers stop coming."*

*I am confused and frustrated as I long to go home. I had never heard this phrase before.*

*I take the guests to the table and begin serving them. They're just like any other couple on any other night, but this feels different.*

*One by one, hour by hour, I serve more and more people as they come in all through the night. Some in large groups, sometimes no one for hours. I believe in those times of lull I would be able to leave, but the lingering question remains: What if someone else comes in?*

*There has to be a point in time where we say enough is enough, but we don't.*

*I am exhausted and can barely move my feet, but time keeps going and I keep serving.*

*Only at 5pm the next night do I realize I am still working, still serving in an endless cycle of customer service at the sake of my health.*

*I never once get to go home.*

## server nightmares II

This one is different, it isn't mine, but Daniel's. He's a tall man, maybe 6'3, with a bushy red beard and a big build. He asks me if I had ever had one, a server nightmare. I'm shocked and say yes, I have, and he asks what it was. I tell him it's recurring, but don't ask him the same. After moments of silence he tells me that even now, four years removed from serving, he has a recurring one too.

*The kitchen, bar, and restaurant, they all look normal. The tables and guests, on the other hand, are far away. The restaurant is fixed atop a mountain, with the tables just a speck of dust in the distance at the bottom. It's a long hike to the tables and there's only one requirement, you have to run there.*

*It doesn't seem so bad because in dream time running up and down the mountain happens much faster than in real life, but not fast enough.*

*Take an order, up the mountain, run the food, down the mountain, oh you need a side of ranch, up the mountain, get the ranch, down the mountain, more food to run, up the mountain. The endless cycle of running while trying to appease the strict corporate time restraints proves too much for the hefty thirty-year-old.*

*He longs to get fired for taking too long, running too slow, anything, but it doesn't happen.*

*"We're short staffed" his boss says.*

He pauses as I chuckle. I say, "Your server nightmare would be exercise." He laughs and agrees as I wonder why my nightmare is about being trapped.



**“I didn’t want to get fired.”**

I arrive to work on Thursday morning with a yawn at eight like I always do. Immediately I am jarred by all of the people and police officers there.

“Can you go to the West Lake location today to work?” Daniel asks me.

“Good morning to you too, Mr. Daniel.” I laugh and say sure. A police officer comes over to me and asks if I know of the situation.

“That West Lake is continually understaffed? Yeah, I work there more than here.” I say with a smile. I was too tired to care why the police were there as none of them seemed in a hurry anyway.

“You got a quick mouth. But West Lake got robbed at gunpoint last night and all of their staff that was there is taking the day off to calm down.” The officer explains to me while Daniel talks to another officer at a table.

“Oh shit, okay yeah. Is everyone okay?” I ask, now wide awake.

“Yes, only one injury, and we caught the guy.” He explains. I accept that as a response and leave.

When I enter West Lake there is not a soul in sight besides the workers. I go up to the manager and introduce myself.

“Looks like the incident scared off the customers.” I try to make light of the situation as she shows me around.

“Something like that. Thanks for coming over here. Everyone called off today that worked last night, except Tyler.” She says as she gestures to a small boy washing what little dishes there are. I clock in, let the manager do her paperwork and look for something to do. After wasting about twenty minutes I went to talk to Tyler.

“Hey Tyler, how are you?” I ask him as he turns towards me. Immediately I see a large, fresh wound right under his black eye. There were at least thirty stitches holding his cheek together.

“I’ve been better.” He whispers.

“Damn dude.” I looked closely at his wound and he started to turn away. “Hey, it’s okay. That stuff doesn’t happen everyday, but you know that.” I laugh.

“I mean not really. Yesterday was my first day.” He looks at the ground and I take a deep breath as he continues. “I’m only sixteen. This is my first job and I got pistol whipped.” He lets out a forced laugh and smiles at me.

“And everyone else took the day off? You really must like washing dishes.” I joke.

“I didn’t want to miss my second day. I didn’t want to get fired.” He laughs, but his eyes shoot to the ground as he mindlessly touches his wound.

### **one single breadstick**

Serving isn't all bad, you have friends, make money and have a laugh or two. This day was one of those not so bad days. One of the ones that make the bad days tolerable.

It was a normal late Friday night; the dinner rush is over and just me and two servers are left with the Wicked Witch. He's everyone's least favorite, but again, sometimes he's even tolerable. Tonight, was one of those nights. Pickles and I are accompanied by Mara, who at this point is completely head over heels for Pickles charm, even to the point of making up absurd lies for his attention. The three of us are in the back joking around when a DoorDash order pops up on the togo screen right as the Wicked Witch walks in. We all look at the order and choke on laughter.

"One breadstick." I manage to get out between laughs. "They ordered one single breadstick."

"The delivery fee has to be at least triple the price of that one breadstick. Silly Kris." The Witch joins in as he reads the name on the order.

The breadstick is made within seconds, bagged up, brought to the front and put next to the only other bag sitting in our togo station. Pickles, Mara and I continue cleaning up and the DoorDashers pick up the last two orders. There is still two hours to close, but it doesn't look like it's picking up much. During our typical late-night game of catching french fries in our mouths, Pickles and I hear the phone ring. We flip a coin on who has to answer it and I lose. I pick up the phone and hear a confused man on the other line.

"Hi, my name's Chris and I ordered a cheeseburger and dessert from DoorDash and he just dropped it off and it was just one breadstick. I've never used them before, did I mess something up?" I can barely hold in laughter as I check the computer. The last two DoorDash orders pop up, one for Kris and one for Chris.

"Uh, I'm sorry sir, it looks like your order got mixed up with someone else named Chris, we will send another DoorDasher out with your new food." He seems happy enough and I hang up the phone.

I explain the situation to Pickles, Mara and the Wicked Witch and a new order gets bagged when the phone rings again. This time it is the other Kris complaining about not getting her breadstick. So, again, we remake the food and set them in the togo station. When the Dasher comes, he picks up the orders and tells us he's delivering both.

Not even twenty minutes later the phone rings. I lose the coin toss again, answer the phone and hear the same confused voice.

“Are you playing a prank on me because the Dasher just got here and it’s just another single breadstick? I ordered a CHEESEBURGER and DESSERT.” He yelled into the phone and I let out a laugh.

“You think this is funny? I’ve waited over an hour and all I have is two breadsticks.” He spits.

“I’m sorry sir, it is not funny I’ll put you on the phone with my manager.” I place him on hold. I, once again, explain the situation to everyone. Pickles, Mara and I all topple over with laughter thinking about this poor man that has two single breadsticks instead of a cheeseburger.

“You think this is funny? This shit is not funny. He is clearly very upset.” The Wicked Witch chastises us and is responded with eyerolls from us all.

“It’s Door Dash’s problem, not ours. Chill out.” I say. I leave the restaurant for the night before I learned whether or not Kris got her breadstick and Chris got his cheeseburger.

### **the story of how *i* was blamed for two men getting fired**

“Hey sexy, come here.” I hear a male voice coming from the kitchen and look around anxiously. No one is around except for me and two male cooks - the one with the voice I don’t know. I lock eyes with the one attached to it and grimace as I leave the kitchen immediately.

After taking care of a few tables, joking around with some servers in the front, I make my way back to the kitchen to get refills. The voice comes once again, this time with haste.

“Beautiful, don’t ignore me.” I see the man, no taller than me, but much older, wink.

“Eat a dick.” I yell back in the best way I can defend myself.

“Come here.” I see a hand and sad eyes wave me over. I assume an apology is coming and I’m ready to accept the comments as gross restaurant talk and won’t let it get to me. I walk over hopefully but keep my distance.

Immediately, I feel two arms around me, and a warm, wet kiss reach my neck. I shoot back in anger and embarrassment. My face becomes bright red as I hear the other cook snicker in the background.

“She’s so fucking gullible. Now she owes you one back.” I’m disgusted by the men that surround me and busy myself with work. Pickles approaches me and looks concerned.

“Are you okay?” He asks.

I look around and see that it is just the two of us, with the Wicked Witch, in earshot distance. I tell Pickles the story just loud enough for my manager to hear.

Afterwards I am embarrassed once again when the story reaches the ears of every server in the restaurant. The whispers and overhearing of Pickles and my conversation spread like wildfire through the restaurant. Which, in hindsight was a good thing because then my boss found out and HR got involved. However, even after the subsequent firing of two vile men, the only thing running through my head was what the Wicked Witch said when he overheard: “Rebecca are you going to keep bitching about it or actually do something? Was it even on camera, cause if not don’t waste my time?”

### **a living oxymoron**

When I tell these stories people always ask why in the world, I would keep such a terrible job. The truth is, all jobs are terrible in their own way. Corrupt people are everywhere and there's always a boss telling you to do something because their boss is telling them and it's an endless cycle. Corporations thrive off of lower employees working themselves to death with a tiny hope that they will be promoted. Service industries thrive off of the customers that buy their product; it doesn't matter how shitty of a person they are as long as they have money. That's the way the world is, and yes, some of my experiences have been unlikely, but it's just a part of the job. However, that's not what I tell people when they ask me. I don't give them a anti-capitalistic spiel about how workers are subjected to horrible working conditions and standards. I simply tell them this:

*For every* person that tells me I'm the worst server ever, there's another one across the restaurant that tells me I'm the best.

*For every* person that cuts me off while I'm talking, there's a couple asking me about my future dreams.

*For every* person that blames me when the food is taking too long, there's one that compliments my quick service - even when they take the same amount of time.

*For every* homophobic slur I've been called, there's people complimenting my short hair every day.

*For every* person who doesn't tip, there's a businessman who tips 30% on his company credit card just because.

*For every* awful thing a customer does, there's a kitchen full of servers to vent to.

And, *for every* shitty night, there's \$100+ in cash that I get to leave with.

### **i love you rocks**

One time a kid thought the world of me and gave me a rock that they wrote "i love you" on. One time I broke my thumb but had to work and a group of teens wrote me a nice note. Sometimes I give regular service and a simple thank you means the world. It means so much that I keep them in a box to remind me of all the good people in the world.



better. Thank  
You for serving us  
& working hard  
even with a  
broken thumb.

God bless you!

\*\*\*\*\*7254  
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19  
Thank you!!!





### **we are still people**

You know the feeling of utter loneliness? When the only thing keeping you, company is the crippling feeling that you are lonely. Well, that's the feeling Maria, a forty-five-year-old Mexican host, saw in me one day.

"Where are you from?" She asks me with an arm around my shoulder.

"Southern Indiana." I respond quietly. She looks at me with a tenderness only a mother could.

"Your mama is far away. My kids are far away too." From that moment on I became her Minnesota daughter and she became my Minnesota mother. She texts me every day to check on me, calls me her *corazon*, and tells me *abre tus ojos* whenever I leave work. She became the filler for the void of loneliness that I held onto, and I became the same for her.

Only later, when she asks if she can come to my graduation, do I realize the extent of her loneliness.

"Of course, mama. But, why?" I ask and she starts to cry. She questions everyday if the money she makes working two full time jobs to send her kids to college and make sure they are taken care of is worth it. I tell her it is, even though I'm not sure.

"My daughter graduates that day." She wipes her eyes as I pull her into a hug. I know without having to ask that she cannot go back to Mexico for her daughter's high school graduation and it breaks her heart.

"Of course, mama." I hug her and feel her loneliness start to close up, just for a minute. We don't talk of her kids, or my family, we just embrace in the comfort that we are family now. She makes me tamales and reminds me to eat. We watched the movie *Coco* together and she gave me a framed picture of herself so I could put it on my *ofrenda* when she passes. I give her one back, per her request, so she can place it next to the pictures of her kids in her house.

### **work family**

There has always been a stigma about workplaces and coworkers that they become your second family because you spend so much time together. But this idea only arises from the thought that you would do anything for you family and is thus a way for corporations to make workers feel guilty for not going the extra mile when they don't have to. Sure, you can be close to your coworkers and even consider them friends, but that does not require you to do things outside of your job description, pick up shifts you don't work, or stay late to help people out. Of course, you can, but you shouldn't feel guilty if you choose not to because at the end of the day it is a job and they are just temporary people in your life, not your family.

This is what I used to think at least, and part of it still reigns true in my mind. However, after spending eight hours a day, five days a week, with the same people they do turn into a family of sorts. A work family, a family you care about but still have boundaries. It's an unspoken bond that coworkers and employers tend to ignore on the surface, but everyone knows deep down. I saw this one night when I walked into the kitchen and saw Maria crying.

"What's wrong mama?" I ask her but she ignores me, hugging one of the cooks and speaking in Spanish. I look at the other cook, Alejandra, with concern. She shakes her head and I take that as my cue to leave.

Thirty minutes later I am back in the kitchen and Maria is on the floor, uncontrollably sobbing. I walk over and give her a silent hug when she tells me her baby nephew died of SIDS.

"I'm so sorry. You should go home and be with your family." I say, but she shakes her head.

"I don't want to leave you guys short staffed." I try to convince her we will be okay, but she won't budge. I leave Alejandra to comfort her and look for Daniel. I find him behind the bar, counting inventory.

He greets me with a smile as I say, "You need to send Maria home." I don't ask or give him the choice.

"Why? Is everything okay?" He stops what he is doing and looks genuinely worried.

"Her nephew died." I say, quietly so no one else can hear. Immediately, Daniel runs to the back, hugs Maria and sends her home. As she leaves, we all gather to decide what we are going to do for her when she comes back to work, and in that moment, I'm fine with being a family.

## goodbye

I had never really cared when people would quit or get fired from the restaurant, mostly because it happened so often that if I cared about all of them, I'd be emotionally exhausted. But the day my boss told us he was moving to a different store, I cried.

The amount of times I see people outside of work is next to none. But, my managers, I have never seen them outside the four walls of our restaurant, and I liked it that way. When I came to this restaurant, I had walked out of my last restaurant job due to my abusive ex working there. I felt this new restaurant as a release from the confines of the relationship, thus, when Daniel interviewed me and offered me a job, I felt like he was personally saving me. The thing is though, people can't save you, they can just help you along your own personal journey.

Daniel was my general manager. He trained me, promoted me, declared me employee of the month and even wrote me a letter of recommendation. I knew about his family and he knew about mine. Our brothers had the same name and his dog's name is Becca. Our birthdays were exactly ten years apart and we had a running joke we were long lost siblings. We would joke around when we were at work and never talk outside of it, but we were close.

The day he announced that he was leaving for a promotion everyone clapped. For some reason I couldn't reach my hands towards each other, so I just stood with my arms crossed. He always called me his best pal and favorite server, so I felt pretty shitty for not congratulating him. But I went on and did my job for the night. Twenty minutes after the announcement, we still hadn't talked so he came up to me.

"I know this is hard for you, pal, and I'm sorry. It's hard for me too. I'll miss you guys." He gave me a one-armed side hug and I cried just a little.

"It's okay. I'm happy for you." And I was. I was truly happy for him. I couldn't even figure out why I was so sad, it's not like we were ever going to be friends outside of work anyway. But, in that moment I remembered the day I called the store from the Emergency Room.

*"This is Daniel, how can I help you? I was relieved that it was him and not another manager.*

*"Hey Daniel, it's Rebecca. I'm in the ER and won't be at work today or tomorrow." I whispered.*

*"Oh my god, are you okay?" He asked with genuine concern.*

*“How many people do you know in the ER that are okay?” I said harshly.*

*“Well, you still have your sense of humor so that’s good. Don’t worry about it, just get better and call me when you will be coming back.” He said and I could tell he was smiling.*

*“Okay, thanks. Goodbye.”*

*“Don’t say goodbye, that means forever, and I don’t want you to die.” He laughed and I hung up the phone with a “see you later next week.”*

He stopped hugging me and said, “My last day is Tuesday, so this is our last day working together.” I wiped tears from my eyes and said “Goodbye, Daniel.” We both laughed as he told me to shut up because he wasn’t dying.