

Dinner and a Show

I have worked at the dining center on campus for three years now. Most of the time I stand in the doorway for three hours and swipe students' ID's so they can come in and eat. I actually have a mandatory "greeter training meeting" this weekend which will be very important to attend since our jobs are so complicated. Hopefully they will be teaching us effective strategies to stay awake. This year I decided to be spontaneous as an employee; I picked up a dining room shift. Better yet, I once watched the floor dry after it had been mopped – this job gets kind of crazy sometimes.

Dining room shifts usually consist of refilling silverware, changing milks when they empty, cleaning tables, delivering clean dishes, and any other tasks needed done to provide students a comfortable and enjoyable environment in which they can eat their overpriced meals. The other night I assisted in providing a lot more than just dinner; apparently I thought there was some need to provide everyone with a theatrical show as well. And apparently I was taking this new interest in showbiz rather seriously because I even warmed up backstage before the real deal, or, non-metaphorically speaking, on my walk over to work.

I suppose it's typical to have *some* nonsense childhood amusements stick around through adulthood. In fact, they may even become even more amusing after being introduced to new friends such as Jack Daniels and Captain Morgan. There is one "childhood amusement" however that stands out above the rest. You can't say you've never dramatically stepped out of your straight-line walking path to absolutely cream a ball of snow sitting on the sidewalk; I suppose it

could be called snow clump stomping. Chances are I look like a drunk man epically failing a sobriety test every time I walk back from class, swerving along the sidewalk being sure not to miss even one clump of snow. Regardless of how I look I can never resist the opportunity to feel a ball of snow crushing beneath my foot.

On my way to work the other night I had my eyes peeled for the next opportunity to "crush." I came up upon a perfect candidate for my next stomp victim. Anxiously approaching I changed slight direction in my walking path, planned my next few steps accordingly, and stomped with *passion*. Well. Apparently when it's 7:45 at night, pitch black outside, and subzero temperatures, anything on the sidewalk that appears to be white, fluffy, and crushable is actually going to be rock-hard solid ice. The only thing "crushed" was my ego after a guy in a camouflage hat, who saw *everything*, completely failed to minimize my embarrassment and pretend he didn't see it. I guess I can't blame him for laughing out loud. He did just watch a girl get into a fight with a snowball - not as her weapon but as her opponent - and lose. Had he stuck around just a bit longer he could have continued to be entertained by the helpless limp I had going from rolling my ankle. It resembled something along the lines of a pathetic attempt at swag combined with a bullet shot to the leg. I'm pretty sure it made me look popular.

After I got to work and finished shaking off the snow, ice, and shame, I took in a deep breath and walked downstairs to clock in. Usually at work I am extremely talkative (or singative, if that were a word), very upbeat and always making those sarcastic, "behind-the-scene" jokes (the kind that would totally get me in trouble if the wrong person heard). I am also not the type to wear my emotions on my sleeve, or even zipped up in my pocket for that matter. But after a particularly rough day dealing with various family, school, and personal matters, not to mention

my recent encounter with nature, I was a little on edge. Okay fine, I was holding onto the damn edge by a strand of dental floss tied in a loose knot to a dead tree at the top of a 500-foot cliff.

Have you ever been to the point where you know you'll be able to hold back your tears as long as nobody asks you what's wrong? Well I guarantee you my supervisor, Alex, will never make the mistake of asking a girl what's wrong again (I apologize in advance to his future girlfriend). That poor guy. The look on his face could have made a "deer in the headlights" face look as if it were prepared for what was about to come. I believe he made out the sounds, "Is everyth-" before I pulled a Miss America and started dramatically wailing like there was no tomorrow. Standing there with a spray bottle in one hand, dirty rag in the other, and a face that scared even more death out of the chicken we were serving, I'm sure he took one look at me and wanted to take off running. And he probably would have had the message from his brain traveled down through his spine and to his legs fast enough, but he was frozen. About like the ankle-twisting ice ball I had fought with earlier.

And so it continued: my theatrical performance. A few kids actually got up and left as I stood there bawling; apparently they weren't the soap opera type. But most of them stuck around and watched my sanity unfold waiting to get a preview of next week's episode - little bastards. You're welcome for the free entertainment. After I pulled myself together and remembered I was 21 years old and not seven years old (which may have been helpful earlier on when I thought playing in the snow sounded like a bright idea), I returned to work with an attitude that everything was out of my system and there was nothing left to pout about.

Being someone who is not at all known to cry in front of people, I was a bit paranoid wondering what my co-workers might have thought of my little dramatic act. I decided I would

recover by striking up positive conversations to imply that I was fine and in a good mood. I walked over to the ice cream venue to talk with Stefanie for a bit and noticed that her dish cart was full of dirty plates. Searching for reasons to stay busy anyway, I offered to take it back to the dish room for her. Also, since this was a new shift for me, I had wanted to get to know the dish room crew a little bit better; perfect.

I made my way back to dish room with the cart and headed for the far side of the room where the beginning of the belt for the dishwasher is located. First passing the girl standing at the end of the belt grabbing clean dishes and moving them to a drying rack, I stopped to make some sort of interaction. I already knew the answer to my question but out of politeness, and a slight feeling of guilt for handing off a load of dirty plates, I asked her if I should load the dishes. As I expected she answered, "You can just stack them on the rack and we will take care of the loading, but thanks for asking!" We exchanged smiles and I continued on toward the dirty dish rack. I'm not even sure I took an entire step before she bellowed out, "Watch the drain hole!"

I don't know which section of my brain is responsible for background music and slow motion effects, but whichever part that may be was definitely ready for action. Apparently at this point I was tired of giving everyone else a show and decided I needed to sit back and watch it myself. It was almost breathtaking - like a waterfall crashing into a stream. Except this was glass plates...crashing into the ground. It was an unusual kind of elegance – but still elegant. Similar to the artwork that goes for millions of dollars but, to me, looks like an accidental paint bucket spill. I swear I watched it in slow motion:

Front left wheel gracefully falls into drain hole.

Dish cart tilts forward, bowing for an audience of royalty.

Plates sophisticatedly dance off the cart's lowered edge, one by one.

Beethoven's symphony playing dramatically in the background.

It was beautiful.

Twenty plates and now hundreds of pieces of broken glass later - I wake up.

Unfortunately it wasn't the kind of "in your bed, turn your pillow over, thank the Lord it was just a dream, and go back to sleep" wakeup. It was the "Oh shit, I'd better pull the dish cart out of the drain hole before my boss comes in and replaces that front left wheel with my face" kind of wake up. Just to make absolute sure I really wasn't only dreaming in my comfortable, warm, safe, and unbreakable bed I blinked my eyes a couple times. Nothing. So then a couple more times. Nope - this was real life.

Apparently the repetitive blinking only made way for tears because they came pouring out. The one and only girl in the room instantly ran over to see if I was okay and to assure me these kinds of things happen all the time. As she continued to try and make me feel better the boys in the room huddled together and helplessly debated what one should do when there's a sobbing dining girl hunched over a pile of twenty broken plates - I'm guessing a similar process takes place when one of the guy's girlfriends asks him to stop by the store and pick up some tampons for her. "What do I do, man? Like, do they come in a box?"

There are times in the dining center, because of how loud it gets, when it's difficult to hear the person sitting next to you talk. At this very moment, you could have heard the person sitting ten tables over from you *whisper*. The amount of noise produced by the glass smashing into the ground was nearly damaging to my ears and instantly put an end to any other sound production going on around me. It was one heck of a grand finale for my show.

The guys did however wrap up their debate (they came to the conclusion that tampons can't be found in the toilet paper isle) and decided to come help me pick up all the glass. I was bent over, sweeping up broken pieces of glass, my dripping snot and tears being swept up in the process, and my face was so red that I could have been mistaken for Elmo's evil twin. One guy noticed how much torture I looked to be in and told me an embarrassing story about his previous job. It actually made me feel *much* better. If I had been able to see his face through the gallons of tears drowning my eyes I probably would have returned to work and thanked him the next day - on second thought there's always the option to change my name, chop off my hair and color it black, move to Rome, and never see any of that night's audience again. Ever.

At the end of the night I made it back home in one piece, uninjured besides a sore snow-stomping ankle, all four limbs still attached, no significant amount of blood loss, and the world wasn't even deprived of plates. I took a long, hot, soothing bubble bath (actually it was a shower in the dorm – used by an entire floor of strangers), put on some sexy lingerie (okay fine - basketball shorts and a giant sweatshirt I stole from my dad in the seventh grade), and crawled into my king sized Tempur-Pedic bed (or just my twin sized mattress thrown on the floor in my room - whatever). I guess the important point here is this: I survived. Nobody is perfect and our lives don't resemble the fairytales we see in movies; we all have embarrassing moments, do illogical things, and have days when we slightly fall apart (or just onto the sidewalk in front of a *really* hot guy). Chances are, though, there is only one *permanent* thing you will walk away with from these sorts of experiences: a story.