

Mystic Sour

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I see she come in one night. Slice the filtering out weeknight crowd in half. She got a crick in her neck an a chip on her shoulder. She make her way toward me, open her mouth, say, "Gimme a sammich, kid."

I know its her by the wrinkly voice. "I wanna sammich, kid," she say. I look down, she at me, an I don look up. Hector say she spell you if you let her. Say she evil.

"Whakind lady?" I ask.

"Don matter," she snap back.

I don make the sanwiches offen. When you do, smile an fix the sanwiches, toppins piled high, the lead heads in line don even notice. An if they do, boss scowl at you an think, Hurry up. His teeth show an he take out his anger on you. Wrong place at the wrong time. Sure sign a something.

"Look Princess," I say, "Gotta know whatchya want or I cant make ya nothin."

"Jus make it better than las time. OO-EE-GODDAMN!" she hoot, "Thatsa bad sammich."

She come up from south a Hunderden Fourth every day. I be pissed if I were her, too. Ugly lady. Wrinkly face an ashy.

Hector say she take his bus home. Say she go further, sit longer. Husband left her two year back, couldnt take it no more. Musta drove him to wits end.

I say, "Princess, I don know whatcha got las time, but I sho didn make it."

"Sonnyboy," she say, "make me somethin special. Mommas hungry.

An don mess it up, baby. Wouldn wanna make you sleep in the doghouse tonight." She check herself in the window, mutter, "Mmm Momma look good." The sanwiche bake for a minute thirty an she talk her crazy fool mouth off.

"When you breakin outta here, baby?" she ask. She got a scratchy voice. "Been lonely a while. Oo baby do I needa man. See you aint cleanin no floors today," she say. "Getta promotion, didjya? Baby gon bring sommo home, aintchya?"

"Sweetheart," I say, "You mus not know what I already know bout this place. The onion slime or rotting tomato," I say an hold up a scraggly slice, the juice dripping onto my yellow cutting board. Yellow from tomato, blood cuts, dirty knives. "I cant get no promotion, already know it all," I tell her, but she don phase. I see Boss, his polo an leather boots.

"Boss," I say an point at her, "Get her gone. She causin trouble." He look at me, open his mouth, raise his hand an say, "Whatever, man."

Hes a six to two, a twelve to eight, not no nine to five. The difference? Do it an you find out.

"Sorry lady," I say, "Bosses orders, you gotta jet, but I let you getchyo sammich."

She pitch a fit. "Whatdya mean jet? Canna lady sedown to eata sammich?" She look around, red in her eyes.

"Ainnobody gettin a sammich if I aint," she taunt, an hold her hands up like she somethin special, pound her fists on the counter, like a cheat, like she know she ain supposed to be here.

I look to Boss an say, "Boss, I quit. Cant handle crazies like the lady no more."

"Ain no crazy, baby," she plead to me.

"Lady, get," he tell her, strong on the get.

"I ain no crazy!" she holler.

"Done, Im done," I say to him. The lead heads in line look around, don know what to do. Never do much now, why start?

Raphael, his skinny waist an mascara, prance over, say, "Lady, Daddy gun fix you up," an he snarl, then wink at her.

"Nu-uh, no you didn, Boy," she hoot.

Boss throw his weight around. Hand raised, she laugh, kiss her tangled necklaces, know she done won some sorta prize for stickin it to a man.

Boss think, arms crossed, wonder if he gone yell at me or put up with me, furrow his brow. He call his boss, stammer on the phone, "Yes, I know, sir. Yes, Sir, I'll try my best, Yes, Sir, Yes, Sir." He look at me an clench his jaw, shift his head. "Lady, thought I toldjya ta leave," I say. "Yo gotchyo sanwich. Now get."