

JUST A BURGER

Written by

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INSERT TITLE SCREEN- "Kansas. June 2nd, 1967"

INT. FAST FOOD RESTAURANT KITCHEN-DAY

The kitchen is loud from the sound of pots and pans banging and from the sound of the sizzle of grease on the big open grill.

CLARK, a tall and pudgy 30 year old, is excitingly making a burger in the kitchen with a lot of finesse and poise. His movements almost as if they are dance moves. We also hear him humming an old-fashioned Italian song.

CLARK

A little bit of lettuce...da ta
da...add a few more veggies for a
perfect crunch...and oh! Can't
forget the sauces!

Clark continues to take his sweet time and ensures that this burger will be unique from every other burger he has ever made.

Clark's boss, RONALD MCSTRONGOLD, storms through the doors separating the front counter and the kitchen. He looks madder than hell. Ronald is in his mid 30s and is very short and fat; he his power hungry and lets the authority get to his head. This can be shown by him always looking up to people. When he is mad he gets red in the face and he spits when he yells.

RONALD

Clark! What in God's name are you
doing back there?! I have a line of
customers waiting for their burgers
and I have not seen one come out of
that kitchen in over five minutes!

CLARK

I'm sorry sir, I just want to make
the best...

RONALD

(cutting off Clark)
...enough with this "every burger
is a masterpiece and no burger
shall be the same" bullshit! I have
told you time and time again, we
follow a formula here at
McStrongolds and there is a system,
a FAST SYSTEM, of how to do things
here!

Suddenly, a huge burst of flames breaks out on the stove. The loud annoying blare of the fire alarms start going off.

RONALD (CONT'D)
Clark! Behind you!

Clark, while getting yelled at, was not paying attention and all of his burgers on the grill caught on fire.

CLARK
Oh shit! Help!

Ronald runs over to the grill while Clark runs to get the fire extinguisher. As Clark runs back to the grill with the fire extinguisher he slips and falls and the handle to the fire extinguisher explodes. It hits Ronald in the head.

Ronald yells out a scream while simultaneously getting covered in foam. The foam also puts out the fire. The kitchen looks as if a bomb has gone off.

CLARK (CONT'D)
Oh my god sir I'm so sorry!

RONALD
(calm and still)
...Get out.

CLARK
Ronald, it was a complete accident...

RONALD
GET OUT OF MY RESTAURANT AND NEVER
COME BACK!

CUT TO:

INT. CLARK'S CAR-DAY

Clark is driving in his car and he is sobbing. He is talking to himself and he sounds distressed.

CLARK
My WIFE is going to kill me...this
job was our livelihood...with a baby
on the way, I don't know how we are
going to make ends meet...

Clark keeps on driving until you can see through his front windshield that he is pulling into the parking lot of a bar.

Clark parks and exits the car.

CUT TO:

INT. BAR-DAY

Clark sits at the bar and orders a beer. He does not drink it though, rather he just stares at it in a state of disappointment.

Sitting next to Clark is a relatively fit man in his early 30s. BRAD is dressed in a very nice suit and looks as if he would be the perfect car sales man. Brad also looks upset and discouraged. He too has a blank look on his face.

BRAD

Excuse me, bartender. What is good to eat here?

The BARTENDER, who is middle aged and tall, walks over to Brad.

BARTENDER

Well, it's ALL good. I guess the question becomes, what are you in the mood for?

Clark lifts his head and wipes his tears with his shirt sleeve. He turns towards Brad.

CLARK

The beef brisket is really good here. It has a perfect barbeque glaze and it is smoked to perfection. I highly recommend it with a side of mashed potatoes. The mashed potatoes are triple whipped and served with scallions on top and sour cream. It's delicious.

Clark pauses as if to realize he gave too descriptive of a response.

CLARK (CONT'D)

Sorry, I come here a lot.

BRAD

Wow, you sure are descriptive when it comes to food now aren't ya?

CLARK

I love food. I practically study it. I'm a chef.

Brad puts down his beer and stares at Clark. His stare quickly turns into a grin.

BRAD
You can't be serious...

CLARK
(weakly and unconfidently)
Well, not exactly a chef, but a
frycook...I'll be a chef one day!

BRAD
Where do you currently work?

Clark pauses and looks away in embarrassment.

CLARK
McStrongolds...Well, actually, I
got fired today.

BRAD
Why did you get fired?

CLARK
I wasn't following the system that
McStrongolds has in place. I like
to take my time and make the most
elegant burger possible. Not just
some slab of meat on a bun.

BRAD
That is a value that is always
pushed aside in the fast food
industry. Quantity over quality.

Brad measures Clark up and down with his eyes.

BRAD (CONT'D)
I believe in the same beliefs that
you do Clark. I used to work in the
fast food industry years ago, but I
left. I did not believe in the
system. I am sorry that you lost
your job today...by the way, my
name is Brad, Brad Davidson.

CLARK
Nice to meet you Brad, I'm Clark
Cooper. Anyway thanks, but it's
okay I don't need anyone feeling
bad for me. I'm just always going
to be a failure...

All of a sudden it clicks in Brads head. He sits up straight and gets a jump in his step.

BRAD
(cutting him off short)
NO! That's just it! I think I have
a solution for you!

Clark looks at Brad with a look of confusion.

CLARK
A solution for me? I'm just a
frycook and that's all I am ever
going to be at this point in my
life.

BRAD
Nonsense! It just so happens that I
am a talent agent for Chefs
International. I am the Kansas
representative. You my friend seem
like a perfect candidate and just
what I need.

Clark perks up at the hearing of this. A gasp comes out of his mouth and he looks shocked.

CLARK
Wait, THE Chefs International? Like
the one's who are responsible for
finding such great chefs such as
Gordon Flapstick and Bobby Roboni?!

BRAD
Roboni was my personal client.

Clark smiles from cheek to cheek.

CLARK
Holy smokes! What do you mean I am
a perfect candidate? I don't
understand, what could you want
from a lonely little frycook like
me?

Brad grins and reaches into his back pocket.

BRAD
This is why I want you Clark.

He pulls out a flyer that reads: "America's Next Top Chef Competition. June 10th and 11th. New York City. Come showcase your skills for a chance to win \$10,000 and an automatic acceptance into ANTHONY AUGUSTUS' apprenticeship program."

CLARK

Me? But I only know how to make burgers and sandwiches. I could never compete in such a prestigious competition against the best in the country.

BRAD

My number one guy, who I have been working with over the past six months, had to back out on such short notice because his grandmother died yesterday and he has the funeral this weekend to attend. I'm desperate Clark, the competition is three days away. Not only does someone win the grand prize, but their agent also gets a cash prize too of \$5,000 because they are responsible for finding the person who wins. I want that money Clark, I have been dreaming of it for too long now.

Clark looks intently at Brad, he has a confused look on his face.

CLARK

Do you think I have a chance? We wouldn't even have any time for training, or coaching, or anything!

BRAD

Clark, the way you described the beef brisket to me shows that you have passion. Someone who is passionate about food is better than someone who just knows how to cook well. I can help you. I know you have what it takes to win this competition. I will guide you step by step.

CLARK

\$10,000 could really help my wife and I out, especially because now I am unemployed...

BRAD

And don't forget the chance to be Anthony Augustus' apprentice. That's major leagues man.

CLARK

You know, I'd have to check with my wife on this one, she may not want me to do this.

BRAD

Clark, I have to call the head of the competition within the next hour to tell him who I am bringing with me to this competition. I need an answer now. Are you in?

Clark thinks about it for a few moments and then finally he snaps out of his concentration.

CLARK

This is the chance of a lifetime. I mean, what's the worst that could happen?

CUT TO:

INT. Plane-Night

Clark and Brad are sitting next to each other. Clark is sitting next to the window. He is quiet and he is gazing out the window.

BRAD

So how did you wife take the news?

CLARK

The news about me getting fired or the news about me going to New York City with a stranger to compete in a big competition?

Brad chuckles and pats Clark on the back.

BRAD

I'm sure she was thrilled! Don't worry, you're in good hands.

Clark looks back out the window and gazes down towards the ground. The plane is descending and he can see the Statue of Liberty on the ground.

FADE TO BLACK:

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN-DAY

Clark and Brad are walking side by side into the Garden. Brad is dressed very casual in a nice suit and Clark is dressed in a chefs outfit. Clark looks uncomfortable and overwhelmed. They enter and head straight to the right to a kiosk where they will sign in.

BRAD

Ah! Here we are! I told you the long night was worth it! I hope you got your beauty sleep because in just one hour you have your first showcase. You are going to need your full concentration and energy for this one!

Clark is looking around. There are people everywhere and the sounds of a live band can be heard in the distance. Down in the middle of the arena can be seen hundreds of people, and at one end there is a large stage where the showcase will occur.

CLARK

(frantically)
So what exactly am I going to be making in this first showcase? And how am I judged? How do I advance?

BRAD

It's simple. There are fifty different competitors, one from each state.

CLARK

Fifty competitors? There has to be rounds I assume.

BRAD

Yes. This competition contains three rounds. Two rounds today, championship round tomorrow. All fifty chefs compete against each other in the first round today and they all make the same meal. You have fifteen minutes to do so.

CLARK

How do you move onto the next round?

BRAD

Everyone is scored by a panel of ten judges and the top ten scores from the first round get to move onto the next round and compete once more tonight. This round requires the making of a more intricate dish so you get twenty minutes.

CLARK

Okay, that makes sense. How do you get to the championship round then?

BRAD

The second round is also judged by ten judges. Only two get to advance from here and go to the championship tomorrow. Tomorrow there is only one judge, Anthony Augustus himself. In the championship you get to make your own dish and you have 30 minutes. Which ever dish Anthony likes better wins.

Clark's eyes grow bigger and excitement fills him.

CLARK

Anthony Augustus judges the last round?! That's incredible!

BRAD

I told you I wasn't a phony Clark, this is the real deal.

Brad turns around and talks to the WOMAN at the kiosk. The woman is young and beautiful with bright blue eyes and blonde hair. Brad flirts with her a little bit and you can see her laugh and smile. Brad signs some paperwork and he turns around back towards Clark.

BRAD (CONT'D)

Alright. You're all signed in. We don't have much time so let's go get ready. You need to be on stage soon.

CUT TO:

INT. MADISON SQUARE GARDEN-MAIN STAGE-DAY

Clark is at his cooking station. There are five rows of ten stations on the stage. Every station has a grill, utensils, ingredients, and an envelope. Every station has all the exact same things. Clark's station is in the back row, last station on the left.

Clark looks towards the giant clock at the end of the stage. It is counting down and there is only sixty seconds left.

Clark looks over to Brad who is standing backstage to his right. Brad gives him a thumbs up. He then pounds his chest and points at Clark.

Clark turns back towards the grill and looks at his hands. He studies them as if they are holding the answer to something.

Clark closes his eyes, takes a deep breath and whispers to himself.

CLARK

Let's do this.

Suddenly the clock rings and all the chefs frantically open their envelopes. Clark looks at his and reads what it says. In big, bold letters are the words "Chicken Parmigiana."

Clark starts to sweat and shake. He looks nervous.

CLARK (CONT'D)

I've never made this before, I don't know where to begin.

Clark looks out into the audience. Once again, he takes a deep breath as if to calm down.

CLARK (CONT'D)

All the ingredients are given, I can figure this out. There is no turning back now.

Clark reaches down and ignites the grill. Suddenly, he smiles. The familiar feeling of turning on a grill excites Clark.

A montage occurs where we see Clark in his zone. He prepares his meal in dance-like motions. He is smiling and twirling, throwing ingredients together with ease and poise. Clark is very comfortable in this setting. The Italian song "That's Amore" by Dean Martin is being played.

Finally, Clark is snapped out of his zone right as the timer goes off. Everyone stops what they are doing.

CLARK (CONT'D)

Well, it's done. Just in the nick of time too. I can only pray it tastes good.

On Clark's station we see a very elegant looking meal. It is very obvious that it is chicken parmigiana, although it looks quite different from all the rest of the contestants.

The JUDGES are of different ages and genders. Some are short, some are tall, some are skinny, but the majority are fat. They proceed to go up and down the aisles grading everyone's meals. They study the meals, touch the meals, smell the meals, and taste the meals. It is a very succinct process and it looks meticulous. They are all carrying clipboards and they take notes.

The judges come to Clark last. Clark is nervous and shaking.

JUDGE 1

Well...well...well, what do we have here. This is an interesting piece now isn't it.

JUDGE 1, a tall and robust man with a distinguishable mustache, picks up his plate and starts dissecting the meal both with his eyes and his knife.

Judge 1 cuts himself a piece and tries it.

JUDGE 1 (CONT'D)

Oh my lord. What is this?

Clark looks scared, he begins to sweat and shake again. The question puts a frown on Clark's face.

CLARK

(sighing)
Chicken Parmigiana, sir.

JUDGE 1

Damn right it is! That is the best chicken parm I have tried all day. Maybe in my life. What is your secret?

Clark looks stunned. His eyes widen and his jaw slightly drops.

CLARK

I'm sorry, sir, but I don't have one. This is the first time I have ever made it.

JUDGE 1
You cannot be serious.

Judge 1 quickly turns around to all the rest of the judges.

JUDGE 1 (CONT'D)
All of you must try this. It's
unbelievable.

All of the judges try it and their faces light up. They all
simultaneously let out a "yum" together.

JUDGE 1 (CONT'D)
We will be seeing you next round
for sure. I hope you are prepared.

CUT TO:

INT. BACKSTAGE-DAY

Clark is hanging out with Brad backstage. Brad is in the
middle of giving Clark the biggest hug ever.

BRAD
I am so proud of you! I knew you
had it in you! The judges all
unanimously voted yes for you. They
didn't do that for anyone else on
that stage!

CLARK
I don't know what got into me. I
have never made chicken parmigiana
in my entire life.

BRAD
Well whatever dish is next I hope
you're able to pull out of your ass
just as well! The next round isn't
for another two hours so go get
something to eat and walk around a
little bit, I need to go make some
business phone calls.

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM STALL-DAY

Clark is sitting in the bathroom in a stall on the toilet. He is in there alone until all of a sudden he hears two men walk in. He cannot see them but he can hear them talking. There are two distinctly different voices.

The door then opens again and you can hear another person walking in.

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM URINALS-DAY

The first two guys that walked in, GUY 1 and GUY 2, are having a conversation amongst themselves mid-pee at the urinals. They both are nerdy looking and they are wearing matching "America's Next Top Chef" T-shirts and they both have VIP lanyards.

The third guy that walked in, JOHN, also is peeing at a third urinal next to them. He is a young and athletic looking man. He is dressed in a suit and looks very professional. He is not a part of the conversation.

GUY 1

Hey, did you hear about that low-life McStrongolds frycook that got a unanimous vote into the next round?

John now looks over to the other two guys having the conversation. He looks as if he is interested in their conversation because his eyebrows suddenly raise and he stares at both of them. They do not notice.

GUY 2

Yeah, what the hell? The guy has been flipping burgers his whole life. He used to work at the McStrongolds down the street from my mother in Kansas. She used to rave about him because he always remembered her order off the top of his head. Where in the world did he get the ability to cook like the way he did on stage though?

GUY 1

I have no idea. Whatever. He has to go up against the best nine chefs in the country next round. The guy doesn't stand a chance.

Guy 1 and Guy 2 walk out. John finishes peeing and walks towards the door. He smirks and starts to laugh as he walks out of the bathroom.

CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM STALL-DAY

Clark looks upset for a moment and then his expression changes. He now looks angry and he is red in the face.

CLARK

Just a frycook huh? I'll show them.

CUT TO:

INT. BACKSTAGE-NIGHT

Clark is standing in line backstage. He looks like he is in full concentration mode and he looks mad. He is standing in line waiting to go on stage.

In the background you can hear an ANNOUNCER on the PA system announcing all of the chefs one by one and calling them out to stage. His voice is very deep, manly, and demanding. Clark is called last.

Brad is standing next to Clark. He turns to Clark.

BRAD

Hey man, you okay? You don't look well.

CLARK

I'm fine. I'm concentrating.

BRAD

Okay, okay good. This is the most important round. We need that invite for tomorrow.

CLARK

Don't worry about a thing. I got this.

Suddenly we hear the announcer say:

ANNOUNCER

And our last contestant ladies and gentlemen is all the way from Kansas, give a warm welcome to Claaaaaark Coooooooooper!

Clark walks on the stage and heads towards his station.

INT. STAGE COOKING STATION-NIGHT

Clark looks down at his station. There in front of him are all the same materials and utensils as last time except for different ingredients.

All of the other contestants are at stations near his. There are two rows of five. Clark is now in the front row, first station on the left.

Clark looks up and looks at the clock, it says thirty seconds. He again stares at his hands and takes a deep breath.

Clark reaches into his left pocket and pulls out a picture. It is a picture of his wife holding up an image of a sonogram.

CLARK

I'm doing this for you baby, I love you.

Clark puts the picture back in his pocket. He proceeds to crack his neck and his knuckles as if he was getting ready for a fight.

Suddenly the clock rings loudly and the competition begins. Clark looks down at his envelope and opens it. The paper inside reads "Veal Saltimbocca." Clark chuckles to himself and grins. He claps his hands together and begins.

CLARK (CONT'D)

(to himself)
Now this is something I am familiar with! My grandma taught me how to make this when I was a kid.

As if it was magic Clark suddenly goes into a trance. A montage ensues. Like the competition before we see Clark dancing around looking very comfortable. This time the song "Do You Believe In Magic?" by The Lovin' Spoonful comes on.

Everything seems to be going perfectly when all of a sudden Clark's hand accidentally hits and knocks over the bottle of lemon juice on the side of the grill. It hits the ground and smashes.

Clark's jaw drops and he lets out a gasp. Nobody but Clark realizes that he has dropped the bottle of lemon juice, however, it is all over the ground.

CLARK (CONT'D)
(to himself)
Shit!

Clark looks at the rest of the ingredients.

CLARK (CONT'D)
(to himself)
Well, I guess this will have to do.
That was the last ingredient I
needed... I'm such a failure.

Clark finishes preparing the meal the way it is and then he stands and waits for time to expire. His hands are behind his back and he stares intently at the clock. He has a blank stare on his face.

The judges look confused. They are all whispering in each other's ears and pointing at Clark in disbelief.

JUDGE 1
There he is again that Clark! Done
five minutes before everyone else.
Veal Saltimbocca is hard enough to
make in twenty minutes, let alone
doing it in fifteen!

Clark over hears this remark and he sighs. He looks over to the CONTESTANT 1 next to him and she is struggling. She is in her early 20s and pretty, wearing a fancy looking chef outfit.

CONTESTANT 1
Ow! Damn grease!

Clark looks back at the clock and awaits patiently for time to end.

Suddenly the alarm goes off and time is up.

The judges start at the other end opposite Clark and they start their meticulous judging rituals.

They finally reach Clark.

JUDGE 1
Done five minutes early I see?
Let's see if I am equally as
impressed as last round...shall we?

Judge 1 takes out his knife and cuts a piece of veal. He dips it in the sauce and eats it. He chews it for a few seconds and then stops. The look on his face is one of pure shock.

He looks as if he was a deer in a set of headlights. He is staring right through Clark.

JUDGE 1 (CONT'D)

This cannot be real. I cannot believe what I am tasting.

Clark's facial expression goes from him sighing to him looking confused. His eyebrows raise and his eyes widen.

JUDGE 2 interrupts. He is a small man and is always by the side of Judge 1. He looks up to Judge 1 constantly and he shakes and quivers as if he is always nervous.

JUDGE 2

What is it sir? Is it good?

JUDGE 1

No. It is not good...

A long pause proceeds. Clark starts to sigh again.

JUDGE 1 (CONT'D)

...it is extraordinary! I cannot believe that this man has had me like this twice in one day. You have to all try this for yourself. I cannot give it justice in words.

A huge smile comes onto Clark's face. His face turns red with joy.

All of the judges try it and they all have similar reactions. The other contestants look over and realize they are in trouble. They all look upset or mad.

CONTESTANT 1

Who is this guy?!

CUT TO:

INT. STANDING AREA IN FRONT OF STAGE-NIGHT

Guy 1 and Guy 2 are standing front row right in front of the stage. They are holding popcorn and beer.

GUY 2

I cannot believe what I am seeing. The judges are giving this guy more attention and time than the rest of the contestants.

GUY 1

This guy cannot be real. He's a
frycook at McStrongolds for God's
sake!

Instantaneously the judges turn towards the crowd and Judge 1
grabs Clark by the arm and holds it up.

JUDGE 1

Our first winner as declared
unanimously by our panel! Clark
Cooper!

The crowd cheers. In the background in the back of the stage
you can see Brad jumping up and down with joy with the
biggest smile on his face.

The judges suddenly huddle up. It appears as if a lot of
conversation is taking place. After about ten seconds the
judges turn back towards the crowd.

JUDGE 1 (CONT'D)

Our final winner, who will be
competing against Clark tomorrow
for the grand prize in the
championship round, will be...

Judge 1 walks over three contestants to LUCIOUS ST. PIERRE,
21, a tall and handsome Frenchman. He has long black hair and
looks more like a model than a chef.

Judge 1 grabs Lucious by the arm.

JUDGE 1 (CONT'D)

Lucious St. Pierre!

The crowd goes wild. The screams from girls is overpowering.

Clark looks over to Lucious and Lucious gives a mean death
stare back as to intimidate Clark. Clark looks away.

CLARK

Why does he look so familiar?

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL BAR-NIGHT

Clark and Brad are sitting at the bar having a drink. It is
very dark outside and there are not many other people at the
bar.

BRAD

I knew you could do it Clark. Good stuff out there today.

CLARK

I find that it is all about motivation. Did I tell you my wife is pregnant?

BRAD

No you didn't. Congratulations man, I can see why winning this is important to you.

CLARK

My grandmother is the one who taught me how to cook. She always told me that cooking is about passion. You need to be passionate about it to be good at it. Same thing goes for my family. I love my wife and I see this as an opportunity to improve our life together.

BRAD

One more day, all you have to do is beat Lucious.

Clark sips his drink and then turns towards Brad.

CLARK

Lucious St. Pierre. Why does he look so familiar to me?

BRAD

You have probably seen him before. He is a chef prodigy. He won Chef International's Tykes competition five years in a row. He is currently studying at Culiard, the nation's best culinary school.

CLARK

That's right. I remember reading an article about him in Time Magazine a few years ago. Why is he in this competition?

BRAD

Since he is still in school he does not have a job yet. This could be his chance to get a job right out of college.

(MORE)

BRAD (CONT'D)

I'll tell you though, I have met him several times. Every time I see him he doesn't remember my name. He is a prick and he only cares about himself. Being in the spot light his whole life and getting told he is the best really got to his head.

CLARK

But do you think I can beat him?

Brad turns to Clark and puts his hand on his shoulder.

BRAD

There isn't a doubt in my mind that you can beat him. You have something he doesn't have.

CLARK

What's that?

BRAD

Passion.

CUT TO:

INT. BACKSTAGE-NEXT DAY

Clark and Brad are backstage. Clark is in his normal white chef outfit and Brad is in a new suit that we have not seen before. It's all white and very fancy looking.

Clark is doing simple stretches off to the side and Brad is seen flirting with one of the girls backstage.

Lucious is also backstage, but on the opposite side. He is standing with JOHN, the same guy from the bathroom. Lucious is in an all black, elegant chef outfit.

JOHN

You ready Lucious? Bring home the big bucks baby!

LUCIOUS

I have never been more calm in my life.

JOHN

You should be able to blow this guy out of the water. Did you hear he was a frycook?

LUCIOUS

What...?

JOHN

Yeah, I heard it from a guy in the bathroom earlier. He used to be a frycook at McStrongolds. Can you believe that?

LUCIOUS

You're kidding?! McStrongolds?!
This is great!

Lucious starts to laugh uncontrollably.

Clark notices that Lucious is laughing. Lucious turns towards Clark, and while still laughing, he makes a hand motion across his neck with his thumb from left to right in a slow motion.

Clark looks away and takes a deep breath. He closes his eyes.

FADE TO:

INSERT BLACK SCREEN

CLARK (V.O.)

For EMILY, and for our baby.

CUT TO:

INT. BACKSTAGE-DAY

Clark and Brad are backstage waiting. Clark is rocking back and forth as if nervous, waiting for his name to get called to the stage.

ANNOUNCER

Ladies and gentlemen, please
welcome back to our stage, our
first contestant competing for the
grand prize, Claaaaark Coooooper!

Clark takes a deep breath and puts on a smile. He walks onto the stage.

CUT TO:

INT. ARENA STAGE-DAY

Clark walks over to his station. He stares out into the crowd.

The arena is more full than it has ever been and the crowd is screaming loudly. It sounds as if the Super Bowl is coming up. The spotlight is bright in Clark's eyes.

ANNOUNCER

Ladies and gentlemen, can I also get a warm welcome for our second, and last contestant competing for the grand prize, Licious St. Pierre!

Licious walks onto the stage from backstage and heads straight to the judges table, bypassing his working station. He grabs the microphone out of the announcers hand. The announcer is shocked and looks at Licious in disbelief. Licious is smiling and looks confident.

LUCIOUS

Thank you for coming everyone! It is truly an honor to be in the championship round! I only wish I had some real competition. Did you know that our friend Clark Cooper actually used to be a frycook at McStrongolds?! Don't be fooled everyone, especially you Anthony, Clark is not a real chef.

The crowd gasps and everyone starts laughing loudly. They cannot believe the news they have just heard. The judges table, including Anthony Augustus, start to speak to each other in disbelief. They all look shocked.

Clark stares straight ahead towards Licious. Clark is so embarrassed that he starts to tear up. He pats his eyes with the side of his chef outfit but feels the picture in his pocket of his wife and the sonogram on the side of his face. He pulls it out and looks at it intently one last time.

CLARK

I have traveled too far and overcame way too much to give up now.

Licious hands back the microphone to the announcer. He walks over to his station, staring and laughing at Clark.

ANNOUNCER

Alright, alright, everyone settle down. We still have a competition to get underway. Let's get started!

CUT TO:

INT. ARENA JUDGES TABLE-DAY

Anthony Augustus grabs the microphone from the announcer. Anthony, 50, is tall and fat with a goatee on his face.

ANTHONY AUGUSTUS

Let me remind you Lucious, that anyone with passion can be a chef.

Anthony looks over to Lucious, but Lucious is still smiling and laughing and seems unphased by what he has to say.

ANTHONY AUGUSTUS (CONT'D)

Remember gentlemen, you may make anything you so desire using the ingredients at hand, just make sure I like it. I am a very picky eater!

Anthony looks at both of the contestants and gives a cynical smile.

ANTHONY AUGUSTUS (CONT'D)

May the best chef win! 3 ...2 ...1
... COOK!

CUT TO:

INT. COOKING STATION ON STAGE-DAY

Clark opens the container on the bottom of the station to see what ingredients he has in there.

CLARK

Beef... bread... vegetables...
assorted sauces...no way.

Clark pauses and looks excited.

CLARK (CONT'D)

No burger will ever be the same.

Clark looks over to Lucious who is calm in his own regard but you can tell by his posture that he is arrogant.

LUCIOUS

Ha! This is going to be perfect.
Everything I need.

Lucious looks over to Clark.

LUCIOUS (CONT'D)

Hey buddy boy! I just want you to know that it was real good knowing you! I hope McStrongolds will give you your job back. Ha ha!

Clark looks back and Lucious. Clark starts to choke up and breath heavily. He looks scared. Lucious has gotten into his head.

Clark is staring off into the distance past Lucious. On screen we see what is going through Clark's head. A montage, this time a different one than before, is occurring showing mail on his kitchen table for late fees and declined checks, his wife yelling at him, the baby crying, Clark looking for a job and interviewing but being denied by employers, etc.

Suddenly Clark snaps out of consciousness. There is smoke coming from behind him. The burger is burning.

CLARK

Shit! Not again!

Clark tries to flip the burger but all of a sudden simultaneously the burger burst up into flames as he is flipping it. The burger is now a mini fireball and it is traveling in air right towards Anthony Augustus, who is sitting at the judge's table.

The burger lands on Anthony's clipboard. This clipboard is what Anthony was using to judge the contestants. The clipboard is on fire and the judges break out into a panic.

Anthony jumps up in a panic and takes off his chef coat to try and hit the fire out. This works a little, but it burns his coat severely.

Clark runs back stage to get the jug of water from the drinking station. Clark runs back over to the burning clipboard. The clipboard has also fallen off the table by this point and has caught a nearby chair on fire.

CLARK (CONT'D)

Watch out! Let me help!

Clark takes the jug and violently throws the water in the general area of the fire.

The fire goes out, but Anthony Augustus also gets soaked because he was standing right there.

CLARK (CONT'D)

I am so sorry. I don't know what happened. It was an accident!

Meanwhile, Lucious is still seen in the background laughing and flipping his meal on a pan over the grill.

Anthony is standing very still. He is dripping wet from the water and his face is very red showing that he is madder than hell.

ANTHONY AUGUSTUS

(calm and collected) I think it is obvious who the winner is. Security, please escort Clark out.

Brad is seen running towards Clark and Anthony.

BRAD

You have got to be kidding me Clark! What happened!

Clark looks towards Brad, he is about to cry.

CLARK

I told you I was a failure.

Two SECURITY GUARDS come and escort Clark backstage and out the back-door. They are two very tall, muscular men.

Clark looks over to Lucious as he is passing by. Lucious blows Clark a kiss goodbye and laughs. He then turns towards the crowd and puts up his fist in victory. The crowd roars.

FADE TO BLACK:

INT. RICHARDS HOUSEHOLD-NIGHT

Clark and Emily are sitting around the kitchen table. Emily is a brunette, petite, middle aged woman. She is sitting next to Clark and she is rubbing his back. Clark is looking down and is frowning.

EMILY

You had nothing to lose, Clark. I am proud of you for trying no matter what.

CLARK

The only success I have had in life is with you Emily. My career is a joke.

EMILY

Nonsense Clark! Stop that talk! You are a wonderful man and we live a very nice life. You will find a job soon and you will be great at it.

CLARK

I don't know, I am getting kind of old, there isn't much for me to do.

EMILY

What did your grandma always tell you?

CLARK

That cooking was about passion?

EMILY

Exactly. So why can't your passion also be about cooking?

Clark sits up straight and looks at Emily.

CLARK

What are you getting at?

EMILY

Clark, how long did you work at McStrongolds?

CLARK

About fifteen years.

EMILY

And in those fifteen years would you say that you know a thing or two of how the restaurant operated?

CLARK

I could run that place myself...wait.

Clark lights up like a lightbulb. He smiles and hugs his wife. Clark has an idea.

TITLE SCREEN- 2 YEARS LATER

INT. FAST FOOD RESTAURANT KITCHEN-DAY

We see a very busy environment. There are employees everywhere working hard and making food. Music is playing in the background and everyone is either singing along or smiling. It is a very upbeat work environment. A complete opposite of the environment at McStrongolds in the beginning.

Clark is running back and forth making food as well and helping others along the way. He grabs things for them and also puts toppings on for them while they are in the middle of preparing their food also.

Clark looks less awkward and more comfortable. His movements in the kitchen moving in and out of people are those like dance movements, like the ones he used to use when preparing burgers.

We hear in the background someone yelling.

CASHIER

Can I get two number 7's with fries
and a cola?!

CLARK

Coming right up!

Clark grabs two delicious looking burgers off the grill. He places them onto two separate buns and then with a little bit of finesse and poise, he adds the appropriate toppings. He wraps them up and carries them to the front.

While passing the grill on the way to the front Clark stops and notices a picture hanging above the door frame. It is a picture of Emily, himself, and a young child standing in front of the restaurant that Clark is currently inside. The picture frame says "Dedicated to my daughter, Wendy."

Clark pauses for a minute and smiles as if he has never been so happy in his entire life.

Clark walks out the door and to the front counter.

CLARK (CONT'D)

Order up!

Clark hands the customer his meal with a big smile.

CLARK (CONT'D)

Thank you for eating at Wendy's!
Please come back again!

FADE TO BLACK:

THE END.