

Food Fight

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INT. CLUTTERED APARTMENT - MORNING

It's almost noon. The sun peeks in as Devon (38) rolls over. He looks like a mess. He musters up all his willpower to leave bed, hitting his answering machine on the way out.

ANSWERING MACHINE

You have...six...unheard messages.

Devon doesn't stay to listen. He wanders to the fridge. After rifling through condiments and empty cartons, he finds half a can of PBR and a sleeve of saltines: Jackpot.

ANSWERING MACHINE

(beeping)

First message.

The sound of a nasally man fills the room. It's his ex-boss.

CARL (ON MACHINE)

Hey hotshot! Carl here.

Devon's annoyed, but continues eating his saltines—spreading grey poupon on a couple. He listens quietly as he sits at a table cluttered with dirty dishes and beer cans.

CARL(ON MACHINE)

Look buddy...it's been two weeks since you've been to work. I haven't even filled out your termination papers yet! I get that you're still not over...what happened...but just swallow your pride and come back to the mill! It's only weird if you make it weird, right D-Man?

Devon winces at Carl's nickname, and his proposition. He finishes the saltines and moves to bowl of cereal from last night, barely passing his sniff test.

CARL(ON MACHINE)

At least next time give me your two weeks notice, am I right?

(laughs to self)

...That's uh...that's just a little jokey-joke. Irene loves 'em. Anyways, I'll see you at work I guess...? Chow!

Devon's relieved the message is over. He washes out the soggy cereal taste with stale beer before rubbing his head in his hands.

(CONTINUED)

ANSWERING MACHINE
Second message.

This time it's a female voice on the machine: friendly but not comforting. She talks quickly, as if she doesn't want to speak.

DAKOTA (ON MACHINE)
Hi Mr. Phillips. This is Dakota from Moneybags Mutual Savings and Loans. Just calling to notify you that another one of your checks bounced this morning.

Devon groans, not because of his breakfast.

DAKOTA (ON MACHINE)
Luckily your insurance plan protects this sort of thing from raising your credit, but if it happens again, your account could be closed.
(beat)
Hope you have a great day, and be sure to download our new Moneybags mobile banking app!

Devon glances at the bills on his table, some of them past due. He's drowning in everything but food. He takes another swig of beer.

ANSWERING MACHINE
Message three. Your call from...Irene Phillips.

Devon drops his PBR. A missed call he wasn't anticipating.

IRENE
Hello, Devon...? If you're there, please pick up.

Devon rushes to his closet, rummaging until he finds a flannel shirt and jeans that, again, passes his smell test, if only barely. He stops at the doorway to give his full attention.

IRENE
Look, with all that's happened recently, I'm not surprised you've been dodging my calls. Just...just know that Carl was there for me when you weren't, and that he gives this family his full attention.

(CONTINUED)

Devon tears up as Irene continues. She's not accusing as much as she's trying to justify her own actions. He puts on work boots.

IRENE

...it's just that you're such a great guy Devon, but you shy away from every confrontation. You have so many talents, but you don't challenge yourself. Carl may be a little...exhausting, but he has ambition, and that's what we need right now.

Devon looks to the answering machine to spit out its final words.

IRENE

If you ever find that spark, please call me. I miss you. Your kids miss you.

Devon stops the answering machine there, sparing him any more. He wipes his eyes on his sleeve before leaving the apartment.

INT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - HALLWAY

Devon walks down towards the elevator before the GURGLE of his stomach stops him. He walks to a nearby door and knocks.

DEVON

Hey Wendell, are you in?

A muffled voice replies as Devon waits in anticipation, ear to the door. The door remains locked shut.

WENDELL

Why wouldn't I be?

DEVON

(relieved)

Good to hear, buddy. I was wondering if you had any leftovers from yesterday?

WENDELL

Of course! I'll bring something right out to you.

Devon does a little hunger dance as he waits. Eventually, a ham sandwich pokes through Wendell's mail slot. Devon takes it eagerly, sitting next to the door to talk to his friend.

(CONTINUED)

DEVON
 (Between bites)
 Thanks Wendell, I owe you.

WENDELL
 (making muffled bites himself)
 Are you kidding? I love having
 brunch with you!

They sit in happy silence eating until Wendell breaks it.

WENDELL
 Nice to hear you out of your room
 again. I was starting to think I've
 rubbed off on you a bit too much.

DEVON
 (sighing)
 If only, Wendell. Irene called. The
 bank called. I need to get back
 into the workforce.

WENDELL
 (between bites)
 You're really going to back to that
 scumbag Carl? After dating your
 wife as soon as you told him you
 were separated?

DEVON
 Oh God, no. I'd rather wash dishes
 than work at the mill with him
 again.

WENDELL
 Now, that's what I like to hear!
 You just gotta get out there and
 seize the day! Carpe Diem! The
 world is your oyster--you just have
 to reel it in!

DEVON
 (mumbling)
 Says the agoraphobic recluse...

WENDELL
 (oblivious)
 It *is* "adorably profuse," you
 getting your second wind! Here, I
 think I saw a couple restaurant
 openings in the paper this
 morning...

Wendell drops the Help Wanted section through the mail slot.

(CONTINUED)

WENDELL

If they aren't hiring, see if you
can't at least work for food!

Devon scans it and stands up. He passes his plate back through the slot, and sets off with a smile on his face.

EXT. DOWNTOWN - AFTERNOON

Devon groans his trademark groan as another restaurant closes the door in his face. He crosses another name off of the Help Wanted page - all of them smelling his desperation. He grows even more discouraged.

DEVON

(to self)

Should've seen it coming...

He walks across the street and peers into the last restaurant on his list, only for the ad to be taken down just as he looked in the window. Defeated, he leans on a lamppost as a familiar GURGLE takes hold.

DEVON

(to self)

Again!?

He argues with his stomach before lifting his head into the window, spying an sign for "The Mount Nacheesmo Challenge": a 4 pound platter of Nachos that must be eaten in under an hour.

DEVON

(reading aloud)

...and if you climb Mount
Nacheesmo, the meal is free...?

The sign confirms it. He straightens himself with newfound vigor and brushes his shirt.

DEVON

(to self)

"Work for food," eh Wendell?
Yeah...I can do that.

INT. RESTAURANT - AFTERNOON

The restaurant is next to empty. Devon reads a "Seat Yourself sign" and does so. A waiter comes over to take his order.

(CONTINUED)

JOHN

Howdy, welcome to Paco's! Name's John. What can I get for you this fine day?

The waiter smiles a rehearsed smile, paper and pencil at the ready.

DEVON

Well, I figure water's as good a start as any...

John does a little chuckle and nods, scribbling.

DEVON

...and to eat, I'd like your Mount Nacheesmo, please.

JOHN

(laughing)

HA! That's always funny...but seriously, our lunch special is this FANTASTIC tenderloin taco with a spicy...

DEVON

(interrupting)

As good as that sounds, Mount Nacheesmo sounds like something I could do. I want that.

John's pencil point snaps. He looks up from his paper.

JOHN

Sir...that's just kind of a promotional thing. More to attract college guys trying to impress their friends than an actual meal...

DEVON

Awesome. I know I can out-eat a college kid. One Mount Nacheesmo please, light on the sour cream.

JOHN

(whimpering)

It feeds eight people...

DEVON

I'm so hungry I could eat eight people. This mountaineer climbs solo. I want the full challenge.

(CONTINUED)

JOHN
(practically pleading)
It's a forty-five dollar dish!

DEVON
All the more reason to finish in an
hour, right?

JOHN
(snapping)
OH COME ON!!!

The patrons look up at John. No way out. He quickly returns to his smiley facade, somehow even faker.

JOHN
...I'll let them know right away
someone's doing the challenge.

DEVON
(smiling)
Thanks, Johnny. I appreciate it.

JOHN
(snarling)
It's John.

John starts to leave slowly for the kitchen, dreading the walk. Devon taps the table in anticipation, still waiting for his water.

20 minutes later, he hears CLAPPING in rhythm as the entire staff walk out carrying the masterpiece, John at the helm. The few patrons stare as John puts on his cheery face again.

JOHN
AAAATTENTION PACO'S! We have a new
contestant for the Mount Nacheesmo
challenge!

The staff sets the monstrosity of chips, refried beans, various meats, queso, and God knows what else in front of Devon.

JOHN
(glaring at Devon)
My BUDDY here has SIXTY minutes to
finish this behemoth. If he climbs
this beast, he gets a Paco's
T-Shirt his picture on the Wall of
Fame, and we pay for the whole
thing!

(CONTINUED)

John puts a digital clock down reading 60:00 on the table along with several glasses of water.

JOHN

And if he falls off Mount Nacheesmo
or loses his lunch, it's all on
him! Any last words before we
start?

DEVON

That's more sour cream than I'd
have lik--

JOHN

(cutting him off)
Aaand he's off!
(under his breath)
Don't choke on it.

He hits the timer as people start to cheer. Devon cuts the monster into four pieces and tackles them one at a time.

Time passes as the sun sets. Everyone has stopped cheering. He's eaten three of the four quarters and stops to rest. The clock reads 14:00.

DEVON

(groaning)
This may have not been a good idea.

He reaches in his back pocket and opens his wallet. There's five dollars inside.

DEVON

Definitely not a good idea.

He stirs and squirms for a few minutes. He summons the rest of his strength and digs in. The patrons look at him going again and cheer.

Against all odds, Devon finishes with five minutes left to spare. The staff and crowd applaud.

JOHN

I actually don't believe it, but we
have a winner! Get my friend here
his shirt!

Devon smiles a big smile, T-Shirt in hand as he gets his picture taken. He's finally fought for something and won.

INT. APARTMENT COMPLEX - HALLWAY

Devon sits outside of Wendell's apartment laughing and smiling as he wears his Paco's shirt. He sips Pepto-Bismol from the bottle as he recounts his story.

DEVON

...And the owner said he hasn't seen someone finish with that much time left before! They were calling me "Iron Man."

WENDELL

(not as excited)

That's funny, considering you work at a steel mill...

DEVON

That's what I said! He said that apparently there's all kinds of these challenges over town...

MONTAGE - VARIOUS

A) INT. SUSHI BAR - DAY - Devon mistakenly shovels down a bowl of wasabi. He groans in agony as his face sweats profusely.

DEVON (V.O)

The Sushi Showdown at Bushido's...

B) INT. OYSTERIA - DAY - Devon pries open oysters stacked plate over plate as patrons chant "Iron Man" on.

DEVON (V.O)

Fried Oyster Onslaught at Petey's Pier...

C) INT. DINER - DAY - Devon pours water over a pile of fish sandwiches and eats the slop with a fork.

DEVON (V.O)

Oh! And the Fish Filet Frenzy at The Tin Can...

END OF MONTAGE

WENDELL

That sounds like a lot of seafood to keep down, Devon...

(CONTINUED)

DEVON

(groaning and pounding his chest)

...It's the principle. This is my meal ticket! I keep doing this and I'll never have to mooch food off of you again!

WENDELL

(laughing)

That'll be the day!

Devon's eyes light up. He stands up, still nursing his heartburn.

DEVON

...What's more is that I can show Irene that I'm not a quitter! I need to call her right now!

WENDELL

Go get her, Iron Man. High-five!

A latex-gloved hand reaches out of the mail slot. Devon slaps it and runs off.

INT. CHICKEN SHACK - DAY

Devon drums his fingers and eyes the door as a manager talks to him holding a pen and clipboard.

MANAGER

...So basically sign here, here, and here to show that you consented to the Hellfire Wing Challenge in your right mind, and that we are in no way liable for tongue burns, nose bleeds, heat stroke, blood in the stool...

Devon signs without looking, eyes fixed at the door.

DEVON

Sounds lovely. I'm just waiting for someone...

He lights up as an attractive brunette (34) clutching a handbag walks through the main door. He waves eagerly before relaxing to seem cooler.

DEVON

HEY IRENE! I mean...hey, Irene. How are things?

(CONTINUED)

Irene smiles and begins to speak when the door opens again. A little girl HALEY (8) walks in--one of Devon's daughters. His smile fades as his other daughter STACY (5) walks in carried on the shoulders of a portly, balding man: Carl (40).

DEVON

No, no, no...this isn't right...

IRENE

Something wrong, Devon?

The manager brings out six blood red buffalo wings in front of Devon. He slaps a pair of industrial rubber gloves on the table.

MANAGER

You're gonna want these, Iron Man.
Spice burn's a bitch.

It's happening too fast. He feels trapped - sweating before even starting the challenge. He puts on the gloves and takes a bite, but the stares of his family are too much.

DEVON

I CAN'T DO IT!

Devon runs out the door with Irene chasing after him as the restaurant lies stunned. Carl breaks the silence.

CARL

"Iron Man"...more like Irony Man,
am I right?

EXT. SIDEWALK - MIDDAY

Devon groans once again a couple blocks down, fighting back tears of embarrassment and ghost peppers. He cradles his head in his still-gloved hands as a familiar voice consoles him.

IRENE

You have quite the appetite for
destruction, don't you?

Devon chuckles but can't make eye contact. Irene sits down next to him.

DEVON

This was stupid. "Iron Man"...I
just thought for a second that
maybe it'd impress you...that I
could actually finish something...

Irene rubs his shoulder.

(CONTINUED)

IRENE

Actually, I thought it was kind of cute. You sounded so eager over the phone. More confident than I've heard you in years.

Devon looks up. They make eye contact and smile.

DEVON

Just wish the kids didn't have to see it, and now Carl has more jokes to tell around the mill...

IRENE

He told me he's getting headshots soon, can you believe that?

They laugh before she continues, taking off his gloves and wiping his face.

IRENE

You know, competitive eaters talk about a "wall" they always hit towards the end of a contest. Where things look bleak and they don't know if they can push on. Do you know how they get past that wall?

DEVON

Tums?

They laugh again.

IRENE

They picture themselves at the other side.

(beat)

They're not doing it for someone else, they're doing it for themselves. You have to look to yourself for approval before you look to others.

Irene hands him a newspaper clipping: Devon's picture after Mount Nacheesmo, a big smile on his face. It reads "THE MAN WITH THE IRON STOMACH."

IRENE

Do it for this guy. I want to see more of him around town.

Irene picks Devon up and gives him a hug.

(CONTINUED)

IRENE

I hear Boulder Bar has a giant
pizza no one's eaten before.

She kisses him on the forehead before heading back.

INT. CLUTTERED APARTMENT -NIGHT

Devon sits in the dark looking at the picture. He pins it onto the refrigerator, right next to a photo of him at the Steel Mill with Carl's arms over his shoulder - only Carl beaming. He cleans up the apartment before picking up the phone in his bedroom.

DEVON

Hello, Boulder Bar? Hoping I caught
you guys before you closed.

Devon pauses to listen on the other end.

DEVON

Awesome. I was wondering if I could
could schedule your Boulder
challenge for sometime tomorrow
afternoon.

Another beat.

DEVON

Yeah, 1:30 works perfectly.

One more beat. Devin looks at a family picture on his bedside, all smiling at him. He grins back at them, looking at himself especially.

DEVON

Name...? Devon Phillips, but you
can call me Iron Man.

INT. CLUTTERED APARTMENT - MORNING

The sun peaks in once again to greet Devon. He glances at his alarm clock out the corner of his eye: 1:00. He panics and scrambles to put on clothes, sprinting out the door.

WENDELL

(shouting from inside)

In a hurry Devon? I have brunch for
you!

DEVON

(not stopping)

No time! Gotta get to Boulder Bar.
Big things are happening!

INT. BOULDER BAR - AFTERNOON

Devon stumbles into Boulder Bar, panting heavily. The patrons stop eating to look at the sight. He straightens up and goes to the host.

DEVON

(still panting)

Hey...sorry I'm late...I had a reservation for Devon Phillips?

HOST

(laughing)

Not a problem, Iron Man! Right this way. We've been waiting for you.

Devon follows the host up a flight of stairs. A large camera awaits him along with a film crew, as well as Irene.

DEVON

(confused)

Irene...what is...how did you?

IRENE

I *may* have called this morning and asked if a guy calling himself "Iron Man" put in any reservations. Have a couple of kids with someone and you're bound to think like them.

The head of the film crew approaches Devon to shake his hand. He speaks almost too fast for Devon to comprehend.

FRANK

Mr. Phillips! Name's Frank. Chow Channel owner and executive. Boulder called me last night after they said Iron Man wanted to do The Boulder Challenge. You're a local celebrity, but you already knew that right? 'Course you do. I can tell by just looking at you.

Devon looks for a chance to chime in. He doesn't get one.

FRANK

Look, we're looking for a face for our new travel show, and we'd think you'd be perfect. We're gonna shoot some stuff today and see if you're a fit.

(CONTINUED)

Devon smiles as a larger-than-life pizza is brought to his table, almost eclipsing it. A crowd gathers to watch.

FRANK

...of course we'll want to make a mano y mano challenge out of it though. Nothing too crazy - we still want you to win so it looks good on the cameras.

HOST

Does anybody want to eat against Mr. Iron Man Phillips?

CARL

I'd be delighted.

Carl steps forward from the crowd, previously unseen. He stares Devon down.

IRENE

(palm in face)

Oh lord...it was bad enough when one clown was doing it.

HOST

Alright, it looks like we have a show! Places everyone! You have 45 minutes to finish the pizza. Last man standing wins!

Another pizza is placed on a table facing Devon's. They sit down and waste no time starting, ignoring all utensils.

20 minutes left. Carl's eaten about two-thirds of his pizza. Devin's just about halfway.

CARL

You know D-Man, I might still be hungry when I finish. I may have to steal a slice of yours.

DEVON

God knows you're good at stealing from me.

FRANK

...we'll cut that part out.
(He signals his crew to keep rolling)

More time passes. 10 minutes left. Both men are at a snail's pace, three giant pieces left each.

(CONTINUED)

CARL
(grunting)
How's that wall treating you, Iron
Man?

Devon groans and looks into his wallet again, this time for the picture of him at Paco's. He sets it next to him and tears into the remaining pieces, edging out Carl by half a slice and with mere seconds left on the clock.

HOST
WE HAVE A WINNER! THE FIRST
CHAMPION EVER TO FINISH THE BOULDER
BAR BOULDER!

The crowd roars in delight as Carl pounds the table. Devon receives handshakes and poses for photos. A rail thin, stiffly dressed young man stands in the back wearing latex gloves.

WENDELL
Wouldn't have missed this for the
world.

Devon runs up to Wendell and lifts him into the air. Wendell is more than uncomfortable, but pats Devon on the back. Devon's greeted by his daughters, joining the hug as well.

FRANK
I didn't expect anything less, Iron
Man! Say the word and I'll have you
on a plane to Idaho for the French
Fry Free-For-All by tomorrow.

Devon looks to Frank, then to his children, then to Irene.

DEVON
Actually, I think I may stay here
for a while.

Frank is stunned. Carl leaps up from the table.

CARL
If's he's not gonna do it, I'm
down! I've been practicing my
material all week. You're gonna
love this...

Frank shrugs as Carl walks off with his arm around Frank's shoulder. Devon looks toward Irene as her boyfriend just leaves.

DEVON

Look Irene, I know things between us were rocky for a reason, but I'm past that wall now. I know what I'm capable of and I'm willing to work to get your trust back.

(beat)

Dinner tonight at my place. That's all I ask.

IRENE

(smiling)

Yeah...I think we'd like that.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Devon sets down bowls of food as Haley & Stacy play patty-cake at the much cleaner table. He kisses Irene on the cheek before sitting down.

DEVON

...And the best part about Carl leaving is that he quit the steel mill job on the spot! I'm going in tomorrow morning to take HIS place for once.

IRENE

You're doing good work, Devon. We're proud of you. We really are.

Devon tears up as he looks down at his dinner. Instinctively, he smashes his biscuit into bits and stirs it into his water to drink at a lightning pace. Haley and Stacy try to imitate.

IRENE

Devon...what's the rush? Take your time for once and enjoy it.

He stops and swallows slowly. They laugh before he continues to race against his daughters. Pan out to see a new family picture: Devon covered in pizza sauce smiling next to his family, Wendell standing to the corner with an uncomfortable smile. He is home once again.