

Catch and Eat Lake.

Martin knew he was close to his destination when he saw the billboard. "Come to Lake Buffet for the Catch and Eat. First right after exit 4."

He turned towards the back of the car, bucket hat flopping as he moved, "You see that kids? We are close. No phones, no internet. Just us, our fishing rods, and at the end of the day a warm meal that we caught." Martin takes a deep, victorious, dad breath, "Nothing better than that am I right?" As he caught a look at his kids before looking back at the road, he saw them both ignoring him. Macy was lying in the back of the mini-van squirming in frustration from what Martin assumed was a lack of freedom. The typical teenage story of being forced into a weekend camping trip. His other kid, Martin Jr, was looking out the window, eyes glazed over, practically asleep. He was upset at how his ex-wife raised his kids, always spoiling them with the newest phones or gaming consoles, but he knew this trip was going to change everything.

After 20 mins of traveling down a long gravel road, Martin stopped the car in front of a row of wooden cabins which sat 50 feet from the water. On the patio of the closest cabin sat a familiar face.

"Come on kids, it's time to meet one of daddy's old friends," Martin said as he opened the door. The kids did not move, but Martin still began walking up to the patio. "Clarence, it's been so long, how is everything? "

Clarence stood from his seat and took a step toward Martin and embraced him. "Yes, it has been quite some time." Clarence pulls away and takes a good look at Martin. "Things have been great here. We have had more business this year than any other, especially this month, the lake is more full than it has ever been. But never mind that look at your grey hairs you old man, and where are your kids, I have been waiting to meet them."

"You're one to talk. But of course, they are still in the car. Typical kids not wanting to drive away from their technology, but I am sure this experience will be great for them. Lemme get them out."

Martin walks back down the patio, and slides open the side door that Martin Jr. is sitting at. He is still unconscious, but after Martin gives him a shake he slowly comes around. "Hmm?" Martin Jr. wipes his eyes and takes a look at his dad, then the surrounding area. "Dad? Where are we? I thought it was mom's week?"

"Your mother and I decided I'd take ya this week. Come on out Junior, meet my old friend Clarence and take a look around. We are going to stay here for a bit." Junior looks past his father to Clarence, who is waving at him. Still groggy he waves back and steps out of the car. "Dad, where are we?"

"Why don't you show Junior Lake, Buffet Clarence? I'll have Macy help me Grab our stuff and meet you out front." Clarence walks down the stairs next to Jr.

"Come on Junior, lemme show you around. Give you a little history." Clarence says with a warm smile.

"O-okay." Junior looks back to his father, who is smiling at him while giving him two thumbs up.

Junior follows Clarence past the cabins to the lake. On the other side of the Cabin, there is another Patio. When Junior looks up he sees an array of various fishing rods, some harpoons, and even a harpoon gun.

"Have you used any of those before?" Clarence asks, seeing him looking at the patio. Junior shakes his head no.

"Well, hopefully, you will see some of them in action, and maybe if your father approves you can use a couple." Clarence smiles. "But first the lake." Clarence walks him over closer to the lake edge. As they approach, Martin Junior sees that there are three well-worn boats pulled up onto the shoreline. They look fairly beat home, with scraps on the bottom of the boats, and even a jagged hole in one of the sides that Martin Jr. can see.

As Clarence leads Martin Junior closer to the lake he glances back over his shoulder and says "Lake Buffet is a bit of a silly name don't ya think?" Martin nods thinking that it is pretty weird. Smirking at the response, Clarence continues "It is the name my Great Granddaddy thought of. Apparently, he would always say that one day he wants the lake full enough that it feels like a buffet of things to catch." Clarence smiles a bit, "Stupid I know, but he would be proud to see that it has indeed become a buffet." As they approach the edge of the water Clarence stops and begins to take the view. Martin does the same, but now that he is closer to the boats he notices that they look to be stained a reddish color and that there are drag marks in the sand where another boat might have been set off at. The three boats that remained looked much worse than he had expected. Holes and gouges cover most of the viewable areas on the outside of the boat. The insides were stained an even darker red than the outside, especially around the areas most people would store things.

"Gorgeous ain't she?" Clarence remarks proudly. Pulling Martin's gaze from the boats to the lake.

Junior did think it was beautiful. This area was peaceful, and quiet outside of the subtle whispers of the lake on the shoreline and the quiet hum of a slight breeze. The lake was big enough that he could not see land on any other side, except for around where he was standing. He scanned the distance looking at the lake seemingly fading into the horizon and saw someone standing on a boat like the ones he saw next to him, waving their arms frantically in the air.

"Um, Clarence, do those people need help?" Junior asks while pointing at them.

Clarence squints, leaning forward a bit as he looks into the distance. Then relaxes and waves back, "Oh no no no. I believe that is my daughter. Must just be waving hi." Clarence waves back for a bit longer and says, "Come on, let's get you in a boat with your sister."

Junior was caught off guard, he was not expecting to get on a boat this soon. In fact, he wasn't really expecting to be in a boat at all But before he could decline the offer, Clarence grabbed his arm and was pulling him towards the closest boat. "Wait, I don't want to. Not yet at least lemme..." Junior tried to pull his arm away, but Clarence had a tight grip on it. "Oh come on Junior, it is still early in the day. And you are going to need all the time you can get." Clarence throws Junior towards the boat. Junior stumbles and then trips over it and lands

on his butt in the middle of it. He looks up to stand and sees his Father walking down the back Patio stairs. He is dragging a sack behind him and has another sack over his soldier.

"Better late than never, eh Clarence?" Martin gives Clarence a smile as he approaches the boat. He lets go of what he was dragging and drops the sack on the ground. He nods over for Clarence to help him, and they pull Macy out of the sack and place her in the boat.

"Macy!?" Junior kneels over her "Dad what is happening why was she in the bag?! Is she okay?!"

"Oh Junior, you are such a worrywart. She is fine. She was just fighting me too much so I drugged her."

"You what?"

"It's no problem, Junior. She will wake up in an hour or so. Which is good cause you guys need to start preparing." Martin leans down and starts taking stuff from the bag he was dragging. "Now I wanna see you succeed, so I am going to be nice. You guys get a rod, a canister of bait, a knife, and even a Harpoon. If that is okay with you Clarence."

Clarence Nods "A bit nice I would say. I just gave my kids a rod and a Knife. Told them to use themselves as bait if they wanted to catch fish."

Martin Chuckles as he tosses all the stuff into the boat. Junior catches the gear before it all lands on top of Macy. The weight of it knocked him back onto his butt. After the gear, Martin Senior tosses in a canister, which lands on Macy's stomach. Junior slides all the gear off of him messily onto the floor of the boat and grabs the canister off of Macy, there is a label on it that reads "~~Bitch~~ Bait". He grabs it off Macy and adjusts her so she is sitting up a bit.

"Dad, what is all this? What is happening?"

"Now Junior, know that daddy loves you, and if you truly love Daddy you will do your best not to get caught. Get used to the water, sleeping outside, baiting your hooks, catching your food to eat, and come to the terms that it's Catch or get caught, and this place isn't called the catch and eat for nothing. Oh, and don't go tossing the gear around, that stuff is everything out on the lake. Also, I believe Clarence and I will be on the lake in a day or two as well so we may run into each other then. "

Clarence nods and the two of them smile at each other and then at Martin Junior. Then, together, they lean down and begin to push the boat into the water.

"Wait Dad, what is happening, what do you mean don't get caught? Dad, I'm scared please, I wanna go home, please. I'm scared Dad."

"Junior, Relax and be brave. If you can successfully catch ten other participants and bring them back here before any of them catch you, you can go free and Clarence will prepare your haul into a nice meal to celebrate. That canister of bait is for the fish so you have something to eat if you are struggling with the bigger catches. Also, keep in mind that is ten for both you and Macy, so I recommend getting her before she wakes. But, Clarence did say this month has been really good for business, so there are probably other kids and other fishermen everywhere. A lot more than when I was on this lake that's for sure."

"Yea back then this place wasn't so well known, could be months before you got 10." Clarence chimes in.

“Exactly” Martin Continues “Plus if you catch Daddy that will count as 3 catches. Simple right? If not, well Daddy will miss you, but know that I have saved the perfect vintage wine to go with you two.”

With that Clarence and Martin are about knee-deep in the lake, and they give one final shove so the boat starts to drift deeper into the lake. “Oh, and if you are caught coming back onto the shore without the 10 catches, you will be disqualified and become bait. Also, use that bait well, Junior. It’s really good your mother had exceptional skin. It baited even me into marrying her.”

Martin and Clarence both chuckle at each other.

“Damn, Martin. Gear AND a full explanation? You really do care for them, you big softy.” Clarence remarks while poking Martin’s side, a wide smile on his face.

Martin replies shooing the hand away from him “Well, they are my kids this time around. And I’d love Junior to make it so we can do this as father and son one day.” Martin spaces out imagining how great it would be to fish with his son, just the two of them on a boat.

When he comes back he continues “but they are also idiots so even with all the help I am sure they will be caught and on our plates within the week.”

Clarence and Martin share a laugh as they begin to walk back toward the cabin to catch up more.

“Dad please I wanna go home. I wanna go back to mom's.” Martin shrieks behind his father's back.

Martin, still walking away from the boat, waves goodbye and glances back over his shoulder, disappointed at his son's childish behavior. Clarence claps Martin on the back reassuringly “Oh Martin, they will be fine. My daughter got caught on the first day. No way they are that bad. Now, let's go inside and catch up, it has been ages, and I just got done preparing the last Haul we got. And I gotta say I really outdid myself this time.”

A smile peaks back onto Martin's face, as he nods and motions for Clarence to lead the way. Martin is still disappointed his son isn't enjoying the family trip, but he has hope that in the coming weeks, Junior will grow to enjoy Lake Buffets' Catch-and-Eat Experience. Just like he has over the years.