

PETER  
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PETE

by  
Paul Dilly

INT. EMPLOYEE BACKROOM -- DAY

Two men get ready for work in a sticky, dingy room. Stuffing spills out of holes in a couch. A mini-fridge whirs in the corner, protesting against the humidity. Weekly schedules and old employee-of-the-month pictures hang lopsided on a cork board. Coffee stains everywhere.

PETER (20s) fumbles with an apron before successfully tying it behind his back. A thick beard disguises his youth. He gets in line behind WARREN (50s), who's punching his ID into a blinking computer.

When the computer beeps, Warren turns around, nearly walking into Peter. He looks up. Puffy pink skin scars his face and arms. Small patches of hair peek out among the scars. One of his eyes appears to be seared shut.

WARREN

Fella. Who are you?

PETER

Peter, sir. But you can call me Pete. It's my first day.

WARREN

I can tell. Name's Warren.

Warren grabs an apron off the hook on the wall and puts it on. A button depicting a cartoon rooster is pinned to a shoulder strap.

PETER

Nice to meet you, Warren.

WARREN

They all say that. Same ones who shit on me when I ain't looking.

PETER

I wouldn't do that.

WARREN

Pfft. Give it till the end of the day. You'll be laughing right along with 'em.

Warren pushes the door open and stalks out of the room. Peter watches him leave, then walks up to the computer and starts typing.

INT. WAREHOUSE -- DAY

Lines of shelves are packed with crates of canned and boxed perishables. Forklifts beep in communication as they store and retrieve. NICKO (18) notices Peter as he leaves the employee room. He's covered in grime and sweat, but he's grinning.

NICKO  
You meet Fuckedface?

PETER  
Who's that?

NICKO  
Who do think, dumbass. The only guy  
in here who looks like he got  
mauled by fire-breathing lions.

PETER  
Oh. Yeah, I met him.

NICKO  
What'd you think?

PETER  
He seems nice enough.

NICKO  
We all call him Fuckedface around  
here. I don't even know his real  
name.

Nicko adjusts his hard hat to wipe his forehead.

NICKO (CONT'D)  
What position you working?

PETER  
Not sure yet.

NICKO  
Work the register. You'll catch all  
the hotties.

He disappears into the maze of shelves.

INT. GROCERY STORE -- DAY

Peter stands behind a cash register, drumming his hands on the conveyor belt. A heavy-set man (40s) comes to his station, unloading a pack of cigarettes and a couple two-liter sodas onto the belt.

PETER  
Will that be all for today?

CUSTOMER  
Yeah.

Peter starts scanning.

PETER  
Cash or card?

He looks up when the man doesn't answer. Seeing that the man's watching something, Peter follows his gaze.

CUSTOMER  
What the hell.

PETER  
He works here.

CUSTOMER  
Good thing it's almost Halloween.  
He's gonna scare the kids real  
good.

The man chuckles at his own joke, then gives Peter a ten. Peter smiles as he counts change, then hands over the money and receipt.

PETER  
I'd buy him a Grim Reaper costume,  
but then he wouldn't be as scary.  
Or ugly.

The man roars in agreement.

CUSTOMER  
Damn right. Thanks.

PETER  
Have a good one.

Peter's smile fades. He stares at the belt till the next customer arrives.

EXT. PARKING LOT -- DAY

Peter pushes a line of carts toward the store. "Rooster Groceries" is displayed in bold letters above the entrance. Underneath, in smaller letters: "Buy before the cock's crow!"

A pair of teenagers strut through the parking lot. Peter can't hear what they're saying, but he can tell they're making fun of Warren.

DELINQUENT #1  
Hey! Worker boy.

Peter stops pushing the carts.

DELINQUENT #1 (CONT'D)  
What's the deal with Mr. Third Degree?

DELINQUENT #2  
Yeah, what happened to him?

PETER  
I don't know. I just work here.

DELINQUENT #1  
Lame.

DELINQUENT #2  
C'mon. You gotta know something.

PETER  
Well... All I know is we call him Fuckedface around here.

The delinquents howl. Peter grins.

DELINQUENT #2  
'cause his face is fucked!

DELINQUENT #1  
I knew you had something good.

The first teenager goes in for a handshake. Peter obliges. He watches as they resume their strut, expressionless.

EXT. DUMPSTER -- NIGHT

Peter steps out the back of the warehouse into an area surrounded by a chain-link fence. Only a dumpster and recycler back here. Spots of expired food stain the ground.

Warren sits on the steps, smoking. Peter tries to slink by, but Warren hears him and looks over.

WARREN  
Peter.

Peters glances at him.

PETER

Hi.

Warren goes back to smoking. Peter sits on the other end of the steps. They stay like that for awhile: Warren smoking and staring at the sky, Peter looking at his hands.

WARREN

Bet you're wondering what happened to me.

PETER

It crossed my mind.

WARREN

I fought fire. Eventually the fire won.

PETER

Oh.

WARREN

They forced me to retire. Said they couldn't let me burn alive again.

Warren takes a drag. The smoke clouds his face.

WARREN (CONT'D)

They just didn't want to look at me. Fuckedface... Damn straight.

A few drags later, he stands. He looks at Peter for the first time.

WARREN (CONT'D)

Day's almost up, Peter.

He puts out his cigarette and heads inside.

INT. GROCERY STORE -- NIGHT

Peter squats, fixing disturbed shelves and restocking empty ones. A cart filled with boxes of goods rests next to him. Nicko approaches him. He's changed his shirt and ditched the hard hat.

NICKO

There he is.

PETER

Hey.

NICKO  
You catch any hotties?

PETER  
Not today.

Peter returns to his work.

NICKO  
I saw Fuckedface in the bathroom.

Nicko waits for a response, then continues when he realizes he isn't getting one.

NICKO (CONT'D)  
He was rubbing lotion all over his face and arms. AS IF that could help.

He shakes his head, snickering, then eyes Peter. Peter gives him a thin smile. Pain and pity all at once.

NICKO (CONT'D)  
What's your problem? You look worse than Fuckedface.

PETER  
I'm fine.

NICKO  
Alright. Later.

Nicko walks down the aisle, toward the front of the store. Peter examines the can of soup in his hand. Then Nicko's back. Then the can. He's squeezing it hard. He stands.

PETER  
Hey!

Nicko half-turns.

PETER (CONT'D)  
His name is Warren.

NICKO  
What?

PETER  
His name is Warren!

NICKO  
Shit. You do have issues.

Nicko turns the corner. Peter looks at the can again and smiles, then puts it on the shelf behind the others. Warren walks up behind him.

WARREN

Guess I was wrong about you.

PETER

Fuck!

Peter spins around in surprise.

WARREN

You ain't no Peter.

PETER

Huh?

WARREN

Nice to meet you, Pete.

Warren sticks out a leathery hand. Pete takes it, firm. A promise.

WARREN (CONT'D)

Better get to work. The sooner  
we're out of here, the better.

He grabs a few cans off the cart and joins Peter.

END.