

Sketch

Volume 69, Number 2

2005

Article 26

American Food

Jenny Stanley*

*Iowa State University

Copyright ©2005 by the authors. *Sketch* is produced by The Berkeley Electronic Press (bepress).
<http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/sketch>

American Food

Jenny Stanley

Part I.

My hands are greasy and my hair keeps falling in my face. This fat sweaty man smells like fried batter, I smell the same. I have been watching this kid all night. The stupid Mexican looks so lost. He probably lives in a two-bedroom apartment with ten other people and runs from immigration.

When I drop the check the fried batter guy touches my hand. The Mexican buses my other tables, now empty as usual. His huge eyes move across the dining room and back down to the floor. The poor kid always looks at the floor. He hurries back to the kitchen. The shadows and the dimmed lights make his face look dark like an olive. The batter guy leaves a grease mark on my hand.

"Those cheap assholes have been leaving me one dollar all night," I say to Jewell. I hurry back to my tables. That fat bastard might have left me a five; for God's sakes, I let him touch me.

Part II.

I have mashed potatoes and beef gravy jammed into my fingernails. I don't know how that fat man at the table can eat this American food everyday. My manager waves at me from across the dining room, "Hey, amigo, grab a mop, someone threw-up over here," he says.

The young waitress watches me and scowls. Her yellow hair sticks to her face. She smiles through her teeth at the fat man. She rubs her eyes and smears the make-up on her shiny face. She seems to have it so easy here. She must take home hundreds of American dollars every night. My brother told me it was easy to make money here.

I slide dishes from the table into the bus tub and wipe my hands on my apron. A five-dollar bill and a one-dollar bill sit crisply on the table. I hold up the money to wipe off the table with bleach water. The bills feel smooth and heavy in my hands. I replace the bills to the middle of the damp table. The bus tub is heavy with ceramic dishes, glasses half-full of soda, and metal silverware.

The gringo with the brown hair seats the table I just cleaned. He touches my shoulder. "You want the one?" he says.

"No comprende."

"Whatever man," he says. He has five American dollars in his hand and moves the bill into his pocket.