

HOW A MAN EATS

Written by

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FADE IN.

1

EXT. WOOD CHOPPING AREA - DAY

1

A boy, JAMES, 10 years old with messy hair and scuffed jeans and T-shirt carries wood to a neatly stacked pile with his Dad, BILL, a 40-year-old with equally scuffed clothes.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Dad had me working as early as I could walk and carry tools at the same time. Man was made to toil as far as he was concerned. But this was the first time he let me do the same work as him; Man's work. He even got me my own pair of wood splitting gloves.

They carry the last of the wood to the pile. Bill grabs a well-used chain saw and throws it in the back of a beat up pickup truck. James throws an axe and a sledgehammer in the back. They both get in and with a crack of lightning and thunder, rain begins to fall.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

He worried about money a lot, so splitting wood seemed to put him at ease. I guess he knew we'd burn through the pile just in time for spring, which means he dodged another winter's heat bill. But I was excited now, because I knew that Dad always would get some food for anyone who worked with him.

The pickup pulls out.

INT. PICKUP TRUCK - DAY

Bill smiles at James and pats him on the head.

BILL

Seat belt, boy. Where are we goin'?

James buckles his seat belt and puts his hand on his chin, thinking about which burger he'd like to eat.

CUT TO:

EXT. GUSTAVO'S BURGER STAND - DAY

James and MOM stand at Gustavo's Burgers while MOM lists to Gustavo all of the special requests for James' burger.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Gustavo's Burgers had only been open a few weeks. Mom had taken me a couple of times, and let me get any sandwich any way I wanted it. And a coke too.

MOM (BG)

With no pickles, no onions, no mayo, no lettuce, no tomato,
(to James)
What else, baby? Oh, yeah, the cheese.

(to Gustavo)

And can you put a slice of cheese on the bottom of the burger and a slice of cheese on the top?

NARRATOR (V.O.)

It was quickly becoming my favorite.

CUT TO:

INT. PICKUP TRUCK - DAY

James comes out of his thoughtful gaze and turns to his father excitedly.

JAMES

Wanna try Gustavo's Burgers?

Bill smiles and accelerates.

2

EXT. GUSTAVO'S BURGER STAND - DAY

2

The pickup truck pulls into the burger stand parking lot, which is surprisingly short.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

What luck! The line was usually so packed, but it looked like we'd have mouth fulls of deliciousness in no time.

3

EXT. GUSTAVO'S BURGER STAND - DAY

3

Bill takes off his gloves and looks at the menu. He examines it and turns to James.

BILL

All right, boy. They got Gusto Burgers for ninety-nine cents. What do you want?

James puts his hand back on his chin, thinking about getting something other than the classic burger on the menu. He thinks better of it.

JAMES

I want a coke, and a Gusto Burger.

Bill smiles and nods. He turns to the ordering window.

JAMES (CONT'D)

With no lettuce, no pickles, no Mayo, no tomato, no onions, and some mustard on it. And some ketchup and cheese too.

Bill gives a fatigued look to James out of the corner of his eye and slowly turns back to the ordering window.

GUSTAVO

Welcome to Gustavo's Burgers, what can I get you today?

Bill glances again at James who is looking yearningly at the window.

BILL

Two cokes and two Gusto Burgers.

James is stunned, dismayed.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

What!?!? Two Gusto Burgers!? Did he not hear me!? Why would he even ask me what I wanted if he knew he was just going to order what he was going to order anyway!?

Bill takes his gloves off. James has his head in his hands.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Didn't he know about all of those horrible items on it? What was I going to do with lettuce? And for God's sake, Tomato!?

(MORE)

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Those things have the gooey locular
 cavities with the slimy seeds
 inside! Even if I picked the tomato
 off, there would still be the
 disgusting residue of it, seeping
 into my bun and my burger.

Bill pays.

CASHIER
 Two medium cokes and two Gusto
 Burgers.

BILL
 Yeah, thanks.

He takes the cokes and hands the bag of Gusto Burgers to
 James.

BILL (CONT'D)
 Hold that for a second, will ya?

James takes the bag and holds it. He is defeated. They walk
 back to the pickup and get in.

1 INT. PICKUP TRUCK - DAY

1

James is defeated in the front seat. Bill pulls the truck
 onto the road.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
 What was I going to eat? I slaved
 away all day with this man,
 swinging an axe for him, hauling
 his wood, and he couldn't even take
 the time to let Gustavo know that I
 don't need tomatoes? That I'd like
 some cheese? That I wasn't
 interested in stomaching the load
 of unnecessary condiments that she
 was going to use to weigh down what
 would have been an acceptable
 burger?

James listlessly reaches for his coke and takes a sip from
 the straw.

BILL
 Listen, man, I got a lot on my mind
 and a lot more to do before the
 day's done. You can pick off what
 you don't want, can't you?

James looks out the window silently, but he's visibly deeper in thought. Why did his dad just call him, "man?"

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Man?

BILL

Hey, hand me one of those burgers, will ya?

James reaches for the bag on the floor and digs out one of the Gusto Burgers.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Burgers? It wasn't just a burger he was asking me to hand him. It was an entire mountain of ingredients; a colossal pile of treatments that did no service to the beef or the bread.

James hands the Gusto Burger to Bill.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

And then he did something, I'll never forget.

Bill peels back the wrapper while driving.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

He peeled back the wrapper; held up the entire Gusto Burger, in all its glory; didn't pick a single thing off of it.

Bill opens his mouth wide.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

And then he just bit into it.

Bill bites into the Gusto Burger. It's a gigantic bite, almost the whole burger in this singly huge bite. A small piece of onion dangles from his mouth and he pushes it in and chews.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Pickles, onions, Mayo, tomatoes, the whole damn thing.

Bill chews another bite. He looks over at James, who is dumfounded by what he sees. Bill winks at him, and then watches the road.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

And that was when I realized ...
This must just be how men eat their
food. No pickiness. No special
requests. A hungry man just picks
up his burger and eats it.

Bill takes a sip from the straw of his coke. James watches him for another moment. Then he reaches down into the bag and pulls out his own Gusto Burger. He unwraps it and opens the bun to see all the ingredients on the inside. He looks at the burger, then at Bill, who is still watching the road. James picks up a tomato to inspect it, then puts it back on the burger. He puts the bun on top, picks the burger up, and bites into it hard. It's the most gigantic bite he could possibly take, and tomato juice and mayo smear the sides of his mouth. He chews.

Bill sees James' breakthrough, and glances approvingly at his son. James nods at his father, like two men sharing an unspoken truth.

FADE TO BLACK.