

CHAPTER 1

'Don't kill the customer!'



Sylvia, her sister Coco, and her husband Raúl walked in silence through the dark, quiet streets. Sylvia held Raúl's hand tightly. She felt nervous and excited at the same time. It was their last night in Mexico. The border was just over fifty kilometres away. A new life in the USA was waiting for them, a life with a good future.

They reached a small house at the end of a street. Raúl turned to the women. 'Here it is. Come on.'

They went into a dark house and in the light of a fire they saw a small group of people. Esteban was waiting for them. He would be their guide through the desert and across the border. He looked at them. He didn't smile. He talked to the group.

'If one of you is weak, everyone is weak. If one of you is slow, everyone will become slow. Help your friends. Let's go.'

Raúl gave Esteban their money. They were on their way to a better life.

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Mickey's was a large, successful fast food business. Inside its main offices a group of businessmen were in a

meeting. They were talking about advertising. They were making suggestions about how to advertise their most successful burger.

'What about *The Big One only gets bigger!*' said one man.

'Or *Everyone wants a Big One!*' suggested another.

'How about *Eat me!*' laughed a third.

'OK!' smiled Jack, their boss. 'Good ideas! Now Phil, what have you got to tell us?'

Phil looked round the group. He was extremely pleased. 'It's amazing. We're selling more and more Big Ones. And all ages are buying them! Kids, adults, grandparents – everyone!'

'That's great. And Don, what about the Little Big Ones?'

Jack turned to the newest person on the team.

Don also had good news. 'We did some tests and the kids really love them!'

'How many in a bag?' asked Jack.

'We think about three for a kid's meal.'

'Wonderful!' Jack was pleased. 'Dave – how about our plans to use the Teletubbies* to advertise the burgers?'

'Sorry, Jack. It's not going to happen. MacDonald's and Burger King have already got them.'

Jack's face went dark. '****!' he said.

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Don was with Reilly, a scientist at Mickey's. There was a small, brown bottle on the table. Don put a piece of white paper in the bottle and then held it to his nose.

'Wonderful,' he said.

'That the Barbecue Big One,' said Reilly proudly. 'Does it need more smoke?'

'No. It's perfect. But this one ...' Don smelt another

* A popular TV programme for very young children.

bottle, '... needs more of something.'

Reilly looked worried. 'The flavours in Caribbean food aren't easy.'

'Lime. Yes, a little more lime,' said Don.

Reilly smiled. 'No problem. I can add some more lime flavour. That's easy!'

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Jack's secretary brought Don into his office.

'Good to see you, Don,' Jack smiled. 'So – what do you think of everything?'

'What does he want?' Don thought. He nodded and smiled. 'Everything's great, Jack.'

Jack got more serious. He spoke carefully. 'Don, we may have a little problem. Have you ever met Harry Rydell? He's at the Chicago office.'

Don shook his head. 'No, I don't think so. Why?'

'Harry's very successful. He gets the best price for the meat. But maybe he's too friendly with the guys who sell the meat. I think he's closing his eyes to some things they're doing.'

'What things, Jack?'

'Well, I have a friend who teaches food science. A couple of his students have tested some of our burgers. They found a lot of fecal coliform* in them.'

Don was confused. 'I'm sorry, Jack, I don't understand.'

'Manure, Don.' Jack looked directly at him. 'Or shit† if you prefer. There's shit in our burgers.'

* * *

* This is found in manure and it can make people ill.

† A rude word for manure.

The desert at night was beautiful. The low trees appeared blue in the moonlight. The Mexicans looked very small against the desert and the night sky. A young man called Roberto walked beside Coco.

'You have the wrong shoes for this journey,' he whispered. 'These are better. See? I got them in America. But I've got some cream if your feet hurt later.'

'Thanks,' said Coco. 'How many times have you done this journey?'

'Three. And you?'

'This is my first.'

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It was getting late. Don finished reading a story to his sons and closed the book.

'Time for bed,' he said, and he kissed the boys.'

The next day he was travelling to Colorado to visit the meat packing factory. He was going to talk to Harry Rydell.

Don went into the living room. His wife, Debi, was at her computer. She looked at him.

'I don't understand,' she said. 'Why are they sending you? You're new.'

Don shook his head. 'Jack's worried. The meat is dirty and I've got to discover why.'

Debi's eyes opened wide. 'Dirty?'

'Yeah. Cow manure is getting into the meat.' Don still couldn't believe it. Manure in the burgers!

'That's terrible!' said Debi. She smiled at Don. 'So, it's a marketing problem. If kids eat your burgers and die, it's more difficult to sell them!'

Don smiled, but he wasn't feeling very comfortable. 'Yeah. It's an important rule in marketing. "Don't kill the customer!" It's bad for business.'