PREFACE

On a warm afternoon in the spring of 2011, I found myself on a shady corner of Forty-Third Street, just off Times Square, smoking one last cigarette before returning to the twentieth floor of the Condé Nast building to complete the second half of my day clipping magazine articles for *The New Yorker*'s editorial library—a temporary gig I'd taken between kitchen jobs. I was about to chuck the butt into the gutter when, out of the corner of my eye, I spotted a figure whose large silhouette seemed familiar enough to warrant a second look.

He was a tall man—at least six foot three—with a nest of unattended curls atop his head that made him appear even taller. He stood with his back to me, a navy-blue pinstriped suit hanging loosely over his broad shoulders. He puffed at a cigarette and chatted on his phone, making lively gestures with his free hand while a nimbus of smoke collected in the air around him.

Even though I couldn't see his face, there was something about his posture that I recognized immediately. He was poised, yet oddly stooped at the same time. His movements were quick and fitful, yet marked by a certain calculated, meditative finesse, which could be detected even in something as simple as the way he flicked the ash from his cigarette.

And then my eyes fell on his shoes and it hit me: checker-print slip-on tennies—with a suit, no less. I knew this man: Chef Marco Pierre White.

I lit up another smoke and waited for him to finish his phone conversation so I could say hello.

Of course, I didn't actually *know* the man; I only knew *of* him. I had read his books and I had seen the hoary BBC clips of him preparing *noisette d'agneau avec cervelle de veau en crépinette* for Albert Roux while a young Gordon Ramsay traipsed around in the background trying to make his bones. I knew that he was the kitchen's original "bad boy," the forerunner of our modern restaurant rock stars. I knew that he was the first British chef (and the youngest at the time—thirty-three) to earn three Michelin stars, and I knew that the culinary world quaked when he decided, at age thirty-eight, to give them all back and hang up his apron. And I knew that in recent years he'd made his way back to the stove, in one form or another, on television and elsewhere. So while I didn't *actually* know him, I did know that no matter how gauche it is to descend starstruck upon idols, I couldn't pass up the opportunity to make his acquaintance.

At first, I was met with the annoyance and reservation one comes to expect when approaching celebrities on the streets of Manhattan. I assume he thought I knew him from television. But once I announced that I was a fellow chef, and mentioned the inspiration I drew as a young cook from his books *White Heat* and *Devil in the Kitchen,* he let his guard down and we were able to speak casually. Over the course of five or ten minutes, we talked about the craft of cooking, its values and its drawbacks, and what pursuing it professionally does to the body and mind.

Eventually he had to get going, and I had to return to work as well. I concluded the conversation by asking him how he felt about quitting the industry. He paused dramatically and pulled on his smoke.

“No matter how much time you spend away from the kitchen,” he said, “cooking will always keep calling you back.”

We pitched our butts and parted ways.

I was sixteen years old when I started working in restaurants. I managed to land a job washing pots in an Irish pub owned by a high-school friend’s father. Half an hour into my first shift, the floor manager swept into the kitchen in search of a dishwasher.

“Hey, you,” he said. “Some kid puked in the foyer. I need you to clean it up.”

It was then that I decided I had to become a cook—if only to avoid vomit detail.

More than thirteen years have passed since I made the decision. In that time, I’ve seen all manner of operation—big and small, beautiful and ugly. I’ve climbed the ladder from dishwasher to chef and cooked all the stations in between. The experiences I’ve had along the way have been some of the best ever and some of the worst imaginable. What follows is my attempt to distill these experiences into a manageable, readable form: a day in the life, as I have seen it.

Within these pages, I've compiled material from several different restaurants and several different periods in time. I've also sometimes modified the names of people and places. In all instances, I've done so in service of authenticity and concision. I don't presume to offer some judgment of the restaurant business as a whole. I only hope to provide a genuine impression of the industry, to throw its nuances into sharper relief, so that when you, the aspiring cook or the master chef, the regular diner or the enthusiastic voyeur, wish to reflect on the craft of cooking, you can do so from a slightly more mindful perspective. I leave it to you to weigh the virtues and vices.

And now to work.

SOUS CHEF

MORNING

The kitchen is best in the morning. All the stainless glimmers. Steel pots and pans sit neatly in their places, split evenly between stations. Smallwares are filed away in bains-marie and bus tubs, stacked on Metro racks in families—pepper mills with pepper mills, ring molds with ring molds, and so forth. Columns of buffed white china run the length of the pass on shelves beneath the shiny tabletop. The floors are mopped and dry, the black carpet runners are swept and washed and realigned at right angles. Most of the equipment is turned off, most significantly the intake hoods. Without the clamor of the hoods, quietude swathes the place. The only sounds are the hum of refrigeration, the purr of proofing boxes, the occasional burble of a thermal immersion circulator. The lowboys and fridge-tops are spotless, sterile, rid of the remnants of their tenants. The garbage cans are empty. There is not a crumb anywhere. It smells of nothing.

The place might even seem abandoned if it weren't for today's prep lists dangling from the ticket racks above each station—scrawled agendas on POS strips and dupe-pad chits, which the cooks put together at the end of every dinner service. They are the relics of mayhem, wraiths of the heat. In showing us how much everyone needs to get done today, they give us a sense of what happened in here last night. The lists are long; it was busy. The handwriting is urgent, angry, exhausted.

But now everything is still.

On Fridays you get in about 0900. As you make your way through the service entrance, a cool bar of sunlight shines in from the loading dock, lighting your way down the back corridor toward the kitchen. Deliveries have begun to arrive. Basswood crates of produce lie in heaps about the entryway. A film of soil still coats the vegetables. They smell of earth. Fifty-pound bags of granulated sugar and Caputo 00 flour balance precariously on milk crates. Vacuum-packed slabs of meat bulge out of busted cardboard.

You nose around in search of a certain box. In it you find what you desire: Sicilian pistachios, argan oil, Pedro Ximenez vinegar, Brinata cheese. These are the samples you requested from the dry goods purveyor. You take hold of the box, tiptoe past the rest of the deliveries, and head to the office.

The office is a place of refuge, a nest. The lights are always dim inside. It is small, seven by ten feet maybe, but it's never stiflingly hot like the rest of the kitchen. A dusty computer, its companion printer, and a telephone occupy most of the narrow desk space, while office supplies, Post-it notes, and crusty sheaves of invoice paper take up the rest. Below the desk is a compact refrigerator designated FOR CHEF USE ONLY. It holds safe the chefs' supply of expensive perishables: rare cheese, white truffles, osetra caviar, bottarga, fine wine, sparkling water, snacks. Sometimes, there'll be beers in there; in such cases, there'll also be a cold cache of Gatorade or Pedialyte for re-upping electrolytes. Alongside the refrigerator is the all-purpose drawer, which contains pens and scratch pads, first aid kits, burn spray, ibuprofen, pink bismuth, and deodorant, as well as a generous supply of baby powder and diaper rash ointment, which help keep the chafing at bay and stave off the tinea. At the edge of the desk is the closet, overstuffed with chef whites, black slacks, aprons, clogs, and knife kits. Shelves of cookbooks adorn the walls' highest reaches, and below them hangs a mosaic of clipboards fitted with inventory sheets, order guides, BEOs, and SOPs. One of the clipboards—the one with your name on it—holds a near infinity of papers. On each sheet is a list of things to do: things to order, things to burn out, people to call, emails to send, menus to study, menus to proofread, menus to write, menus to invent. . . . You try not to look at your clipboard first thing in the morning.

As the opening sous chef, the first thing you do is check for callouts. In good restaurants, these are rare. A good cook almost never misses a shift. He takes ownership of his work; he takes pride in it. He understands how important he is to the team and he will avoid disappointing his coworkers at all costs. Regardless of runny noses or tummy trouble, regardless of stiff necks or swollen feet, regardless of headaches or toothaches or backaches, regardless of how little sleep he got the night before or what fresh hell his hangover is when he wakes up, a good cook will always show up for work in the morning. But things happen, of course, and sometimes even the most high-minded cooks must call out. And when they do, it's up to you to find someone to cover for them. Given the limited roster of cooks in most restaurants, this task is often extremely difficult—something of a Gordian knot. So, if the problem exists, it's important to diagnose it as early as possible.

If there aren't any callouts, you get a cool, peaceful moment in the shadowy office to take stock. This moment is a rare encounter with tranquillity that must be relished. You chomp on a hunk of the morning's freshly baked bread and click through your email. You fire up a few eggs over medium, trade morning text messages with your girlfriend. You duck out and smoke some cigarettes on the loading dock, step over to the corner store for a seltzer and a paper. You do as little as possible for as long as you can. For now, for just this very moment, the kitchen is yours.

Eventually your attention turns to the box of samples. It is fully within your purview—in fact it's your charge—to inspect them for quality. The executive chef has made this clear. He trusts your instincts and expects you to act on them. Nevertheless, an adolescent excitement stirs in you when you open them up.

The Sicilian pistachios, forest green, are soft in your hands, succulent in your mouth. They are rich and sweet, like no nut you've had before. You twist the cap on the argan oil and a sumptuous perfume fills the air. Drops of the golden liquid trickle down the neck of the bottle onto your knuckles. Wasting it would be a sin. You lick it off. It is robust, plump, nutty. The PX vinegar counters the sultry fat with a sharp burst of sweetness. Unlike most vinegar, this redolent nectar is thick and syrupy, with layers of flavor.

The Brinata—the queen piece, wrapped in white paper with a pink ribbon—summons you. You gently lay the cheese in the middle of the desk and begin to undress it, slowly peeling away the wrappings to reveal a semihard mound with delicate curves and moon-white skin. To use your fingers would be uncivilized. You trace the tip of a knife across the surface in search of the right place to enter. In one swift motion, you pierce the rind and thrust into its insides. You draw the blade out, plunge in again. You bring the triangle to your lips. It melts when it enters your mouth. Your palate goes prone; gooseflesh stipples your neck.

This is the life, you think.

Afterward, you smoke another cigarette out on the loading dock and ready yourself for the day.

ROUNDS

Time to get changed. You riffle through the office closet until you find a freshly pressed coat with your name on it.

Good whites are designed to be comfortable for the long haul—the hot, extended blast. Your coat, fashioned of high-thread-count cotton, buttons up around you like a bespoke suit. Unlike the standard issue line cooks' poly-blend, the material for the chef's coat is gentle on the skin, with vents in the armpits to let in air when it gets hot. Your black chef pants, in contrast to the conventional, ever-inflexible "checks," are woven of lightweight, flame-retardant fabric meant to keep your bottom safe when hot grease splashes and fires flare. They slide on like pajamas. Your shoes, handmade Båstad clogs, conform to your feet like well-worn slippers. They're ergonomically designed to reduce joint and back pressure, with wooden soles lined with a special rubber that's engineered to withstand chemical erosion and to defy slippery floors. When properly dressed, you're clad in custom-fitted, heat-resistant armor that's light as a feather and comfortable as underwear.

Also in the closet is your knife kit. This kit represents everything you are as a cook and as a chef. Not only does it contain all the tools you need to perform the job, but its contents also demonstrate your level of dedication to the career. Certain items define the most basic kit: a ten- or twelve-inch chef knife, a paring knife, a boning knife. Other additions, though, might indicate to your colleagues that you take your involvement in the industry a little more seriously: fine spoons, a Y peeler, a two-step wine key, cake testers, forceps, scissors, miniature whisks, fish tweezers, fish turners, rubber spatulas, small offset spatulas, a Microplane, a timer, a probe, a ravioli cutter, a wooden spoon. . . . While these items are typically available for general use in most kitchens, having your own set shows other cooks that you are familiar with advanced techniques and that you know what you need in order to employ them. Also, having such a kit at your disposal means that you are ready to cook properly no matter what the circumstances.

Most important, though, your knives themselves tell how much the job of cooking means to you. A dull knife damages food. We are here to enhance food. Extremely sharp knives are essential for this purpose.

No one makes knives better than the Japanese. Every Japanese knife is perfectly balanced to perform a specific function, a specific cut. Its precision in this respect is unrivaled. Its sharpness, too, is unmatched. The metallurgy is most refined, a coalition of hardness and durability. No sophisticated kit lacks Japanese blades.

You take a moment in the office to examine yours, reflecting on your level of dedication. You know these knives as you know your own body. Their warm Pakkawood handles have shrunk and swelled to fit your hands; each blade welcomes your grip the way a familiar pillow welcomes the head at day's end. You could cut blind with any of them. Their individual features, their nuances, are so entrenched in your muscle memory that even as they sit on the table, you can imagine how each one feels when you hold it.

The nine-inch Yo-Deba is bulky in the hand. She is top-heavy—a bone cutter, built to cleave heads and split joints. Beside her is the seven-inch Garasuki, a triangle of thick metal, meant to lop apart backs and shanks. She's heavy, too, but more wieldy, with a weight that's balanced at the hilt. Her shape tapers sharply from a hefty heel to a nimble nose, delivering her load downward to the tip. Honesuki, Garasuki's miniature sister, sits beside her, similar in shape but lighter and more agile, for dainty work among tendons and ligaments. Even more ladylike is the Petty. Her slim six inches slither precision slits deftly through the littlest crevices. She works tender interiors, snipping viscera from connective tissue. Next to Petty is Gyutou—"Excalibur," as you like to call her. She is the workhorse of the pack, trotting her ten inches out whenever heaps of *mise en place* need working through. And at the far end, finest of all, is the slender Sujihiki. At eleven inches she's the longest of the bunch, but despite her size, she's the most refined. She's not built for the brute work of the other blades—she's made to slice smoothly. A one-sided edge optimizes her performance. While her outward lip traces lines in flesh with surgical exactitude, the convex shape of her inward face attenuates surface tension, releasing the meat. Cuts go slack at her touch; fish bows beside her.

Here they lie before you, not reflecting light but absorbing it. They don't shine like the commercial novelties on television. No, they are professionals—hand-folded virgin carbon steel. A bloomy patina colors each of them, nearly obscuring the signature of their maker. To some people, this gives the kit the tatty look of disuse. For you, it does the opposite. You see care and commitment in their dusky finish. You see a decade of daily work: a farm's worth of produce cut, whole schools of fish filleted, entire flocks of lamb broken, thousands of hungry mouths fed. You see their maker's hand in crafting them so well that they would last you this long. And you see a lifetime more in them, so long as you remain committed to keeping them clean and rust-free and razor-sharp.

Stefan, the closing sous chef, is due in shortly, and Bryan, the executive chef, won't be too far behind him. You've been here almost an hour; the real work must begin. Espresso jolts you into action.

You start by greeting anybody who might be in the kitchen. There aren't many people in at this hour—an A.M. prep cook, a baker maybe, a dishwasher or two—but you must see them and shake their hands. It's an opportunity to confirm that anybody who is supposed to be in is in, and that everybody is working on something constructive. It's also an opportunity to let them know that you are here, in case they get the idea to mess around. Moreover, it's a signal of respect. A handshake in the morning is an important mutual acknowledgment of the fact that outside our work, we are all human beings, not just cooks or chefs or dishwashers.

"*Dimelo,* baby," you say to Kiko, the senior dishwasher.

"¿Que onda, güero?" he says, turning from the slop sink to greet you. His hands are perpetually wet; he extends one out for the shake.

"Where's Don Rojas?" you ask. "He's here?"

"Sí, papito, ahi atrás."

"Bravo," you say. *"¿Todo bien contigo?"*

"Sí, güey. Siempre."

You make your way to the back prep area—the production kitchen—to greet Rogelio, the A.M. prep cook. He's loading split veal shins into a fifty-gallon cauldron. His forearms are thick and rippled from decades on the steam kettles and tilt skillets. You shake his hand and leave him to his work.

After the greetings, it's time to do the rounds. First is a walk-through of the line.

The line is the nexus of the kitchen—the main stage, where thrills reside. It's where the cooking gets done, where mise en place is transformed into meals, moment by moment, hour by hour, day by day. The three-hundred-square-foot section of the kitchen where half a dozen cooks and chefs work long into the night, straying seldom but moving much.

Our line—generously sized and uncommonly well appointed for a downtown New York restaurant with ninety seats—is set up in the traditional fashion, with Escoffier's brigade system in mind. The hot side is T-shaped, with a made-to-measure Bonnet stove as its centerpiece. This five-by-fifteen-foot gas range of Herculean capabilities is the island suite around which the cooks run their various stations. At the far corners of the range are a grill and a *plancha,* for meat and fish roasting; in the center are a row of steel-grid burners, a pasta cooker, and a fryolator; at the near end are a pair of cast-iron flat-tops. Above the stovetop is an open-flame salamander and some pan shelving; below is a fleet of gas ovens and hot cupboards.

Perpendicular to this apparatus and forming the horizontal line of our T is the pass—*le passage.* The pass is composed very simply of a flat, sturdy stainless-steel table, above which hangs a set of telescoping heat lamps and below which rests an assortment of clean china. It's called the pass because this is where the cooks pass their food to Chef for plating, and where Chef passes the food to the back waiters for serving. Nothing comes or goes in the kitchen without a stop at le passage.

Flanking our T on either side is a row of lowboy refrigerators, one a mirror image of the other. The lowboys hold the cooks' cold mise en place throughout service. They also act as work surfaces, upon which the cooks do their cutting and seasoning and arranging of ingredients. Above the lowboys are welded shelves that hold the sections' printers and ticket racks, along with some side materials—C-folds, gloves, bar mops, etcetera. Below the lowboys lie the black carpet runners, which keep the cooks from slipping as the tile floors get slick with this or that refuse throughout the night.

Our cold side is set up to the right of the T, beyond the fish station's lowboy. The cold side is home to *garde manger* and pastry. It's composed of a roll-in freezer, two lowboys, and a connecting table that combine to form a narrow U shape inside which two people can work comfortably. Since most of the food emanating from this section is cold, the emphasis here is on refrigeration. There is not much in the way of heat, not even a gas feed. The two stations are rigged up sparingly with two induction burners, a circulator, and an electric tabletop convection oven, nothing more.

These two areas, the hot and cold sides of the line, are central to the restaurant, both spatially and ideologically. The entire operation revolves around them. Without a kitchen there is no restaurant; without a strong line there is no kitchen. Therefore, it is essential to maintain cleanliness and order in these areas.

When they arrive in the morning, Rogelio and Kiko perform an opening routine. They turn on all the equipment: ovens, fryers, flat-tops, and hoods. They deliver health code supplies to every section: sanitizer buckets, latex gloves, fancy caps, and probes. They re-up the stations with all the basics: pepper mills and saltshakers, as well as ninth pans for mise en place and squeeze bottles for fats and acids. In your walk-through, you double-check this work. You also double-check the work of the cooks from the night before, their scrupulousness with the closing procedures. You make sure that any mise en place left over in their lowboys from last night has been consolidated, properly labeled, and neatly organized. You make sure that their ovens and fridges have been thoroughly cleaned. You make sure that the prep lists they've written for themselves are clear and comprehensive. Then you check the equipment. You make sure that all the fridges are holding a temperature below 4.4°C, to prevent bacterial development. You make sure that all the pilot lights are lit and that the burners are running clear. You make sure that all the hand sinks are stocked with soap and C-folds, that they're streaming both hot and cold water, and that their drain screens are free of debris. Finally, you make sure that all the hinges, handles, knobs, gaskets, and spouts are gunk-free, that everything, every corner, every tabletop, every surface, looks shipshape, like new, next to godliness. These are the conditions we need in order to cook well.

After the line, it's time to hit the storage fridges—the walk-in boxes. The watchwords here are the same as on the line—cleanliness and order—but each walk-in also requires its own specific attention.

You start with the fish box. A briny waft of sea air strikes you as you enter. This is good. If another aroma hits you—of chemicals, say, or rot—you know something is wrong, perhaps expensively so. Fish is the most delicate of all foodstuffs in the kitchen. It has the shortest shelf life, the highest price tag, and the weakest constitution. The flesh is easily damaged, and exposure to temperature fluctuations can denature its physical properties. It easily takes on an unattractive "fishy" smell. It becomes mealy. It develops slime. Not only do these transformations happen quickly, but they can also be of great detriment to the cooking process. The minutest degradation of quality impacts the ability of a given piece of fish to undergo the administration of heat. It loses its capacity to retain moisture; it fails to take a sear; it crumples, falls limp, goes floppy. This can harm the business significantly. There is an expectation among discerning diners that fish be cooked to perfection. In their minds, it is a chance for the chef to exhibit his skill, or lack thereof. People know that cooking beautiful fish at home presents a marked degree of difficulty. It breaks apart; it dries out; it's flavorless. It sticks, even to nonstick pans. When people go to a restaurant, they expect to see a better performance. The fact is, fish is always difficult, even for professionals. To be *chef poissonnier* in a good restaurant requires extensive experience and mastery of technique. It is one of the most honorable positions on the line, and for good reason. To complicate the exercise by allowing the protein to deteriorate through negligent storage can be ruinous.

So when you enter the fish box, you're checking on several things:

First is temperature. Whereas most foodstuffs keep well below 4.4°C, the fish box must remain between 1.1°C and 3.3°C.

Next is the manner of storage. All fish must be properly covered, protected from air, and shrouded with an abundance of ice. Whole fishes must be sitting upright in the ice—dorsal fins to the sky as if they were swimming—in order to preserve their anatomical constitution. Laying a whole fish on its side predisposes it to bruising, bone breaks, bloodline punctures, uneven air circulation, and a host of other unwanted conditions that compromise the integrity of the fish. Portioned fishes, on the other hand, must be wrapped tightly with food-service film, laid out flat and even in perforated trays (which keep liquids from pooling), and overspread with ice. Any deviations from these methods of storage must be rectified at once.

Next is the quality of the product. Everything must look fresh and smell fresh, or else it goes in the garbage.

Finally comes general hygiene. All surfaces—shelves, walls, ceilings, and floors—must be spotlessly clean. The fish box, above all places, must be immaculate.

The other boxes come under a similar level of scrutiny. The produce box should smell of fruits and vegetables, the dairy box should smell of milk and cheese, the beverage box should smell of beverages—typically keg beer, which can be nauseating in the morning—and the meat box should smell of blood. Like the lowboys on the line, all these boxes should be below 4.4°C. The standard pathogens—*Clostridium botulinum, Listeria monocytogenes, Trichinella spiralis, Escherichia coli,* salmonella, etcetera—have difficulty thriving under 4.4°C.

In the case of produce, everything should be properly kitted up in plastic containers. Fresh lettuce glows green in Lexans, gold bar squash shines in Cambros. Every container should be easily visible and clearly labeled with its contents, the packing date, and the initials of the handler. If the product has not been properly organized in a "first in, first out" fashion, you should be able to identify the issue immediately and correct it without difficulty.

In the dairy box, your focus is on expiration dates. A major error to look out for when the deliveries have been unpacked is the placement of new milk in front of old milk on the shelf. It's an easy corner that's often cut. The way to solve the problem is to figure out who's responsible for the error and bring him into the box to observe the situation. You might even read him the riot act. He'll likely snicker or apologize, blame somebody else, and fix it.

In the beverage cooler, you check the inventory. While it's usually the duty of the bar manager to maintain the beverage cooler, you keep your eye on certain pars, such as bar fruit and juices. Additionally, you check the bottled beer for evidence of tampering. Most missing beers in the restaurant are blamed on the kitchen staff—your staff. A bottle here or there is usually no cause for concern, but you check to ensure nothing's gotten out of hand.

You have one main objective in the meat box: to keep the chicken below and separate from everything else. Owing chiefly to production methods in most American bulk chicken facilities, the Department of Health considers the bird a terribly dangerous creature. It marinates in its own filth from the time it dies until the time you put it in the oven. It is a haven for bacteria. And its exudate—chicken juice—travels like quicksilver. No other protein can cross-contaminate its neighbors quite like chicken. When you enter the box, you make sure the chicken is never above and nowhere near anything else.

Likewise, you ensure that the eggs are safe. An intact egg is relatively innocuous. The expected bacterial distribution in industrially produced eggs is one contaminated unit per twenty thousand. Once that egg breaks, however, the potential for contamination spikes remarkably, as does the capacity for that contamination to spread, making the egg, too, a considerably dangerous entity. And so the Department of Health levies steep fines against restaurants for broken eggs. You take care in the meat box to check all the eggs.

When you are satisfied with the state of all the boxes, you go to task on checking the deliveries held therein. Overnight stewards and A.M. prep cooks are usually responsible for unpacking the deliveries, and they've been trained on how to put things away properly. But if something is amiss, the hammer will come down on you, so it is essential, again, to double-check their work.

For this you need the invoices, which are usually in Rogelio's custody. He will have decorated each invoice with check marks next to all the items that have arrived. You confirm with him that everything *seemed* to come in. He undoubtedly says yes, but you go through the invoices with a careful eye anyway. Often something will appear in one area of the invoice as delivered, but on spare sheets in the back it will be marked "unavailable" or "out of stock." This happens most frequently in dry storage and with exotic produce items. Even though you might order and receive such items all the time, they are often secretly unavailable, which is to say: special-order. Just because violet mustard and crosnes *seem* to be readily available doesn't mean that a given purveyor keeps them stocked in the regular catalog. It's not uncommon to get shorted on things like this from time to time, especially when they require importing.

You also always have to check the invoices against the order sheets that the closing sous chef prepared the night before, to ensure that nothing extra was delivered. This is another phenomenon that the A.M. prep cooks and stewards are typically unaware of, but a technique that some purveyors enjoy utilizing. Sales reps are often held to delivery minimums, which they might not tell you about in order to keep your transactions smooth and comfortable. On some occasions, though, when your order is shy of that minimum, they'll sneak something they know you use regularly onto the truck for you in order to prevent their bosses from taking it out on them. If this error has occurred, you call that particular purveyor on the phone, communicate your feelings about the matter aggressively, and insist that they retrieve the unneeded product and strike it from your invoice. If that hasn't occurred, however—if you've received everything that's been ordered and nothing else—you complete the invoices with a signature of approval and put them in a file with the rest of the week's paperwork.

Then, when the line is set and the fridges are clear and the deliveries have been meticulously checked, you do a final pass of the kitchen, making sure that all cardboard has been broken down, all trash has been bagged and taken out, all floors have been swept and mopped and are sparkling.

And like that, you're done with rounds.

It's ten-thirty now. Probably just enough time for one more cigarette before Chef arrives.