Culture



Jeremy Allen White portrays Carmy in Season 2 of "The Bear." (Courtesy of Hulu)



by Eric Clayton

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I worked at a Baskin-Robbins ice cream shop throughout high school. As a result, I spent a not insignificant amount of time in the walk-in refrigerator and freezer. You know, getting ice cream, cherries, milk — that sort of thing.

So if there's one thing I know about walk-in refrigerators — and I say this as a guy who knows very little about appliances — it's this: You don't want to get trapped inside. It's cold, dark and cramped. It's the unlucky soul who spends an hour or more staring at cartons of unopened milk.

If you've seen the second season finale of the hit show "The Bear," you know that Carmen "Carmy" Berzatto (Jeremy Allen White) is one of the unlucky ones.

What's Carmy doing in the walk-in? Not running the opening night of the restaurant he's spent the entire season getting off the ground. Not motivating and mentoring the team of misfit chefs he's assembled to meet the biggest moment of their professional lives. Not greeting his guests or sharing a meal with his girlfriend or pulling his weight alongside his seemingly professional partner or being with his sister or looking after his mom.

No — Carmy is in the fridge, regretting the fact that he never followed through on hiring someone to fix that broken handle. And he'll remain there the whole of opening night.

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Here's the thing about the culminating moments of "The Bear's" second season: Each and every one of those misfit chefs do rise to the moment. Carmy has skillfully mentored them and has pulled unique skills and gifts out of each one. Tina (Liza Colón-Zayas) is confident at the stove. Marcus (Lionel Boyce) is whipping up desserts that are beyond imagining. Sydney (Ayo Edebiri) finds her rhythm as leader. And Richie (Ebon Moss-Bachrach) steps up in a way that seemed impossible merely two episodes earlier.

But Carmy can't see any of that — literally. He’s locked away in the fridge, lambasting himself. He's upset that he didn't follow through on the repair, that he's not there for his team. He's upset that he's wasted time with his new girlfriend, Claire (Molly Gordon), and that he even thought he could sustain such a relationship.

But for all that Carmy can't see, he is able to hear. He can hear when things take a turn for the worse in the kitchen — and he can hear when things turn around. He can hear Tina's words of encouragement to him, even if he refuses to listen.

He can hear Claire when she comes to comfort him. But unfortunately, he's already long been castigating himself, and has all but talked himself into breaking up with her. Claire hears it, and she leaves him.

Richie comes to talk to Carmy, to ask him what he's done to Claire and why. Carmy can hear that, too, and he hears a myriad of voices screaming at him in his head. He loses it with Richie, calls him a parasite, a failure, a terrible father. He projects, no doubt, his own personal sense of failure onto his "cousin." And though Richie responds with a number of choice words, his "F- yous" are interspersed with "I love yous," because Richie really has grown.

And after all, Richie isn't the one stuck in the fridge.

That fridge is essential to the spiritual life. Carmy probably doesn’t know it; maybe the writers of the show didn't intend it. But we all find ourselves trapped in those dark, cramped, dingy places time and again. Those are the pressure cookers of our own spiritual journeys. And though we feel utterly alone, voices surround us.



Ebon Moss-Bachrach portrays Richie in Season 2 of "The Bear." (Courtesy of Hulu)

There's a story of a saint I often turn to: Ignatius of Loyola. He, too, was stuck in a fridge, except fridges didn't exist in 16th century Spain and it was actually a cave and it was all, really, in his head. Because he had told himself, as he sat in that cave penning what would become his Spiritual Exercises, one of the finest collections of spiritual writing in the Catholic tradition, that he was worthless. That he couldn't possibly live up to the life God dreamed for him. That he was already washed up and a failure.

The things that had so often brought him joy — his prayer life, Mass — now brought him only dryness. Dark voices whispered in his ear: How did he expect to go on living another 30 or so years? He seriously contemplated suicide. He certainly didn't take care of himself, mentally, physically or emotionally.

And yet, even in the darkest moment, light still shone. Because Ignatius got the Exercises down on paper; he continued serving others. And one day he realized God wanted nothing of this dour man; God wanted Ignatius to live a full, flourishing life.

So, Ignatius got about that work.

That's what we saw in the season two finale of "The Bear." Carmy was caught in a deeply dark moment. He harangued himself despite the fact that the evening's successes literally taking place all around him were directly the result of his good work. Again and again he listened to those nefarious voices within his head instead of the voices of love and delight that spoke to him from just the other side of that refrigerator door.

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Saints and chefs, scripture and screenwriting — these feelings of failure, feelings that trap us in our own refrigerated caves are very real in our very own lives.

Ignatius finally listened to the God who invited him out of the shadows. Carmy's friends finally found the number for the technician; the season ends with that door being pulled from its hinges.

But just like Carmy, we need to step up and out and listen more closely, more intently to the voices that call us what we really are: beloved. Anything we hear that says something to the contrary should be left among those cartons of unopened milk.

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