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No one's story of how they met their romantic partner is better than the one of how I met my amazing wife, Chantal. We met at 4 a.m. on Bourbon Street in New Orleans, outside the Old Absinthe House, while I was conducting research at Tales of the Cocktail, and she was covering it for the *Village Voice*. A smoke-filled conversation on a humid night, while surrounded by cocktail people, turned into a few dates back in New York, which became the relationship that defines my world. Chantal, you saw almost every step of this project, the highs and lows, and always had an open ear, a piece of advice (always from the heart), and a warm embrace for me. Shortly after I finished my fieldwork our daughter, Rita, was born. Rita, I'm thrilled I've gotten to see so much of you as you have grown from a baby to a toddler to a little girl (in part because of your love of steak). I'm already so proud of you, and I can't wait to see what else you have in store. I love you both.

PREFACE | THE DAILY GRIND

Thus a man's work is one of the things by which he is judged, and certainly one of the more significant things by which he judges himself.

—*Everett Cherrington Hughes*[1]

The subway is never too crowded when Joaquin goes to and from work.[2] A bartender by trade, Joaquin, 29, works at Death & Co., one of the most popular cocktail bars in New York City. His shift runs from 6 p.m. to 2 a.m. on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays, and Sundays, but he arrives a couple of hours before the bar opens, and leaves an hour or so after last call (sometimes stopping at another cocktail bar nearby for a nightcap or two before heading home). So he commutes to work in the late afternoon and returns home around 3 a.m., waiting bleary-eyed on a near-empty platform for the F train back to Brooklyn. But the hours are worth it to make and serve cocktails for a living. "I walk into work feeling good, I walk out of work feeling way better. Tired as hell, but it's a satisfying tired. I sleep well."

Born in Ecuador, raised in Miami, and educated at Boston University, Joaquin moved to New York City in 2005, at the age of 27. Uncertain of his career path, he started bartending to pay the bills, as he did after college. After early stints at beer and shot joints, he moved on to places where the quality of the drinks only sometimes mattered, until he got his job at Death & Co. This Friday Joaquin wakes up around noon, gets out of bed, and spends a couple of hours trolling various food and drink websites and blogs to stay abreast of the latest trends. Today he is most interested in learning about new ingredients that chefs are using, for inspiration. Last month, Joaquin worked at a dinner for a supper club and paired five cocktails with five courses.

The next month's dinner sold out quickly. "So now I know the pressure's on, and I gotta do it better," he says.

Joaquin understands his role behind the bar to be like a performance on a stage. He waits to shower and shave until just before he leaves for work,

to look as fresh and awake as possible. Light-skinned with light brown hair, he maintains a fashionable amount of stubble. Wearing blue-gray pants with cuffs rolled just above the ankle, boat shoes, and a white V-neck t-shirt, Joaquin walks from the sunny downtown streets of the East Village into the windowless bar. He goes downstairs to change into his work clothes: a button-down dress shirt, tie, vest, arm garters, slacks, and dress shoes. In uniform, he checks himself in the mirror to make sure everything is on just right. He ties on an apron and starts prepping the backbar by filling bins with five different varieties of ice, juicing lemons and limes by hand, and making sure the dozen or so bitters bottles the bar uses are full. By 6, he is ready for his audience.

The tiny town of Gardiner, in Ulster County, is a two-hour drive north of New York City. Along with the natural beauty of the mid–Hudson Valley region, one of the town's attractions is Tuthilltown Spirits, on the site of a historic landmark gristmill, which turned grain into flour for over two hundred years with waterpower from the Shawangunk Kill. The distillery is down a short, dead-end dirt path off Tuthilltown Road called Grist Mill Lane. Ralph, the company's co-owner, purchased the property in 2001, and with his partner, Brian, renovated the two granaries into a craft distillery operation and a rickhouse, or a warehouse for storing whiskey barrels as their contents slowly age. In addition to the converted granaries, Ralph's house, some storage facilities, and a port-a-potty, the property consists of a large field with patches of overgrown grass. The people at Tuthilltown are considering growing crops (heirloom varieties of apple, corn, and rye) for making spirits. For now, some of its employees use the field for recreational camping over the summer. Their rent is to mow the grass.

Liam wakes up in his teepee at the break of dawn. He puts on a pair of thick khaki-colored work pants and worn brown boots. With the temperature already approaching ninety degrees, and a long day ahead of making whiskey amid the steaming hot stills, he does not bother to put on a shirt. Twenty-seven years old and over six feet tall with a thick mustache, a stubbly beard, shaggy brown hair, and an upper body chiseled by more than a year of lifting heavy barrels and equipment, Liam resembles a rugged character from American folklore. Born and raised in nearby Rhinebeck, he bartended locally for a few years after he graduated from SUNY New Paltz, a town close to Gardiner, with a degree in geology. Wanting a change, but wanting to still work with

his hands, he responded to an ad on Craigslist for a job at a small distillery that makes handcrafted spirits from local ingredients. Although he had never distilled before, the job appealed to several of his interests and sensibilities—manual labor, spirits, and sustainability—and the chief distiller, Joel, happened to be an old customer from his bartending days.

Liam and I walk behind the distillery to finish priming six-gallon barrels for today's barreling, and prepare more for tomorrow. Two sets of six sit stacked in pyramids from yesterday, each one full with water. We remove the wooden bungs from the holes with a hammer, drain the barrels into a cistern, and then place them upright on a wooden pallet to be forklifted into the distillery. We take twelve more, stack them and fill them with water from the hose, and hammer the bungs in with a rubber mallet. Letting barrels sit for a day or so with water primes them by causing the wood to expand, thereby closing any possible leaks. "You would rather lose water than whiskey," says Liam. By 10 a.m., we are ready to start barreling.

Miles usually takes a car service to his job as a barber from his apartment in Park Slope, Brooklyn. Half African American and half Puerto Rican, Miles grew up in various apartments (some in public housing projects) throughout all five boroughs, but mainly in the Bronx. As usual, Miles arrives ten minutes or so before 11 a.m., when Freemans Sporting Club opens. Seven young men waiting for haircuts stand outside the gated front door, which opens to a high-end men's clothing store. Past shelves, tables, and rails of handmade shirts, pants, suits, vests, jackets, shoes, and ties (and some samples of taxidermy) is the entrance to the barbershop. Miles, who started cutting his friends' hair at age 15, was drawn to the barbershop/clothing combo. "I was always into fashion, menswear. If anything, I'm just kind of like a creative dude. I'm into art. I just like creative things."

Barbers stand on their feet with their arms half-elevated and have to be "on" for clients and attend to their needs for nine hours a day. Some can start "banging out" haircuts immediately, but others prefer easing into the day gradually, at their own pace. After entering the shop through the building's side door in Freemans Alley, Miles takes his tools out of his locker and lays them out on a towel at his station. He checks his spray bottle's water level and chats for a few minutes with the other barbers as they also set up. More men have arrived as the shop opens. Freemans is a walk-in shop without appointments, which leads clients to come early. Clients can request a specific

barber, which may mean a longer wait, or just see the next available one. As one of the shop's more popular barbers, and someone his colleagues recognize as an expert on fades (from having worked in " 'hood" shops in black neighborhoods), Miles already has three customers who put their names in with the receptionist to have him cut their hair. He greets a regular client with a handshake into a half-hug, and tells him to sit in his chair and he will be right back. Miles then goes to the restaurant next door that operates an espresso bar during the day and orders an iced Americano. He flips through a men's fashion magazine he picked up in the window of the clothing shop, takes a few sips, and sits on the bench outside. At 11:15 he goes in and cuts his client's hair. At 12:30 he finishes a second one, and then goes back outside to check his phone and chat with Mark, another barber, who is having a cigarette, while two other clients on his list continue to wait. Meanwhile, Van, whose station is next to his, has started on his fourth haircut of the day. The clients do not complain. They simply sit quietly and take in the atmosphere. As the day goes on Miles settles into his rhythm and starts banging out cuts every half hour.

Five days a week, from Sunday through Thursday, Giancarlo leaves his Harlem apartment, which he shares with three strangers, and rides the A train down to 14th Street, to his job as a butcher at Dickson's Farmstand Meats in Chelsea Market, an indoor food center. Thirty years old, Giancarlo moved to New York from Colorado last year. "I was tired of working in a box," he says about his former post-college job as a manager of a medical center. He decided to pursue his true passion, food and meat, and after stints at a charcuterie shop, slaughterhouse, and butchery program at an upstate university, ended up in the city at Dickson's. Giancarlo goes through the back door by the loading dock on 16th Street instead of the main entrance most people use on 9th Avenue.

He greets Junior, the kitchen's sandwich maker, and goes into the bathroom to change into his uniform of black clogs, white snap-button shirt, white butcher coat, and white apron, all of which will get redder throughout the day. He keeps on the old black jeans he wore to the shop, since he does not have any special plans after work. He hangs a side towel from the shoelace tie of the apron. Like all employees in the cutting room he wears a baseball hat, but he keeps on his "Neil Young and Crazy Horse" hat instead of putting on the black and white "Dickson's" trucker hat. Finally, he puts on a pair of

white disposable powderless latex gloves, and a pair of thicker off-white cloth "cut" gloves. The sharp knives the butchers use will easily slice and pierce right through both sets. But if they are working slowly enough, the cut gloves at least provide a warning.

With no customers in sight for another two hours, Giancarlo goes over to the laptop and puts on music by the heavy metal band Pantera. Music aside, the prep period is a peaceful time in the shop. The butchers spend most of it filling the 15-foot-long, two-tiered refrigerated display case. "We do a complete overhaul," Giancarlo says as I follow him. "We go tray by tray and anything that looks old we replace with something new."

They also replace anything that got sold, or, if they are completely out of a cut, add something different. The "old"-looking cuts are still perfectly edible. The people at the shop just feel customers will not want to buy cuts of meat that look less red than others. So either the staff will take home old cuts, or the kitchen will prepare them in a lunch dish, for the "family" lunch.

Giancarlo removes the strips of butcher paper that the crew who closed the shop last night placed on top of all the meat in the display. He takes out a long metal tray with nothing left on it but a fifth of a whole cut of beef tenderloin, about three inches in length, and a rolled up skirt steak. Brian, another butcher, takes a top blade, one of many primal cuts, or subsections, on a cow, out of the walk-in and starts making flatiron steaks. Giancarlo takes out another tenderloin from the walk-in, cleans it of fat, sinew, and silvery skin until it resembles a small meat log, and ties it. He stands the older tenderloin on its end next to the skirt at the top-right corner of the tray, which will be farthest from customers, and lays the new one behind it. He then takes out the short rib section from the walk-in and begins sawing it into even pieces with the electric bandsaw. Two-by-two, standing upright like columns, he arrays them next to the tenderloin. Giancarlo then cleans another skirt he grabbed from the walk-in, rolls it up, and places it in the top-left corner, with the old one in between it and the short ribs (counter workers know to try to sell the cut closest to them first, which is often the oldest). One empty corner remains on the tray, for the flatiron steaks that Brian is preparing at the other butcher table. He brings four of them, stacked staircase-like on a white ceramic plate, over to the tray. Giancarlo squishes and scrunches the soft tenderloin a bit to fit them, then brings the tray over to the display and slides it in.

Today is also pork day. Six pigs hang in the walk-in, sawed in half down the spine. Once the beef display is complete, Giancarlo and the two other

butchers prepare the cutting area for breaking them down. By noon, with the shop now buzzing and full of customers, they are ready to start the day's main event.

Perhaps because my own job requires me to work with and within my head I have always been drawn to people who work with their hands. I have always liked the performance aspect of being a professor: using my body and facial expressions to make points while standing in front of a classroom full of students, or telling a story from my field notes at a conference. But still it is not the same feeling as harmonizing the body and brain to make something tangible, something people can instantly determine the quality of, and something you can satisfyingly hold up as your own.

My interest in these workers also stems from my own background. My parents grew up in white ethnic neighborhoods in Brooklyn in the decades after World War II: Bay Ridge (my mother) and Bensonhurst (my father). Places like bars, barbershops, and butcher shops were community institutions in these neighborhoods. They were local meeting places, part of the rhythm of daily life. Growing up, my parents and extended family regaled me with stories of their lives as kids and young adults. Residents walked to the greengrocer, the cheesemonger, the fishmonger, the baker, and the butcher shop, all on the same few blocks, sometimes daily. Men went to the local bar after work with co-workers and neighbors. And fathers and sons went to the same barber each month. People dealt with the same personnel at these shops, who watched their children grow up, saw the same neighbors, and never had to leave a few-block radius to satisfy their basic needs. In my mother's case, the shop owners, workers, and customers spoke Norwegian. In my father's, they spoke Italian and Brooklyn-accented English (although my father was Spanish). Where I grew up, the more suburban Staten Island, we went to the butcher shop and bakery only for special meals and holidays. Our regular food came from the supermarket. We always drove to buy anything. When he first moved to Staten Island, my father lamented not being able to walk for his needs, not even to a corner bar, because one didn't exist. He stocked a home bar and learned how to make his own Martinis: stirred with London dry gin and a hint of vermouth, served on the rocks with olives.

My father's father was a barber from Spain. He came to the United States in the late 1920s, and eventually owned a barbershop in Chelsea and a house in Bensonhurst. He died of cancer at 45 when my father was just 9, and my

father started working at a young age to help support his mother, aunts, and cousins. College was not an option for a family of immigrants who lost the main breadwinner. He inherited my grandfather's tools and became a hairdresser for a time. But cutting hair in his working-class family and neighborhood was a *good, honest* job for a son to have.

Never did my parents think I would enter a trade, or get a manual labor job, as their parents and so many of their peers from working-class Brooklyn did. They both worked in offices in Manhattan, and we lived a comfortable, middle-class life. College was always in my future, because they felt it was the best way to move up. Manual labor and "blue-collar" professions were honest and respectful, but not for me. The message sunk in. A few degrees later, I'm now a knowledge worker.

Despite my basic interest and personal background, I came to study these workers and their workplaces by accident. I first learned about cocktail bars like Death & Co. while I was conducting research for my previous book.[3] I was drawn to the people of what I learned was a cocktail-based "taste community" of national and even global scale: owners, serious cocktail enthusiasts, members of the liquor industry and lifestyle media, PR representatives, casual consumers, and, of course, the bartenders.[4] Of all these groups, they intrigued me the most. Most had gone to college. Some at one time worked full-time jobs in other industries. Some had bartended to earn money while in school, or while they worked toward a creative pursuit, like acting or music (their "real" passion).[5] All had a lot of cultural capital, or hip, cool tastes for food, fashion, and music found in today's city. But at some point they all decided on bartending—specifically bartending in specialized cocktail bars—as their job, career path, and professional identity. Like Joaquin, these young workers did not turn away from drink service—they ran toward it. In today's "new economy," with its slew of knowledge-, creativity-, and technology-based jobs for well-educated and culturally savvy workers, they wanted to bartend, in spite of other job options and, in some cases, the expectations their families had for them. As a sociologist with an interest in the cultural economy of cities, and as someone who came from a background similar to theirs, I was fascinated and began studying the cocktail community.

Since at first I wanted to look at the entire extended cocktail world, I chose to also study the craft distilling industry.[6] Many small companies opened in the 2000s and made new spirits, which cocktail bartenders embraced. Some bartenders even started working at these craft distilleries or for liquor companies

as "brand ambassadors," a fancy term for a PR representative. To learn about craft distilling firsthand, I worked as an intern at Tuthilltown Spirits, where I toiled alongside Liam and the crew to help make several varieties of whiskey and vodka.[7] But my fieldwork there reinforced my interest in the workers themselves.

I began to come up with several interrelated research questions. Why do people with options in the labor market pursue service, manual labor, and light manufacturing jobs like bartending and distilling, which have never required advanced degrees or hip tastes to get, as careers? Why have some traditionally low-status service, manual labor, retail, and light manufacturing jobs become "cool?" Why have they transformed in this manner today? How do these workers come to understand these typically low-status jobs as respectable rather than as yielders of downward social mobility? What meanings do they create from their work? What impacts, if any, are they having on their larger industries? What do these masculine-coded jobs reveal about the gendered nature of work?[8] And how can we understand this transformation and where do these workers fit in the larger context of today's "new economy?"

To choose more occupations to study and answer these questions, I relied on the commonalities between bartending and distilling beyond alcohol.[9] I also used my knowledge of the work and culture literature in sociology and other disciplines, and my own knowledge of the zeitgeist of cultural trends among the postindustrial city's gentrifying neighborhoods and well-educated, creative young adults. I noted how bartending and distilling shared several elements. They were old, classic, manual labor jobs. They had gone through a "deskilling" phase and are now being "reskilled."[10] Most importantly, young people took these jobs seriously as occupations (not as cool lifestyles) and even pursued them as careers. And, by doing so, these workers were injecting these jobs with a new set of meanings and values that underlie the work they do. In effect, they were forming a unique "occupational community" and making a specialized niche for themselves within their larger industries.[11] They were, to build from a concept I engaged with in my previous book, "upscaling" these common occupations, or ascribing an exclusive status on them based on a new cultural understanding of how professionals in these fields *should* work.

I sought out two more occupations that fit these criteria to study and chose upscale men's barbers and whole-animal butchers. As with the first two workplaces, I used participant observation research in the shops to get close to the

workers and the work. I sat, watched, and spoke with barbers like Miles as they worked, as I did at the cocktail bars, and worked shoulder-to-shoulder with such butchers as Giancarlo as an intern at the butcher shop, like I did at the craft distillery. By the end of my fieldwork I realized I had studied three jobs that combine service and manual labor in retail workplaces that people regard as community institutions (bartenders, barbers, and butchers) and one that focuses on light manufacturing with less of a retail, service, and neighborhood-oriented component (distillers). But I contend there are more similarities than differences between the new workers in these two types of industries. And I only exclude craft distillers in chapter 7, on service work practices, because distiller is not a service job, and distilleries are wholesale, not retail, businesses.

Perhaps the most interesting commonality among these four occupations is their status in today's cities as "cool" jobs. In-the-know, middle-class urbanites, the lifestyle media, and hip consumers all regard young people who want to make exquisite cocktails and small batches of booze, coif retro hairstyles, and break down whole animals into unusual cuts of meat as being on the cutting edge of the postindustrial city's cultural cornucopia, and at the vanguard of what makes a city worth living in as a provider of cool amenities. So much of today's postindustrial city revolves around consuming, particularly in gentrifying neighborhoods. Well-educated urbanites who move to and explore these neighborhoods for new and authentic products and experiences are exactly who city leaders aim to attract as residents and visitors.[12] They are "cultural omnivores," or people with the cultural and economic capital to consume a broad range of products and genres, from the highbrow to the low, without threatening their own status.[13] Most significantly, these consumers look to these workers in the industries of nightlife, alcohol, style, and food for guidance in their pursuits.

In this book I argue that the upscale, new elite versions of these classic, common occupations have become cultural tastemakers, specifically producers of omnivorous tastes, in the gentrifying city and legitimate employment options for young, well-educated, and/or culturally savvy workers at a time in urban history when the meanings behind "good" tastes and "good" jobs are changing.[14] This view differs tremendously from how people in mainstream society have typically viewed these jobs: honest, respectable, and necessary, but low-status, dirty, physically demanding, for people with few other work options, not jobs people would want their children to do if they want them to

move up in the world, and certainly not culturally hip.[15] These jobs have also been traditionally viewed as "man's work," requiring physical labor and done in workplaces not suitable for women. These images still exist, but not in contexts of the cool quarters and social circles of today's city.

Most importantly, people pursue these jobs as careers not because they're cool, but because they provide meaningful work with many intrinsic rewards, which is not easy to obtain in today's volatile economy of precarious work conditions.[16] In an economy in which high-status jobs revolve around knowledge and ideas, these workers seek out knowledge-based manual labor that combines thinking, serving, and making. But these new workers and their work present an intriguing paradox. While they do not pursue these jobs as careers because they are "cool," once they get them they must show they *get* them, or can put them all into practice, in part by acting cool. They must competently, confidently, and convincingly enact a set of "cultural repertoires," or use cultural "toolkits," that combine physical and technical skills based on a sense of craft and craftsmanship with an ability to understand and communicate specialized cultural knowledge.[17] Not everyone succeeds. Doing so not only defines them and their work professionally but also separates them as upscale versions of these classic jobs.

Covering the period from February 20, 2007, when I first walked into Death & Co. to see what all the fuss was about with craft cocktails, to August 28, 2013, my emotional last day as an intern at Dickson's Farmstand Meats, in this book I document what I learned from these workers and their work.[18] In part I, I introduce each job and explore a number of themes found in them: the new "elite" in service work, the logics of authenticity, the role of masculinity in the new economy, and the production of omnivorousness. In part II, I examine how people pursue these careers (paths) and how they perform in them (practices). I show how high-status work in today's knowledge- and service-based urban postindustrial economy includes a pattern of young workers who choose to enter manual labor jobs because they derive meaning from what they do. They construct this meaning through a set of performances based on these cultural repertoires: the services they provide, interactions they have, and products they make. By fusing mental and manual labor, head and hand, cultural taste and physical skill, they form a new elite tier in the retail, service, and light manufacturing industries, or a niche occupational community in the new economy.[19] While people from certain social backgrounds would have once dismissed, overlooked, or shunned the low status of these occupations,

the presence of these cultural repertoires leads these workers to pursue and take pride in them. And by plying their trade publicly, in the service of others, they transform traditional community institutions—the local bar, barbershop, and butcher shop—and manufacturing businesses—distilleries—into examples of the new elite in retail and craft production, complete with validated notions of "quality taste" and "good work" in the gentrifying city. This book tells their stories.