

Lunch Break

Korbyan Chavez

The bells tolled ominously, indicating that noon had arrived. Twelve hits of the bell, every staff member pausing to count in order to make sure they had the correct time.

When the reverberations fade into the air, a general shift occurs in the office. Every staff member stands up and walks to the cafeteria in an automated fashion. No formal lines were formed, but no friend groups were uniting to discuss the day thus far either. Every individual marched at their own pace, expressionless, heading in the same direction.

The cafeteria was large, with white being the primary and only color on the floors and walls. Those who weren't accustomed to it would have been blinded temporarily, but everyone here was settled in a routine, a strict one. They were indeed used to the brightness. They were also used to the fact that there were no tables or chairs, no counters, and no food stations. The cafeteria was simply a large, empty, white room.

Small, light gray-covered vents are what the employees stood in front of, now forming a queue. The vents were about waist-height on an average person, dozens covering one wall of the cafeteria, directly across from the entrance. The only noise heard was the pitter-patter of dress shoes on linoleum floors, which soon began to fade as the lines were formed. The staff was patiently waiting for the next step.

Silence filled the room; nothing appeared to happen at first. Then, a shuttering emanated from the vent-covered walls, sounding as though some machine was creaking behind it. It shook the wall, and seemingly, the room as well. No one reacted; they simply waited.

Suddenly, the jittering comes to a halt, and a small bell releases a quiet *ding*. The vents open silently, and a tray is extended to those first

in line. Bland, gray food is offered, and without hesitation, those first in line grab the tray and walk out of the cafeteria, heading back to their desk.

The queue moves with ease, the vents dispensing more and more trays of mush, and employees taking what was given and walking out. No one bumps into each other; a system is in place to avoid such things. No one speaks; not even the sound of breathing can be heard from the staff. Only the shifting of the line and the footsteps of those leaving.

Eventually, the rush is over, and the cafeteria is empty once more. The staff are all back in their offices, taking bites of their food and typing away on their computers. None of them seemed to be upset by this, having to eat and continue working at the same time.

There was a project to be completed, after all.

Korbyan Chavez is an accounting major working to earn their bachelor's and master's. Though accountants typically can't write, this one somehow can.