

86 DESSERT – LIBRETTO

CHARACTERS:

JOCELYN (FD), (Line Cook)
Peter (FD), (Line Cook)
Kendra (wife), (Line Cook)
Samuel (husband), (Line Cook)1
Anne, (Line Cook)
Rose, (Line Cook)
Taylor (Server)

Begins with Ensemble Piece of Server with all characters doubling as Line Cooks (wearing black apron and black chef hats)

We make this night just for you,
Prepare this night for two.
We forget our debts,
While you forgive your forgets,
From julienne
Prepare the mirepoix,
Clarify the consommé,
No matter if you're straight or gay!

We make this night just for you,
Prepare this night for two.
We forget our names and our bills,
While you forget yours too!
We send you our thrills
From the deglaze of the pan.
Leaven the dough, wrap it en croute,
Torch the pate precisely to plan,
To wrap this night around you!

We make this night just for you,
Prepare this night for two.
Heat the bain-marie,
Add the bouquet garni,
From chiffonade to crudite,
And beurre blanc to velouté.
Remove your minds from the clutter,
To our mise en place for you!

Jocelyn is sitting at her table.

[Jocelyn puts her phone face down on the table, she visibly takes a deep breath and looks around, she sips her water, fidgets, anxiously awaiting her first date with Peter]

[Server approaches table]

Server (Taylor): Welcome to Bulles Fines, are we waiting for one more?

Jocelyn: Yes, he should be here soon.

Server: Would you like anything in the meantime? A craft cocktail, or Champagne?

Jocelyn: What do you do on a first date? Is it rude to already have a drink? Would that say I'm impatient, or an alcoholic, or both? Well, maybe a little something would help...

Server: How about a small taste to cut the nerves? On the house. Shall I alert the kitchen of any food allergies?

Jocelyn: No allergies, and yes, I would not turn that down, Thank you!

[Server walks away, stopping at Kendra and Samuel's table]

[Jocelyn picks up her phone and checks it. On the screen we see her text conversation with Peter, the last messages include confirmations of place and time, confirms it is a prix-fixe menu and they both have made reservations and paid in advance. We also see that he is 5 minutes late. Jocelyn puts it down quickly when she realizes what she is doing. She takes a deep breath and exhales. While this is going on, there's another introductory conversation at a nearby table between Wife and Husband, Kendra and Samuel.]
CUT

(Samuel and Kendra are sitting at their table)

Samuel: This place is so beautiful!

Kendra: It really is. I mean, it's dark... so you can't really see the lake... at ALL...

Samuel: Details.

SERVER: Good evening. My name is Taylor, and I'll be taking great care of you. Will tonight be a moment of celebration?

Samuel: Our marriage of ten years!

Kendra: (joking) but maybe we could take back the last 3?

Samuel: Remember, our councilor Henry advised us not to joke like that? Some truths aren't funny.

SERVER: I will give you two a moment.

CUT

[Server heads to pour a small shot for Jocelyn]

Server: Here is a petite pour of our house made ambrosia, with notes of blood orange, cantaloupe, and turmeric.

Jocelyn: Cheers! ... [takes the shot, handing the glass back to the server] Mmmm, thanks, please dispose of the evidence! (awkward laugh)

Server: My pleasure. [Server walks away]

CUT

[Anne enters the restaurant and is led to her table. She thanks the server and sits at the table.]

Server: Good evening and welcome. Are we waiting on one more?

Anne: Yes.

Server: Would you like to sip on a wine while you wait?

Anne: A cup of tea, please.

Server: Cream and sugar?

Anne: A little cream, no sugar, I'm sweet enough... (she laughs)

Server: I'll take your word for it and be right back with your tea.

Anne: Thank you, dear.

[The server nods and walks away.] [Anne watches the door and perks up anytime she sees the restaurant door open]

CUT

[Peter arrives at the restaurant. The server walks him over to the table. Jocelyn stands up and the two hug awkwardly. They both settle into their seats at the table.]

Peter: Sorry I'm a little late. There was more traffic than anticipated and this idiot in a Prius couldn't find the gas pedal. I swear, it's like incompetent driving is a prerequisite for owing a Prius.

Jocelyn: Hmm... [awkward pause]

Peter: [recognizing the silence] Fuck, don't tell me.

Jocelyn: I drive a Prius... but by some miracle, I found the gas pedal and arrived on time.

Peter: Foot, meet mouth. Can we start over Jocelyn? (pronounced 'Jaw-suh-lihn)

Jocelyn: It's pronounced 'Joe-suh-lihn.'

Peter: Joe-suh-lihn. Noted. Now we definitely need to start over. Perhaps with a drink? [Peter snaps for the server's attention, the server ignores or doesn't see. Peter appears frustrated.]

Jocelyn: [trying to get things back on track] I'm sure they'll be over soon. So, how was your day?

Peter: It was fine, thanks. Friday mornings we have these inane group meetings, but today's was shorter than usual and I made good progress on that project I was telling you about. The interface for AI to detect anomalies on CT scans...

Jocelyn: Oh yeah, I remember you mentioning that. Something about the app that syncs the data from the machine with the algorithm thing, which then delivers the analysis to the doctor?

Peter: Essentially, yes. It's actually [emphasize "actually"] more complicated than that, but... [seeing the server approaching, snaps again]

Jocelyn: [drinks her water to hide her annoyance with Peter's rude behavior]

Server: Good evening! My name is Taylor, and I'll be taking care of you tonight. Have you dined with us before?

Peter and Jocelyn: (overlapping) No.

SERVER: As you know, we have a prix fixe menu this evening. We'll begin with Champignon en croute adorned with little gems of pickled persimmon and three carefully placed geometric sculptures of microscopic gelee. Followed by an amuse bouche of confickles of squawb,

consommé droplets of dried cassia bud, egg yolk cured of all its ailments, brushed with shaved salamander. The second course is tartare of pointy-nosed female sturgeon accompanied by her raw offspring in egg form and dried olive powder in a precise line. The dessert is of many fine layers, savory and sweet, of jaconde, cacao, duck liver, crème au beurre, ganache curls, tawny port, all formed into an OPERA cake.

ALL: (stand up) Opera cake?

SERVER: Oooooopera cake.

Jocelyn: Oooooooooopera cake?

ALL: Oooooopera cake. (All sit) (pause)

SERVER: Shall I alert my kitchen to any food allergies?

Peter and Jocelyn: (again overlapping) No.

Server: Wonderful! Would you like to start with an item from the bar? Perhaps a martini? Or some bubbles?

[Peter gestures for Jocelyn to go first, he looks at the menu]

Jocelyn: I'll have a Hurry Up We're Dreaming Martini.

Server: And for you, sir?

Peter: An old-fashioned, thanks.

Server: Excellent.

[Server walks away]

Peter: How was your day?

Jocelyn: It was... good. Sorry, I'm trying to remember. (she laughs) Yeah, it was good. I had the early shift today, which was uneventful. [remembering, growing excitement] Except there was a guy who came in with a nasty infection from a possum bite. Turns out, he "adopted" this wild possum and was showing us pictures of the outfits he'd dressed the thing up in. A possum in a Santa hat, in a tutu... [she laughs] I'm not kidding you. But surprise, surprise, the wild animal bit him on the ear. It was horribly infected and turned necrotic. They were talking about amputation... a modern day Van Gogh... [she noticed he was making a grossed out face] Sorry, that's not exactly dinner conversation...

[There is an awkward pause as they both search for something to say]

Server: Here you are. (places drinks on table)

Jocelyn: Thank you.

Peter: Thanks

[Server walks away]

Jocelyn: Cheers!

Peter: What are we cheers-ing?

Jocelyn: To us and... to a meal we'll never forget!

Peter: Cheers!

[They tap glasses and take a sip.]

Jocelyn: Excuse me, I'll be right back. [She walks to the restroom.]

CUT

[In the bathroom or in the hallway off to the side, we hear her on her phone.]

Jocelyn: He doesn't really look like his pictures... Well no, not another catfish exactly, but he looks about 10 years older (younger), some pounds heavier, and short a few hundred hair follicles...

[unheard] Sister: So? Isn't that what people do on dating sites?

Jocelyn: Yeah, I guess so. It's just kind of weird to see him in person different than I expected. I don't know, it feels kind of like he was lying to me...

[Meanwhile, at the table, he is texting his mom, we overhear him speaking some of the conversation out loud, potential for a duet]

Peter: Things are ok so far, but she looks different than I expected.

Mom: different as in bad different???

Peter: Looking at her profile now, I think she was using filters. She's a little larger (older) than I expected too. not ugly by any means, but in the pictures, she's a 9 and in person, she's a 7 at best.

CUT

Kendra: (trying) You look really great tonight, Samuel.

Samuel: As opposed to other nights?

Kendra: [sign] I didn't mean that. (long pause) I colored my hair...

Samuel: Yes, I noticed! It looks nice! (long pause)

Kendra: So, we've been advised to share a memory from when we were dating. Remember that first hike up the shore? We swam in that little pool of the Crystal River.

Samuel: When was that?

Kendra: Our third date? I packed sandwiches and a bottle of wine? [he stares blankly] There's that selective memory again.

Samuel: Ok, let's try another one. What has your partner brought to your life that would not be there otherwise?

Kendra: My partner has brought A selective memory that only favors my failings.

Samuel: Oh COME on! Ok, I'll go first.. you brought...

SERVER: And for the first course... (places two plates)

CUT

[She walks back to the table as the server arrives with the bread, butter, and nuts]

Server: For you - fresh baguette, the most cultured butter on earth, and our house spicy nuts

Jocelyn: Thank you!

[Server walks away]

Peter: How was the bathroom?

Jocelyn: Excuse me?

Peter: The bathroom... uhh, oh not that. They say you can tell a lot about a kitchen by the state of its bathroom.

Jocelyn: Oh, it was nice and clean.

Peter: [awkward pause] This place is really cool. I'm digging the vibe.

Jocelyn: Yeah, it's been on my list for a while, but I needed a good reason to justify the expense. Thank you for being my good reason.

Peter: [laughs] Thank you for inviting me! I'm actually a big foodie.

Jocelyn: [starting to clock the use of "actually"] Me too! I've been cooking my way through Julia Child's book.

Peter: Yeah, I saw your posts, #singleinthecity. The pictures all looked fantastic!

Jocelyn: Thanks, there have been some misses... [she laughs]

Peter: Misses? As in food or in dates?

Jocelyn: BOTH!

Peter: What's your worst dating story?

Jocelyn: Oh, jeez, it's probably one of my catfish stories.

Peter: One? (laughs)

Jocelyn: Yeah... I don't know, I must be a magnet for people who post fake or dated old photos.

Peter: Oh... [he nods his head and looks off wondering if he is being called out]

Jocelyn: I mean, what about you? Worst dating story?

Peter: Oh, probably the same. Girls using heavily filtered images and only shots from that skinny angle. [he mimes the up angle and duck face]

Jocelyn: Oh... [she feels called out] K.

[Conversation stops. The two awkwardly sit there. Both are growing more upset as they stew in their thoughts.]

Server: And... the next course.

CUT

[The server returns to Anne]

Server: Would you like some more hot water?

Anne: Yes, please, dear. They say they're leaving soon. Things are wrapping up slowly.

[Server returns with a pot of hot water]

Server: At least they let you know. Would you like anything else? [Anne nods her head no] I will check back in.

[Anne nods and the server departs]

CUT

Samuel: You made that face.

Kendra: What?

Samuel: You made that face, you don't like it.

Kendra: What face? I do like it.

Samuel: What do you like about it?

(Add more non-escalated lines here)

Kendra: The sauce, well... I guess I would have added a bit more lemon... uh...I like the texture... though it's a bit firmer than that place over on 32nd St... Buuut all the extra accoutrement! A+!!

Samuel: I know that face. It's like you and me. I try so hard to think of everything, to precipitate your needs, to plan a nice night for us to finally connect. But I can never make you [happy!]

Kendra – [cuts in] Can you please lower your voice?

Samuel - [trying to swallow his anger] Lower my voice? I've been silent for YEARS!

Kendra: Nothing tastes good when you feel insignificant. (maybe a line for the Unheard/Unseen song)

CUT

Jocelyn: (getting buzzed, takes a photo of her plate) You know, there's something about this baguette that reminds me of the baguette bread my mother used to make.

Peter: How fantastic you have a mother could bake with such skill. My mother worked multiple jobs and struggled to remember whether I was fed. My father was out of the picture.

Jocelyn: I'm sorry to hear that.

Peter: It's ok, she still loved me very much and anyway, it actually [once again, she clocks the overuse of "actually] made me teach myself to cook as a kid via youtube!

Jocelyn: Impressive! What is your favorite dish to make?

Peter: It's hard to say but I really enjoyed making a mushroom lasagna with prosciutto and sage recently. I love the way chef prepared these mushrooms. It will be great to compare it to the chef's tonight.

Jocelyn: Well now you've one-upped me! I've stuck to French cooking. I've never tried one.

Peter: Julia Child #singleinthecity

Jocelyn: [laughs] That's right! She has a charming souffle of mushrooms, shallots, and herbs.

Peter: You know, Jocelyn, there's something about your voice that sounds fantastically and mysteriously familiar. So soothing. Like it's been buried somewhere from deep within my memory.

Jocelyn: You mean like thiiiiis? [music enhances this]

Peter: Actually, [this "actually" doesn't bother Jocelyn] yes, exactly...

Jocelyn: This [dish] is amazing. It starts a bit chaotic but it's actually a symphony for the senses.

Peter: This [dish] IS actually [emphasize] amazing...

Both: Oooooooo Could this dish be a bit like you? [duet?] [They take a selfie]

CUT

[Duet – the Ooooh song between Jocelyn and Peter.]

[Server returns to Anne]

Server: Would you like some more hot water?

Anne: No, thank you. I'm sorry to be holding up your table.

Server: [More introspective] The apology is unnecessary.

Anne: It's just— oh, I'm so nervous! The friend I'm waiting for, well, they're not just a friend, well, no, they are just a friend, an old friend, but just a friend. There was a time when I wondered... but paths cross and diverge. If we had the internet back then, I wonder... but now, nearly six (four) decades later, our paths crossed again, online... and tonight, hopefully tonight, in person.

Server: How wonderful and exciting!

Anne: Yes, and nerve-wracking! I've never been known for my patience and this is surely testing its limits.

Server: I'll keep my eye on the door and check back.

CUT

[Unheard/Unseen song based on Yung Pueblo quote] – Kendra and Samuel

My words cannot reach you.
They stop in your mind
derailed by your story of me... aimless.
Your eyes cannot see me.
They filter out my words
And they turn away from mine... aimless.

Your eyes created the me of long ago
Based on who I once was
Based on who you once were
We are no longer what our words once were.
Deaf and blind, traveling in a story.

How can we have a real conversation?

In your presence I have never been more unheard,
In your presence I have never been more unseen.
Why is your presence is vacant to me?
I can't live in your empty house.

CUT

[Samuel's Aria]

Sitting in silence,
I don't know what to say.
Unhappy with, unhappy without.
What is the way forward?

Festering thoughts, ruminating.
Cannot forgive, cannot forget.
She didn't do enough.
She's too dependent on me.

Resentment bubbling,
How can silence be so loud?
Can't forgive, can't forget.
Unhappy with, unhappy without.

[tension builds, until it bubbles over]

Samuel: I can't do this anymore. We'll never be able to improve our communication. I don't see how we can make this work. I'm done, tonight and forever.

Kendra: Samuel, what? Sit down, let's talk.

Samuel: WE CAN'T TALK! That's the whole fucking problem! [Samuel storms out]

[Kendra looks around and quickly walks to the bathroom, eventually we see her leave the restaurant]

Server: [to the kitchen] 86 Dessert

[Server returns to Anne]

Server: How are we doing?

Anne: I'm a mess of nerves! A lot can change in 57 37 years.

Server: I struggle with anxiety and my grandmother used to tell me, “what’s the worst that can happen?” That question paired with my boundless imagination created some extreme scenarios, but to each she would reply, “you are adaptable, capable, and resilient and this too shall pass.” So what’s the worst that can happen tonight?

Anne: I’m alone.

Server: In that case, you had a lovely cup of tea and nobly chose to open yourself up to hope and possibilities.

Anne: Put that way, the worst sounds lovely.

Server: My meditation teacher taught us trouble vs kindness. Repeat the phrase “trouble, trouble, trouble” and watch how your body responds. Then repeat the phrase, “kindness, kindness, kindness” and watch how your body responds to that. There’s a lot in life that is unknown, but we can choose to meet each moment with “trouble” or “kindness” and in my experience, “kindness” is a more enjoyable experience.

Anne: Thank you, dear. You have brought kindness to my troubles.

Server: You are so welcome. I’ll check back with you soon.

[Server leaves]

CUT

[Anne perks up in her seat noticing Rose enter the restaurant. Rose is pointed towards Anne and the two lock eyes across the room. Anne rises to hug Rose. The two embrace. Rose immediately offers her apologies.]

Rose: I am so sorry I am horribly late! The graduation ceremony went on and on, and by the time we were out of there, we were over an hour late to the early table and our table was given away. So we had to wait for them to accommodate our large group, and I couldn’t eat a bite as I was sick with impatience to see you.

Anne: You’re here now.

Rose: I’m here now.

[The two look at one another and giggle.]

Anne: It feels like no time has passed.

Rose: I regret how much time has passed.

Anne: You're here now.

Rose: We're here now.

[Rose reaches out for Anne's hand.]

Rose: We never talked after that day. When my mother...

Anne: I rode by your house for weeks and knocked on the door when I was sure she wasn't home, but a neighbor told me you had left early for college.

Rose: Yes, my mother took me to school early and had me at daily sessions with the priest to atone and as she put it, "get my head straight." For years, that phrase ran through my head. "Get my head straight" as if my mind was crooked or bent. And shortly thereafter, I met Paul and I kept thinking, Paul will keep my head straight and his family was so kind and welcoming, I never visited my mother at home. We had the kids so quickly. I'll always be grateful for the kids and the grandkids. But it was like my life was a network of carefully ignored lies, little ways I denied myself and reasoned things away. But as I look back, I see the truth. It was like my life was a network of intricate lies, little ways I denied myself, Sneaking peeks at Paul's magazines, sneaking into the theater convincing myself my curiosity was only for comparison. But as I look back I see the truth. I've lost Paul, and my mother was lost to me that day she found us. Time is precious and fleeting.

Anne: Except for today, it dragged on interminably.

Rose: I hope time slows for us tonight.

Anne: We will have more than just tonight. I never told you...

Rose: But I knew.

Anne: You're here now,

Rose: I'm here now.

Anne: It feels like no time has passed.

Rose: Let no more time pass...

[The two lean over the table and gently kiss.]

Anne: Shall we order dessert?

Rose: Dessert? I'm here for the full meal, to experience everything with you.

Anne: How about we start with some wine? Red or white?

[The server arrives]

Server: Or bubbles?

May We All Be Better With Bubbly

May we all be better with bubbly!
It begins on the tip of your tongue.
Rolls down the sides right to your head.
Liberated dreams uncorked and sprung.
Ferments of dry will run through you wet.
Flowers your eyes, periphery lit,
Lifts up your spine, your fantasy fed.
May we all see better with bubbly!