

THE MENU

Written by

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BLACK

Foghorns. Waves lapping the shore. Seagulls.

EXT. WATERFRONT DOCK - SEATTLE - EVENING

CLOSE on MARGOT, her face red and puffy, remnants of tears. She puts drops in her eyes.

CRAIG (O.S.)
Margot, you sure you're okay?

MARGOT
Yeah, I'm fine.

CRAIG (O.S.)
I said I was sorry. And I am. I'm really sorry. Super sorry.

MARGOT
I believe you.

The couple in their 30s stand waiting on a pier, elegantly dressed in an off-the-rack sort of way, their clothing perhaps purchased at Von Maur at the mall. Craig wears a non-iron shirt beneath his suit and "nice" loafers with tassels. He's a stiff, eager type, and maybe a tad portly.

Margot has chosen a red floral print dress and flats. A navy-blue cardigan covers her shoulders. She's quicker than Craig, her bullshit detector higher.

Right now Craig is contrite -- for what, we don't know. All we can tell is that he's eager to get a special evening back on track. As he puts an arm around her, she digs a cigarette out of her purse.

CRAIG
Honey, no, don't --

MARGOT
Don't what, "kill my palate?"

CRAIG
Well, yeah. Of all nights --

MARGOT
Then my palate will die happy.
(lighting up)
I'll only smoke half.

She takes a long drag. Craig puts his hands in his pockets and looks down, sulking a little.

CRAIG

I'm only thinking of you. The flavor profiles are going to be super-subtle and delicate.

MARGOT

Yeah, well. I have like zero appetite.

CRAIG

Honey, I asked you not to eat that --

He trails off. What's the use? He glances at a beautiful BOAT docked nearby, where a uniformed CREW prepare the deck.

They are not alone on the dock. A well-dressed couple in their late 60s also stand waiting nearby.

CRAIG (CONT'D)

(affable)

Good evening.

MARGOT

Hi.

RICHARD and ANNE LIEBRANDT respond with polite, tight smiles.

CRAIG

I bet we're in for quite a night tonight, huh?

RICHARD

Oh, yes. We are indeed. First time?

CRAIG

We flew in from Indianapolis just for the occasion. It's our anniversary.

RICHARD

You don't say.

ANNE

Congratulations.

CRAIG

How about you guys?

RICHARD

Oh, we've been here quite a few times.

CRAIG

A few times? Oh, wow. Lucky you.

ANNE

Well, we live locally. You know.

Richard and Anne lose interest and turn away.

FOUR RICH TECH-NERD BROS in their 30s and 40s amble up to the dock, a little drunk, a little rowdy.

TECH BRO #1

Don't talk to me about hedging
crypto. I invented hedging crypto.

They all laugh.

CRAIG

Great. A power tasting. They'll
be wasted by the *amuse*.

Now an Uber Black pulls up and drops off an intellectual-looking twosome. First to emerge is TED BLOOM -- 50s, hip suit, bow tie, precise eyewear. With him is GRETCHEN ROSS -- also 50s, bookish, smartly-dressed, large jade jewelry.

CRAIG (CONT'D)

Shit, that's Ted Bloom.

MARGOT

Who's Ted Bloom?

CRAIG

You know who he is. Food critic at the *New York Times* for years. Now he's at *Saveur*. Restaurants rise and fall on his reviews. He must be prepping his next world top-fifty. Last time he had it number seven. But San Pelligrino already has it at number three.

MARGOT

Oh. Cool.

A BOATMAN opens a little gate on the dock.

BOATMAN

All aboard for Hawthorn!

As they file down the dock and board, the passengers hand the boatman fancy TICKETS.

INT. BOAT - EVENING

A magical interior -- dark wood, brass fixtures, candlelit tables, flowers. Ravel plays dreamily on the sound system.

A finely-dressed CAPTAIN appears, flanked by WAITERS bearing trays of champagne.

CAPTAIN

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome.
Just a brief 29-minute ride to
Hawthorn, and we endeavor to make
your journey a pleasurable one.

(pointing)

Restrooms are over here, and in the
unlikely event of an emergency,
life vests are located on either
side, beneath the benches.

Meanwhile, Chef Slowik joins me in
welcoming you aboard with a glass
of 2005 Henri Gouturbe Special Club
champagne. Crisp pear and apple
notes, maybe even a slightly
chocolatey finish.

As guests take their flutes, they hear British accents coming from the dock.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Uh...no. Uh-uh. I change my mind.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)

Please. Just get in the boat. I
promise you'll love it.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

It's my one day off of shooting,
and I wanted supper, not fucking
Pirates of the Caribbean. You know
I'm claustrophobic.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)

I told you a hundred times it's on
an island. You can't swim to it.

We hear the pair clamor aboard, and they peer inside the cabin. Why, it's none other than a famous MOVIE STAR and his assistant FELICITY.

MOVIE STAR

Excuse me. Does anyone know how
long the trip is?

CAPTAIN
Just 29 minutes.

Noting the opulence of the room and all the faces recognizing him, the movie star is "on," instantly transforming from spoiled actor to charming famous personage.

MOVIE STAR
(venturing inside)
Ahoy! Avast me hearties! Let's hope she's seaworthy, eh? Good evening, everyone.

CRAIG
(whispering to Margot)
Can you believe this night? First Ted Bloom, and now a big movie star?
(looking at her squarely)
We have no reason to be fighting, babe. It's our anniversary, and look where we are. I mean, look at where we are! We're super lucky. Plus *Hamilton* tickets tomorrow? Come on.

Margot looks at him -- he's really trying -- and concedes a smile and nod.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
This whole trip is going to be good for us. You'll see. We needed this.

MARGOT
I know. We really did.

They peck-kiss. A WAITER approaches with two large porcelain spoons on a tray.

WAITER
Just a small bite to go with the champagne.

CRAIG
And this is...?

WAITER
Silverbrite salmon caviar harvested this morning right here in the Sound. Served with a smoked Hood River oyster, oysterleaf cream, and a pale ale "air." Enjoy.

CRAIG
Gorgeous. Thank you.

The waiter walks away.

MARGOT
Pale ale air?

CRAIG
Fancy name for, you know,
stabilized beer foam.

MARGOT
So why can't they just say beer
foam?

Margot places the spoon in her mouth, but Craig takes a quick photo with his phone before slurping his.

CRAIG
Fuck. Oh, my God.

MARGOT
Really good. I'd be happy with
just the oyster, though.

Craig waits for the finish and opens his eyes.

CRAIG
You're right. Perfect oyster. But
it's the balance of the products
together. You need the richness of
the cream and the mouthfeel of the
roe.

MARGOT
What'd you just say?

CRAIG
Uh... mouthfeel.

MARGOT
Really?

The HORN BLOWS.

EXT. PUGET SOUND - EVENING

The boat makes its way across the water, the ISLAND in the distance.

INT. BOAT - EVENING

All lean in as the great Ted Bloom holds court.

TED BLOOM

... and he's always had trouble staying put. Cuts his teeth with Keller, puts in a year as a *stage* with Ferran and Albert, then suddenly pops up as head development chef at The Fat Duck. Two years later he opens his own place in New York, Tantalus. Immediately, boom -- two Michelin stars. That's when I discover him. But then three years later, at the top of his game, he closes up shop and disappears. Falls off the map. Probably lost a fortune just on the lease.

CRAIG

Do you have a theory on where he was?

TED BLOOM

Some say Lyon. Some say Hanoi, of all places. No interviews, no photos, zip. I'd just moved to *Saveur* and tried like hell to track him down for the scoop of the decade, but he's a phantom. Cut to three years after that.

GRETCHEN

Final chapter of the Slowik creation myth, folks. King Maker here is in... where were you, Ted?

TED BLOOM

Ladies and gentlemen, my West Coast editor Gretchen Ross.

GRETCHEN

Hi, everybody.

TED BLOOM

So yeah, I'm in Portland. Umbrellas, beards, heroin. Big food convention.

CRAIG

Pacific Food Expo?

TED BLOOM

Right you are. Big arena full of pop-ups. And I think, if I have to sample one more lukewarm consommé or one more precious little salmon-cream cone, I'm going to puke. So I'm walking to Powell's Bookstore and stop at a Korean taco truck. And I fucking lose my mind. It's like the Platonic ideal of a Korean taco. The Korean taco of your youth.

Margot blinks. What?

TED BLOOM (CONT'D)

I look in the truck, and guess who's manning the grill.

TECH BROS

No way. Wow!

GRETCHEN

And that's the now-famous piece Ted wrote about him. Calvin Trillin meets Gregory of Tours. Culinary hagiography.

CRAIG

I've read it many times.

TED BLOOM

The point is, after all those years, I'd found him. It was like a sign from God. Before you know it, every investor in the Northwest is hounding him, but Slowik plays it cool.

As she half-listens, Margot notices the older couple. Richard glances at his phone, while Anne just looks bored.

TED BLOOM (CONT'D)

Says he'll consider opening a restaurant again on four conditions. One, total menu autonomy. Well, duh. Two, land to forage and grow his own produce and raise and slaughter his own livestock. Three, it has to be by the water so he can fish and access kelp and seaweed. And four, complete privacy.

(MORE)

TED BLOOM (CONT'D)

That's when Doug Varrick ponies up and says, "Well, Chef Julian Slowik, I happen to own an island in the Sound, and if you want it, it's all yours." And here we are.

GRETCHEN

Thanks to your piece. This is all because of Ted.

TED BLOOM

Last two times I ate here, it was just superb. Peerless. But tonight I think we're in for something new, something special. He texted me personally last week with the invitation. I didn't even think he had a phone.

TECH BRO #1

Yeah, we actually work with Doug Varrick but were still waiting another four months for our table. Then they suddenly call last week to say they could take us tonight, so we're like, yeah, we're in.

CRAIG

Huh. We put in for the lottery again a month ago and heard back the very next day. That never happens. We'd been trying for two years.

MARGOT

He'd been trying.

CRAIG

I even wrote letters -- you know, snail mail.

(brightening)

Maybe it's because I told them it's our anniversary.

TED BLOOM

Oh, cheers, you two. But no, he wouldn't care about that.

EXT. HAWTHORN DOCK - EVENING

SERVERS and HOUSE STAFF line the spotless wooden dock of Hawthorn Island. Behind them gleams the jewel-box RESTAURANT, at once rustic and modernist.

The gangway is secured, and the guests disembark, welcomed at the end of the dock by ELSA, the polite but severe Nordic restaurant captain.

Elsa recognizes everyone while checking names against a list. Margot and Craig get their turn.

ELSA

Welcome to Hawthorn, Mr. and Mrs. Spooner. My name is Elsa, and I will be at your service this evening. Everyone at Hawthorn, especially Chef Slowik, joins me in wishing you an exceedingly happy fifth wedding anniversary.

CRAIG AND MARGOT

Thank you.

EXT. GREAT LAWN - EVENING

The guests assemble on an expanse behind the restaurant.

ELSA

Again, welcome to Hawthorn. You are all part of an enormously special evening. As those of you who've eaten with us before well know, each of our menus tells a unique story. Tonight we will tell you a story we've never told before, and will never tell again. So let me warn you --

(smiling)

-- wonderful surprises await you all.

Everyone laughs fondly. It's all so exciting.

ELSA (CONT'D)

But first let us introduce you to our home.

As Elsa begins the tour, we cut to BEAUTIFUL SHOTS OF THE ISLAND -- trees, unusual wild plants, gentle waves on rocks, dragonflies buzzing through reeds.

ELSA (V.O.)

Hawthorn Island comprises twelve acres of prodigiously fertile forest and pasture. Our principal investor purchased the island in 1989, but we prefer to think of it as ownerless.

(MORE)

ELSA (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 As wild. As a natural outgrowth of
 the sea and the air and the sky.

MARGOT whispers to Craig.

MARGOT
 Oh, boy. Here we fucking go.

Craig nudges her -- just go with it, okay?

EXT. HAWTHORN GARDEN AND GREENHOUSE - EVENING

Elsa leads the group toward the garden and greenhouse tended
 by a small but diligent STAFF.

ELSA
 Wild sea beans, salmonberries and
 sea lettuce, for example, grow
 abundantly on our shores and are
 easily foraged. And our garden here
 supplies us with no end of produce
 throughout the year.
 (pointing to the shoreline)
 And of course we have the abundance
 of the sea which surrounds us. Out
 there, right now, we are harvesting
 manila clams. You'll eat them
 tonight!

She waves broadly at a GUY IN A ROWBOAT. As if on cue, he
 waves back. The guests join in and wave as well.

MOVIE STAR
 (cupping his hands)
 Keep looking! We're starved!

Everyone laughs at what the famous guy said, everyone but --

ELSA
 Right this way, please.

GRETCHEN
 (to Ted Bloom)
 It's like a biome for creative
 energy. Just magical.

Margot overhears this and reacts.

EXT. SMOKEHOUSE - EVENING

Elsa removes a giant KEY RING and opens the door.

INT. SMOKEHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

All enter a compact room where large slabs of MEAT and FISH hang on sharp hooks.

ELSA

Our smokehouse mixes the traditions of a Nordic smokery with the demands of a modern luxury restaurant. We use dairy cow meat only, chosen from our own stock, and we age it for an astonishing 152 days, the exact point at which the protein strands in the muscle tissue relax to the point of supreme tenderness.

TECH BRO #2

What happens if you serve it on the 153rd day? All hell breaks loose?

He and his posse laugh. Elsa smiles tightly.

ELSA

Actually, at this temperature, on the 153rd day, the bacteria, having breached the interior of the flesh, would seep into the customer's bloodstream and produce a series of very unpleasant symptoms. Pathogens would spread into the customer's spinal cord membrane, at which point he or she would become incapacitated and shortly thereafter expire. So, yes. All hell breaks loose!

Elsa laughs. They all laugh.

ELSA (CONT'D)

Good thing we are professionals, yes?

EXT. ROOT CELLAR - EVENING

Elsa leads the group toward a wooden DOOR built into the side of a small hill. Again the key ring.

ELSA

And this is our root cellar.

INT. ROOT CELLAR - CONTINUOUS

A dank, wood-paneled cellar with rows and rows of carefully-labeled JARS and BASKETS.

ELSA

In all seasons, we use only what we produce here on the island. Here we store vegetables, preserves, seeds and nuts for the winter.

MOVIE STAR

Maybe this is a good time to mention I have a severe nut allergy.

ELSA

Oh, yes, we know. We've planned for that. And Mrs. Liebrandt's shellfish allergy. And Mr. Nelson's gluten sensitivity, even though technically no such condition exists.

Mr. Nelson, one of the tech bros, makes a puzzled face.

ELSA (CONT'D)

We try to know everything about our guests, and Chef Slowik plans his menu accordingly.

EXT. GREAT LAWN - EVENING

The group follows Elsa quietly across the idyllic lawn. Craig reaches over to take Margot's hand.

CRAIG

Just beautiful, right? Foodie Disneyland. I feel like I've died and gone to heaven.

At the front of the group, Elsa sees Ted Bloom taking notes.

ELSA

Writing good things, I hope, Mr. Bloom? Not like what you wrote about our friends at Mercia.

TED BLOOM

Mercia? Now, be fair. I wrote a very kind review of Mercia.

ELSA

Not completely, Mr. Bloom. Not completely.

At the end of the group, one of the tech bros turns amiably to the actor.

TECH BRO #1

Well, you guys probably had no trouble at all getting a table.

FELICITY

Actually, yes, eight months ago we got an e-mail out of the blue saying the chef was a huge fan, and if he was ever in the area, we should come dine.

TECH BRO #1

Guess he's a big fan of your films.

FELICITY

Loves them, apparently.

TECH BRO #1

Me too, by the way. Huge fan. Honor to meet you.

MOVIE STAR

Thank you.

(to Felicity)

Did the chef mention any of my theatre work? My *Equus*?

FELICITY

Not that I recall.

MOVIE STAR

(to Tech Bro #2)

I got naked in *Equus*, you know. Very risky.

TECH BRO #2

Cool.

INT. BUNKHOUSE - EVENING

The group is led inside what looks exactly like a MILITARY BARRACKS. Bunk beds line the walls. In the bathroom area, open showers and toilets without walls or doors.

ELSA

And this is where we live.

TECH BRO #2

Wait, what? You guys actually live here?

ELSA

Yes.

GRETCHEN

All of you? Men *and* women?

ELSA

Yes. All of us together. All of us except Chef.

GRETCHEN

Total commitment. Love it.

ELSA

It's not a question of love, Miss Ross. It's what we do. We are like a family. A common mission unites us, and that mission is to run the world's finest restaurant. We work eighty hours per week if we're lucky. And we're never lucky. Each day starts at six with five hours of prep work. We harvest. We gather. We ferment. We slaughter. We butcher. We chop. We marinate. We steep. We smoke. We temper. We liquify. We spherify. We gel.

MARGOT

You gel?

ELSA

We gel. After staff luncheon, we have only four short hours for pre-service prep. Supper is typically four hours and twenty-five minutes. And once our guests depart, we break down the kitchen and scrub and clean for another two hours. By then, it's well past two in the morning. Yes, it's best that we all stay here.

TECH BRO #4

Don't folks get, you know, burned out?

ELSA

Burned out?

TECH BRO #4

Like at our office, if we get tired, we have nap rooms.

ELSA

Chef holds himself to the highest possible standard in every single detail of every single task, large or small, and he demands the same of anyone who has the *honor* of working at Hawthorn. He never... naps. So we do not...nap. Now --
(big, terrifying smile)
Who's hungry?

EXT. GREAT LAWN - DUSK

As they approach the restaurant, Craig notices a charming COTTAGE perched on a hill in a copse of trees.

CRAIG

Excuse me, Elsa. Who lives there?

ELSA

Chef.

CRAIG

Are we seeing that?

ELSA

Even we are not allowed inside Chef's cottage.

EXT. HAWTHORN RESTAURANT - DUSK

Elsa shows everyone inside and quietly locks the door.

The interior is high-end and spare, formal and stiff, a touch sad even. Despite warm wood on the walls, the minimalist décor and somber lighting don't suggest a place where people necessarily "enjoy" eating.

ELSA

You will find your names at your table settings.

A sad husk of a woman around 75 -- LINDA -- sits drinking wine at a small table abutting a wall. The diners are mildly confused by her presence.

LINDA
 (quietly)
 Welcome. Welcome.

Everyone takes his/her seat almost in unison. These will be their stations for the evening.

THE KITCHEN is open, visible from the dining area. It's cool to watch the bustling staff hard at work.

ELSA
 Chef Slowik likes to dissolve the barrier between host and guest, so please feel free to observe the cooks as they create. We ask only one very small favor. Please do not photograph our dishes. Chef feels strongly that part of the beauty of his creations is precisely their ephemeral nature.

MARGOT
 (whispering to Craig)
 Boy, she is some piece of work.

Most seem wary about actually getting up and going into the kitchen -- but not Craig.

CRAIG
 Here, come with. Let's not miss this.

They rise, and, Craig leads Margot by the hand into the --

KITCHEN

-- where they watch the beautiful machine that is one of the finest kitchens in the world. COOKS OF ALL RANKS hunch over their tasks -- more cooks, in fact, than diners.

One SOUS-CHEF spoons a cold, snow-like powder into a bowl.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
 Hi. So, do you make that with a Pacojet?

SOUS-CHEF
 Exactly right, sir.

CRAIG
 (to Margot)
 A Pacojet can powderize cold ingredients without thawing them.

SOUS-CHEF

Gee, you really know your stuff,
Mr. Spooner.

CRAIG

You know my name?

SOUS-CHEF

We like to know everyone who dines
with us. We even keep records of
what you eat, so if you ever come
back you won't have the same thing.

CRAIG

Amazing.

SOUS-CHEF

Now why don't you take your seat?

Craig is unsure whether to feel offended until --

SOUS-CHEF (CONT'D)

We're about to serve.

CRAIG

Yeah, okay. Sure.

LINDA still sits alone, idly playing with her empty wine
glass. A cheery SOMMELIER approaches with a bottle.

SOMMELIER

More Lambrusco, madam?

CRAIG AND MARGOT take their seats.

CRAIG

I think this place even beats
Azurmendi in the Basque country. The
attention to detail is just -- Shit,
there he is.

Craig and Margot look toward the kitchen, where they and we
get our first glimpse of the man himself.

CHEF JULIAN SLOWIK

is 50ish, brooding, intense. Utterly focused, he glides
swiftly from station to station, tasting dish after dish.

Spoon to mouth, he glances over and scans the faces of
tonight's guests, his eyes eventually falling upon Margot, who
is staring back at him.

They lock eyes. In that moment the great chef and his guest share a type of recognition -- a sadness perhaps? A longing? Chef tersely breaks eye contact and resumes his tasks.

TITLE CARD AGAINST BLACK:

AMUSE BOUCHE

SERVERS appear at once in the dining room and fan out in perfect unison.

SERVER

This is a pine-nut tuile cone filled with a Shuksan strawberry sofrito and a goat's milk snow. Enjoy.

TED BLOOM

(to Gretchen)

See? What is this on-going obsession with cones?

GRETCHEN

It's like a pandemic. No one is immune.

Craig holds his cone just so and furtively snaps a photo. He will do this with every dish.

MARGOT

Craig, they specifically asked us not to do that.

CRAIG

Yeah, but, you know, we're paying \$725 apiece. I won't post them.
(then)
Tonight.

He pops the cone into his mouth and closes his eyes.

CRAIG (CONT'D)

Oh, my God. Jesus.

MARGOT

Yeah, it's pretty good.

CRAIG

(laughs)
"Pretty good?" You're --
(shakes head)
You're funny.

Margot's gaze falls on the WINDOW, where she sees the BOAT leaving the dock and sailing away into the twilight. She watches longingly, wishing she were on it.

TITLE CARD AGAINST BLACK:

FIRST COURSE

CLOSE on Chef as he inspects the food. He tastes something, closes his eyes and keeps them closed long after swallowing, as though in contemplation. Then he opens them.

CHEF SLOWIK

Okay.

We follow Chef into the dining room, where he takes a stance, raises his hands and CLAPS. Once, loud. All conversations stop. His staff stops. Everything stops.

Chef Slowik stares at his diners, smiling tightly. It's clear that this is his show. Everything revolves around him, the all-powerful sun in this solar system.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

Welcome to Hawthorn. I am Julian Slowik. And tonight it will be our pleasure to feed you.

The diners dutifully, nervously applaud. Ted Bloom and Gretchen exchange self-satisfied looks. Margot scrunches her face and smiles, playing begrudgingly along.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

Over the next few hours, you will ingest fat, salt, sugar, protein, bacteria, fungi, various plants and animals -- at times entire eco-systems -- at a brisk but fair pace. We hope you find it musical, actually. But I wonder if you could all do one thing for me.

(dramatic pause)

Do not eat.

The patrons look amused, if confused -- especially the movie star, who furrows his brow in mock alarm at Felicity. Ted Bloom smiles knowingly. Craig laps it all up.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

Taste. Savor. Relish. Consider every morsel you place in your mouth and stomach. Be mindful. But do not eat. Our menu tonight is far too precious.

(MORE)

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

(then)

Some of you may have noticed the presence of a camera crew.

We see a hipster-ish three-person CAMERA CREW near the kitchen, filming them all at this very moment.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

They will film us tonight for a documentary. No, nothing as pedestrian and bourgeois as "Chef's Table." They are here only to document. And a crucial document it will be.

We see Chef from the MONITOR of the handheld camera, looking directly at us.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

They have promised not to intrude upon your dining experience. I take that promise very seriously.

The crew exchange nervous looks but offer reassuring nods. Chef turns again to the diners.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

Open your eyes. Look around you. Breathe deeply. Accept. Accept all of it. Forgive. This is what the right food can help you do. And on that note...

(smiles)

Food!

Servers fan out in perfect formation carrying exquisitely manicured plates.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

Our first course is called "The Island."

One of the plates lands on a table in a gorgeous, slow-motion CU product shot. Perfectly curated bits of flora and jewels of clam meat rest artfully atop a smooth, icy rock.

A SUPERIMPOSED TITLE reads, "THE ISLAND. Foraged plants, manila clam, seawater."

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

On your plate are various plants from the island. They've been placed on rocks from the shore covered in barely-frozen seawater.

CRAIG

Are these the same clams the guy
was fishing for outside?

Rather than fielding a perfectly honest question from a
valued diner, Chef stares at Craig with a withering glare.

CRAIG (CONT'D)

Oh. Sorry if I interrupted... you.

CHEF SLOWIK

Perfectly all right. And yes, they
are those very same clams.

(back to the group)

Here is what you must remember
about this dish as you...eat. We,
the people currently on the island,
are not important. The island and
the nutrients it provides exist in
their most perfect state without
our gathering them, manipulating
them or digesting them. What
happens in this room is meaningless
compared to what occurs outside, in
the soil and the water and the air.
This dish is a testament to
nature's perfection and our own
irrelevance within it. We are but
a frightened nanosecond. Nature is
timeless, eternal.

(warm smile)

Enjoy!

He retreats into the kitchen. Margot arches an eyebrow at
the pomposity.

MARGOT

Cheery thought.

(noticing)

Hey. Are you crying?

CRAIG

Sorry. I... I just think it's all
so beautiful. To be in the presence
of... true beauty... and true
genius. I just wish I... Oh, well.

He quickly wipes his eye before sliding his phone out of his
pocket for another photo. Margot stares at him.

CRAIG (CONT'D)

It's almost too stunning to eat.

MARGOT

Oh, I agree. I would happily not eat it.

She pokes perfunctorily at the weird sea life on her plate and drops her fork.

CRAIG

Can you please just try to enjoy it?

MARGOT

I can't make a joke?

CRAIG

Of course, a joke, sure. But could you please at least just allow me to feel how I feel? And be in the moment? I mean, it's like being at the Louvre.

MARGOT

No, Craig, being at the Louvre is like being at the Louvre. This is like being in Alcatraz. For rich people.

She holds up a big forkful of wet seaweed.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

I mean, come on. What in the hell is happening with this?

Margot means it to be funny, but Craig takes her sarcasm as an attack.

CRAIG

Please, Margot. I don't want to get sucked into another fight right now.

The sommelier slides up, seemingly out of thin air.

SOMMELIER

And to pair, from our friends at *Isabelle et Denis*, a premier cru Chablis from 2011. Not just single vineyard but a single row of --

MARGOT

Sorry, not now. We're fighting.

CRAIG

No, we're not.

MARGOT

Yes, we are.

SOMMELIER

(finishing the pour)
Happy anniversary!

The MOVIE STAR and FELICITY stare at their perfect plates.
Neither lifts a fork.

MOVIE STAR

So, like, he meant literally don't eat?

FELICITY

I think he meant it figuratively.
Don't just stuff your face. Really think about it first. Or something.

MOVIE STAR

Right. So just to be clear, I am eating this now?

FELICITY

Yes.

MOVIE STAR

Lovely.

TED BLOOM AND GRETCHEN dine with pure ecstasy.

GRETCHEN

Astonishing.

TED BLOOM

He always pays homage to the sea around us, but I've never tasted anything so clean, so utterly... thalassic.

GRETCHEN

Thalassic?

TED BLOOM

Oceanic. From the Greek. Thalassa was the primeval spirit of the sea. Slowik is essentially allowing us to actually eat the ocean.

GRETCHEN

We're eating the ocean.

TED BLOOM
We're eating the ocean.

RICHARD AND ANNE sit eating silently like two live corpses. They could just as well be eating prime rib at a casino.

AND THE TECH BROS are in fact purely eating and drinking, not even looking at their plates as they talk.

TECH BRO #1
... and the cloud space is only getting crazier. Everyone scales up, and their OPEX budgets grow, and, if we're smart, that's where we've got to capitalize.

TECH BRO #4
But that's my fucking point. You're literally making my fucking point for me.

TECH BRO #2
(pointing)
You like?

TECH BRO #4
Food? Oh, yeah. Great.

TECH BRO #3
To be honest, the plating's a little frou-frou for my taste. And I've had shellfish just as good at Kashiba, or even with my chef at home. But whatever. Now we can say we've been here. As my dad used to say, "We're buying an experience."

ELSA stands against the wall near the tech bros, eying them -- all the diners, really -- with utter contempt.

CRAIG eats, still annoyed. Margot picks idly at her food.

THE KITCHEN teems as the next course is prepared. Chef steals a glance at Margot, noting with concern her tense posture and nearly-full plate. Then he sees Craig extending his fork toward hers. Chef is disgusted but shakes it off.

CHEF SLOWIK
Plating in five!

All stand suddenly upright like soldiers, turn to face him, and answer in unison.

ENTIRE KITCHEN

Yes, Chef!

Chef looks directly into CAMERA, irritated.

CHEF SLOWIK

Excuse me? Orson Fucking Welles?
 (pointing)
 On the plate.

The camera crew, who have been filming Slowik, turn the lens to a sous-chef.

CAMERAMAN

Sorry.

EXT. HAWTHORN ISLAND - TWILIGHT

Darkness descends. We see the restaurant from afar, bay windows aglow with warm light. But out here, amid the water and trees, all is quiet save for the lonesome, distant call of a loon.

AGAINST BLACK, TITLE CARD:

BREAD SERVICE

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Margot and Craig look silently at each other.

MARGOT

Say something.

CRAIG

I don't know what to say, Margot.
 Seems like anything I say is wrong.

Chef Slowik enters again and CLAPS. He waits in silence a few moments. Too many moments.

CHEF SLOWIK

Bread has existed in some form for over 12,000 years and in every culture of the world, in particular among the poor. Flour and water. What could be simpler? Even today, grain represents 65% of all agriculture. Fruits and vegetables? Only 6%.

(MORE)

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)
 Ancient Greek peasants dipped their
 stale, measly bread in wine for
 breakfast. It is, and has always
 been, the food of the common man.
 But you, my dear guests, are not the
 common man. Thus, tonight you do
 not get bread.

Margot shakes her head. You've got to be kidding.

Servers place SHALE PLATES on the tables, along with a lovely
 NOTE on parchment. Where there would normally be bread is an
 empty space surrounded by condiments -- creams, pickles,
 butters. Another gorgeous slow-motion CU.

A SUPERIMPOSED TITLE reads, "BREADLESS BREAD PLATE: no bread,
 savory accompaniments."

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)
 In this spirit, please enjoy the
 unaccompanied accompaniments.

The MOVIE STAR looks at his plate and smiles.

MOVIE STAR
 Is he fucking serious?

FELICITY
 I guess so. Kind of a cute
 gimmick, if you ask me.

MOVIE STAR
 (starts eating)
 I will say, though, the shit around
 the total absence of bread is quite
 nice.

TECH BRO #4 reads the parchment note.

TECH BRO #4
 "The bread you will not be allowed
 to consume tonight is made from a
 heritage wheat called red fife,
 crafted in collaboration with our
 partners at the Tehachapi Grain
 Project, who are devoted to
 preserving heirloom grains..."

TED BLOOM AND GRETCHEN chuckle.

TED BLOOM
 What a wickedly clever conceit.
 Slowik is famous for his bread.
 (MORE)

TED BLOOM (CONT'D)
Tartine doesn't hold a candle. And tonight no bread?

GRETCHEN
Outrageous.

TED BLOOM
Fiendish. He's always been keenly aware of food as a history of class while still preserving his sense of the delicious.
(poking at a sauce)
Although I will say the emulsion here does look slightly broken.

GRETCHEN
I was just thinking the same thing.

TED BLOOM
And you really --
(whispers)
You really shouldn't see that in a restaurant of this quality. I'm frankly surprised.
(jotting a note)
Minor quibble. But there it is.

Chef Slowik sees this and smiles.

Now CRAIG AND MARGOT.

CRAIG
See, he always weaves allegories into his food. The game is trying to get what the over-arching theme of the entire meal is going to be. I read that you can't really tell until the very last course, and then you can sort of piece it all together in hindsight.

Margot watches him snap another photo before digging in.

She wishes she could partake in Craig's fascination, his little foodie hobby, but she feels a million miles away. She smiles faintly with acceptance of that's just how things are. Her anger toward him, at least for now, dissolves into pity.

CRAIG (CONT'D)
You should try these things. One tastes better than the next.

MARGOT

I'm sorry, babe. I'm just not that hungry.

CRAIG

At least just taste everything. Put a little on your tongue.

MARGOT

I'm happy you're happy, Craig, but I just don't like this kind of food. I'm sorry, I don't get it. It's all trying way too hard, and for what?

CRAIG

Honey it's not just food -- it's art. You could say the same thing about any medium. I think part of you attacks it just because I like it appreciate it so much.

MARGOT

That's not true. I'm happy you like it. And you know I don't have an appetite when we argue. I get so fucking anxious...
(tearing up)
...and sad.

First glancing around, Craig leans over and rubs her arm.

CRAIG

Margot, Margot, sweetheart. Please don't cry. I'm sorry. I've told you a hundred times I'm sorry.

MARGOT

What are you sorry for?

CRAIG

You know... everything. Well, not *everything*. But, you know, everything we've been through and been talking about and dealing with these last couple of months. Everything we've been sharing with Dr. Gertler.

MARGOT

I don't think you really even know what you should be sorry for.

CRAIG

And you know I'm sorry about that, too. I want to be more aware. I'm really trying to listen now.

MARGOT

But, Craig, here's the thing. I don't even know any more what you should be sorry about.

CRAIG

Please. I hate seeing you cry.

MARGOT

You just don't want people to stare at us.

Indeed, Ted Bloom and Gretchen are glancing over, and Craig's mortified about it. But he hides it with a smile before turning back to Margot.

CRAIG

It's our anniversary, for Christ's sake, and this opportunity tonight is maybe once in a lifetime. Let's treat ourselves and forget everything else, you know, roll back the clock. Just tonight. Please eat. I'm serious, honey. Please just eat. This is humiliating.

Margot blows her nose into her napkin.

TED BLOOM and GRETCHEN.

TED BLOOM

Back in New York, I bake some pretty good bread of my own.

GRETCHEN

Of course.

TED BLOOM

Very rustic. Peasant style. Yeasty.

GRETCHEN

What kind of yeast do you use?

TED BLOOM

I make my own.

GRETCHEN

Of course you make your own yeast.
You're Ted Bloom.

TED BLOOM

I harvest it from an apple orchard
two properties over from my place
upstate.

GRETCHEN

I love things like orchards and
properties.

Elsa approaches with another, LARGER CONTAINER of the broken
emulsion Bloom complained about.

ELSA

Mr. Bloom, here is another broken
emulsion. Courtesy of Chef Slowik.

She points toward the kitchen, where Chef Slowik offers a wave
and warm smile. Ted Bloom laughs nervously and waves back.

TED BLOOM

Oh, I -- thank you!

TECH BRO #1

(calling to Elsa)

Excuse me. Excuse me.

Elsa heads to THE TECH-BRO TABLE.

ELSA

Is everything to your liking, sir?

TECH BRO #1

Well, actually, no. Thanks for
asking. I mean, look, we love the
food so far, and we totally get all
the conceptual stuff, but could we
please get some bread? You guys
are super-famous for your bread,
and we don't know when we'll ever
get a chance to eat here again.

TECH BRO #2

Everybody always talks about your
amazing bread.

ELSA

Yes. And?

TECH BRO #1
Can we just get some bread? You
know, just *sample* your bread?

ELSA
No.

TECH BRO #1
No?

The tech bros an incredulous look. Elsa continues to stare coldly.

TECH BRO #1 (CONT'D)
This is all clever and funny and
whatever, but -- Okay, I really
don't want to play this card, but
you know who we are, right?

ELSA
Yes.

TECH BRO #1
You do? You know who we are?

ELSA
Yes, I know who you are.

TECH BRO #1
You know we work with Doug Verrick.

ELSA
No, you work for Mr. Varrick.

TECH BRO #3
(trying to be jocular)
Exactly. So you know we all play
on the same team. Just bring us a
little bread. Please.

TECH BRO #1
We won't tell a soul.

ELSA
No.

TECH BRO #1
Did you say no?

ELSA
I said no. Yes.

TECH BRO #1
Okay. Wow.

Elsa leans in to speak in a menacing whisper.

ELSA

You will eat less than you desire
and more than you deserve.

She spins and walks away, passing --

MARGOT AND CRAIG'S TABLE.

CRAIG

So if you really don't want to eat
it, fine. I'll have it.

Rather than extending his fork, Craig reaches over and picks up her entire plate to exchange it with his own. He tries to do it carefully but can't help bumping a wine glass with his elbow. It SHATTERS on the ground.

Two servers materialize to clean up the shards. Craig apologizes profusely, and they reassure him it's all right.

Margot watches her husband as he fumbles. We see she still has sympathy for this man. But respect? Attraction?

Now Craig spots Chef Slowik marching over and soon towering above their table.

CRAIG (CONT'D)

(tail between legs)

Sorry for the disturbance. Total
accident.

Chef ignores him, focuses solely on Margot.

CHEF SLOWIK

You haven't touched your food.

MARGOT

Yeah, sorry. Guess I don't want to
fill up early.

CHEF SLOWIK

That would not be possible. I've
precisely designed the portions to
account for that. Please eat. The
menu makes sense only if you eat.

MARGOT

But you told us *not* to eat.

CHEF SLOWIK

This is not what I meant, and you
know it.

MARGOT

Thank you, but I'll eat what I want to eat. And when I want to eat.

Chef half-smiles and half-grimaces. No one talks to him like this. He walks away. Craig is even more mortified.

CRAIG

Well, that was humiliating.

MARGOT

I'm not humiliated. That guy's a prick.

AT LINDA'S TABLE. There is no food on her table, only wine. Chef kneels at her side and gently takes her hand in his. She looks at him with glazed, wounded eyes. He smiles at her with deep understanding. She weakly smiles back. Chef kisses her forehead, rises and heads back into --

THE KITCHEN

-- where he looks at his watch.

CHEF SLOWIK

Plating in three, my friends.

ENTIRE KITCHEN

Yes, Chef!

EXT. HAWTHORN ISLAND - NIGHT

Tall, spindly evergreens shiver in the cold darkness.

VERY CLOSE on an OWL on a limb. Its glassy eyes scan the island floor until, spotting something, it takes flight.

AGAINST BLACK, TITLE CARD:

FIRST COURSE

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Richard and Anne sit across from each other. No eye contact, silent, a still life. PAN to Craig and Margot, also silent, no eye contact.

SOMMELIER

(arriving)

This is a 2009 *Valpolicella Classico Superiore* from Tommaso Bussola, which we've hyper-decanted with an immersion blender. Slavonian oak. Rich cherry and tobacco. Faint notes of longing and regret.

Chef Slowik's CLAP. All heads swivel toward him.

CHEF SLOWIK

The next course is called "Memory." That's what it's meant to evoke -- a memory. Let me tell you one of mine. When I was a child growing up in Waterloo, Iowa, Tuesday was taco night. Taco Tuesday!

(a hand on Linda's shoulder)

This is my mother. As you can see, she is quite drunk. When I was seven years old, one Tuesday my father came home, also quite drunk. Not unusual. Mother grew angry and screamed at him. At which point he proceeded to wrap a telephone cord around her neck and pull it tight. I wept. I wept very hard and begged him to stop. He ignored me. To make him stop, I finally had to stab him in the thigh with kitchen scissors. You remember that, mother, don't you?

Linda reacts vaguely, continues drinking.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

We thought he might leave us for good. But he stayed in our home. And from that point forward, and until his death, we never exchanged a single word to each other. His mere presence brought unspeakable agony. I should have stabbed him in his fucking throat that evening!

The diners exchange uneasy glances. This is getting weird. Margot, however, watches Chef intently and with empathy, somehow understanding his pain. Noticing, Chef says the next line directly to her.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

It was, as you can imagine, a very memorable taco night.

Servers appear and somberly distribute plates fashioned of tightly coiled telephone cords, as well as bowls of tortillas. Atop the plates are chicken thighs with tiny scissors sticking out of them.

A SUPERIMPOSED TITLE reads: "MEMORY. Chicken thighs al pastor, smoked pineapple salsa, tortillas."

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

You have house-smoked Bresse chicken thighs *al pastor* and our own tortillas made with heirloom corn masa from Masoned. Images on the tortillas have been made using a computer-controlled laser cutting and engraving machine. We hope this taco night evokes pungent memories for us all.

(warm smile)

Enjoy.

TED BLOOM examines his tortillas -- various buildings.

GRETCHEN

What are they, Ted?

TED BLOOM

Restaurants.

GRETCHEN

Restaurants?

TED BLOOM

That I reviewed That -- that closed.

He holds one with a sign reading "MERCIA."

THE TECH BROS discover, to their horror, tortillas printed with dense blocks of formatted text, like business records.

TECH BRO #2

What the fuck?

TECH BRO #3

Are these --? How did they --?

TECH BRO #1

That's it. Fuck this.

He slams a tortilla on the table and waves Elsa over.

ELSA
Can I help you, sir?

TECH BRO #1
What the hell are these?

ELSA
These are --
(perfect accent)
-- *tortillas*. *Tortillas deliciosas!*

TECH BRO #1
Fuck you. What are these?

ELSA
These are *tortillas* which contain Echobright's tax records and other documents showing how the company has hidden transactions with shell companies, performed various acts of intellectual theft, and created seemingly countless invoices with fake charges.

TECH BRO #1
How did you get these?

ELSA
I'm sorry, but Chef never reveals his recipes.

TECH BRO #4
This isn't a fucking recipe. This is theft.

ELSA
No, this is fraud.

TECH BRO #1
Do you know how fucked you are?
We'll have you shut down by morning.

ELSA
(walking away)
That won't be necessary.

The MOVIE STAR AND FELICITY examine their tortillas.

FELICITY
Looks like they're all the same.

MOVIE STAR

They are.

Each depicts a MOVIE POSTER.

MOVIE STAR (CONT'D)

Victor Frankenstein.

FELICITY

Guess he's a fan.

MOVIE STAR

I don't think so.

At Richard and Anne's table, they have way more tortillas than anyone else. Anne peeks at the tortilla on top. It reads, "Welcome back, Mr. and Mrs. Liebrandt."

All the subsequent tortillas show Richard and Anne sitting across from one another like corpses. The only thing different is their attire.

ANNE

Richard, what are these?

RICHARD

Taco shells. For the tacos.

ANNE

The pictures. Are these us?

Richard dons his glasses and looks closer.

ANNE (CONT'D)

Look at this one, Dick. This one was taken after you had that melanoma removed from your forehead. There's the bandage.

CRAIG examines their tortillas, crestfallen.

MARGOT

What's on them?

CRAIG

They're all... from tonight.
Shit.

Margot looks. Each shows Craig sneaking photos of the food.

MARGOT

Jesus. What's *with* this guy? This means they've been photographing us the whole night.

They look around to see where the cameras might be. Feeling busted, Craig starts to panic.

CRAIG

Goddammit. First the wine glass. Now this. He must hate me. Do you think I should apologize? I think I should go apologize.

MARGOT

They're the ones who should apologize. We're sending it back.

Margot turns to wave a server over. Craig snaps his fingers.

CRAIG

Hey. Hey! Margot!

MARGOT

Did you just snap your fingers at me?

CRAIG

Are you out of your mind? You don't send shit back here. You thank them for even letting us in the door.

Craig folds a tortilla, constructs a taco and takes a bite. His rage and humiliation begin to dissipate.

CRAIG (CONT'D)

Fuck.

(chewing)

This is incredible. Oh, my God. You have to try this.

Incredulous, Margot throws down her napkin down and gets up.

INT. SIDE HALLWAY

En route to the ladies' room, Margot stops at a stunning SILVER DOOR molded in an ornate floral pattern, like a museum piece. She reaches for the handle.

ELSA

Can I help you, madam?

Margot turns to see a disapproving Elsa.

MARGOT

I'm looking for the little girls' room.

ELSA
(nostrils flaring)
Down the hall, to your right.

MARGOT
What's behind this door?

ELSA
Dessert.

INT. LADIES' ROOM - NIGHT

Margot enters the dim, minimally-decorated room and locks the door. She pauses, breathing a little heavily with exasperation over the entire night. It's nice to be alone.

She gets a cigarette from her purse, cracks a tiny window and lights up. She gazes at an artsy framed photo on the wall of a marshmallow roasting on a campfire.

Suddenly the lock turns on the door. Margot flicks the cigarette out the window. CHEF SLOWIK ENTERS.

CHEF SLOWIK
What are you doing here?

MARGOT
It's... the ladies' room.

CHEF SLOWIK
I mean here on this island, you little fool. You're not supposed to be here.

MARGOT
What do you mean "not supposed to be here?" We have reservations.

He takes slow, deliberate steps toward her.

CHEF SLOWIK
We did not prepare for you.

MARGOT
What does that mean?

CHEF SLOWIK
My guests are eaters. They eat and eat and eat and eat until they convince themselves that they are no longer hungry, that they are full. But not you. You're ruining everything.

MARGOT

Um... I'm sorry. I just don't have much of an appetite tonight. What do you want me to -- ?

CHEF SLOWIK

I can see you. You're starved. I know you are. *Starved*. Because so am I. But tonight I will be sated. And you will not stand in the way. And if you wish, you may be sated, too.

They exchange a long, weirdly intimate look.

He exits. ON MARGOT -- what the fuck was that?

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

She returns to the table.

MARGOT

That's it. We're fucking out of here.

CRAIG

What?

MARGOT

We need to go. We're leaving.

CRAIG

Leave? We can't.

MARGOT

You do what you want. I'm gone.

CRAIG

We're on an island.

She stares at him. He's right.

MARGOT

He walked in on me in the bathroom, Craig. Confronted me.

CRAIG

Who did?

MARGOT

The fucking chef.

CRAIG

(blinks)

Why would he do that?

(pointing)

Look, what are you talking about, he's right there. What kind of scene are you trying to cause now?

(smelling)

Were you smoking again?

THE TECH BROS

TECH BRO #1

I don't like the feel of this. At all. I want out of here.

TECH BRO #2

Dude, chill. It's a fucking taco.

TECH BRO #1

A fucking taco that would hold up in court.

TECH BRO #3

All four of us have plausible deniability. It's not like we're that high up the food chain anyway. If they turn us in, then we --

TECH BRO #2

Right. If they turn us in, then they're turning Verrick in. And then they're just as fucked as we are. We're fine. Hey. We're fine.

(unsure)

Right?

Uncertain, they sit silently with this thought. Then, shrugging their shoulders, they make tacos.

AGAINST BLACK, TITLE CARD:

Fourth Course

The patrons watch two servers methodically unrolling a TARP across the middle of the floor and smoothing out all the wrinkles. Other servers arrive with decorative baskets and cover the tarp with sea fennel and edible flowers.

TED BLOOM

Never seen anything like it, not even when I ate here before. It's like theater.

GRETCHEN

I was going to say. Very theatrical. And minimalist, like in the Japanese *minimirasuto* style.

Chef enters. CLAP!

CHEF SLOWIK

We are ready for our next course, which I think you'll find --

TECH BRO #2

(rising to his feet)

Excuse me. But just what the fuck is going on here?

CHEF SLOWIK

Glad you asked. Elsa?

Elsa walks over, rears back and PUNCHES HIM. Hard. She then calmly re-folds his napkin and places it back on the table.

Shock. The first hint of real violence. No one dares speak as Tech Bro #2 writhes in pain, bleeding at the mouth. Elsa flashes a small sadistic smile. She's been wanting to do that.

MARGOT

(You see?)

Craig!

But Craig has no answers.

The shocked guests now officially know they're into something bad. Only Linda remains impervious.

CHEF SLOWIK

Thank you, Elsa. Ladies and gentlemen, meet sous-chef Jeremy Loucks.

A chef around thirty strides out of the kitchen and stands in the middle of the tarp. He stares straight ahead, stoic.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

Jeremy created the next dish. It's called "The Mess." Jeremy, may I explain "The Mess?"

JEREMY

Yes, Chef.

CHEF SLOWIK

Originally from Sparks, Nevada, Jeremy graduated from the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park. Jeremy's goal, as he wrote in a heartfelt letter, was to work for me here at Hawthorn. Isn't that right, Jeremy?

JEREMY

Yes, Chef.

CHEF SLOWIK

Jeremy is talented. He's good. He's very good. But he's not great. He will never be great. He desperately wants my job, my position, my prestige, my status. My talent. Isn't that right, Jeremy?

JEREMY

Yes, Chef.

CHEF SLOWIK

Jeremy has forsaken everything to try to achieve that. He works so hard, so very hard. He works twenty hours a day. He has no time for friends. No time for family. He can't even go to the park or see a movie or stop at the bank. Jeremy, when's the last time you talked to your mother?

JEREMY

I don't remember, Chef.

CHEF SLOWIK

His entire life is service and pressure. Pressure to put out the best food in the world. Pressure to please his Chef. Pressure to please the customers. Pressure to please the critics. And even when all goes right, and the food is perfect, and the customers are happy, and the critics are too, there is no way to avoid The Mess.

(MORE)

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

The mess you make of your life, of your body, of your health, of your sanity, by giving everything you have to pleasing people you will never know, people whom you increasingly care nothing about. Jeremy, do you like your life, this life you dreamed about?

JEREMY

No, Chef.

CHEF SLOWIK

Do you like my life, the life you envy?

His forehead beaded with sweat, Jeremy looks at Chef Slowik. He wasn't expecting this question.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

It's okay. You can answer. Do you like my life? Not my position. Not my prestige or my talent. My life.

JEREMY

(tears in his eyes)
No, Chef.

CHEF SLOWIK

Ladies and gentlemen, your fourth course. Sous-chef Jeremy's Mess.

Chef takes a step back. Jeremy removes a pistol from the back waistband of his apron and blows his brains out.

Everyone shrieks as blood splatters on the walls and the floor and on their faces -- including on Linda, who continues to drink, unfazed. Jeremy falls backwards.

Servers rush over and, with practiced efficiency, roll up the tarp with Jeremy's body inside.

Other servers approach tables with perfectly-folded moist washcloths so diners can wipe their faces.

Still other servers fan out with plates for the tables. A SUPERIMPOSED TITLE reads, "THE MESS. Pressure-cooked beef, bone broth, heirloom carrots and potatoes. R.I.P. Jeremy Loucks, 1988-2020."

Panicked and screaming, many diners rise from their seats and run toward the door. Servers and cooks rush out from the kitchen to block their way.

The horrified documentary crew have stopped filming.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)
 Film. Film! What will you ever
 shoot in your lives better than
 this?

TECH BRO #3
 (to no one in particular)
 Is this real? Is this real?

CHEF SLOWIK
 Please. Please. Sit. Make
 yourselves at home. Everything's
 fine. All part of the menu. All
 part of the show.

He casually strides back into the kitchen. Scared diners
 hesitantly return to their seats.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)
 Fifth course, on order!

ENTIRE KITCHEN
 Yes, Chef!

CRAIG AND MARGOT, faces still splattered, haven't moved.

MARGOT
 Craig, what's -- what's happening?
 What's happening?

CRAIG
 I don't know.

The sommelier sashays up, cheery and helpful as ever.

SOMMELIER
 This is a biodynamic Cabernet
 Franc/Gamay blend from our friends
 at *Clos de l'Elu* in the Loire
 Valley. No added sulfites. A bit
 of barnyard funk, but a wonderful
 match with braised proteins.

RICHARD AND ANNE

RICHARD
 We're leaving. Now.

ANNE
 My -- my coat.

RICHARD
Forget your coat. Get up!

They rush to the front door, but Elsa stands in their way. Everyone else watches to see how this goes.

ELSA
Is something wrong?

RICHARD
Get out of our way. We're leaving.

ELSA
There is no boat to leave on.

RICHARD
Then I'll call a helicopter.

ELSA
That will be difficult without phone service.

RICHARD
Get the fuck out of our way!

Richard tries to push past her when two cooks appear wielding meat cleavers.

ANNE
Oh, Jesus. Richard, just do what they say, for God's sake.

RICHARD
Let me handle this. I'll handle this.

ELSA
With which hand?

RICHARD
What?

ELSA
With which hand will you "handle" this, Mr. Liebrandt? Your left or your right?

RICHARD
What are you saying, you bitch?

ELSA
Shall we choose?

RICHARD
Choose what?

ELSA
Very well. Left hand. Ring
finger.

A cook grabs Richard and forces his left hand onto a table.
The other one tries to aim, but Richard squirms.

ELSA (CONT'D)
Mr. Liebrandt, please hold still.

He looks at her for split second and freezes, giving the cook
the opening to chop his finger off. Everyone screams.

ELSA (CONT'D)
(to the room)
You try to leave, you lose an
appendage. Questions?

A petrified MOVIE STAR AND FELICITY watch the chaos.

MOVIE STAR
This is happening, then?

FELICITY
I think so.

MOVIE STAR
Right. Brilliant. Thanks for
bringing me. You're such a good
assistant. I'm giving you a raise.

RICHARD writhes in pain on the floor. Two servers gently
wrap a linen napkin around his bleeding stump and tie it with
decorative ribbon. Elsa picks up his finger from the table,
slides the wedding ring off and offers it to Anne.

ELSA
Your husband's ring, madam.

ANNE
(in a daze)
Thank you.

TED BLOOM watches incredulously. This can't be real, right?

TED BLOOM
Yes... yes... it might all be a
show just for our benefit. Just
for us. He's never been above
stunts. That's why he texted me.
This is incredible.

GRETCHEN

It's excellent. Performance art.
Like one of those mystery dinner-
theater things --

TED BLOOM

-- but at an exceedingly high
level. Amazing.

GRETCHEN

Very Antonin Artaud. The actors
are so convincing.

MARGOT AND CRAIG are shaking, confused. Still, Craig lifts a
trembling fork to his mouth. He's almost enjoying it.

MARGOT

Jesus Christ.

ELSA

(approaching)

Mrs. Spooner, please join Chef
Slowik in the kitchen.

MARGOT

What?

ELSA

Chef would like you to join him in
the kitchen. Right now. Please.

CRAIG

Can I come, too?

ELSA

No.

Craig watches helplessly as Margot follows Elsa toward the
kitchen. COOKS WITH KNIVES guard the kitchen entrance, but
Elsa waves them aside.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

A scared but brave Margot stands face to face with Chef.

CHEF SLOWIK

I won't have it. You are ruining
my menu. So I ask you again: Why
are you here?

MARGOT

Why are you doing this?

CHEF SLOWIK

Do not answer my question with a quest-- Look, you do not meet my requirements. You are supposed to be one half of a middle class foodie couple -- the doting wife who encourages her husband's hobby, pathetically embracing it herself to bolster his happiness at the expense of her own. That, and to eat some very good food. Mrs. Spooner, where do you and... *Bonzo* come from?

MARGOT

His name is Craig.

CHEF SLOWIK

Craig.

MARGOT

Indianapolis.

CHEF SLOWIK

And what do you do in *Indianapolis*?

Pretty weird line of questioning, but she goes with it.

MARGOT

Craig's at Deloitte. He's a lawyer and CPA who specializes in tax and estate planning.

CHEF SLOWIK

Not him. You.

MARGOT

Me? I work in the office of Indianapolis Tourism and Economic Development.

CHEF SLOWIK

Oh, dear. Do you have children?

MARGOT

No.

CHEF SLOWIK

Did you want to be here tonight?

MARGOT

My husband's been into food for years.

(MORE)

MARGOT (CONT'D)

Pretty much all he talks about.
And the bassoon. He plays bassoon.

CHEF SLOWIK

Jesus. Look, it's you I care about.
Answer for you. Did you want to be
here tonight?

MARGOT

Why does it matter?

Chef looks into her eyes, almost pitying her.

CHEF SLOWIK

This menu, this guest list, this
entire evening has been
painstakingly planned by myself and
every member of the staff. And we
all have made a very large
commitment. It wasn't easy to
achieve. And you, who have barely
touched your food -- you are
throwing everything off. You don't
know how hard I've worked, how
assiduously I've prepared. It will
be my single greatest achievement.
All I asked was that you fit a
certain archetype I have seen over
and over in my restaurant. But you
do not, for you clearly do not wish
to be here at all, or to be married
to that *thing*. That *Craig*, if
that's his name. *Craig*.

He's right, but she's not about to give him a victory.

MARGOT

That's not true. And he's not a
thing. That man is my husband.
And what did you say? Archetype?
We're people, not fucking
archetypes?

CHEF SLOWIK

They are. Not you. You are a
smudge of grease on the rim of the
plate, spoiling both the flavor
balance and visual appeal of the
dish. But it's all right. The
first lesson every good chef learns
is what to do when the recipe
fails. You set out to make a
perfect omelette, but something
happens. The stars do not align.

(MORE)

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)
 So you try to make perfect
 scrambled eggs. Please help me.
 In order to proceed, I just need to
 know where to seat you, with us or
 with them?

MARGOT
 What do you mean, "with us or with
 them?"

CHEF SLOWIK
 Answer the question.

MARGOT
 And then what, you'll let us eat
 and leave?

CHEF SLOWIK
 Oh, no. We're all going to die
 tonight.
 (to the kitchen)
 Isn't that right?

ENTIRE KITCHEN
 Yes, Chef!

We see Margot realize more and more the horror of the whole
 scene.

CHEF SLOWIK
 So the question is, Margot Spooner,
 do you want to die with those who
 give? Or with those who take?

MARGOT
 You're fucking crazy.

CHEF SLOWIK
 No, I am feeling quite well. I've
 never felt calmer or clearer.

This is chilling. He believes it. And the more Margot
 starts to panic, the calmer and more comforting Chef grows.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)
 I understand a new and unsettling
 question like this takes time.

He sets a KITCHEN TIMER.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)
 Fifteen minutes. That is how long
 you have to decide. Our side or
 theirs.

(MORE)

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)
 In the meantime, please return to
 your seat. The next dish is --
 (mocking, American accent)
 -- *super awesome*.
 (turning away, clapping)
 Plating in five!

ENTIRE KITCHEN
 Yes, Chef!

CHEF SLOWIK
 I love you all.

ENTIRE KITCHEN
 We love you, Chef!

Put yourself in her shoes. Margot is thoroughly creeped out.
 Mass psychosis.

She turns to walk through the kitchen toward the dining room
 and sees Elsa emerge from the SILVER DOOR with Linda, now so
 drunk she must hang on Elsa's arm.

LINDA
 Thank you, Elsa. For showing me.

ELSA
 My pleasure.

LINDA
 A beautiful room to die.

ELSA
 Yes.

Elsa and Linda take a few steps.

LINDA
 I couldn't be a good mother. I
 wanted to, but I couldn't.

ELSA
 I understand.

LINDA
 He was a monster.

THE DINING ROOM

Margot returns to a wide-eyed Craig.

CRAIG
 What happened? Did you get a
 kitchen course?

MARGOT
A kitchen course?

What person in his right mind would react like that? Maybe something is really wrong.

MARGOT (CONT'D)
Are you all right? What's the matter with you? Don't you see what's going on?

Chef Slowik enters the dining room and surveys the guests.

CHEF SLOWIK
Thank you again for dining with us at Hawthorn and for taking a chance on our constantly changing menu. Nothing is as constant as change. The wisest among us know that, we who pay close attention to nature. Before we continue, are there any questions about me, or Hawthorn, or why none of us are getting out of here alive tonight?

It's the first time anyone but Margot has heard this news.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)
Really? No questions?

All are hesitant to venture a question, all except --

CRAIG
Was that star anise I detected in the stew?

TECH BRO #2
That's your question?

CRAIG
I'm curious.

CHEF SLOWIK
And saffron, yes. Exactly right.

Margot looks at her husband as though he's a victim in "Invasion of the Body Snatchers." The terrified movie star raises his hand.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)
Actor man. Yes?

MOVIE STAR

I suppose I -- yes, I would like to know why this is happening.

CHEF SLOWIK

Frankly it depends. Some of you were chosen because of what you've done.

We cut to Richard and Anne, to the techies, to Ted Bloom.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

Others because you've lived as complacent bystanders.

We cut to Gretchen and Felicity. To Margot, too, to see how she's taking all this in.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

As Dr. King said, "In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends."

Did he really just quote Martin Luther King?

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

But this shouldn't be a surprise to any of you. Mr. Bloom -- Ted, if I may -- my cherished early advocate, knows the damage he has done to so many livelihoods.

TED BLOOM

Now, wait a moment, Chef, I've been very --

CHEF SLOWIK

YOU DON'T TALK!

At that moment, a server approaches Ted Bloom and sets down a comically LARGE NEW CONTAINER.

SERVER

Your broken emulsion, sir.

Ted Bloom stares at it. How is this happening? Chef turns to the terrified CAMERA CREW to make sure they're getting this, wordlessly directing them for a better shot.

CHEF SLOWIK

What happens here tonight is nothing. One day the real change is going to come.

Elsa appears at Margot's table, bends down and gestures to the KITCHEN TIMER in her hand. The texture of reality is growing stranger by the moment.

ELSA

Ten minutes, Mrs. Spooner.

MARGOT

(to Chef)

I have a question.

CHEF SLOWIK

Yes, Mrs. Spooner?

CRAIG

Margot, be careful.

MARGOT

Why do you deserve to die?

CHEF SLOWIK

Excellent question. I deserve to die because I've wasted my life. I thought I was an artist, but instead I see I've been slavishly trying to please people who can never be pleased -- starting with *her*.

(his chin toward Linda)

Now, at the peak of my powers, all I see is that my food turns instantly to shit inside a rich man's stomach.

ELSA

And woman's.

Chef glares at Richard and Anne.

CHEF SLOWIK

You two. How many times have you eaten here in the last five years?

RICHARD

I don't know, six or seven.

ANNE

I think more than that.

CHEF SLOWIK

Eleven. Eleven times. Most people consider themselves blessed if they eat here only once.

(MORE)

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

Mr. Liebrandt, name one dish you ate the last time you were here.

(off Richard's silence)

You can't, can you? Eleven times you take the boat, come out here, where we introduce every dish, every *fucking* time. We tell you *exactly* what we are feeding you. And we tell you a story. We even give you a copy of the *fucking* menu to take home. So tell me one dish you ate the last time you were here. *One!*

Richard looks at Anne.

ANNE

(whispering)

Cod.

RICHARD

(to Chef)

Cod.

CHEF SLOWIK

It wasn't cod, you *fucking* donkey. It was halibut! Rare *fucking* spotted halibut that we caught just four hours before you... you wasted it! Why do you two even bother to come to my restaurant? You come here just because you're rich. WHY? You come, you sit, you don't talk, and you --

ANNE

We have nothing else to do!

Silence. That's pretty sad and hangs in the air. Margot registers this on quite a few levels.

TECH BRO #3

It's not your restaurant.

CHEF SLOWIK

Come again?

TECH BRO #3

It's not your restaurant.

CHEF SLOWIK

You're right. He's right. It's not mine. Doug Verrick owns this island. Doug Verrick owns this restaurant.

(MORE)

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

And seeing how this restaurant is my entire life, Doug Verrick owns me. All of which is complicated by the fact that I currently own Doug Verrick.

Chef gestures to Elsa, who in turn gestures to TWO COOKS. They open a pantry door and extract a man in his mid-50s, gagged and tied to a spit rod like a roast pig.

The tech bros stare, mouths agape.

TECH BRO #2

Now we know why he wasn't at the teleconference this morning.

The cooks carry the spit rod into the center of the dining room and hold it aloft before, at Chef's nod, dropping it. Doug Verrick lands with a thud and a groan.

Chef picks up Doug Verrick's bandaged, FINGERLESS RIGHT HAND.

CHEF SLOWIK

Doug Verrick lost the first finger due to Elsa's no-escape rule. Doug Verrick is a very determined man. That's how he got to be Doug Verrick. The thumb was punishment for how Doug Verrick questioned my menu. He would even request substitutions even though --
(screaming into Doug Verrick's face)

THERE ARE NO SUBSTITUTIONS AT HAWTHORN!!!

(calm again)

This brings us to the other three fingers. They were to get the information we printed on table four's tortillas.

(to the Tech Bros)

Did you enjoy your tacos, gentlemen?

(off their numb nods)

Doug Verrick will not live to see tomorrow, but his wife, his children and his empire will. That is, until the SEC and FBI receive what I've sent them.

Doug Verrick starts lunge-crawling toward the door. It's too slow, and he has no chance. It's pathetic. He gets as far as Margot's feet before the cooks drag him away.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)
 Outside. Loud followed by quiet,
 please.

As Elsa unlocks the front door, the cooks hoist up Verrick
 and carry him outside. CAMERA creeps closer to Chef.

TECH BRO #1 (O.S.)
 You are fucking --

CHEF SLOWIK
 Shh. Just listen.

TECH BRO #2 (O.S.)
 This is --

CHEF SLOWIK
 I said listen. First loud.

DOUG VERRICK (O.S.)
 AAAHHHHHHHHH! AAAGGGHHHH!

Chef smiles. Camera creeps closer.

DOUG VERRICK (CONT'D)
 (fading)
 Ahhhhhhhh...

CHEF SLOWIK
 And...

DOUG VERRICK
 (lower)
 Ahhh...

CHEF SLOWIK
 (a whisper)
 Quiet.

Eyes closed, Chef listens a few more seconds. Nothing.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)
 Do you hear that silence? Listen.
 Can you hear it? That silence
 means... I'm free.

Close on MARGOT, motionless, struck by Chef's utter serenity.

AGAINST BLACK, TITLE CARD:

FIFTH COURSE

Margot and Craig sit silently, filled with dread. The sommelier brings little BLACK CUBES with straws.

SOMMELIER

As you can see, our next pairing is literally in a black box. Meaning I can't tell you what it is. You'll see when the food arrives. Have fun!

Elsa walks by their table with the kitchen timer.

ELSA

Five minutes, Mrs. Spooner.

Margot tries her mystery wine. Maybe it's the booze, the food, the fear, but for whatever reason she belches.

MARGOT

Well, Craig, I'm not sure what's coming out of that kitchen next, so should we exchange gifts?

Craig looks at her quizzically.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

I brought a gift for you. For our anniversary. Would you like it?

CRAIG

(brightening a little)
I brought you a gift, too.

He reaches into his pocket and slides over a jewelry box. Margot opens it to find a silver necklace with a charm -- a wooden heart.

CRAIG (CONT'D)

The fifth anniversary is wood, so I looked for something with that theme. It's a necklace with a wooden heart. The fifth is wood. I love you, Margot.

Margot looks at this half-assed gift and then up at Craig softly, pitying. Then she looks again at the wooden heart.

CLAP! Guess who's back.

CHEF SLOWIK

(quoting something)
"There is the house whose people sit in darkness. Dust is their food and clay their meat.

(MORE)

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

I entered the house of dust, and I saw the kings of the earth."
The dark. We avoid it. We fear it. Yet some of the most beautiful and interesting ideas emerge from the dark. The glow of a firefly, a singing boy emerging from the darkened canvass of a Caravaggio. And now, one of Hawthorn's signature dishes, "The Blackout." We change our menu constantly, but this has been a staple since day one. It's what --

(turning to him)

-- Mr. Bloom once said --

TED BLOOM

Put you on the map.

CHEF SLOWIK

Put me on the map. And precisely what map would that be?

As this rhetorical question hangs in the air, servers fan out and place dishes before the patrons.

No one moves. Why eat if they're going to die? Chef Slowik sees them not eating and, in perhaps the angriest he will ever be --

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

EAT!!!

They obey. And you know what? It's good.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

(to Ted Bloom)

I was happy in my taco truck. I was fine.

(to the room)

Oh, almost forgot. In our test kitchen last week, we discovered that the Blackout should be eaten in literal blackout so the senses can be heightened. Elsa, can you please turn off the lights? Oh, wait. Almost forgot again. Elsa, where is my head this evening?

As Elsa makes a humorous "I don't know" gesture, a server enters with a CRATE and puts it in the center of the room.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

We also found that the dish is best
when paired with my friend
Walterinnesia aegyptia.

He slides open a side of the crate. As a glistening BLACK SNAKE slithers out, the room goes dark.

IN COMPLETE DARKNESS

SCREAMING, CLANGING and an ominous HISS. Diners are destroying the room. Finally we hear what sounds like snake bites followed by shrieks of pain.

Over the black screen, a SUPERIMPOSED TITLE reads: 'THE BLACKOUT' - black squid ink rice, black charred veal, blackened parsnip, black snake."

The lights come back on. The dining room is in complete disarray. People are in tears, many cowering atop tables, including Margot and Craig.

A cook wearing elbow-length gloves and carrying a short, hooked pole catches the snake and replaces it into the crate.

Tech Bro #3 is convulsing and foaming at the mouth -- anaphylactic shock from the snake bite.

Carrying a SYRINGE and a spoonful of food, Elsa calmly approaches Tech Bro #3. She waits a bit too long, taking extra moments to enjoy his suffering, then kneels and stabs him with the needle.

ELSA

As the anti-venom takes effect,
please enjoy this spoonful of
kaffir lime gel.
(to the room)
We gel.

As his convulsions cease, she shoves the spoonful of food into Tech Bro #3's mouth.

TECH BRO #1

If we're all going to die tonight,
why not just let him die?

CHEF SLOWIK

He hasn't finished eating.

CRAIG dissolves into tears, barely able to speak between little gasps.

CRAIG

Oh, God... Forgive me, Margot. I'm the one who wanted us to come tonight, and now we... we... we might die. I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. I didn't know. I didn't know....

MARGOT

(stoic)

I want to give you your gift now.

CRAIG

Huh?

Margot reaches into her purse and takes out --

CRAIG (CONT'D)

An... old phone?

-- an OLD IPHONE tied in a bow.

MARGOT

Mine. From years ago. I saved it.

With a look that says, "Let me show you," Margot presses the screen a few times, finding a VOICEMAIL.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

Listen.

As she plays a message on speakerphone, we watch Craig's saddened, pained face. Unlike the shell of a man we see before us, the voice we hear is alive and charming, perhaps even that of a man in love.

CRAIG'S VOICE

Hi. It's me. I'm calling to say... Okay, well, this might freak you out, and I know it's only been a few weeks and I'm supposed to play it cool, but there was a moment tonight at dinner. You were telling me about your Dad, and the old house, and how you used to watch the trees from the roof, and there was a second when your voice caught. Remember? And you looked away, because I guess you felt vulnerable. And I suddenly thought, "Oh. This person is my new favorite person. This is the best person." And I wanted to hold you so badly, in front of everyone.

(MORE)

CRAIG'S VOICE (CONT'D)

But that stupid table between us
felt five miles long. I just
wanted to be safe and warm with
you. And hold you.

(laughs, choking up)

Anyway. I just thought you should
know. And I can't wait to see you
again, my friend. My lover. My
friend. Okay. Bye.

Craig can't bring himself to look at her.

MARGOT

What happened to that guy? Is he
still in there? Or did he get full
and move on?

DING! That pesky kitchen timer.

ELSA

Time's up, Mrs. Spooner.

MARGOT

(to Craig)

Yes, it is. It's too late.

ELSA

Chef will speak with you now. In
his office.

Margot rises and follows her --

THROUGH THE BUSY KITCHEN

-- and to a plain door. Elsa knocks.

CHEF SLOWIK (O.S.)

Come in.

Elsa opens the door for Margot.

INT. CHEF SLOWIK'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Margot enters.

The "office" is a completely barren room, larger than you'd
predict. No decoration, no desk, nothing. Just plain white
walls, a white floor, and a chair where Chef Slowik sits,
upright and still. The atmosphere is other-worldly.

CHEF SLOWIK

You've made your decision.

MARGOT

I have.

CHEF SLOWIK

And?

MARGOT

I've decided what you said earlier was correct. I shouldn't be here tonight.

CHEF SLOWIK

I've decided that you should. Only, it's even clearer now that you are in the wrong cage.

MARGOT

The wrong cage. What cage should I be in?

CHEF SLOWIK

You should be with your own breed, Margot. With those who have been subjugated. The forgotten. The starved.

Margot recognizes these words as Chef says them almost hypnotically. Her defenses already weakened, tears appear in her eyes.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

Why do you cry? Are you afraid? Afraid of death?

MARGOT

No. I mean, yes, sure. But --

CHEF SLOWIK

But what?

She looks at him and blinks, wipes her eyes. Why should she tell this guy anything? Still --

MARGOT

When you asked me whether we have children... We almost did, not that long ago... But... we lost it. I lost it.

CHEF SLOWIK

I'm sorry.

Margot looks at him a long moment.

MARGOT

I wasn't.

Chef nods at her slowly, compassionately.

CHEF SLOWIK

Come with me.

AGAINST BLACK, TITLE CARD:

SIXTH COURSE

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Chef and Margot enter. Tension and dread hang in the air. Exhausted diners flinch as Chef walks near, like beaten dogs.

Chef motions for Margot to stand by his side. This stuns Craig. Chef CLAPS, but the diners are too numb to respond.

CHEF SLOWIK

Ladies and gentlemen, our next course will be presented by sous-chef Katherine Ocampo.

KATHERINE steps out of the kitchen and takes her place at the center of the room. She smiles amidst the exquisite silence.

KATHERINE

Good evening, everyone. I have a story for you all. Two years ago, Chef Julian Slowik tried to fuck me.

Chef Slowik remains impassive. As Katherine speaks, CAMERA slowly semi-circles around her from profile to front-on.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)

Naturally I refused his advances. He was angry but not dissuaded. A week later he tried again. Again I refused. But he did not fire me. "That would be unethical," he must have thought. He just kept me in the kitchen and refused to look me in the eye or speak directly to me for eight months, during which time male cooks rose above me in the ranks. This was unjust. Not because I deserved to be treated as an equal. But because I deserved to be treated as a superior.

(MORE)

KATHERINE (CONT'D)

I am better than the male *commis* in this kitchen. I am better than the male *chef de parties*. I am better than the male sous chefs. I am better even than Chef Slowik. And he knows it.

(into camera)

I should be the star. But I'm not. Because none of you would accept me in that role. Only men get to be the dark romantic geniuses who suffer for their art. A woman chef is a trooper. A go-getter. A mother hen in the kitchen doing women's work, grandma's recipes with a sly modern twist. A woman chef doesn't challenge. She nourishes. Isn't that right?

Diners shift uncomfortably in their seats. Ted Bloom nods as if he agrees, fingertips to chin, fascinated.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)

I have been groped, I have been leered at, I have deserved more but earned less, I have not been featured in one FUCKING shot this entire night by the documentary crew.

She shoots an accusing finger at the crew. Sure enough, their camera is trained on Chef Slowik.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)

All of it an attempt to humiliate me. Well, I will show you what true humiliation looks like. Our next course is called "Humiliation."

(sincerely warm)

Please enjoy.

Katherine approaches Chef Slowik and stands very close, looking him directly in the eyes. She pulls a small PARING KNIFE from her apron and stabs it into his thigh. He accepts it with a slight wince and nod.

Katherine and Chef Slowik share a long, meaningful hug. There is a deep understanding that we'll never know.

CHEF SLOWIK

(a whisper)

I'm sorry.

Katherine smiles at him. He smiles back and pulls the knife from his thigh. A SERVER is there with a tray with a little flower on it to take it away. For the rest of the movie, Chef will have a growing bloodstain on his pants and limp.

More servers arrive, but not bearing plates. Instead, they line up six PLASTIC DOG BOWLS on the floor.

We view one of the dog bowls in gorgeous, slo-mo close-up. Inside rests an impossibly refined vision of *haute cuisine*. A SUPERIMPOSED TITLE reads: "SEVENTH COURSE: 'HUMILIATION' - squid, chorizo, slow-poached egg & pheasant consommé."

The diners exchange glances. Why dog bowls? Why only six?

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

This course is designed for our gentlemen diners alone.

TED BLOOM

(sees where this is going)
Oh, fuck.

CHEF SLOWIK

Ladies, enjoy your palate-cleansing calvados sorbet.

The women diners are presented with little ice cream bowls.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

Gentlemen, please remove your pants.

The men sit there, dazed. What did he just say?

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

Servers, please assist the gentlemen with their pants.

Servers approach each male customer, physically lifting the resistant men from their chairs. As burly COOKS raise threatening cleavers, the servers begin removing the men's pants and underwear.

THE MEN

What are you --? Get the fuck off me! Hey, leave me alone!

Chef Slowik smiles at Margot, as though they share a private joke. Then she looks at Craig, who looks back at her -- helpless, hurt, betrayed -- as he's being stripped.

Soon the scared men are NUDE below the waist.

KATHERINE

Eat. Get down and eat.

They do as they're told. They line up in front of the bowls, kneel and begin scooping up the food with their hands.

KATHERINE (CONT'D)

No hands.

The half-nude men bend over on all fours and eat directly from the bowls. Like dogs. The always-gracious SOMMELIER arrives. Servers place tiny doggie bowls next to the larger ones and pour wine into each.

SOMMELIER

This is a searingly beautiful
 Alsatian Pinot Gris. One of my
 favorites on the list, actually.
Cuvee St. Catherine from Weinbach.

The men lap up wine as well, some first sniffing.

Margot is not smiling at the sight, but she's not entirely unhappy either. Some perverse part of it feels good. Other female diners seem to share this feeling. Finally --

CHEF SLOW

Enough!
 (to Margot)
 Please sit.

Margot returns to her table. All the men stop eating except for Craig, who hasn't quite finished. In fact, servers have to drag him away from his bowl.

CHEF SLOWIK

Pants on, please. Take your seats.

The men put their underpants and pants back on and return to their tables. They're like children. Every ounce of their dignity has been drained.

Gretchen and Anne can barely bring themselves to look at their partners. And Craig looks at Margot, devastated.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

I'm afraid our menu tonight cannot
 continue as planned until we deal
 with an unresolved matter.
 (approaching his table)
 Craig Spooner.

CRAIG

M-me?

CHEF SLOWIK

Yes, you. I've been avoiding you all night for a reason. You're different, aren't you?

CRAIG

I am?

CHEF SLOWIK

Don't be coy. You know what I'm talking about. I read your letters. You know this world. You know about me. You know what we do here. You know about food. Don't you?

A tiny flush of confidence returns to Craig's face.

CRAIG

Well... I have been trying to eat at as many of the world's best restaurants as I can, if that's what you mean. I do my research.

CHEF SLOWIK

I noticed. We all noticed. And we were... Well, part of me hates to admit it, but we were quite impressed. You yourself cook, do you not?

CRAIG

I fool around a little in the kitchen, sure. I guess you could say that I'm an avid home cook.

CHEF SLOWIK

And you've been told that you're good. You know you're good.

MARGOT

(to Chef)

Leave him alone.

CRAIG

That's for others to say, but yeah, I get some compliments. I worked in a kitchen in college. And I like to cook my way through whole cookbooks. Right now I'm about halfway through Eleven Madison Park. And every Thanksgiving we usually host around fifteen, twenty people, and every year I try step up my game.

CHEF SLOWIK

You noted the star anise. You know what a Pacojet is. You may be our first customer who knows what a Pacojet is. You're not like the others, are you?

CRAIG

I... I don't know about that. I mean, look, there's Ted Bloom. He's probably forgotten more about food than I'll ever know.

CHEF SLOWIK

Somehow I don't feel comfortable keeping you out here with the others. You belong in the kitchen. With us. We need some fresh blood.

Craig looks to the kitchen staff behind Chef. They all smile warmly and nod, welcoming him. Elsa comes over with beautifully folded CHEF'S WHITES and hands them to Craig.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

Go on. They're for you.

MARGOT

Craig, don't.

Craig hesitantly dons the whites and apron, tying the belt around his waist.

A server approaches to place little tongs and a meat thermometer in his left sleeve pocket. Another server brings a mirror so Craig can admire himself. The word "Hawthorn" is embroidered on his breast, as is, miraculously, "Craig."

Craig looks over at Margot. He can't help feeling a little proud despite the fucking weirdness of it all.

CHEF SLOWIK

That's more like it, don't you think? You look wonderful.

LINDA

Mr. Handsome Boy!

Craig doesn't quite know what to say. Pause.

CHEF SLOWIK

Now cook.

CRAIG

What?

CHEF SLOWIK
Cook. You're a good cook, so cook.

CRAIG
What do you mean, cook *here*? Me?
Oh, I'm not prepared, I could never --

CHEF SLOWIK
Not prepared? You are ten feet
away from a fully stocked, world-
class kitchen. Now show me.

Craig fumbles for an answer for a moment, until Chef Slowik starts shooing him into --

THE KITCHEN.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)
COOK COOK COOK! GO ON NOW, COOK!

Chef Slowik seizes Craig by the shoulders and positions him in front of the burners. The other cooks halt work to watch.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)
COOK SOMETHING!

Trying to stay strong, Craig takes a pan and puts it on a burner.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)
What do you need? We have
everything. Just tell me what you
need for your dish.

CRAIG
L-l-l-leeks?

CHEF SLOWIK
Get the cook some leeks!

SOUS-CHEFS
Yes, Chef!

Someone hands Craig two leeks. Craig's hands shake as he takes a knife and finds a nearby cutting board.

CHEF SLOWIK
What else?

CRAIG
Um. Sh-sh-sh-

CHEF SLOWIK
Shit? Would you like some shit?

CRAIG

Shallots.

CHEF SLOWIK

Shallots for the great foodie! Mr.
Food himself! Foodie McFooders!

Someone hands Craig two shallots. Craig is so flustered that he can cut only haphazard chunks, like with the leeks. Margot watches horrified from the dining room.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

Everyone pay close attention. We must learn from Craig. This is a new dicing method of which we have been woefully ignorant.

(to Craig)

What next?

CRAIG

Uh -- uh -- B-butter?

CHEF SLOWIK

Butter! Leeks and shallots sautéed in butter! I bear witness to a revolution in cuisine!

MARGOT

(yelling)

Leave him alone!

Craig is given butter. He's so nervous at this point that he lamely dumps it into the pan, followed by the leeks and shallots.

Someone hands him a piece of lamb, which he dutifully, numbly puts in the pan, too. Same with carrots and capers. Salmon roe. Strawberries. Eggs. The cooks just hand him shit, and, to their amusement, he puts it in. A horrible, grotesque comedy.

They hand him a spatula. Completely out of body, he stirs.

CHEF SLOWIK

Is it done? Or would you like to jam it into the Pacojet?

(Craig shakes his head)

Then plate it.

Someone produces a plate, and Craig basically just dumps the food onto it. He tries to arrange it in some artful way, but his hands tremble, and it's just terrible.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)
 Shall I taste it?

Craig can't even respond. He's crying.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)
 I think if you want to work at
 Hawthorn, I should taste your
 cooking, don't you?

Chef takes a spoonful of Craig's food and lifts it to his
 mouth. Just as he's about to try it --

AGAINST BLACK, TITLE CARD:

SUPPLEMENTAL COURSE

CLOSE ON CRAIG'S HIDEOUS PLATE. A SUPERIMPOSED TITLE reads,
 "CRAIG'S BULLSHIT. Under-cooked lamb, inelegantly reduced
 strawberry-salmon-leek butter sauce, utter lack of cohesion."

Chef Slowik puts the forkful into his mouth. He looks to be
 savoring it. Craig watches through tears.

CHEF SLOWIK
 Mmmmm. Mmmmmmm!

Chef continues to chew, eyes rolling in back of his head in
 mock ecstasy.

MARGOT
 STOP!

She pushes aside the cooks, runs up to Chef and SLAPS HIM.

MARGOT (CONT'D)
 Stop this right now! Leave him
 alone! What the fuck is your
 problem, you sadistic son-of-a-
 bitch? You and your cunt sidekick!

Elsa smiles. She takes it as a compliment.

MARGOT (CONT'D)
 My husband may not be perfect, but
 he doesn't deserve this. No one
 does.
 (taking his hand)
 Come on, Craig.

Chef calmly spits out Craig's food into a napkin.

CHEF SLOWIK

I meant no harm. I simply wished to demonstrate to *Craig* here how the mystery has been drained from our art.

(to *Craig*)

People like you feel knowledgeable and informed about our craft. But you are not. And you will never be. You see that now, don't you? *Craig?*

CRAIG

Yes.

CHEF SLOWIK

Yes, what?

CRAIG

Yes, Chef.

CHEF SLOWIK

But if you really wish to cook, you can start as we all did, at the bottom. So. You can go back to the table with your wife. Or you can stay here with us. In the kitchen at Hawthorn. Washing dishes.

Craig looks back and forth between Chef and Margot.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

Which will you choose?

His spirit broken, Craig -- shoulders slumped, head bowed -- robotically plods to the DISH STATION in back of the kitchen and starts rinsing plates with the dangling FLEX-HOSE.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

(to Margot)

The man wants to work his way up. You have to respect that. Greatness begins at the bottom. I learned that as a child in Bratislava.

Back in the dining room, Felicity makes a face. Do does Gretchen. Didn't he say Iowa before?

CLOSE ON MARGOT, looking back and forth between Chef and Craig. Yet a new level of incredulity.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)
Now you. Follow me.

Chef leads Margot into the --

PASTRY AREA

-- where cheery FEMALE PASTRY CHEFS, faces dotted with flour, ply their craft. They greet Chef Slowik as he passes.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)
(to Margot)
We have only one more savory course left on our menu. That means we have to prepare for dessert.

Margot has no idea what to do with this information. And she's still shaky from what just transpired.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)
Dessert requires a large barrel that is supposed to be there, in the corner. Do you see a barrel?

MARGOT
(weary)
No. No, I do not see a barrel.

CHEF SLOWIK
Neither do I. That is because my negligent employee Elsa forgot to assign someone to bring it.

Elsa, always somehow nearby, looks gutted by her error.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)
You will fetch the barrel instead.

MARGOT
Me?

CHEF SLOWIK
You remember the smokehouse.

MARGOT
I -- yes.

ELSA
Chef, perhaps a member of the kitchen staff should --

CHEF SLOWIK

No, Elsa. We need to know once and for all which side Mrs. Spooner falls on. She knows and accepts that she is going to die. But she's with us now. With me. Isn't that right?

MARGOT

(pause)

Yes.

CHEF SLOWIK

Yes, what?

MARGOT

Yes, Chef.

CHEF SLOWIK

Elsa, give her the smokehouse key.

ELSA

Yes, Chef.

Elsa slides a KEY off of her big key ring and, against her better judgment, hands it to Margot.

CHEF SLOWIK

Go.

Margot looks at him, then at her husband, dutifully rinsing dishes amid a spray of hot, steamy water, as if born for the job.

Margot's incredulity shifts to something we've not seen this entire time -- ease. Almost the hint of a smile.

MARGOT

Yes, Chef.

EXT. HAWTHORN ISLAND - NIGHT

A clear, beautiful evening, lit by moonlight. Calls of insects and night birds.

Margot walks purposefully across the lawn. She's actually going through with this. She appears committed.

Not far off looms a patch of WOODS leading to the smokery.

EXT. WOODS - MOMENTS LATER

Margot enters the dark forest. Up ahead is the small SMOKEHOUSE lit by a single, dim porch light.

As she walks, she hears a rustling sound in the woods and a distant SNAP. She stops and turns to listen. Nothing. Then she looks down at the KEY in her hand.

INT. SMOKEHOUSE - NIGHT

Margot enters and flips on the overhead light. Sure enough, there's the BARREL resting beneath hanging ocean trout.

She approaches the barrel as if to retrieve it. But instead she reaches behind the barrel, where a scaling KNIFE hangs by a nail on the wall.

Taking the knife, she glances out a small window and spots Chef Slowik's COTTAGE bathed in moonlight.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The room is silent. Chef Slowik enters and is about to clap when the movie star rises to his feet, scared but brave.

MOVIE STAR

Excuse me, Mr. Slowik. I have s-something to s-say.

Chef turns to him. The famous actor summons all of his experience and talent for this crucial moment.

MOVIE STAR (CONT'D)

I want you to know I truly understand the premise of this evening. Everyone here is being punished. Including you. But I don't deserve to *die* -- none of us do. Especially my friend here, my assistant.

Felicity looks up at him.

MOVIE STAR (CONT'D)

I'm famous. I can't change that. And with fame comes fortune. But I've come by my success honestly, and I've tried to treat people -- everyone -- with compassion and respect.

(MORE)

MOVIE STAR (CONT'D)

I don't consider myself better than anyone in this room, or on the planet, for that matter. Quite the opposite. In fact, we actors often suffer from worse self-image problems than average people.

He looks at Felicity and smiles warmly. She smiles back.

MOVIE STAR (CONT'D)

As for my friend, let me tell you about my wonderful friend Felicity. We're shooting up in Vancouver, had a couple of days off, and she simply wanted to give me a treat. It's been a miserable year, you see. I've felt quite lost. And afraid. She simply wanted to cheer me up.

(directly at Chef Slowik)

Forgive me, but you know nothing about Felicity. She's a complete stranger to you. You know nothing of her life, of her pain. She's innocent. And she's wonderful. Which is why I implore you -- please let her go. Thank you for listening.

Chef Slowik stares at him, unmoved by his little speech.

CHEF SLOWIK

Do you wish to know why you're being punished?

MOVIE STAR

Yes.

CHEF SLOWIK

I saw the movie *Victor Frankenstein*, and I did not enjoy it.

The puzzled movie star furrows his brow.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

It was a Sunday. My one day off in months. And I saw *Victor Frankenstein* alone in the cinema.

MOVIE STAR

That's a weird movie to go out of your way to see.

CHEF SLOWIK

I'm a weird man. And a very big fan of Shelley's *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus*. Which you ruined. You undercut the power and value of the Frankenstein myth. You turned a crucial metaphor into a cheap action film.

MOVIE STAR

I didn't direct it. I just acted in it. I'm just an actor.

CHEF SLOWIK

What did you do with the money you made from it? You already have more money than God. Did you give it to charity? To children?

MOVIE STAR

I give a lot to charity. Right, Felicity?

FELICITY

He does. Frequently.

MOVIE STAR

Wasn't there a dog thing? Recently? That dog thing?

FELICITY

That's right. You gave to a dog thing.

MOVIE STAR

Right, helping dogs was it?

FELICITY

Yes, helping dogs. A dog charity. Other charities as well.

He looks at Chef hopefully. Chef stares at him. It's futile.

MOVIE STAR

And her?

CHEF SLOWIK

She works for you. Who knows how much abuse she puts up with just to say she works for a big movie star?

MOVIE STAR

That's not fair.

CHEF SLOWIK
 (weighing the word)
Fair.

MOVIE STAR
 Well. That's that, then.
 (grim beat)
 Cheers.

The movie star sits down. He and Felicity reach across the table and warmly grip each other's hand.

EXT. CHEF SLOWIK'S COTTAGE - NIGHT

Margot approaches Chef's domicile at the edge of the forest. She reaches for the door handle and, to her surprise, finds it UNLOCKED.

INT. CHEF SLOWIK'S COTTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Margot enters and looks around. The interior is an EXACT REPLICA of the interior of the restaurant.

It's so quiet here, so clean. No blood. Pristine.

For reasons she doesn't quite know, she takes her same seat from the restaurant, closes her eyes, breathing in the quiet and tranquility.

INT. DINING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Back in the real dining room. Not quiet. Screaming. BEDLAM.

One cook holds the movie star's head in a vice-like grip. Another holds a cleaver to Felicity's throat, forcing her to feed him NUTS. He's having a massive allergic reaction.

A SUPERIMPOSED TITLE reads, "EIGHTH COURSE: 'GONE NUTS' peanut dashi, peanut foam, peanut curd, peanut brittle, and raw peanuts hand-fed."

The sommelier pops up with fresh stemware and a bottle.

SOMMELIER
 I can see you're busy, so I'll just pour and tell you about it later.

INT. CHEF SLOWIK'S COTTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Silence.

Margot remains seated. She looks at the chair once occupied by her husband. She fights tears and starts to breathe heavily, as if finally able to process everything.

Then Margot realizes that the mysterious SILVER DOOR might be here, too. And whatever lurks behind it. She gets up, leaving the scaling knife on the table.

She finds the door, indeed an exact replica of the other one. She tries to open it, but it's locked.

She hears the front door open. We see the footfalls of the person stepping inside the cottage. CAMERA rises to reveal --

ELSA

I told you when you arrived that no one may enter Chef's home. And you have disobeyed this rule.

Elsa sees the knife on Margot's table and smiles.

Margot enters the dining room, ready for a confrontation, and sees Elsa holding the knife.

MARGOT

Fuck.

ELSA

I worry about the customers so Chef can worry about the menu. And you have made my job quite difficult.

Elsa takes a step toward Margot, who braces for whatever attack Elsa might unleash.

ELSA (CONT'D)

But yet I admire you. How you've carried yourself. How you've talked to him. He is after all just a man, isn't he? Yes, he is just a man.

Extending the knife, Elsa takes a couple of threatening steps toward Margot. Margot sprints to the front door, but it's locked. Then she turns back to Elsa and picks up the nearest weapon she can find -- a chair -- and raises it high.

Elsa looks at her and laughs. Then she SLITS HER OWN THROAT with the scaling knife.

Margot puts down the chair and manages to catch Elsa before she falls to the ground. Through disgusting gurgles, Elsa manages a final whisper.

ELSA (CONT'D)

I just remembered.

MARGOT

What's that?

ELSA

We neglected to re-fold your napkin when you went to the ladies' room earlier. Apologies.

Elsa dies. Margot lays Elsa down, then takes the key ring from her pocket and returns to the silver door.

INT. THE SECRET ROOM - CONTINUOUS

A lovely room. A real office and man cave. Warmly lit and beautiful. Fragments of an actual life. A desk. Comfortable leather furniture. Stacks of recipe books. A lava lamp.

AND PHOTOS

-- YOUNG CHEF SLOWIK smiles with his mentors and classmates from culinary school.

-- A GRADUATION of some kind -- Slowik happy and optimistic.

-- His restaurant TANTALUS in New York. He's CLOWNING in front of it.

-- SLOWIK OPENING HAWTHORN, standing with Doug Varrick. Slowik looks deadly serious, joy drained from his face.

Then Margot notices a RADIO on a shelf across from his desk. She dashes towards it and fiddles with the transceiver.

MARGOT

Hello? Is anyone there? Can anyone hear this? Hello! Can anyone hear this? CAN ANYONE FUCKING HEAR ME?

VOICE

(crackly)
Hello?

MARGOT

Hello? Who is this?

VOICE

Coast Guard. Who am I talking to?

MARGOT

Oh, thank Christ. I'm at the restaurant. The... Hawthorn. Hawthorn. People are getting murdered. Send help. Send help!

VOICE

What did you say?

MARGOT

Just get here! Now! PLEASE!
Hawthorn Island! People are dying.
It's an emergency!

VOICE

Okay, just, uh -- don't move.

INT. CHEF SLOWIK'S COTTAGE - NIGHT

Margot staggers back out into the dining room and, stepping over Elsa's body, retakes her seat. Silence.

Then a startling CLAP from an INTERCOM speaker.

CHEF SLOWIK (O.S.)

Do you like my home?

Margot makes a face like, "Of course this isn't over."

CHEF SLOWIK (O.S.) (CONT'D)

People always say you shouldn't take your work home with you. I wholeheartedly disagree. Go ahead. Speak. I can hear you.

MARGOT

You didn't strike me as someone who's into the whole work/life balance thing. Elsa's dead.

CHEF SLOWIK (O.S.)

I know. It's what she wanted. It's what I want, too. Death is nothing. I am a chef, Margot. I work with death every day. Death is my raw material. My paint. How can I call myself the greatest chef who's ever lived if I don't experience death for myself?

MARGOT

But then you'd be dead.

CHEF SLOWIK

Hmm. So. Just between us starved individuals, say tonight had gone as normal. The food eaten, the bill paid, and you and the man named Craig return to shore. Would you have woken up tomorrow morning happy to be alive?

MARGOT

We have *Hamilton* tickets.

CHEF SLOWIK

Do you want to see *Hamilton*?

MARGOT

I don't really like musicals.

CHEF SLOWIK

Exactly.

Margot laughs slightly.

MARGOT

Okay, I have a question. If you're so fed up feeding your *precious art* to rich people, why don't you just chuck it and go work as a cook in a soup kitchen? Or a monastery? Go back to your little taco truck? Come to think of it, why did you put a Korean taco truck so close to a food convention you knew was swarming with food critics?

CHEF SLOWIK (O.S.)

(long pause)

Please do retrieve that barrel.
The guests are waiting.

The intercom speaker clicks off.

INT. HAWTHORN DINING AREA AND KITCHEN - NIGHT

We PAN ACROSS the restaurant. PEOPLE ON THE GROUND IN PAIN, choking, too wasted to scream.

Anne weeps over Richard's battered body. Gretchen is keeled over in her seat in some ungodly pain, and Ted Bloom numbly sneaks a bite of her leftover food. The movie star is wheezing, struggling to breathe, near death.

The documentary crew, meanwhile, is being made to shoot a long, unbroken close-up of an egg poaching in a small pot.

CHEF SLOWIK

Don't film me. Film the egg. If you can poach an egg perfectly, you can do anything. The essence of cooking. A minute to learn, a lifetime to master.

An sweaty Margot enters the restaurant, rolling the barrel in front of her, and stops to absorb the chaos.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

Leave that there. And take your seat.

Margot sits at her table, which has been cleaned and perfectly re-set. Chef Slowik walks over.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

I thought about your question. Here is the answer. I am a monster. No, was a monster. And a whore. But tonight everything I'm doing is 100% pure. 100% egoless. And at last, the pain is almost gone.

There's a CANDLE on Margot's table. Chef Slowik extends his hand directly over it. The flame burns his flesh, but he doesn't so much as flinch.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

Chef's Hands. "Asbestos hands," we call them. I can carry a cast-iron pan from a 550 oven to your table with no protection. That's a cook's training. But this isn't.

Now Chef Slowik bends over and holds his CHEEK to the flame, burning the side of his face for many seconds. It crackles. Margot turns away.

Chef Slowik stands upright, now sporting a gruesome BURN. He extinguishes the candle with his thumb and forefinger. Smoke trails upward.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

I can no longer be hurt, Margot.
As Dr. King said, "We know through
painful experience that freedom is
never voluntarily given by the
oppressor. It must be demanded by
the oppressed."

MOVIE STAR

(eyes bulging, barely
alive)

Did he just quote Martin Luther
King again?

Outside the large bay windows, a LIGHT appears on the water.
A small BOAT. Margot sees it out of the corner of her eye
and stifles a gasp.

Chef Slowik spots it, too, for a moment frozen with
indecision, perhaps even fear. Then a calm comes over him.
He knows what to do.

CHEF SLOWIK

So you found our radio.
(to the kitchen)

Clear the dining room. Immediately!

Servers appear from everywhere to get people seated again,
wipe down the floor, their work hyper-fast and spotless. One
server administers an EPI-PEN to the movie star, and his
breathing begins to clear.

Another applies a white bandage to Chef's cheek and ties a
new apron around him to mask his blood-soaked pants.

Margot looks out the window to see a lone COAST GUARD OFFICER
stepping onto the dock. No back-up. Not good.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

I see we have an unexpected guest.
Sadly we are fully booked tonight
and cannot accommodate him. You
will be tempted to ask him for
help. To plead, even. This would
be unwise. He cannot help you.

The guests look unconvinced and exchange conspiratorial
glances. How can they let this opportunity pass?

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

I can see you don't believe me.
You think this might be your only
chance, a chance worth taking.

(MORE)

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)
 But ask yourselves if you really
 want to be responsible for the
 death of an innocent man. A man
 who did nothing to deserve a death
 here tonight.

He's right.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)
 And ask yourselves -- this entire
 evening, why didn't you all try to
 harder to escape? Honestly, you
 probably could have.

All the patrons look at one another. Why didn't they?

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)
 Anyway, something to think about.

A knock. Chef Slowik nods at a server to unlock the door.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)
 Good evening, officer. How can we
 help you?

COAST GUARD OFFICER
 (stepping inside)
 I got a radio report of a
 disturbance.

CHEF SLOWIK
 A disturbance? Here? No.

The officer doesn't quite trust this answer. He looks around
 the nearly empty dining room.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)
 What kind of disturbance, exactly?

COAST GUARD OFFICER
 A violent disturbance. In fact, I
 don't want to alarm you folks, but
 there was a report of a possible
 murder.

We cut to the diners' quietly panicked faces. Chef Slowik
 begins to laugh, and one by one the whole staff joins in.
 The diners play along wearily with forced smiles.

CHEF SLOWIK
 No, officer. Nothing of that
 nature.

COAST GUARD OFFICER
Are you the owner?

CHEF SLOWIK
Ownership changed hands this evening, but that's another story. I am the executive chef. I don't wish to be rude, but, as you can see, we are right in the middle of our dinner service.

COAST GUARD OFFICER
What happened to your face?

CHEF SLOWIK
If you must know, I have been undergoing treatment for skin cancer.

COAST GUARD OFFICER
Oh - okay. Are these your only guests?

CHEF SLOWIK
Tonight is a private event. We're peer-testing a new concept menu.

Not quite understanding that, the officer looks around at the diners. They seem composed enough.

COAST GUARD OFFICER
Did anybody here call in a distress on the short-wave tonight?

All shake their heads, even Margot.

CHEF SLOWIK
We are not in the habit of serving our guests short-wave radios with their meals.

The cooks laugh again. Maybe a little too loud. The Officer notices the movie star panting at his table.

COAST GUARD OFFICER
Hey, are you --?

MOVIE STAR
(instantly)
Yes.

COAST GUARD OFFICER
Oh, wow. I'm a big fan. (Wrong Name), right?

MOVIE STAR
(Right name).

COAST GUARD OFFICER
(Right name)! Shit. Sorry.

CHEF SLOWIK
Would you like his autograph?

COAST GUARD OFFICER
Oh. Uh, I mean, I don't want to bother you.

MOVIE STAR
No bother at all.

A server arrives with a pen and paper on a tray.

MOVIE STAR (CONT'D)
What's your name?

COAST GUARD OFFICER
Doug.

MOVIE STAR
Doug.

COAST GUARD OFFICER
You're great. Loved that, uh... what's it called? The Frankenstein one.

MOVIE STAR
Victor Frankenstein.

COAST GUARD OFFICER
Yeah. Great stuff.

The movie star smiles sadly and hands over the autograph.

MOVIE STAR
Thank you.

COAST GUARD OFFICER
Okay. Well, sorry again to bother you folks. I'll be going now.

CHEF SLOWIK
Thank you for your service.

The officer turns and walks back toward the door. But then we see, from his POV, a SMEAR OF BLOOD on the floor, perhaps the only one missed by the wait staff.

The officer stops, whips out his gun, turns and points it at Chef Slowik.

COAST GUARD OFFICER
Hands above your head! Now!

CHEF SLOWIK
(nervous laugh)
Are you joking?

COAST GUARD OFFICER
I am not joking, sir!

A cook behind Chef Slowik steps forward to protect his master, but Chef holds up a hand.

CHEF SLOWIK
No, we will comply. Clearly
there's some misunderstanding.

COAST GUARD OFFICER
Get down on your knees with your
hands up. Now!

Chef Slowik draws a long breath and kneels.

ANNE
Help us, officer! He wants to kill
us. He wants to kill us all!

Others diners chime in as well.

COAST GUARD OFFICER
Nobody move till I say so!

The officer inches forward. When he has almost reached Chef, he pivots toward Margot's table, gun still pointed, and pulls the trigger. A SMALL FLAME emits from the barrel, and he lights the extinguished candle on Margot's table.

MOVIE STAR
Fuck me.

Chuckling, the officer holsters the gun. Somebody tosses him an apron, and he joins his comrades in the kitchen. They laugh and pat him on the back. That was a good one.

CHEF SLOWIK
(standing)
Thank you, Douglas.
(to Margot)
In a kitchen everyone works
together, or nothing works at all.
(MORE)

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

You have betrayed our sacred bond of trust. And you have shown your craft to be sloppy. I was wrong. You're an eater. A taker. An animal like all the rest.

We scan the FACES of the cooks and servers behind Chef Slowik. He's right. She has failed the test. Chef trots back into the kitchen.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

Final course plating in five!

ENTIRE KITCHEN

Yes, Chef!

Two cooks unplug the top of the barrel and tip it on its side. A thick, VISCOUS LIQUID pours out across the floor. What is it -- chocolate? Rendered animal fat?

Resigned to their fate, the diners don't even bother lifting their feet. By now some even feel as if they deserve it.

Margot's head droops. All is lost. But she doesn't look scared. Or sad. Instead, a kind of quiet, simmering anger builds inside her.

MARGOT

(barely audible)

I don't like your food.

Servers have begun busily draping thick sheets of MARSHMALLOWS strung together with candy floss over the diners, over the documentary crew, even over themselves. As a server drapes a marshmallow sheet over her torso, Margot does nothing to stop her.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

I don't like your food.

Again no one hears. The staff continue to hustle, now creating elaborate, Jackson Pollock SPLATTERS AND SWIRLS of melted chocolate and graham cracker crumbs atop the tables.

The SOMMELIER pours dessert wine over the diners' heads.

SOMMELIER

This is a Palo Cortado Sherry from our friends at *Lustau Almacenista*. I think you'll find it highly flammable and redolent of leather, cigar box and freshly mown grass.

Margot rises, tears off her marshmallow coat, hurls it onto the floor, and CLAPS. Everything stops, just like at the beginning of the meal. Even the film score stops.

Chef Slowik looks over from the kitchen.

MARGOT

(loud)

I don't like your food!

CHEF SLOWIK

(entering the dining room)

What did you say?

MARGOT

I said I don't like your food. And I would like to send it back.

We see the faces of the staff, shocked and ready to tear Margot to pieces. Slowik takes a deep breath, unhappy but not angry.

CHEF SLOWIK

I'm very sorry. What about my food is not to your liking?

MARGOT

You've taken the joy out of eating. Every dish we've had tonight has been some intellectual exercise rather than something you just want to sit and enjoy.

The COOKS can't believe what she's saying, even if deep down they know there's a kernel of truth to it. Chef Slowik doesn't react at all.

MARGOT (CONT'D)

When I eat your food, it tastes like it was made with no love.

SLOWIK

That's ridiculous. I always cook with love. Love is the most important ingredient.

MARGOT

You're kidding yourself. Even your hot dishes are cold. And dead. Like they were made by one of those fucking fish hanging in your little smoke shack. There's no personality. Only concepts. You are a chef.

(MORE)

MARGOT (CONT'D)

Your one single fucking purpose on this Earth is to serve people food that they will like. And you have failed. And you've bored me. And worst of all... you've left me hungry.

Chef Slowik takes it all in and nods slightly.

CHEF SLOWIK

You're still hungry, you say?
(off her nod)
How hungry?

MARGOT

You know the answer. *Starved.*

CHEF SLOWIK

What are you hungry for?

MARGOT

What do you have?

CHEF SLOWIK

Everything.

MARGOT

You know what I want?

CHEF SLOWIK

Tell me.

MARGOT

What I really want?

CHEF SLOWIK

I'm all ears.

MARGOT

A cheeseburger.

CHEF SLOWIK

I can do a cheeseburger.

MARGOT

I mean a real cheeseburger. Not some fancy deconstructed avant bullshit.

CHEF SLOWIK

I can make you a very good, very traditional cheeseburger.

MARGOT

I don't think you're capable.

CHEF SLOWIK

I will make you feel as if you are eating the first cheeseburger you ever ate. The one that tasted better than any other cheeseburger in the world.

MARGOT

(strong, daring)

Show me.

CHEF SLOWIK

How would you like it cooked?

MARGOT

Medium. American cheese.

CHEF SLOWIK

American cheese is the best cheese for a cheeseburger because it melts without splitting.

MARGOT

And no weird homemade artisanal ketchup. I want Heinz.

CHEF SLOWIK

I make a special sauce that's equal parts Heinz, mayo, and hot dog mustard.

Margot cocks her head, suspicious.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)

You want it. It's delicious.

MARGOT

How much?

CHEF SLOWIK

\$9.95.

MARGOT

(weighing)

That come with fries?

CHEF SLOWIK

(yelling)

Niels!

SOUS-CHEF NIELS
Yes, Chef?

CHEF SLOWIK
Is the fryer still on?

SOUS-CHEF NIELS
Yes, Chef.

CHEF SLOWIK
(to Margot)
Crinkle-cut or Julienne?

LATER

The sound of cooking. Slowik is alone in the kitchen. The rest of the staff has gathered in the dining room, chatting amiably with diners. The tension in the room has dissipated. Everyone seems fine. Margot waits patiently.

Chef emerges from the kitchen and, sloshing across the liquid still covering the floor, places a plate in front of her.

It looks, no shit, like the best fucking cheeseburger ever. A SUPERIMPOSED TITLE reads, "SUPPLEMENTAL COURSE: 'A CHEESEBURGER - just a well-made cheeseburger"

Margot looks at it and nods. All present -- diners, kitchen staff, servers, sommelier, film crew, Mama Linda -- watch carefully as she takes a bite, closes her eyes and chews slowly. The moment is suspended. What's the verdict?

MARGOT
Now that is a cheeseburger.

CHEF SLOWIK
Yes. That is a cheeseburger.

They smile and share the moment. She takes another bite.

MARGOT
Unfortunately, my eyes were a little bigger than my stomach.

CHEF SLOWIK
Meaning?

MARGOT
Can I get the rest to go?

DOLLY IN on Slowik as he thinks. He looks around his restaurant, the sum total of his life's work.

The ferocious beauty of his menu. The havoc he has caused. Somehow his entire life has led up to this very moment. He nods.

CHEF SLOWIK
One moment, please.

LATER

Chef Slowik hands Margot a TO-GO BAG.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)
Thank you for dining at Hawthorn.

Margot goes on tippy-toe to spot her husband, still washing dishes. He pauses to look back, smiling wistfully, perhaps offering a final little wave. She blows him a kiss.

MARGOT
(to Chef)
Thank you for everything.

She reaches into her purse and hands him a ten-dollar bill.

MARGOT (CONT'D)
Keep the change.

CHEF SLOWIK
(handing it over)
And don't forget your gift bag.
Tonight's menu is included along
with a little personal memento to
remember us by.

MARGOT
Goodnight.

CHEF SLOWIK
Goodnight.

Margot walks out of the restaurant, free to go. The sneaky camera crew try to follow her out, but Slowik stops them.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)
Where do you think you're going?
Have you no respect for your craft?

They sadly shuffle back inside. Chef Slowik CLAPS.

CHEF SLOWIK (CONT'D)
So. Before our final dessert
course, there is, as they say, the
matter of the bill.

Servers place CHECKS on the tables, along with little Hawthorn gift bags. The movie star reaches for his wallet, as does Ted Bloom, until Gretchen stops him.

GRETCHEN

No, this is on the magazine.

TED BLOOM

You sure?

GRETCHEN

Absolutely.

CHEF SLOWIK

We are on a no-tip system, so gratuity is included. Also, please enjoy your gift bags. A few goodies in there -- a booklet listing our local suppliers, some house-made granola, chocolate truffles, a human finger, and a copy of tonight's menu.

Using his only good hand, Richard reaches for his wallet and hands it to Anne.

RICHARD

Can you take out my Amex?

The tech bros all toss in a credit card. They're splitting it four ways.

CHEF SLOWIK

And now, our final dessert course is a play on the traditional campfire classic -- the s'more.

EXT. HAWTHORN ISLAND - NIGHT

From afar we see Margot board the coast guard boat.

INT. COAST GUARD BOAT - NIGHT

Margot steers the boat with one hand on the wheel, gazing wearily into the distance, Hawthorn Island at her back. BRIGHT FLAMES rise inside the restaurant.

Margot's other hand rises into frame holding the leftover cheeseburger. She takes a bite.

AGAINST BLACK, TITLE CARD:**"FINAL COURSE"****EXT. HAWTHORN ISLAND - MORNING**

Daylight has finally arrived.

FIREFIGHTERS AND EMERGENCY CREW WORKERS scavenge through the charred remains of Hawthorn Restaurant. We STEADICAM through the wreckage, passing the remains of the dining room, the remains of the kitchen, and the remains of the diners and staff.

A SUPERIMPOSED TITLE reads: "FINAL DESSERT COURSE: 'S'MORE' - marshmallow, chocolate, graham cracker, customers, staff, restaurant."

We finally reach the locked SILVER DOOR, the portal to the room inside, which remarkably has not burned. It's like a jumbo-sized version of the black box of an airplane.

Officers blow the door with an explosive charge, and it flies open in a plume of smoke.

We continue in through the door. When the smoke clears, we see the interior --

A beautiful, perfectly preserved office like the one in which Margot used the radio. Only this one has three small TABLES lined up side by side.

On the left-hand table is the camera from the documentary crew along with all of their tapes.

On the right-hand table is Chef Slowik's smiling severed head on a platter.

And on the middle table are Chef Slowik's two severed hands, positioned perfectly upright so that they are holding Chef Slowik's menu, with all of the courses we saw the night before, listed in order.

The shot stops once the MENU fills the ENTIRE FRAME.

A SUPERIMPOSED TITLE APPEARS:

"THE MENU"