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OMLETTES

By Miriam Gallagher

C H A R A C T E R S

3 WAITERS These are marionettes of Fate. Dressed in black suits (tails, white shirts). Faces are masks (white make up, no lipstick or exaggerated eyebrows). Movements are stylised, graceful. An undertone of menace is ever present when they appear and builds up so that they carry a nightmare quality that is more chilling for being polite and mysterious.

MAN A tired businessman, around fifty-two years old.

WOMAN Bored lady, his wife, late forties.

BOY University Student.

GIRL University Student.

TRAMP Affable, tends towards grandiloquence, chatty. Wears old coat, battered hat, fingerless mittens, long muffler.

NOTE: As in a nightmare, there is a distortion of reality and Characters "diminish" as Waiters become more menacing.

S E T

Restaurant takes up all of stage except down stage right (DSC.) and down stage left (DSL.). Areas (Outside Restaurant) are down stage right (DSR.): MAN & WOMAN'S House (suggested) and Dancing Area. The feeling is of a "Grand Hotel" type restaurant with a disquieting sense of surrealism.

Entrance to Restaurant is DSR. Doors are suggested, E.G. space with door frame. If stage is small, two large pots of shrubs at either side with signposts would create illusion of many confusing Doors stage right (SR.). Behind a screen (trellis or greenery) comes "Violin Music". Table up stage right (USR.) is further upstage than the screen so "Violinists" can be "seen" by diners at this table.

There are seven doors: one is up stage centre (USC.) on which portrait is hung, two doors right and left of centre (to kitchen), two doors stage left (SL.) marked LADIES and CLOAKS, two doors SR. (upstage from screen) marked GENTS and the other with a blank sign.

(PLAY opens in silence. FIRST WAITER ENTERS USL. with portrait of middle aged phlegmatic moustachioed gentleman. This is hung on hook on centre "Door". As FIRST WAITER exits USR., SECOND WAITER enters USL. with a shelf. He hooks this on under portrait. As SECOND WAITER exits through USR. door THIRD WAITER enters DSR. with a bunch of red flowers, pauses DSR., looks at portrait. FIRST WAITER enters through SR. "Door", nods briefly at THIRD WAITER. Then SECOND WAITER enters DS. with a silver vase, takes flowers from THIRD WAITER and gives them to FIRST WAITER who puts filled vase on shelf under portrait. They group facing portrait, pause briefly. Then suddenly music fades up (E.G. Valse Triste: Sibelius.) To music, WAITERS set up Restaurant, constantly disappearing & reappearing from behind centre "Door" giving illusion of many waiters. Tables, candles, napkins, cutlery, flowers etc. are brought out. Their movement is like a skater's waltz with a suggestion of underlying menace. As music stops with a flourish, WAITERS have disappeared & Restaurant is now set up. Cross-fade lights from Restaurant to MAN & WOMAN. DSR. He wears a respectable suit, ready for an evening out. She is buffing her nails, wears a satin housecoat.)

MAN. Fancy a bite out Dear?

WOMAN. *(bored)* Huh?

MAN. I thought we'd eat.

WOMAN. *(sighing)* If you like.

MAN. It's better than staying in isn't it?

WOMAN. If you say so.

MAN. You know it is *(over to her)* Look *(rubs her shoulder with his finger)* you choose. *(She shrugs, attends to nails)* Go on.

WOMAN. No.

MAN. Go on, pick a place.

WOMAN. *(sharply)* No!

MAN. *(edgy)* Alright then.

(SHE sighs, takes cigarette from pocket. As HE goes to light it languidly she takes gold lighter from pocket, lights up just as he strikes match. A flicker of recognition from her of his weakness. She fondly regards lighter, puts it away.)

MAN. *(vainly tries to be masterful)* We don't always have to end up in the same place. We can choose.

WOMAN. *(irritated)* Let me know what you've decided.

(She smokes, looks away. Cross-fade lights from DSR. to Restaurant. Music is faster [Flight of the Bumblebee by Rimsky Korsakoff] as the pace of WAITERS is much quicker. FIRST WAITER enters with lighted taper, lights candles. SECOND and THIRD WAITERS bring menus, ashtrays, flowers etc. Tables are set with black cloths, white stiff napkins, red candle holders, glasses and cutlery. A sign OMELETTES is put by centre Door. The WAITERS converge SC. as music stops. They speak fast, expressions deadpan.)

FIRST WAITER. Why

SECOND WAITER. Are

THIRD WAITER. We

FIRST WAITER. Waiting?

SECOND WAITER. *(takes up menu)* What's on?

THIRD WAITER. It's always the same.

FIRST WAITER. They don't mind.

THIRD WAITER. They're lucky.

FIRST WAITER. No choice.

SECOND WAITER. But there is a choice.

THIRD WAITER. They think there is.

FIRST WAITER. *(softly intense)* Choice kills.

SECOND WAITER. Choosing is a worry.

THIRD WAITER. We choose for them.

SECOND WAITER. They come here to escape.

FIRST WAITER. The toil of work.

THIRD WAITER. The worry of boredom.

SECOND WAITER. But they think they can ---

FIRST WAITER. *(imperiously)* Choose!

THIRD WAITER. *(shuts eyes to concentrate)* Omlette La Belle Dame Sans Merci
(eager) Wasn't I quick?

FIRST WAITER. It's only a game.

THIRD WAITER. (to SECOND WAITER) You're next.

SECOND WAITER. Why bother?

FIRST WAITER. You must choose.

THIRD WAITER. Feel

FIRST WAITER. Free

THIRD WAITER. Go on.

SECOND WAITER. I'd like....

FIRST & THIRD WAITERS. Yes?

SECOND WAITER. Can I have two?

FIRST WAITER. Can't be done.

SECOND WAITER. That's a pity.

FIRST WAITER. (*glancing at portrait*) Pity doesn't count.

SECOND WAITER. If (*breaks off, then quickly*) I'll have Omlette Belle Surprise.

THIRD WAITER. But you know the surprise.

FIRST WAITER. You should by now.

SECOND WAITER. That's why I wanted two.

FIRST WAITER. Greedy guts.

SECOND WAITER. Are you joking?

FIRST WAITER. I never joke.

SECOND AND THIRD WAITERS. That's true.

FIRST WAITER. Nothing's true.

THIRD WAITER. So nothing matters.

SECOND WAITER. It's all the same.

THIRD WAITER. The very same.

FIRST WAITER. (as WAITERS move towards exit) You pays yer money and you takes yer -

ALL THREE WAITERS. (pause DS., turn heads only to look at audience, then whisper) CHOICE!

(EXEUNT to kitchen. Cross-fade Restaurant lights to DS. GIRL, with college books, sighs. BOY dashes onto stage, collides with her. Both bend to pick up books, files etc.)

BOY. I'm sorry.

GIRL. That's all right.

BOY. I didn't look where I was going. That's me all over. (pauses) How did it go?

GIRL. (as she rises) I don't think I'll make it.

BOY. Of course you will. Anytime I see you, your head's stuck in a book. You must know it all by now.

GIRL. (shakes head) No.

BOY. (suddenly) Look, what you need is to forget all about exams.

GIRL. I wish I could.

BOY. (leading her over DSL.) Let's go out and celebrate.

GIRL. (laughing despite herself) What?

BOY. Come on. We'll go and eat...somewhere special - First time for both of us.

GIRL. Oh I don't know...

BOY. (seeing sign over Door) How about Omlettes?

GIRL. Omlettes? But wouldn't that cost too much?

BOY. (laughs) Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. Meet you back here at eight.

GIRL. All right.

(Exeunt SL. Lights up in Restaurant. Music very fast. WAITERS move swiftly but smoothly. Potted shrubs are put DS. on floor, signs are hung over Doors E.G. Cloaks, Gents, Ladies. Enter MAN & WOMAN in "good" clothes.)

SECOND WAITER. (*looking up*) They're here (*to FIRST WAITER*) Your choice?

FIRST WAITER. (*idly flicking napkin at tablecloth*) Omlette Riders to the Sea.

SECOND WAITER. Omlette

THIRD WAITER. Kismet?

(*They turn their heads to look inquiringly at FIRST WAITER.*)

FIRST WAITER. (*very suavely*) Our "guests" have come.

(*One final flurry of movement in and out round centre door on which hangs portrait. Suddenly music stops, WAITERS poised in semicircle facing out front, motionless. MAN & WOMAN enter restaurant through DSR. WAITERS line up DSL. of Door.*)

THIRD WAITER. (*gliding over to them*) Good evening.

SECOND WAITER. (*over to them*) Good evening.

(*FIRST WAITER bows but doesn't move to them.*)

THIRD WAITER. Let me take your coat Madam.

SECOND WAITER. Your coat Sir?

(*WAITERS drape coats over arms and take them through Door marked CLOAKS DSL. or put them on coat stand DSL.*)

FIRST WAITER. (*as he leads them with a flourish to table USL.*) This way (*lifting her chair*) Madam. (*She sits*)

(*FIRST WAITER helps MAN be seated, then goes for wine menu.*)

SECOND WAITER. (*giving food menu*) Here you are Madam. (*SHE takes it and sighs*)

THIRD WAITER. (*giving food menu to MAN*) The menu Sir. (*He takes it and reads*)

FIRST WAITER. (*puts wine menu on table*) The wine list Sir.

(*FIRST WAITER hovers SL. not too near table. SECOND and THIRD WAITERS stand like sentinels beside portrait or DSL.*)

MAN. What would you like Dear?

WOMAN. I don't know (*idly*) The music hasn't started yet?

FIRST WAITER. (*gliding over*) May I be of assistance Sir?

MAN. Oh thank you Waiter. My wife was wondering if the music...

FIRST WAITER. *(goes DSL., looks at audience, returns)* They'll be starting in a moment Madam.

WOMAN. *(vaguely)* What did I have last time?

(FIRST WAITER clicks fingers. THIRD WAITER comes to table.)

FIRST WAITER. Madam wonders what she had last time.

THIRD WAITER. *(pauses)* I think it was number ten.

WOMAN. I'll have that again.

MAN. Sure you don't want to be adventurous? *(All ignore this)*

FIRST WAITER. *(writes)* One of number ten. And you Sir?

MAN. *(uncomfortable)* It's hard to choose.

FIRST WAITER. It is indeed Sir *(pauses)* If I might suggest Sir?

MAN. Oh yes, please do.

FIRST WAITER. *(points to menu)* That might suit you Sir.

MAN. Mm...well, if you recommend it...

FIRST WAITER. *(after a SL. cough)* The choice is yours.

MAN. I think I'll take your advice. I'll have number 59.

FIRST WAITER. If I may say so, I think that's a wise choice.

MAN. *(relieved)* Well that's settled.

FIRST WAITER. *(to SECOND WAITER)* One of no. 10 and one of no.59.

SECOND WAITER. *(to THIRD WAITER.)* One of no. 10 and one of no.59.

THIRD WAITER. One of no. 10 and one of no.59.

(THIRD WAITER disappears through Door left of portrait.)

FIRST WAITER. Some wine? *(hovers, MAN reads wine list)*

(Lights out except for night lights on restaurant tables. Music, 'Grand Hotel' type with violin, comes from behind screen SR. TRAMP enters USC., peers over curtain into

restaurant. He wears a battered hat, fingerless mittens, tattered muffler. He comes to rest in a slump USL. of Door near potted plants outside restaurant. Lights on TRAMP.)

TRAMP. Wonder if I'll go in? I fancy a plate of somefing savoury with a bottle – nah – a glassful of your full-bodied French wines...no need to make a glutton of meself on the booze. Might spoil the taste of the food. "Never be foolish" 'E said "about wine. Think of your palate. It needs exercising". Like a muscle I suppose he meant. Yeh, it needs to know wot's wot. If you don't train it, and tell it wot's wot, your palate, like everyfing else, ken get carried away and fink it knows all the answers. A lifetime's education is wot we're talking about, a lifetime's. *(sighs)*

(Lights up in Restaurant.)

FIRST WAITER. A dry white wine Sir?

MAN. Ah! Yes.

FIRST WAITER. Thank you Sir. *(bows)*

(FIRST WAITER withdraws with wine list into "kitchen". Silence between MAN and WOMAN. Music plays "Oh how we danced on the night we were wed". FIRST WAITER comes from kitchen, clicks fingers. SECOND WAITER comes from kitchen with silver dish, stands near table. FIRST WAITER clicks fingers. THIRD WAITER appears with similar dish, stands near table. As FIRST WAITER clicks fingers, SECOND WAITER removes lid from dish and puts a small plate with an omelette on it in MAN'S place. As FIRST WAITER clicks fingers, THIRD WAITER removes lid from his dish and puts similar omelette in WOMAN'S place. SECOND AND THIRD WAITERS withdraw backwards into kitchen.)

MAN. *(sniffing)* It smells good.

(SECOND WAITER brings basket of bread rolls, offers these.)

MAN. *(taking one)* Thank you. Oh! *(as WAITER goes)* Can I have two?

SECOND WAITER. *(gliding back)* By all means Sir. *(MAN takes roll)*

(FIRST WAITER takes wine from THIRD WAITER, opens bottle with pomp, pours some into MAN'S glass.)

FIRST WAITER. Your wine Sir.

(MAN tastes, nods. Glasses are filled. MAN eats. WOMAN sips, toys with food. FIRST WAITER crosses to others USR. near portrait.)

SECOND WAITER. Wonder why they still come?

THIRD WAITER. It's all there is.

FIRST WAITER. They know their onions.

SECOND WAITER. Omlettes.

WOMAN. Why do we come here?

MAN. (*mouth full of food*) You can depend on the place.

WOMAN. It's not the same since he...(*voice trails off*)

FIRST WAITER. They miss him.

THIRD WAITER. Who's next?

SECOND WAITER. A boy and girl.

FIRST WAITER. Love's Young Dream.

(*BOY & GIRL ENTER USL. dressed casually, glance at sleeping TRAMP.*)

THIRD WAITER. (*as they enter Restaurant*) Good evening.

SECOND WAITER. (*over to them*) Good evening.

THIRD WAITER. Let me take your coat Madam. (*She gives it*)

SECOND WAITER. Your coat Sir. (*BOY gives his coat*)

(*WAITERS take coats. FIRST WAITER leads them to table USR.*)

FIRST WAITER. (*as he brings them to table*) This way.

(*Chairs are pulled out. GIRL sits on chair upstage of table*)

SECOND WAITER. (*giving menu*) The menu Madam.

THIRD WAITER. (*hands BOY menu*) For you Sir.

FIRST WAITER. (*puts wine list on table*) The wine list Sir.

BOY. (*As THIRD WAITER hovers, pen poised for their order*) What'll you have?

GIRL. Gosh I don't know.

BOY. Whatever you like. It's a celebration.

GIRL. It isn't you know. Not yet.

BOY. What's life for if you can't celebrate?

(THIRD WAITER coughs politely.)

BOY. *(jolly)* I'll have number seven!

GIRL. Maybe I'll have that too...No. I'll have number nineteen.

THIRD WAITER. Will that be one of number seven and one of number nineteen?

BOY. Yes thanks. *(to GIRL)* Will you excuse me?

(BOY goes to GENTS SR.)

GIRL. *(as THIRD WAITER moves away)* Actually I'll have a little of number four as well.

(THIRD WAITER freezes. A chord of discordant music.)

GIRL. I said I'll have some of number four as well.

THIRD WAITER. I don't think so.

GIRL. What do you mean?

THIRD WAITER. *(after glancing at portrait)* Can't be done. He wouldn't like it.

(THIRD WAITER glides off into kitchen.)

GIRL. What's he talking about? *(mutters as she glances at portrait)*
Who's that anyway?

(BOY returns to table. SECOND WAITER glides over, gives GIRL a black ticket, the other WAITERS are lined up SR.)

GIRL. *(perplexed)* What's that for?

SECOND WAITER. *(as he moves USR. to join WAITERS)* That's a lucky dip.
(pauses) If your number comes up.

BOY. *(laughs)* Don't much like the sound of that. What's the prize?

THIRD WAITER. *(who has noiselessly reappeared near table)* I can see Sir you haven't been here before.

BOY. Emm, no...I haven't actually.

THIRD WAITER. *(smoothly)* I know Madam hasn't. Otherwise she wouldn't have ordered number nineteen and number four.

BOY. *(surprised)* What's that got to do with it?

THIRD WAITER. Your orders will be along presently.

(BOY and GIRL exchange puzzled looks. Violin music gets louder. They dance DSR. Lights dim. Spot follows TRAMP, who rises shuffling.)

TRAMP. You can't expect to train your palate in a matter of moments... An acquired taste takes time. *(sniffs)* Maybe as I shall go in. Keep them on their toes *(unsteady)* You never know what they could get up to now 'E' s gone *(smacks lips)* A slice of life eh?

(TRAMP enters Restaurant, muttering. MAN ignores him. WOMAN has her back to him. Music plays gaily.)

FIRST WAITER. *(gliding over to him)* Good evening Sir.

TRAMP. *(breezy)* Evening All.

(WOMAN turns on hearing his voice, gasps.)

SECOND WAITER. *(gliding over)* Your coat Sir?

TRAMP. I'll keep it on.

FIRST WAITER. *(leads TRAMP to centre table. He sits)* Here you are Sir.

THIRD WAITER. *(giving menu to TRAMP)* The menu Sir.

TRAMP. *(taking it)* Ta! *(reading)* Can't make head or tail of it. It's all numbers. I ask you, when did numbers nourish? *(scratches head)* Naw! People can't go round their daily grind fortified by a plate of threes or a dish of sevens! How ken I educate my palate if I don't know wot's educatin' it? I mean for Gawd's sake, wot flavour is number seventeen? *(loud)* I'll ask. *(pauses, then loud)* Waiter!

THIRD WAITER. Can I help Sir?

TRAMP. Ken you tell me wot flavour number seventeen is? *(After THIRD WAITER whispers in TRAMP'S ear)* Oh I see. *(glances at portrait)* I'll have some then.

THIRD WAITER. *(writing)* Yes Sir.

TRAMP. Oh! and bring me a glass of wine.

(THIRD WAITER bows and goes into kitchen.)

FIRST WAITER. *(handing menu to TRAMP)* Some wine Sir?

TRAMP. *(takes it)* Ta. Mmmm. More numbers eh? I'll have a lucky dip.
(shuts eyes, sticks finger on wine list) That one!

FIRST WAITER. *(peering over TRAMP'S shoulder)* I'm not sure which one it is Sir.

TRAMP. *(reasonable)* It's the one where my finger is.

FIRST WAITER. Ah! Would that be number twelve?

TRAMP. It might. *(looks at wine list)* No. I'd say my finger is more on number thirteen wouldn't you Waiter?

FIRST WAITER. Yes sir. It would seem to be number thirteen.

(FIRST WAITER glides off into kitchen)

TRAMP. I'm still educating my palate.

FIRST WAITER. *(peers from kitchen Door)* We quite understand Sir.

TRAMP. It takes time *(jerks head towards portrait)* 'E said so and 'E knows.

(FIRST WAITER smiles, bows, then goes into kitchen.)

WOMAN. *(shocked whisper)* There's a...tramp at the next table.

MAN. Ignore him. *(sips wine)* Really Dear you should try to enjoy Life.

WOMAN. *(pushing plate away)* You sicken me.

TRAMP. *(rising)* I think I will shed the old coat.

SECOND WAITER. *(coming over)* Certainly Sir. *(gingerly takes TRAMP'S coat to CLOAKS)*

TRAMP. Be more comfy in me shirtsleeves.

MAN. *(to WOMAN who's about to protest)* Sh! Live and let live.

WOMAN. You expect me to lower my voice so I won't be heard by a tramp!

TRAMP. I heard that.

(BOY and GIRL return to table, are puzzled by TRAMP, but keen to keep to themselves. Music stops.)

MAN. *(embarrassed)* I'm most frightfully sorry. My wife didn't mean ---

TRAMP. *(airily)* Oh that's alright. Live and let live I always say and let the dead rest. *(nods at portrait)*

(BOY and GIRL exchange glances of unease.)

MAN. I only meant ---

TRAMP. *(cheery)* Oh I know wot you meant my good man. You meant and your good lady wife meant...that I am different *(WOMAN looks away)* and *(moving over to them)* may I say PROUD to be different. Don't waste your pity on me Madam.

WOMAN. *(embarrassed)* I wasn't feeling sorry for you.

TRAMP. Glad to hear it I'm sure. Cos if you was feeling sorry for me then I would have no way out but to feel sorry for you.

MAN. *(leaping up)* Would you care for a cigarette?

TRAMP. Don't mind if I do. Thanks. *(takes cigarette)*

MAN. Have you a lighter Dear?

WOMAN. *(giving MAN her lighter)* Of course.

TRAMP. *(as MAN lights his cigarette)* Ta.

MAN. Not at all.

(ENTER cavalcade of WAITERS. BOY and GIRL are taken aback when food is brought to TRAMP'S table.)

TRAMP. Ah! *(goes to table)* Grub's up! *(tucks napkin under chin)*

(A. AND B. ARE ORCHESTRATED)

A.

(FIRST WAITER clicks fingers. SECOND WAITER brings dish to table, removes lid. FIRST WAITER clicks fingers. THIRD WAITER opens wine as SECOND WAITER goes to kitchen. FIRST WAITER pours wine into TRAMP'S glass.)

B.

WOMAN. Your food's cold. Ask them to heat it up.

MAN. I don't mind.

WOMAN. (*scathing*) You like it cold. (*laughs*) I must remember that.

MAN. Sh! (*jerks head towards WAITER. WOMAN drinks, pours more wine*)

TRAMP. (*to WAITER*) You can fill her up.

FIRST WAITER. (*fills glass, then*) Everything all right for you Sir?

TRAMP. (*mouth full*) Mmm. (*raises glass to portrait, watched by WAITER*) Bottoms up! (*eats, drinks with gusto*)

WOMAN. (*after watching TRAMP*) It's not the same without him.

BOY. (*whispers loudly to GIRL*) Who was he anyway?

GIRL. (*loud whisper*) They think he's still in charge.

TRAMP. (*points with knife at portrait*) Who was 'e? You're looking at the best man as ever lived. (*to FIRST WAITER*) Isn't it the truth?

FIRST WAITER. Indeed Sir.

MAN. (*cheerful*) Still you chaps do a fine job, considering...

FIRST WAITER. Considering what Sir?

MAN. (*quickly*) Considering he's not here anymore.

TRAMP. An 'ero. That's wot 'e was...An 'ero.

FIRST WAITER. A hero.

TRAMP. I think we should all drink to that.

(*FIRST WAITER clicks fingers. Drink is brought. All glasses are filled. BOY & GIRL reluctantly take glasses from WAITERS 2 & 3.*)

TRAMP. (*to FIRST WAITER*) You too?

FIRST WAITER. Not on duty Sir. He wouldn't have liked it.

(*TRAMP rises grandiloquently. ALL rise, BOY and GIRL uneasily*)

TRAMP. I give you, Ladies and Gentlemen...An 'Ero! (*They drink.*)

BOY. (*aside to GIRL*) Paying homage to a picture...I think it's a bit...

GIRL. (to BOY) Letting someone who's dead....

(WAITERS look pained at BOY and GIRL who are afraid. TRAMP winks at portrait and sits. WAITERS bring food to BOY and GIRL & carafe of white wine. Serving RITUAL as before.)

BOY. I don't think we ordered any wine.

FIRST WAITER. Compliments of the management Sir. *(pours wine)*

BOY. *(glances uneasily at GIRL)* Oh thank you.

FIRST WAITER. Everything all right for you Sir?

BOY. *(nervous)* Oh yes...Yes thank you

(WAITERS withdraw, take positions as sentinels near portrait.)

GIRL. *(eating)* Mm...It's nice.

BOY. Good. *(pours more wine)* Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. *(smiles wanly, drinks, then suddenly)* Are you free Saturday?

GIRL. I haven't a clue what I'll be doing on Saturday.

BOY. *(disappointed)* Oh.

GIRL. *(quickly)* I only meant anything could happen between this and Saturday.

BOY. Like what?

(FIRST WAITER gliding by gives black ticket from floor to GIRL. She's nervous. He bows, exits. They eat. Music (Gypsy Dances) begins to play.)

WOMAN. *(slightly tipsy)* Jane's just back from Djibouti.

TRAMP. *(cheery)* Know it well.

WOMAN. *(glass half way to lips)* I beg your pardon?

TRAMP. Now there's a place I'll never forget.

MAN. *(hastily)* I'm sure Dear Mr....em...doesn't wish to...

TRAMP. *(coming over to them with his glass)* on the contrary Sir. Your good lady here mentions Djibouti...That's one place I'll never forget.

MAN. (polite) Oh really?

TRAMP. (waxing eloquent) Oh yes! Give me Africa! (to WOMAN) There was a lady once - not unlike your good self - Karen Blixen she was. Expect you've heard of her.

WOMAN. No.

TRAMP. One whiff of Africa an she was hooked! Africa ken do that to you.

MAN. I was in Malaya myself. Singapore.

TRAMP. Naw! Didn't take to Singapore. Too artificial like if you get my meaning. (MAN looks abashed, WOMAN is getting tiddly) Now take this Karen Blixen. A countess I fink she was. May I? (helps himself to their wine) Married this explorer chappie and off they went. But she lost her heart to the dark continent. (drinks) She knew what she wanted. (smiles at WOMAN) You've got to know wot you want.

WOMAN. Yes...

TRAMP. And then keep going in that direction till you hit the Bull's Eye. (laughs) Whoosh! (mimes arrow) Straight to the centre!

WOMAN. (a bit slurred) Maybe you're right. (To MAN) Is he right?

TRAMP. (confidentially) Oferwise, life is but a game of chance. (drinks) A game of chance. Naw! You need to be free to choose wot you want, where you're going. (pauses, swills glass) Like that lady (rises, mimes arrow) Whoosh!

WOMAN. How did she go about it?

(TRAMP has ambled back to his table during WOMAN'S query.)

MAN. Good riddance

TRAMP. (with his back to them) You talking to me then?

MAN. (taken aback) Emm...no.

TRAMP. (slowly ambling over to them) Cos if you wasn't talking to me nor to your good lady wife here, I'd say as you was talking to yourself and you know wot they say about them as talks to themselves.

MAN. (weary) Quite.

TRAMP. *(playful)* Have a toothpick. *(offers them to MAN)*

MAN. No thanks.

TRAMP. *(dreamy)* Odontoglyfida! [Pr.Oh-dhon-thoh-gliff- eedah]
(WOMAN giggles) That's wot they're called in Greece. *(slowly)*
ODONTOGLYFIDA! Sort of glides over the tongue it does, that
word. Smooth and glistening like honey. *(To MAN)* Not the kind
of word you'd expect for toothpicks is it?

MAN. *(stiff)* I've never thought about it

TRAMP. *(jolly)* Come on now, would YOU have come up with it?

WOMAN. *(laughing)* Of course he wouldn't

TRAMP. *(snapping toothpick in half and dropping it onto plate)* Still! You
have to hand it to the Greeks all the same.

(MAN goes to speak as music starts to "Oh How We Danced On The Night We Were Wed". WOMAN grabs MAN. They dance. TRAMP quaffs rest of his glass, then moves to his table.)

TRAMP. Waiter! What's the damage?

THIRD WAITER. That's all right Sir.

TRAMP. Are you sure?

WAITERS. That's quite all right Sir.

TRAMP. *(affably resigned)* Well in that case I'll just have to leave you a
tip. *(WAITERS look pained)* After all, you don't get somefing for
nothing these days. *(loud)* Now let me see My Good Man
(delves in pocket) Ah! Here you are. *(hands coin to FIRST
WAITER)*

FIRST WAITER. *(very polite, taking it)* Thank you.

(BOY & GIRL get up to dance. TRAMP goes into GENTS.)

THIRD WAITER. He must pay.

FIRST WAITER. He'll pay. *(pauses)* Like everyone.

SECOND WAITER. When? He must have his turn

FIRST WAITER. Soon.

THIRD WAITER. Who's next?

FIRST WAITER. Love's Young Dream.

(LIGHTS dim. MAN & WOMAN dance. She's tipsy, enjoys dancing giddily. MAN is embarrassed. BOY & GIRL sip drinks.)

GIRL. It's been lovely, honestly. But I must get back .

BOY. *(smiling)* We must do this again. *(whispers)* Maybe somewhere different next time.

GIRL. *(smiles politely)* Mmm. I must go.

(BOY signals to WAITERS. THIRD WAITER glides over, hovers)

BOY. The bill please.

THIRD WAITER. Yes Sir.

(While WAITER goes, BOY searches vainly. WAITER returns.)

BOY. *(aside)* My wallet!

THIRD WAITER. *(presenting bill)* The bill Sir.

(BOY looks helplessly at GIRL who takes bill.)

GIRL. *(taking bill)* Thank you.

THIRD WAITER. Not at all Madam.

(GIRL takes out purse, hands coins to WAITER. He stands still hand out, waiting. GIRL empties purse. WAITER is motionless. SL. pause as BOY & GIRL exchange frantic looks. Then FIRST WAITER glides over noiselessly, glances at THIRD WAITER.)

FIRST WAITER. *(softly)* You must pay. *(looks at coins)* Tck! Tck!

SECOND WAITER. *(who has glided over)* Everyone must pay *(pauses)* before they go.

(As MAN & WOMAN, breathless from dancing, return to table, TRAMP enters from GENTS whistling. MAN & WOMAN drink, ignore others.)

GIRL. *(as TRAMP passes by table)* Can you help?

TRAMP. Wot's the matter Luv?

BOY. *(pointing to WAITERS)* It's them. They won't let us go.

TRAMP. *(cheery)* Can't you let them go?

FIRST WAITER. *(confidentially to TRAMP)* The young lady and gentleman haven't paid.

TRAMP. *(loud, relieved)* Oh I see! That explains everyfing. *(To GIRL)* When you've paid you're free to go. Isn't that so Waiter?

FIRST WAITER. Quite so Sir.

(TRAMP & WAITERS move to dancing area to talk. BOY tries to open Door to street but in vain. He returns to table where GIRL sits, frightened. Meanwhile we hear the following:)

TRAMP. *(cajoling)* But can't they go...just this once?

FIRST WAITER. He wouldn't like it.

TRAMP. But e's not here is 'e? *(All WAITERS look pained)* I mean to say wot 'e don't know won't hurt him.

FIRST WAITER. It may not hurt him.

SECOND WAITER. His wishes were quite clear.

TRAMP. Yeh I know all that. Keep things exactly the same.

THIRD WAITER. Quite.

TRAMP. *(as if reciting rules)* Attend to the needs of the Clientele. Give people wot they want

FIRST WAITER. What they deserve.

TRAMP. Yeh. They come in for a meal and wot they get is a slice of Life.

SECOND WAITER. His words exactly

TRAMP. *(sighs)* So, that's it then....They stay

THIRD WAITER. Till they pay.

(ALL WAITERS gesture "It's out of our hands". TRAMP moves SC.)

TRAMP. *(turns suddenly)* Say if I was to become manager?

(A pause. Polite silence from WAITERS while TRAMP waits.)

FIRST WAITER. We manage things nicely.

TRAMP. How can you be sure of what he wants now that he's (*FIRST WAITER coughs politely*) O.K. You win.

(*GIRL goes to LADIES SL. SECOND WAITER exchanges labels on Doors marked LADIES and CLOAKS.*)

FIRST WAITER. (*smoothly*) No one wins.

TRAMP. Do I lose then? (*pauses*) Is that it? (*pauses as WAITERS lower their eyes in silence, then suddenly very jolly*) Well riddle me this and riddle me that, curiosity killed the cat.

FIRST WAITER. Would you care for more wine?

TRAMP. No, it's time I was pushing off.

(*Since GIRL went to LADIES, BOY has vainly tried to get TRAMP'S attention, then MAN & WOMAN'S. FIRST WAITER clicks fingers. SECOND & THIRD WAITERS get TRAMP'S coat, help him on with it.*)

TRAMP. (*buttoning coat*) Well I must say it was very tasty.

FIRST WAITER. Always pleased to oblige Sir.

SECOND WAITER. Your hat Sir.

TRAMP. Ta. (*puts it on*)

THIRD WAITER. Your gloves Sir.

TRAMP. (*putting on mittens*) Ta.

SECOND WAITER. Your scarf Sir.

TRAMP. (*puts it on*) Ta.

(*Music: "I'm forever blowing bubbles." TRAMP goes DS. WAITERS follow.*)

TRAMP. Oh! (*fishes in pocket, takes out balloon, blows it up as WAITERS stand motionless*) You can give this to the young lady.

FIRST WAITER. (*taking balloon*) Certainly Sir.

TRAMP. Well then, I'll nip in sometime soon... when I fancy a slice of life.

SECOND AND THIRD WAITERS. At your service Sir.

(They bow as TRAMP leaves Restaurant. BOY stares shocked as Door lets TRAMP out. BOY behaves as if separated by an invisible wall from others. Spot follows TRAMP.)

TRAMP. *(muttering as he exits)* If that's educating your palate you ken keep it. I wouldn't go there if it wasn't for him. I wouldn't you know. Oh! how he loved the place! A slice of Life. That's wot they come for and wot do they get? *(pauses)* Hmm! *(moving DSL.)* Always attend to the needs of the Clientele. Wasn't that wot I was doing? 'Elping that young girl, eh? *(scratches head)* A slice of life eh?

(WAITERS have been watching TRAMP from inside Restaurant.)

SECOND WAITER. We must tell him he's next.

THIRD WAITER. When he comes again.

SECOND WAITER. Everyone must pay.

FIRST WAITER. *(looking at balloon in his hand)* Yes.

TRAMP. *(reflectively as he moves to go off SL.)* Don't know as I will go there again. *(burps)* Whoops! Parding me. Must be the garlic. I must mention that -- next time.

(Exit TRAMP DSL. Music stops. FIRST WAITER enters kitchen with balloon. BOY moves secretly towards GENTS, is seen by THIRD WAITER who suavely stops him.)

THIRD WAITER. *(indicating GENTS)* It's over there Sir.

(BOY nods quickly & nervously enters GENTS. THIRD WAITER then changes Door labels so BOY is in a nameless room near GENTS.)

WOMAN. *(can't find lighter for cigarette)* My lighter! It's gone!

MAN. Don't be silly. Shh! Keep your voice down.

(SECOND AND THIRD WAITERS look pained)

WOMAN. Call the waiters.

MAN. Don't make a fuss Dear. It'll probably turn up.

WOMAN. Call the waiters.

(WAITERS busy, straighten chairs, switch labels Doors E.G. 'Ladies' is changed to 'Cloaks'.)

MAN. *(pours wine)* I must say their wines are delicious.

WOMAN. *(loud)* Rule number one -- Keep things as they are.
(WAITERS stop what they're doing) Everything's fine as long as we stick to the rules. That's all you ever do.

MAN. Don't be silly Dear. *(whispers)* Shh!

WOMAN. *(loud)* Rule number two. No Protest. *(glares)* You sicken me!

MAN. *(coughs, then tentative)* Waiter!

SECOND WAITER. You called Sir?

WOMAN. Go on tell him.

MAN. There seems to be a mishap.

SECOND WAITER. A mishap Sir?

WOMAN. I've been robbed.

SECOND WAITER. *(polite)* Robbed Madam?

WOMAN. Yes. My lighter is gone.

SECOND WAITER. I'll see to it Madam.

(He glides into kitchen and returns with FIRST WAITER.)

FIRST WAITER. Don't distress yourself Madam.

WOMAN. It was gold, a valuable piece, about this size. I had it for years.

MAN. It can't have got far.

WOMAN. I know! That...that scruffy fellow who was in here could have...
(voice trails off as WAITERS are joined by THIRD WAITER)

THIRD WAITER. Can I be of assistance?

FIRST WAITER. Madam's lighter seems to be missing

WOMAN. *(irate)* Is- Is missing

SECOND WAITER. She fears ...taken.

WOMAN. Look! That chap who's just gone out --

(A pause. FIRST WAITER looks at portrait & WAITERS who lower eyes.)

FIRST WAITER. *(polite)* Madam has seen the gentleman in question with her lighter?

WOMAN. *(affronted)* Of course I haven't.

MAN. If he had it, I'd have got it back from him.

WOMAN. *(glares at him)* Oh yes?

FIRST WAITER. *(pauses, coughs)* I'm very sorry about this Madam.

(FIRST WAITER clicks fingers. Table is fully reset. He goes behind screen. We see him nod at "Musicians". Music starts.)

MAN. There you are Dear.

WOMAN. What's this for?

MAN. It's to make up.

WOMAN. *(amazed)* For my lighter?

FIRST WAITER. Everything all right for you now Madam?

WOMAN. No. There's my lighter for one thing.

FIRST WAITER. That's being sorted out Madam.

WOMAN. Oh...and there's that tramp. *(FIRST WAITER lowers eyes)* Why did you let him in?

FIRST WAITER. It's a question of some delicacy Madam.

WOMAN. *(furious)* Delicacy! *(laughs harshly)* There was nothing delicate about his behaviour. *(to MAN aggressively)* Was there?

MAN. We don't usually find his sort in OMLETTES.

FIRST WAITER. Oh, he has been before.

WOMAN. But why? When? I never saw him here...Things are not the same anymore. *(glances at portrait)* He wouldn't like it.

FIRST WAITER. *(freezes, then icily polite)* We are the best judge of that Madam. *(pauses)* The gentleman to whom you refer has connections with our restaurant.

MAN. *(shocked)* What? You mean that fellow was a friend? *(glances at portrait)*

FIRST WAITER. In a manner of speaking Sir.

WOMAN. *(appalled)* A relation?

(FIRST WAITER whispers in her ear and in MAN'S ear. MAN & WOMAN exchange looks of alarm. GIRL comes from "Door" marked CLOAKS. FIRST WAITER goes to kitchen, instantly brings balloon.)

FIRST WAITER. *(polite cough)* This is for you Madam.

GIRL. *(startled)* Oh!

FIRST WAITER. Allow me *(ties balloon to her chair. As BOY returns, sees balloon)* Ah! there you are Sir *(pulls out chair for BOY who sits, then pleasantly)* Everyone has to pay.

GIRL. How?

FIRST WAITER. *(shuffling pack of cards)* You can play.

(FIRST WAITER deals cards. GIRL gets black card. Freeze on this. Spot on MAN & WOMAN.)

MAN. Tired? Another drink?

WOMAN. My lighter?

MAN. You'll see, they'll have it for you next time.

(They rise. As FIRST WAITER goes to WAITERS, GIRL goes to WOMAN.)

GIRL. *(desperate)* Could you, would you play with us?

WOMAN. *(laconically)* I'm too tired for games.

MAN. Awfully sorry. We must go.

(GIRL scurries back to BOY, leaving cards at centre table. WAITERS bring coats. MAN & WOMAN are helped on with coats.)

FIRST WAITER. Everything all right for you Sir?

MAN. Emm..y - yes *(pauses. Then WOMAN coughs loudly)* You will look for my wife's lighter won't you?

FIRST WAITER. If we find it, we'll keep it safe.

SECOND WAITER. *(at her right side)* For Madam.

THIRD WAITER. *(at her left side)* Till next time.

FIRST WAITER. *(pauses while WOMAN pulls on gloves)* Same time next week Sir? *(MAN nods)* We'll keep your usual table.

WOMAN. *(tense)* Good night.

MAN. Yes, thank you. Good night. *(as FIRST WAITER smiles, bows, holds Door politely)* Thank you.

(They exit SR. MAN puts his arm round WOMAN'S shoulder. She shrugs it off. FIRST WAITER watches.)

FIRST WAITER. *(looking after MAN & WOMAN)* A pleasure.

(BOY & GIRL are sitting uneasily USR. GIRL notes changed Door labels. She confuses BOY by trying to signal this.)

SECOND WAITER. There is a way you can pay.

THIRD WAITER. With your thoughts.

SECOND WAITER. Pennies for thoughts.

THIRD WAITER. You need plenty.

FIRST WAITER. Are you ready?

(Dim lights.)

SECOND WAITER. Think of a word.

BOY. A game? *(To GIRL)* We'd better play.

SECOND WAITER. A word.

BOY. Let me see.

FIRST WAITER. Sea

SECOND WAITER. Waves

THIRD WAITER. Wash

GIRL. Clean

FIRST WAITER. Pure

BOY. Silver

SECOND WAITER. Glitter

THIRD WAITER. Copper

FIRST WAITER. Burnish

SECOND WAITER. Forge

BOY. Horse

GIRL. Ride

FIRST WAITER. *(swiftly)* Wind

SECOND WAITER. Air

THIRD WAITER. Mist

FIRST WAITER. Dissolve

BOY. *(desperate)* Sea

GIRL. *(in a burst)* I can't!

(GIRL rises. FIRST WAITER gets cards, brings them to GIRL)

FIRST WAITER. *(shows Queen of Hearts to GIRL)* You had your fun.

SECOND WAITER. La Belle Dame Sans Merci.

(FIRST WAITER shows her the Queen of Spades.)

GIRL. *(To BOY)* We shouldn't have come.

ALL WAITERS. *(softly in unison)* Too late.

BOY. We can't pay.

THIRD WAITER. You can play *(pauses)* forfeits.

(WAITERS remove black ties. THIRD WAITER puts ties on silver dish. Reluctantly BOY gives his watch, GIRL a ring. Dish is covered and paraded about. SECOND WAITER then shakes dish, shuts eyes, removes lid, picks a black tie. He opens eyes.)

THIRD WAITER. That's mine.

GIRL. How can you tell? They're all the same.

FIRST WAITER. Everything's the same.

SECOND WAITER. No questions.

(THIRD WAITER goes to kitchen, brings 3 eggs to juggle. WAITERS clap. Repeat game. FIRST WAITER picks black tie.)

SECOND WAITER. *(quickly)* My turn.

(BOY & GIRL exchange alarmed looks. SECOND WAITER does magic trick. WAITERS clap. Repeat game. THIRD WAITER picks BOY'S watch.)

BOY. *(nervously licks lips)* All right. I'll sing.

(As WAITERS group DS. BOY stands under portrait, tries to sing. We hear no words. GIRL is terrified. WAITERS smile. FIRST WAITER puts hand to ear as if trying to hear. BOY stops in horror, runs SR. Chilling light as WAITERS come closer to GIRL.)

FIRST WAITER. You could

SECOND WAITER. Stay here and help us

FIRST WAITER. Look after people

SECOND WAITER. Help them escape

THIRD WAITER. The turmoil of work

SECOND WAITER. The worry of boredom

FIRST WAITER. You could wash up

SECOND WAITER. Clear away

THIRD WAITER. Set tables

BOY. *(gasps in horror, then)* Can we go then?

FIRST WAITER. *(intense)* We need your thoughts

SECOND WAITER. To feed the minds

THIRD WAITER. Of the hungry ones

FIRST WAITER. The greedy, bored and worried ones

THIRD WAITER. We need the juices of your minds

SECOND WAITER. As succulent fillings

FIRST WAITER. For flavour and spice

THIRD WAITER. The spice of Life

THREE WAITERS. In OMLETTES.

(Shocked Pause. WAITERS advance on BOY and GIRL in a circle.)

SECOND WAITER. *(stares at HER)* Omlette La Belle Dame Sans Merci.

GIRL. No! *(clutches balloon)*

THIRD WAITER. *(stares at BOY)* Omlette La Belle Surprise.

BOY. *(shivers)* No please! *(looks helplessly at GIRL)*

FIRST WAITER. You must pay with your minds.

(BOY & GIRL scream. They are forced into kitchen by WAITERS 2 & 3.)

SECOND WAITER. The guests need food

THIRD WAITER. Only the best will do

FIRST WAITER. For their minds

SECOND WAITER. *(softly intense)* The youngest, freshest

THIRD WAITER. Rarest

ALL WAITERS. Choicest!

(BOY & GIRL are in kitchen now. FIRST WAITER watches, laughs softly. WAITERS come from kitchen. THIRD WAITER dangles key SC. They laugh softly, defer to FIRST WAITER.)

THIRD WAITER. *(SC. throws key over shoulder to 2nd W.SR.)* She is

SECOND WAITER. *(catching key)* La Belle Dame

THIRD WAITER. *(bending down so key can be thrown)* We are

SECOND WAITER. *(throwing key over shoulder to FIRST W. SL.)* Sans merci!

(ALL WAITERS turn backs to Audience, facing table DSC. They start putting on black ties. FIRST WAITER pockets kitchen key.)

FIRST WAITER. He has high standards.

THIRD WAITER. *(taking balloon from pocket, burns it)* He demands satisfaction.

FIRST WAITER. We satisfy.

THREE WAITERS. We know what he wants.

(FIRST WAITER clicks fingers. Tables cleared, except for candles.)

FIRST WAITER. *(clicks fingers)* Knives out. *(knives on tables)*

SECOND WAITER. Forks out. *(forks are put on tables)*

THIRD WAITER. Spoons out. *(spoons are put on tables)*

FIRST WAITER. *(clicks fingers, then glances at portrait)* That's how he liked it.

SECOND WAITER. The need for food

THIRD WAITER. Is never satisfied.

FIRST WAITER. New flavours are always needed.

SECOND WAITER. Who's next?

THIRD WAITER. Who's here?

(WAITERS look around, out front. FIRST WAITER nods)

THIRD WAITER. Everything ready.

SECOND WAITER. Waiting and glinting.

THIRD WAITER. We're ready.

SECOND WAITER. We're waiting.

(WAITERS prepare to blow out candles. A slight pause)

FIRST WAITER. *(looks out front)* We're waiting *(whispers)* for you.

(WAITERS smile secretly, then blow out candles. Blackout. Curtain falls as knocking is heard from kitchen.)

(END OF PLAY)

Performance rights must be secured before production. For contact information, please see the "Omlettes" information page (click on your browser's "Back" button, or visit <http://www.singlelane.com/proplay/desserts.html>)