

PLUCK THE DAY
a raucous comedy

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Dramatist Guild Member



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Be wise, strain the wine; and since life is brief,
prune back far-reaching hopes! Even while we speak,
envious time has passed: pluck the day,
putting as little trust as possible in tomorrow!
—Horace

CHARACTERS:

CAST: 5 actors—2 males, 3 females

CLAIRE late 30's, of African descent. Works at Pearl and Ash with her friend, CY. Enjoys a 2006 Dirty and Rowdy from Napa. She and Parker are married.

PARKER late 30's, early 40's, Caucasian male, married to Claire. As a som at Le Bernardin. His favorite wine is a Domaine de la Romanée-Conti (DRC) because it is the most expensive.

SANDRINE late 50's, elegant, and she wears her wealth. She is synonymous with a nice chilled sauvignon blanc, or four. Parker's mother.

KE a late 20's Asian man who works as a sommelier at Charlie Bird. His favorite is from the Piedmont or a 2002 Bourgogne Rouge from Domaine Lafarge. Previously, Ke made a fortune in nano-technology, but spent it all on travel, clothes, and a trainer.

CY a young 30's, female Hispanic (light brown). She works as a som at Pearl and Ash. Enjoys old Napa cab, Spotts Woode, 1987.

DELIVERY PERSON/LIMO DRIVER Unseen. Voice only.

SETTING:

A lower eastside converted warehouse loft apartment in New York City. Wine cubes filled with hundreds of wine bottles decorate the living spaces.

TIME:

The time is now, 2018, October to December.

Scenes:

| | |
|----------------------|-----|
| ACT ONE | 3 |
| PROLOGUE | 3 |
| Scene 1: | 3 |
| Scene 2: | 42 |
| ACT TWO | 75 |
| Scene 1: | 75 |
| Scene 2: | 91 |
| AD LIB STORIES | 110 |

PLAY DEVELOPMENT:

I want to thank: C. Denby Swanson, and Michael Kinghorn for their help on the play in 2019.

| | | |
|------|---|---------------------------------|
| 2020 | B Street Theatre's 3 rd Annual New Comedies Play Festival (Finalist) | Sacramento, CA |
| 2020 | Theatre Artists' Studio | Writers' Public Reading |
| | | Scottsdale, AZ |
| 2019 | Now and Then | Workshop and Public Performance |
| | | Phoenix, AZ |

AUTHOR'S NOTES:

The events are imagined encounters and do not proport to be true.

The scenes should flow quickly from scene to scene.

If possible, the play would benefit from being staged in a real bar and restaurant with live guitarists playing Spanish and French tunes. In between the scenes the guitarists would play on the set or in front of it. I recommend guitar solos and duet.

SYNOPSIS:

Welcome to the prestigious world of Master Sommeliers. An impressive group of wine experts, who passed an exam with one of the lowest success rates in the world. Claire wants to be part of the group. But when the Court of Master Sommeliers revokes their licenses because of a cheating scandal, Claire's dream is corked. She and her husband, Parker, lose their new apartment; Ke loses his visa, and Cy is demoted to waiter. Claire's mother-in-law, Sandrine, jumps to the rescue and readies them for the re-exam. All the while Claire searches for the cheater. A truly drunk on life comedy about lies, loves, and sour grapes.

ACT ONE

PROLOGUE

AS THE AUDIENCE ENTERS two acoustic guitar players play. CY, KE, PARKER, and CLAIRE pour wine for the audience and “peddle” wine. Ushers serve appetizers. They improvise (ad-lib) dialogue (see Stories). We see them as sommeliers making a living.

Scene 1:

Lights up on a converted warehouse loft apartment in New York City bursting with wine cubes. Wine bottles and glasses sit atop counters. Open boxes clutter the room. A backpack sits on the kitchen counter. It is 11:00 p.m. In the kitchen CLAIRE, in a headwrap, gargles wine.

PARKER (Off-stage)

Can you name it!!—

CLAIRE

(mouth full of wine) Hold on—!

PARKER (Off-stage)

It’s not difficult!

CLAIRE

(mouth full of wine) I got it—!

PARKER enters shirtless with items from the bedroom and puts them in a box.

PARKER

Doesn’t it taste wet—?

SANDRINE (Off-stage)

I’ll bet a fifty she can’t name it!

PARKER

She can name it, Mom. (To CLAIRE) The wine is wet. The year was a wet year— A wet place— and wet grapes.

CLAIRE grabs PARKER, kisses him, all the while spits wine into his mouth.

PARKER

(mouth full of wine) (liking the kiss) Hey-hey-hey—

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CLAIRE

That is what I call a California kiss.

PARKER

(smiling) Umm—. Do it again.

CLAIRE

When your mom leaves.

PARKER

I'm working on it.

CLAIRE

And this wine is a Mendocino zinfandel.

PARKER

Good! You got it! *(Being handsy)* And my sexy Nubian Princess, what's the year?

CLAIRE

(solidly) 2000!

PARKER

Was 2000 wet?

CLAIRE

No?

PARKER

No.

CLAIRE

Damn.

SANDRINE enters with men's underwear, which she folds in front of Parker.

SANDRINE

1998! El Nino! Very rainy—!

PARKER

Very wet—

SANDRINE

And my boy knows wet—

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PARKER

MOM! God! If they haven't named a hurricane after you, they should.

SANDRINE

Why?

PARKER

You come in like a storm and you make everything a mess—You just say whatever you want.—

SANDRINE

Is this because I said “wet”?

PARKER

Please—

SANDRINE

But you did. Wet the bed until 6th grade. Only way to stop him? I had my assistant sleep in his bed. When she'd feel him pee! She'd make such a fuss.

PARKER

Please—

SANDRINE

Had to pay her ten pesos extra. It worked. You stopped wetting the bed.

PARKER

Can we not talk about this—

SANDRINE

Don't be so sensitive. It's not becoming. Like I told Cook and Chauffer this past Christmas when they wanted to take-off for the day: suck it up. We are who we are. (*Holding up underwear*) Ahh. So, you like these Superman undies?

PARKER

Compared to last month's Sponge Bob ones? These are more adult.

PARKER exits.

SANDRINE

(*To CLAIRE*) Dear. Folding underwear correctly is a must. Let me show you—

CLAIRE

I'm good—

SANDRINE

You'll get a dollar for each undie you fold right.

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CLAIRE
(*resistant*) I'm not being paid-off—

SANDRINE
Must be forty bucks in here.

CLAIRE
(*eager*) Show me how.

SANDRINE
Spread it, find the leg seems, press, crease back, and fold in half. Got it?

CLAIRE
Got it.

SANDRINE
You do it.

CLAIRE
After I get these wines committed to memory.

SANDRINE
(*Quietly*) Give it up.

CLAIRE
Excuse me?

SANDRINE
I'll pay you to stop this fiasco.

CLAIRE
You mean the sommelier—

SANDRINE
You know exactly what I mean. You two.

CLAIRE
I don't think you—

SANDRINE
He did this behind my back, just to get me mad. And now we can come to an agreement. Just let him go. I'll give you a nice severance package. Set you up in London even. Call it.

CLAIRE
I'm just a bit shocked—

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SANDRINE

Shocked? So was I when I first heard about you. Think about it.

PARKER re-enters.

PARKER

(*To CLAIRE*) Boo. You don't have to do the wine exam for me.—

SANDRINE

Or me—

PARKER

You can start something else—

SANDRINE

Like folding clothes right or filing for divorce. Your choice.

PARKER

Boo, the exam's done—

CLAIRE

We trained together, and I wanted to pass together.

SANDRINE

(*examining the comic-book underwear*) Once you move, I'll come to the new apartment just to finish reading this comic book.

CLAIRE

We don't have the apartment yet—

SANDRINE

Just the signing's left—

PARKER

—then we move—

SANDRINE

Do you know how many favors I called in to make the other tenants agree? I mean, six and a half tenants! Do dwarfs count as a whole or a half now-day? Doesn't matter. I've never been so over leveraged on favors.

CLAIRE

We're thankful.

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SANDRINE

I'll be thankful if my dreams come true.

PARKER

Now we can get our family going—

SANDRINE

Well, you'll be right above my lawyers—

CLAIRE

We'll learn to be quiet.

SANDRINE

And right across from me.

CLAIRE

What?

SANDRINE

(To Parker) Just in case you need me, pound on the door.

CLAIRE

I will do more than pound on the door. But I thought.... You're staying?

PARKER

Mom, I thought you were going back to Melbourne after you helped us move.

SANDRINE

That was the plan, before. Before I met Claire. Before I discovered you were scheming behind my back—

PARKER

I wasn't scheming. I was falling in love.

SANDRINE

Falling in *love*?

PARKER

Yes— There was something in Claire that I loved— That I love. Her gentleness. When I first... She had something that quietly said, "I've been through a lot and I need your help." I like the fact that she leans on me, that she needs me.

SANDRINE

Yes, she needs you. She's using you.

PARKER

Mother—

SANDRINE

What? I don't understand how you could keep this a secret. There I was hundreds of thousands of miles down-under, and you couldn't pick up the phone and tell me you got married.

PARKER

But I told you.

SANDRINE

You didn't give me *all* the *necessary* details.

PARKER

You mean that she's black.

SANDRINE

Yes. How could you keep this secret? Why didn't you ever tell me you liked African-American women?

PARKER

I couldn't come out to you. Ever since I was young I knew.

SANDRINE

You knew? When?

PARKER

Since I can remember. You could line up all these white playboy women in bikinis, and put one black woman at the end. Just a grocery-store check-out clerk, and I'd be, "Hey! You can check me out. You can ring me up." I've always had this, and when we met, I knew. I've been in-love with Claire since our first date, and it wasn't like I was keeping a secret; it was like I was keeping her to me. I knew you wouldn't approve, but I didn't care. No, I did, but I loved her. Love her. I love you, Claire. And then, Mother, when I saw you at the exam—

SANDRINE

And you didn't tell me then either.

PARKER

I did too. I introduced you to Claire. And you just stood there like you'd had a stroke.

SANDRINE

I had! That's what it felt like. While I was over there learning their wine process and setting up some of the best vineyards I've ever owned, and come for a quick visit, and you're married. Any mother would react like I did.

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PARKER

I thought it was better this way. So, you're not going back? You're moving here?

SANDRINE

Don't you love your mother?

PARKER

Yes, Mom. I just want you to see that what Claire and I have is real. And now she's family, you need to treat her as such.

SANDRINE

Family? What an interesting cultural concept. I discovered that the Aborigines, you know, they're the Australian blacks. In their culture, Aborigine women have a strict policy. They never look directly at their mothers-in-law. They don't do it. Never. The wives don't look directly at their mothers-in-law. It works. Let's try it.

PARKER

We aren't Australian.

SANDRINE

(Disappointed) It'd be nice though. *(Pause.)* Park— I'll give you a fifty. Put on a shirt and take me home.

PARKER

Later—

SANDRINE

You drive a hard bargain. I'll give you fifty-five!

PARKER

Just help me finish—

SANDRINE

Oh, you want me to Oh-ber?

CLAIRE

Oo-Ber—

SANDRINE

You sure—

PARKER

Yes, Mom—

SANDRINE

Fine. And what do I have to do to get you to put on a shirt?

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PARKER

It's my place, and—

CLAIRE

I like it.

PARKER

Let's pack the things on the bed, then go.

SANDRINE

For every minute you make me wait, you lose two dollars. After that, you'll be paying me.

CLAIRE

Hurry, Parker. We're broke.

SANDRINE

Hardly. You know, in Australia, it's nice too how Aborigines can't be sommeliers.

CLAIRE

Have they tried?

SANDRINE

They know their place, so why try?

CLAIRE

I will continue to try.

SANDRINE

Why?

CLAIRE

How many Master sommeliers are women?

SANDRINE

I was the first!

SANDRINE exiting.

SANDRINE (Off-stage)

—and there's like three others. Four! If you count Cy!

PARKER

(*To CLAIRE*) I'm okay without a shirt, right?

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CLAIRE

Yes. (*Whispered*) But if you don't take her soon, I'll forget I love you and SNAP HER NECK, babe!

PARKER

I get it, but—

CLAIRE

(*Whispered*) You get it? She's like Ebola!

PARKER

(*being all sweet*) And you're her cure.

CLAIRE

The only thing that will cure what she's got is a *taser*!

PARKER

Be nice.

CLAIRE

How can she not see it—? She passed. You passed. Ke passed. Cy passed. I am the only one who didn't. How do you think that feels? —

SANDRINE (Off-stage)

Wonderful!

CLAIRE

(*Whispered*) Take her home or you'll be taking her to ER.

PARKER

I will.

CLAIRE

Come here—

PARKER

What?

CLAIRE whispers into PARKER's ear.

PARKER

You are?

CLAIRE

(Nods.)

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PARKER

That's great—

CLAIRE

Shhh. Don't tell her. Not until—

PARKER

Okay—I won't— But won't the wine impact the “you-know-what?”

CLAIRE

I'll lay off the wine, and I won't ingest.

PARKER

Don't you think my mom will notice?

CLAIRE

You can come up with something—

PARKER

She really doesn't like you—

CLAIRE

You think?

PARKER

I'm sorry. I'll talk to her.

CLAIRE

Boo. Love you, and I'm going to be respected as a somme—

PARKER

She respects you; she just doesn't like you—

CLAIRE

She respects me the way a lion respects a deer. As prey—

PARKER

You didn't marry her, you married me.

CLAIRE

Clearly, you don't understand the mother-in-law thing. Believe me, I need to prove a lot.

PARKER

Okay-okay— At least you're not in the situation Ke was in.

CLAIRE

Thank God. If Ke hadn't passed, they would've revoked his visa, and sent him back to China.

PARKER

Yeah, but he's a good immigrant. If only all immigrants were like him.

CLAIRE

All I'm saying is—I'm mad I didn't pass, and I won't blow it next time. I'm going to pass.

PARKER

Here's to next year!

PARKER and CLAIRE kiss. With a bottle of wine, CY, a light brown-skinned 20-ish female, opens the warehouse door. Because of her poor eyesight she wears glasses.

CY

(To CLAIRE) What'd I miss?

CLAIRE

(breaking-off the kiss) Just my humiliation.

CY

You didn't spend all day obsessing over wine did you?

PARKER

Of course she did.

CY

If you really want to take it again, I can help.

CLAIRE

Thanks—

CY

Just 'cause you're movin' out doesn't mean outta mind. Homegirls for life.

CLAIRE

You're always been there for me—

CY

Be right back.

CY exits, carefully missing the doorjamb.

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CLAIRE

Watch those doorways!

CY (off)

It moved!

PARKER

(To Claire) Bet she can't wait to see straight.

CLAIRE

I won't recognize her without glasses.

PARKER

She won't recognize *you* without her glasses. How long does she have to wear the patch?

CLAIRE

A few days. Until her eye adjusts to the Lasik. And then she'll get the other eye done.

PARKER

And she'll switch the patch?

CLAIRE

Yep. One paycheck at a time.

PARKER

She'll be so happy when she can see with both eyes.

CLAIRE

Our floor manager always says, "Cyclops", he calls her that, "When you get both eyes, you'll be a hit with the blind people!" She'll show him. She'll be a hit with all the people.

SANDRINE enters.

SANDRINE

Park, maybe invite Claire to our vineyard.

CLAIRE

I've seen vineyards, thank you—

PARKER

How's that going to help her pass the test next year?

SANDRINE

I know when I get stressed, I walk the rows. The vines. I just thought, Clar, working the fields, she'd enjoy pickin' grapes. Make a few bucks. The pickers are some of the nicest people I know.

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CLAIRE

I don't need to pick any grapes—

SANDRINE

We pay well. Everyone says so, except the unions, but screw the unions—

CLAIRE

My great-grand-mother was the last field hand in my family, and I'm not going back to those days.

SANDRINE

I never meant—You don't think I was referring to— Oh!

PARKER

You just can't say those things Mom.

SANDRINE

I didn't say the N-word.

PARKER

No, but— Mom, you keep saying racist comments, and I warned you. If you keep this up, I will have no choice, and we'll stay here, and I'll cut you off the same way you did to Dad.

SANDRINE

Give me some time. I'm getting used to your marriage and—

PARKER

That doesn't condone some of your comments.

SANDRINE

I am working on it, and I even explained to Clar that we could come to an agreement.

PARKER

Good. And since you too don't really know each other, and Claire could use the help, maybe Mom you can help her pass the exam.

CLAIRE

I'll pass. You'll see.

SANDRINE

Pass? As what, exactly?

PARKER

She going to pass the test, and I want you to help her. To show me you're trying to get to know my wife.

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SANDRINE

I can try. I will try harder.

PARKER

And you'll help her ace the exam?

SANDRINE

If she is willing?

CLAIRE

Let's see how it goes.

PARKER

Good start. Boo, why don't you try one of the other wines?

CLAIRE

I should help pack.

SANDRINE

Let's do a white. I like whites.

CLAIRE

I'm sure you do.

PARKER

And Master Mom, help me with the bed sheets.

SANDRINE

Be back, Clar. Master Parker I'm right behind you.

PARKER and SANDRINE exit. KE, a late 20's Asian man, enters wearing a bike helmet and a suit. In the hall is a jug of wine, and a flat of plastic cups with lids full of urine.

KE

What a day!

CLAIRE

Ke, thank god. Save me with your bad wine.

KE

Save you? From what?

CLAIRE

Sandrine is here.

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KE

She's back from Australia?

CLAIRE

Yes.

KE

So let me get this straight: Parker never told his mom about you, and that was fine because she was living in Australia.

CLAIRE

We met only once—

KE

At the exam, right?

CLAIRE

That was it—

KE

And he didn't tell her then—

CLAIRE

(Shaking her head) He told her over the phone once she was back in Melbourne.

KE

And is she okay with the marriage?

CLAIRE

About as happy as a Grand Wizard with the Obama election.

KE

Doesn't matter now. It's all done.

CLAIRE

Where is bad wine? Did you forget?

KE

I am like a panda: I don't forget.

CLAIRE

You mean an elephant. Elephant's don't forget.

KE

Ever see a panda lose its way, or forget where they lived? Course not. Pandas don't forget.

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CLAIRE

Okay. So, where's your bad wine?

KE

In the hall. I just can't! I can't carry it any farther. Would you please, dear? It's just. (*Waving his phone*) Grindr! You know. And... Now that I'm a Master, I can't do it!

CLAIRE

You want me to pick up your jug of wine—

KE

Besties for life dear—. Master to... ummm.

CLAIRE

I'll get it.

As CLAIRE retrieves the urine capped samples, which she puts in the frig.

KE

If it weren't for this guy— A nobody. Like gross. I mean get this: (*reading off his phone*) "Hi. I'm Dion, which rhymes with 'get on' this."

CLAIRE

(As she gets the jug of wine) Ick.

KE

That's not the "ick" part. He says: "Do you know that Asians are hard to sedate?"

KE/CLAIRE

Ewww.

CLAIRE

How'd you get the jug and those here on your bike?

KE

A trick I learned as kid on the streets of Beijing. You think biking in New York is a challenge? In China it's murder.

CLAIRE

(Referring to the capped cups of urine in the box) What are these?

KE

They're from my very distant cousin, the urologist.

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CLAIRE

I've met your cousin.

KE

His lab refrigerator failed, and they'd spoil, so I'm keeping them until it's fixed.

CLAIRE

Is he blackmailing you?

KE

He says he won't tell INS anything, but you can never believe him. His grand-mother was Japanese. I'm keeping them just a few days.

CLAIRE

They're urine samples?

KE

Not for drink. They're going in the frig. And the jug's my entry for the bad wine contest. And what box-wine did you dig up?

CLAIRE

A Napa 2014 earthquake left-over.

KE

No contest. I'll win. I don't mind helping you two decorate your new apartment, but lifting boxes? Not my thing.

CLAIRE

Come here. See what Parker picked for the new place.

CLAIRE sits at the bar with her laptop.

CLAIRE

Look at these pillows—

KE

(Looking on the laptop screen) Ahhh! What is he? Color-blind?

SANDRINE enters from the bedroom with towels, which she boxes.

SANDRINE

Actually, yes. He says he doesn't see color, but how can you not see color? I mean no offense, Clar.

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CLAIRE

Of course not.

KE

Hello, Sandrine.

SANDRINE

Ke, didn't you ever wonder why Parker wears only blue and black?

KE

Or nothing—

SANDRINE

Parker has trouble discriminating browns and reds—

PARKER (Off-stage)

MOOOOM! We had a deal!

SANDRINE

I'm just explaining why you failed art and biology.

CLAIRE

Biology?

SANDRINE

He couldn't tell the good blood from the bad blood.

PARKER (Off-stage)

MOOOOM! Stop!

SANDRINE

I'm just explaining your tastes in—

CLAIRE

Women?

SANDRINE

No. Decorating.

PARKER (Off-stage)

KEEE! LOOK AT THE NEW PILLOWS!

KE

Ick! Only Nicki Minaj gets away with ugly like that.

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SANDRINE

Don't gays like pink?

KE

For a wine. Not for a living room!

PARKER enters with boxes.

PARKER

It's an accent color.

KE

(closing the laptop) Leave accents to actors. I finished designing *your* living room. Leave it alone.

PARKER

Yes, and you did a stunning job, like always.

KE

Thanks sexy. *(Toying)* Nice free show. Anyone have a dollar I can stuff in his waistband?

PARKER

This ain't free.

KE

I'm going to miss that strut.

CLAIRE

He does strut, doesn't he.

KE

(Lewdly) Nicely.

PARKER

(Flirting) It's all for you, and you.

SANDRINE

Oh now I get it! Ke's the designer! Makes sense. You gays are so good at designing. Oh, Parker, where'd you put the water?

CLAIRE

We have water.

PARKER

Over on the counter.

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SANDRINE

I thought all you Masters could use ‘em.

PARKER

Anybody want a Vody water? Mom’s new business—

SANDRINE

It’s a side business—*(to Parker)* I don’t think everyone will like Vody. They’re endorsed by Rush Limbaugh.

KE

I always wondered who your dealer was.

CLAIRE

None for me. I’ve got water.

KE

I’ll pass.

PARKER

(To Sandrine) We appreciate it, Master Mom.

KE

We Masters thank you.

CLAIRE

Oh please.

KE

Were these at the Master Sommelier exam?

PARKER

A donation from Master Mom.

PARKER puts the water bottles away.

SANDRINE

(At the window) Can’t wait Park until you’re done with this stage.

PARKER

What “stage”?

SANDRINE

The “slumming it” stage.

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PARKER

I wasn't "slumming it" on purpose.

SANDRINE

You could've always lived with me, and left this behind—

CLAIRE

We're not living separate lives—

PARKER

Claire and I needed to bond without you—

SANDRINE

And did you bond enough?

PARKER

Enough that I think we know we love each other very much, and we are so solid in our love that we aren't threatened by living near you.

CLAIRE

I agree. And we're also changing the locks when we move in so you can't just barge in when you want.

SANDRINE

I don't barge. I arrive. Such a beautiful view but it doesn't feel safe.

KE

I've learned to be safe. Grand-mother says I was the product of too much rice wine and an expired condom.

SANDRINE

What I mean is this neighborhood looks more like a prison complex. Don't you recognize it, Clar?

CLAIRE

Then it's a good thing we're moving—

SANDRINE

For Parker it is.

PARKER goes to his backpack, on the counter, and pulls out two bottles of re-corked wines, and wine glasses.

PARKER

Mom, try one of the bad wines in the frig. After the contest, we'll go—

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SANDRINE

Okay, Master Parker. (*Picking a bad wine*) So, ennie-meanie-minnie-mo. Catch a—

CLAIRE quickly grabs a urine sample and pours it into a wine glass.

CLAIRE

Try this one. Its new. You might like it.

SANDRINE

Oh? I'll give it a try.

KE

Claire? Those are—

CLAIRE

Just one, Ke. For Sandrine.

KE

All's fair in love and—

CLAIRE

Exactly. Hey, Parker—more glasses from work?

PARKER

We need a complete set.

CLAIRE

But—

SANDRINE

They write off ten percent for breakage.

PARKER

What's one or two?

CLAIRE

Ten or fifteen bucks. It's not like the guy who I fell for. Not like the guy who thought the Olive Garden was spicy. It's not like the guy who promised me he'd love me forever.

PARKER

Alright. I'll take them back.

PARKER keeps one glass. CLAIRE takes the other glass and returns it to PARKER's backpack.

PARKER

Masters! Let's celebrate our new status! Everyone! Get a glass, get a bad wine! Let's get drunk on life!

KE/SANDRINE/CLAIRE

I'm in! / To life! /Cy! Get out here!

PARKER pours wine for himself, using one of his new glasses. CY enters carrying a box of wine, The Big OK, and she hits the doorjamb with a shoulder.

CY

Oww.

PARKER

Didn't you get the Lasik?

CY

Got uno eye done.

KE

No longer as blind as a cat.

CY

Ke, it's "blind as a bat".

KE

Why? Bats aren't blind. You ever see a bat run into walls?

CY

Doesn't matter. As long as there is enough light, I'm fine.

CLAIRE

What about at work?

CY

No big deal. I've got so much of it memorized and my second appointment's Monday! And with what I made tonight I can get both eyes done! Lasik here I come!

PARKER

A good night?

CY

Keepin' it 100. Like top sales.

Pluck the Day

CLAIRE

Sweet!

PARKER exits to his bedroom.

CY

Chicka, I got finesse! I got it! And when they hear I'm a "master sommelier" they spend twice as much. When the sale goes up, so does my tip!!

The door buzzes.

CY

Ke, we're trill about the move, right?

KE

Trill yourself away from me!

CY

Calm down salty.

KE

No— I hate moving. It's all elephant in an egg!

SANDRINE

Is that some ancient Chinese secret?

KE

Yeah. Almost as ancient as you.

KE presses the door intercom.

KE

Yes? What is it?

(UNSEEN UPS PERSON)

Delivery.

Been by twice and no

one's ever home.

SANDRINE

Master Cy?

Need these signed.

Is this your bad wine?

KE

(into intercom) Fine.

CY

I'll be down.

Yep. The Big O. K.

Pluck the Day

KE

The Big NOT O.K.! Last time it left fuzz on my tongue.

CY

That was the stud you had over.

KE

You mean that walking STD who wouldn't leave me alone for weeks?

CY

Yeah— him.

CLAIRE

Wasn't he married?

KE

So? I wasn't. He was!

SANDRINE

(raising her glass) Here-here!

CY

Oh, please. You're so not innocent.

KE

Compared to Harvey Weinstein, and Bill Cosby, I'm a saint.

SANDRINE

I'm not.

SANDRINE drinks. CLAIRE moves CY to a private spot, so they are not overheard. CY opens CLAIRE's wine. Lights can help with this. Two conversations at once.

CLAIRE

Cy? Come here.

CY

What's up?

SANDRINE

(To KE) And Saint Ke, how's it over at Charlie Bird?

KE

They love me, of course.

Pluck the Day

SANDRINE

But of course.

CLAIRE

(whispered) I'm pregnant.

CY

(whispered) No way—!

CLAIRE

(whispered) Shhh.

CY locks her lips.

SANDRINE

(To KE) Not missing the nano-tech world?

KE

Not with what I make: now I'm a crazy rich Asian.

PARKER enters in a shirt.

SANDRINE

Ke? You happy my son's moving?

KE

I am happy for his move. *(To Parker)* I like you, Park, but... now I won't ever walk in on you in the bath, shaving.

PARKER

So? Lots of people shave in the bath.

KE

Not those parts.

SANDRINE

Ahhh! My son wouldn't ever—! He gets his manscaping done at the same time I do.

CY

I am so DONE with that image!

KE

Not me. Be right back. UPS delivery at the front desk.

KE exits the front door.

Pluck the Day

SANDRINE

(To Cy) Umm.... Cy? Pearl and Ash? How is it?

CY

Still tres Michelin stars. Still not selling *your* swill.

SANDRINE

Your loss.

CY

No— Our gain. Our restaurant is still on the top ten list. And porque? Because, it's simple. We have taste.

SANDRINE

Cy, you *think* you have taste.

CY

These buds are in better shape than Serna, Aretha, or Latifah! My eyes might be 20/100, but my taste buds are all 20/20.

CLAIRE

You go, girl!

CY and CLAIRE high-five.

SANDRINE

Well, if I could have everyone's attention. I want to make a toast. You've all been together... What? Since?

PARKER

Since Ke and I worked at Charlie Bird together.

SANDRINE

That's right—

PARKER

I was always flirting with him, so when I got tired of couch surfing—

CY

So you admit it?

PARKER

Hell, yah. We even messed around a bit—

Pluck the Day

SANDRINE

You did what?—

PARKER

(To Sandrine) The things you don't know. *(Laughs)* Ke and I. Whatever. We found this place, and then we got good at wines.

CLAIRE

All the while he worked his charms on me—

SANDRINE

That's when Charlie Bird fired you?

CLAIRE

No. I left Charlie Bird and moved in.

PARKER

You know that Mom.

SANRINE

Kept your relationship a secret for six months—

PARKER

We weren't a secret, you were in Australia.

CLAIRE

And Charlie Bird couldn't sponsor Parker and Ke and me—

PARKER

Finessed Le Bernardin.

SANDRINE

Finessed?

CLAIRE

And I met Cy—

PARKER

She makes a mean enchilada.

CY

Gracias, cono.

SANDRINE

All very nice, but I just wanted to congratulate you—

Pluck the Day

CY

Should we wait for Ke—?

PARKER

He'll be right back—

SANDRINE

You worked hard to become Master Soms. And it's paid off. Not just in money, but it opens door you'd never dreamed of. And last year, when I proctored the east coast exam, we had fifty-three soms and only six passed. It was an arduous journey, but you made it! Everyone let's toast.

She looks around the room. Everyone but CLAIRE has a wine. CLAIRE has water.

SANDRINE

Clar?

CLAIRE

I'm good with this—

PARKER

Let's wait for Ke.

CY

She can toast with the agua.

SANDRINE

You don't drink—

PARKER

She's ummm—

SANDRINE

She's what?

PARKER

She's—

CY

She's okay.

SANDRINE

Then get some wine.

PARKER

She can't.

Pluck the Day

Why? SANDRINE

She's— PARKER

She's ahh— CY

It's my toast. SANDRINE

She'd be— PARKER

She'd be cheating on her sobriety. CY

Sobriety? I didn't know you were an alcoholic. SANDRINE

She just let us know too— CY

You're like her best friend. How didn't you know? SANDRINE

No, I knew— CY

It's not new, really, it just a new sobriety year. PARKER

It is? CLAIRE

It is. CY

She's been sober for one-hundred days. PARKER

Just as long as we've been married. CLAIRE

Pluck the Day

CY

Just since the wedding—

SANDRINE

But you drank at the exam—

CLAIRE

That was before the wedding, and I hadn't admitted to my alcoholism then.

SANDRINE

So many bartenders and soms I've know were drunks. Makes it hard to pass the test.

CLAIRE

(Glaring at Parker for help) I didn't think of that.

PARKER

It's just tasting. Not swallowing.

CY

And isn't that why at the exam they had all those water bottles—

PARKER

Right—so you can dilute the wine and you don't swallow as much.

CLAIRE

It's one time. After that, I won't be doing anymore tasting.

CY

For a few months.

SANDRINE

I don't see a harm if it's just the exam.

KE enters the apartment carrying four large certified envelopes.

KE

You'll never guess what I have here!

SANDRINE

Divorce papers?

KE

From the Court of the Master Sommeliers.

Pluck the Day

SANDRINE

Not the court I was hoping for.

KE passes out the envelops.

PARKER

Must be our official certificates.

KE

With seals—

CY

Must be.

CLAIRE

One for me?

PARKER

Let's all do this at the same time.

SANDRINE grabs a "wine" (urine sample) from the refrigerator, tears off the lid.

PARKER

(to the gang in this order: Cy, Ke, Sandrine, Claire) Master Cy, Master Ke, Master Sandrine—

KE

Master Parker—

PARKER

Soms! And my dear wife. Let's open on three. One. Two. Three. —

As they each open their letters, SANDRINE, in a special space, spot lit.

SANDRINE

(in one breath) The Board of Directors of the Court of Master Sommeliers of America unanimously voted to invalidate the results of the tasting portion of this year's Master Sommelier Diploma Examination for all candidates. This is due to clear evidence that a Master breached the confidentiality with respect to the wines presented for tasting. Maintaining the integrity of the examination process must be our highest priority.

The lights return to normal. SANDRINE sips the wine.

CLAIRE

Does this mean we can't move?

Pluck the Day

CY

I'm still reading.

PARKER

We're moving!

KE

I'm not redoing that test!

The lights alter.

SANDRINE

(Speaking quickly) We discovered that the tasting portion of this year's examination was compromised by the release of detailed information concerning wines in the tasting flight. The Board unanimously voted to void those results. We understand this decision is a shock to those who recently passed this examination. We are committed to developing an expedited process so that all eligible candidates can retake the tasting examination. Sincerely, yours truly, The Court.

Lights return. SANDRINE sips wine.

PARKER

What the hell?

KE

Ahh!— My visa.

CY

You guys are going too fast—

KE

But I passed!

CLAIRE

Apparently not anymore.

KE

Immigration will send me back.

CLAIRE

They won't. They have no clue what a sommelier is—

CY

And the president's too worried about Mexicans to pay attention to Asians.

Pluck the Day

PARKER

Can the Court do this—?

SANDRINE

Yeah.

KE

Can they take away our titles?!

SANDRINE

The Board's attorney said they could—

KE

If I don't pass again? I can't go back to Beijing. It's full of Koreans!

CY

This isn't fair! I can someone turn on a light—

PARKER

There goes the new apartment—

CLAIRE

—our plans for a family—

PARKER

—the money—

CLAIRE

I'm not going backwards—

KE

Me neither!

CY

They should take the degree away from the cheater, not us!

PARKER

They don't seem to know who cheated.

CLAIRE

And there might be a reward.

SANDRINE

Good idea. I'll check—

Pluck the Day

CLAIRE

If I can find out who the cheater was—

KE

You'd save me—

CLAIRE

Then that's my plan— If you'll help—

CY

I'm still on page uno.

SANDRINE

They don't know who it was.

CLAIRE

It says they'll call my employer—

KE

There goes my visa! Shit!

SANDRINE

Deep sigh. Eye-roll, eye-roll, eye-roll.

CY

Have some compassion, Sandrine.

SANDRINE

I don't have a visa.

CY

I don't have one either, but—

SANDRINE

You don't have a visa? Where're you from?

CY

Arizona.

SANDRINE

Of course. A boarder state.

PARKER

Mom, did you know about this?

Pluck the Day

SANDRINE

Just a rumor—

CLAIRE

We'll lose our deposit.

PARKER

We need a lawyer—

KE

I need a lawyer—!

SANDRINE

(*queasy*) The Board checked with lawyers—

CY

Ke, you dated a lawyer—

CLAIRE

You're not helping, dear—

KE

He was clingy. Like—

CY

Like Saran Wrap?

KE

No. Like a Korean.

SANDRINE

When's the retest?

CLAIRE

In eight weeks.

SANDRINE

December? Okay, then. Let's buckle down and start training.

PARKER

Mom, what are you up to?

SANDRINE

If I train all of you, then can redeem, I mean recover—

Pluck the Day

PARKER

I agree that's a good idea—

SANDRINE

You passed it once, you can pass it again.

CLAIRE

Most of us.—

SANDRINE

Give us time to get to know each other—

CY

I've only done half my Lasik—

SANDRINE

You'll pass, and get the money for the other half—

PARKER

We can't expect the same answers the second time—

SANDRINE

Then no cutting corners—

KE

I'm not going back to being *just* a som—!

PARKER

Claire and I needed this—

SANDRINE

Then it's a deal. I'll train you. That way I can get to know Claire better, and you can all help me learn a little—

CLAIRE

Empathy?

SANDRINE

If that's what you call it.

CY

I'm down. I need it to see! —

CLAIRE

All right. But one racist comment—

Pluck the Day

SANDRINE

I'll make mistakes, and you'll make mistakes, but we'll help each other, okay?

CLAIRE

Only if you help all of us. Ke? You okay with Sandrine being our coach?

KE

If she wants to help—

SANDRINE

I do—

KE

I'm in. I have no choice. People know me as Master now. My parents told everyone! I had Master som embroidered on all my t-shirts!

PARKER

Did you really?

KE

See!!

KE unbuttons his shirt and reveals his t-shirt. His t-shirt says "Master Som."

CY

Just keepin' it 100.

PARKER

So it's a deal. Mom will coach us and get us back in shape.

SANDRINE

On the bright side, you don't have to pay the nine-hundred test fee.

CLAIRE

We will all pass.

KE

You do have a very discerning palate, Sandrine.

SANDRINE

Not the best wine, and clearly not the worst. Since fifty, things have lost their flavor.

KE

Maybe you've licked too many hundred-dollar bills.

Black out.

Scene 2:

A week later. The boxes are gone. A large table stands in the center of the room with the kylix. Bowls of various sliced fruits, nuts, and spices set on the table. CY and CLAIRE, in the middle of a chat, sit at the table with wine in their glasses. Wine bottles in brown-paper bags stand near them. On the table stands various wine labels like large cards. On the backs of the cards are notes. CY holds a piece of paper.

CY

And you shared this list with Parker?

CLAIRE

Yes. He's out getting signatures— For his petition against the Court.

CY

¿Por qué?

CLAIRE

He wants them to rescind the re-test.

CY

No—I mean, why'd you share this list with *him*?

CLAIRE

He's my husband. I love him.

CY

Which I don't get.

CLAIRE

Why?

CY

What do you see in him?

CLAIRE

I've told you—

CY

Tell me again, 'cause it didn't stick the first time.

Pluck the Day

CLAIRE

He's smart, he's funny, he's a great kisser—

CY

He's rich.

CLAIRE

She has money. He won't take it. He wants to earn it. He wants to be his own person.

CY

Keep tellin' yourself that—

CLAIRE

He chose to stay where I wanted until we felt solid, like truly bonded. 'til we knew for sure—

CY

Sure, helped that the wicked witch was in Australia for a while.

CLAIRE

There was that. But Parker fell in love with me despite her position, despite her attitude.

CY

To spite her.

CLAIRE

No, that's not it. But I don't care why he did it; he just did. He loves me, and he thinks I'm beautiful, and he believes in me, and he likes by butt!

CY

I get that, and so does anyone who lives in the building. We HEAR *your love* every night of the week. It's like clockwork. One A. M., and instead of hearing Jimmy Fallon's opening music, we hear "ooohhh-ohhh-oooo! Boo, do that again!"

CLAIRE

It's not like that—

CY

Yes, it is. But I get it. You two are... *(She retches.)* You're ... *(She retches.)* You're in... *(She retches.)* You and Park are... *(She retches.)*

CLAIRE

Oh, stop it.

CY

What I don't get is this? The hacking? What are you doing?

Pluck the Day

CLAIRE

What everyone would do.

CY

Would everyone go online, hack into the Master Somm's database—

CLAIRE

Yes—

CY

Noo—. It's dangerous.

CLAIRE

Not really. It wasn't that hard. It wasn't secure, the website. I mean, anyone could do it with just a little programming know-how. It took no time and I found names and addresses. Where they work.

CY

And por qué? What are you going to do with this list?

CLAIRE

I'm going to find the one who cheated.

CY

Think about what that means, chicka.

CLAIRE

I have thought about it. Really. I have. At first, I wasn't going to do anything. Just stick to my goal of passing the test. But then I got a few Facebook friend requests from a few of the other sommeliers I met at the exam—

CY

They tracked you down?

CLAIRE

Sommeliers do that.

CY

So do stalkers, the FBI, and the NYPD.

CLAIRE

I haven't done anything illegal.

CY

'Cept hack into a company website.

Pluck the Day

CLAIRE

Well, there is that. But I can't do nothing. We've spent thousands on training.

CY

You don't have to tell me—

CLAIRE

Right! And I didn't pass. Now they're offering a reward to find the—

CY

How much is it?

CLAIRE

Fifty thousand.

CY

Oh! So you're after the cheater for the dinero?

CLAIRE

And for Park. For all of us. We're a team.

CY

And what're you going to do, chicka? You know, with this list?

CLAIRE

I've written them all an email inviting them for "A Meeting". I bought those. Same wines from the first test— And we'll discuss the petition, taste these, and test 'em. I'll find out who can really identify the wines.

CY

Clever. A practice test.

CLAIRE

Well, at least weed out the frauds.

CY

You invited all of them?

CLAIRE

Except you, and Ke. But you're welcome to come.

CY

(jesting) Oh shut-up.

CLAIRE

You know these.

Pluck the Day

CY

I'm just sayin': be careful. Cheaters don't like to be caught.

CLAIRE

I hear you.

CY

If I could stop you, I would. But as my Nan used to say: "Once a woman's made up her mind, she's as dedicated as the Mississippi to the sea. She'll get there, by rush, by flood, by cutting out canyons, she'll get there.

CLAIRE

If I don't do this, I'll always wonder, and I'll never feel we're on stable ground. What I mean is, we must take the current when it flows, or lose who we are.

PARKER enters, taking off his backpack and his shirt.

PARKER

Got 'em! Twenty-two! Got 'em to sign—

CY

I didn't sign—

PARKER

Sign now! I want the Court to apologize— Clear our names—

CY

Clear those of us not involved in the—

PARKER

Exactly! Reinstate our status— As soon as possible— Along with our back pay. That's what my letter is all about.

CY

I signed.

PARKER

(To CLAIRE) Sign. We're gonna show them how wrong they are.

CLAIRE

(Taking the pen from CY) Sure, but we also have to—

PARKER

Oh, I will, and I'll kill it! Better than the first time— Get top score again! You with me!?

Pluck the Day

CY

¡Yo Bueno! Let's get practicin'!

PARKER

Pour me a wine!

CY pours some of the test wines.

CY

Got-cha! This one. You'll know this one. You know all these wines—

PARKER

Of course I do—

CLAIRE

Cy?

PARKER

Weren't these on our test?

CLAIRE

Cy, we're saving them—

CY

(To CLAIRE) Come on. Just a taste.

PARKER

(Looking at the bottles) These are them, that's for sure.

CLAIRE

(whispered) What are you doing, Cy?

CY

Let's taste this one, and see if we all know it. Yeah?

PARKER

Was this one on the test?

CY

Claire got 'em.

CLAIRE

Yeah, for the petition party—

CY

But Parker's here now, so let's test 'em—

Pluck the Day

CLAIRE

No, let's not.

CY

Parker, did you know Claire bet me.

PARKER

She bet you what?

CLAIRE

Nothing—

CY

My dear friend bet me she could identify these, and I couldn't.

PARKER

Even I could identify these.

CY

That's what I said.

CLAIRE

(To CY) What're you doing?

PARKER

Hell, yah! Test me. I know these backwards and forwards!

CLAIRE

I'm sure you could—Both of you, but—

PARKER

Let's do it!

CY

Let's taste 'em! You and I will go first. Clare will keep score.

PARKER

That's fair.

CY

I agree.

PARKER

What's the bet?

Pluck the Day

CY

Fifty bucks.

CLAIRE

Cy?—

CY

If you want to lose the bet and just pay up, I'm good with that.

CLAIRE

Okay.

CY and PARKER sip, swish, and spit.

CY

I have some idea.

CLAIRE

(To Parker) What's the vineyard?

PARKER

It's... um.... It's Spanish—

CY

Too many flavors for Spain.

PARKER

Too thick.

He sniffs the wine.

CLAIRE

You know this wine.

PARKER

Give me a sec! Ga!

CY

Oh, I think I got it—

CLAIRE

You know, Parker and I aren't complaining—I mean sure, we lost the apartment, but—

PARKER

You didn't want to live so close to my mom.

Pluck the Day

CY

That would've sucked—

PARKER sips the wine.

CLAIRE

And at least Ke's boss lets him use vacation and personal time.

CY

Letting him? That's not how it went down.

CLAIRE

That's what Ke said.

CY

Cover. All cover. Truth: he's not allowed back until after the re-test, if he passes.

CLAIRE

But every day he goes to work.

CY

Are you loca? He doesn't go to work. He goes to the library. And reads about wine. He's memorized the Wine Spectator Magazine from back to front.

CLAIRE

You mean from front to back.

CY

No. It's Ke. He still reads back to front.

PARKER spits.

PARKER

I don't have a clue.

CLAIRE

But dear, you've got the clues in your mouth.

PARKER

None of the wines they gave us had this combo!

CY

Yeah, they did.

Pluck the Day

No, they didn't! I was there!

PARKER

Don't get mad—

CLAIRE

It wasn't on the exam!

PARKER

It was.

CLAIRE

Give me a better clue.

PARKER

It's sweet and chalky.

CY

(angry) God! Something else!

PARKER

Don't talk to me like you know it all, Parker. Don't you dare.

CY

Don't give up!

CLAIRE

I KNOW IT!

CY

Tell me! What is it?

PARKER

Steen. South Africa. 2005.

CY

She's right

CLAIRE

Steen?! Aww, shit!

PARKER

I think I won this bet.

CY

CY exits to the bedroom as PARKER puts on a shirt.

Pluck the Day

CLAIRE
You know Steen.

PARKER
I know!

CLAIRE
You've got to focus.

PARKER
I'll be fine.

CLAIRE
But the last few days—

PARKER
And I'll get them right in a few weeks!

PARKER's cell phone rings.

CLAIRE
You're right.

PARKER
It's the real estate agent.

CLAIRE
See if we can get our escrow money back.

PARKER
Then we'll practice another way.

CLAIRE
This worked last time—

PARKER
It's not working now!

PARKER storms out of the room.

PARKER
Hey, Doug, this is insane! We need to get that escrow.

(He exits. Carrying a few blindfolds, CY carefully enters.)

Pluck the Day

CY

Well-Well-Well.

CLAIRE

That doesn't prove anything.

CY

I think it does.

CLAIRE

You just don't like him.

CY

True. Which blindfold do you want?

CLAIRE

What do we need blindfolds for?!

CY

Sandrine said we needed them for training. Parker's using a gel-eye-mask.

CLAIRE

A gel one? Where is it?

CY

In the freezer!

CLAIRE

Of course. Cy, you know that proved nothing. He's just—

CY

—Under stress, I know. But stress doesn't alter our taste buds.

CLAIRE

I don't want to talk about it.

CY

Have you asked him?

CLAIRE

God, no. And don't say a thing. Sister-swear.

CY

I swear. If you promise to keep down the noise.

Pluck the Day

CLAIRE

You couldn't hear us.

CY

Oh yes I could. You promise to keep it down, and I won't bring up your--

PARKER enters with a trashcan full of receipts and papers.

PARKER

Not bring up what?

CY

How loud you two were. Between your room and Ke's room with his Asian porn, it's like I'm in a Dutch brothel. Ke's room—All I could hear was, "Man, you're hung like a sea-horse." And your room, was like—

CLAIRE

You should wear ear plugs.

CY

No, I wear a blindfold. Put on this, and I hear nada.

PARKER

Whatever— (To CLAIRE) Boo, let me show you what I found in Ke's room.

CLAIRE

You've been snooping?

CY

You BETTER STAY OUT OF MY ROOM!

PARKER

I was just thinking, who had the most to lose, or gain if he or she got the sommelier medallion?

CLAIRE

Ke's working with his lawyers—

PARKER

Which he probably can't afford. And he's lied to us about work. (To CY) You said it yourself. (To CLAIRE) And if he is working with his lawyer, there should be a receipt, and it would clear him.

CLAIRE

He is fastidious with receipts—

Pluck the Day

PARKER

A meticulous gay. His receipts are so organized the treasury department would be jealous.

CY

(in the eye-mask) I need one of these.

PARKER dumps the receipts on the table.

PARKER

Let's see if he paid a lawyer or for the exam answers.

CLAIRE

He will be back any minute—

CY

In this I wouldn't hear the apocalypse—

PARKER

If he is the one, then we can get the reward, and I can get my certification reinstated. It's easy. My dad showed me how people hide their money. See, if we compare his ATM receipts, his deposits, his withdrawals, I'll bet we can find how much he paid for the answers.

CY

(In the eye-mask) Is this like— Twenty- twenty-five—

PARKER

How much do you think? I mean, what would you pay for the answers?

CY

(in the eye-mask) Thirty?

PARKER

Thirty? *(Looking at CY)* Will you get with the show?

CLAIRE

Stop it, Babe.

CY

(Taking off the eye-mask and seeing the receipts) What'd you do!?

CLAIRE

Haven't you been paying attention?

PARKER

How about this one? A receipt for two-hundred dollars?

Pluck the Day

CLAIRE

Put that back!

PARKER

He might've spread it out. Dad did.

CLAIRE

You shouldn't—

PARKER

Two hundred here, two hundred there.

CY

Put it all back!

PARKER

But if I can find proof it was Ke, then we can turn him in.

CY

Why would we do that?

PARKER

The reward.

CY

Yeah, like a prison sentence.

PARKER

For him, but not for us! Look at this one.

CY

You're out of your mind!

PARKER

A thousand dollars!

CLAIRE

Let me see.

PARKER

See?

CLAIRE

It's for A and J Lingerie!

Pluck the Day

PARKER

Who spends that much money on underwear?

CLAIRE

Gay men.

PARKER

He bought three pairs of Picante Spicy Briefs.

CY

Must be what makes him swish when he walks.

PARKER

He does swish, doesn't he. And they do show off his—

CLAIRE

Stop this.

CY

Yes, let's get this place cleaned up before they—

PARKER

Oh my! Look how much Ke made last year!

CLAIRE

PUT THAT AWAY!

From the hallway KE yells.

KE (off-stage)

Can you guys help in there?! We've got groceries!

SANDRINE (off-stage)

(as she tries the big door) Why's the door locked?

PARKER

IT'S NEW YORK CITY, MOM! (To CY- whispered) Shit!

CY

Get rid of these!

KE (off-stage)

Parker, your mother's starting to sweat!

SANDRINE (off-stage)

No, I'm not!

Pluck the Day

KE (off-stage)
She is. I smell her!

PARKER
Where am I supposed to put them?

CY
Back in his room.

PARKER
I can't refile all of them.

CLAIRE
Just do it!

CY
(To Parker) Get!

PARKER runs down the hall with the receipts shoved in the trashcan as CLAIRE cleans as CY unlocks and slides the door. KE enters carrying bags. SANDRINE carries nothing. KE is partially unshaven, and he has band-aids on his face; he wears gym clothes.

SANDRINE
I think I strained a muscle.

KE
Yeah, like your wrist. You'll never believe what we bought.

SANDRINE
Please! Is anyone going to take the bags?

KE
The one's under your arms or the one's under your eyes?

SANDRINE
I didn't pay you to insult me.

CLAIRE
Let me.

CLAIRE takes bags from KE, and they are heavy.

Pluck the Day

KE

Careful—

CLAIRE

What's in this!? Rocks?

KE/SANDRINE

I know! / Yes.

SANDRINE

They are part of the palate training. If you're going to be a great master cork dork like me, this is where we start.

CY

Rocks?

KE

I know—Awful, isn't she? But I'm not complaining. Lifting rocks replaces my canceled gym membership. I must get ready for my return to communist China.

CLAIRE

That's not going to happen.

KE

Why? You found the cheater?

CLAIRE

No.

KE

Then I must learn to like rocks for dinner.

CLAIRE

That's not going to happen. I've got a list of names, and I'm going to interview them for clues. Find out what they know. I talked to the Court.

SANDRINE

You did?

CLAIRE

On the phone. They want me to share anything I learn with them.

SANDRINE

Shit! That's more info than I got, and I gave the Court secretary a twenty. You know what she told me: "They aren't talking to you." Damn! Silent as a nunnery.

Pluck the Day

KE

Or a Chinese concentration camp. If you say one word? They cut out your tongue.

CLAIRE

That's not going to happen! I promise. I'll find who did it—

SANDRINE

It won't happen because you'll all pass! I'm here! In this blood sport, I'm called (in a tough voice): Sandrine the Sommelier.

KE

You want a blood sport? Watch me shave without shaving cream. Yes, that too was cut from my budget.

CY

I told you to use the olive oil.

KE

I did. But it wasn't virgin. This is what happens when I don't use the best. But I am not complaining.

CY

You're not?

KE

No. I said I'd do anything to be a cork dork, except lick a rat.

CY

Lick a rat?

SANDRINE

I know people who've done that.

KE

Koreans do that. Me? I'm not that desperate.

CY

Speak for yourself. They demoted me to server.

KE

Eww. You poor thing. You're demoted. I'm getting deported!

CLAIRE

We're not going to let that happen.

Pluck the Day

SANDRINE

The rats were dead when I did it. I wouldn't do it if the rats were alive. What kind of crazy woman do you think I am?

CLAIRE

Well—

CY

(Putting a hand over CLAIRE's mouth) Don't answer that.

CLAIRE and CY set up the table. In one pile they place various rocks; in another pile they set out some cheeses; a pile of wood. One opens nuts. PARKER enters with a large pump dispenser of hand-sanitizer. Their teamwork is well choreographed.

SANDRINE

Don't forget to use the hand-sanitizer.

CY

One time I used so much, I lost the feeling in my hands.

SANDRINE

That doesn't happen.

CY

It happens.

SANDRINE

Use it. We will have no diseases here!

KE

So says the woman who licked a rat.

SANDRINE

It was washed!

PARKER

Is that what happened to my rat?

SANDRINE

Oh, Parker, what now? Another complaint about how bad I was as a mother?

PARKER

You don't remember?

Pluck the Day

SANDRINE

Remember what?

PARKER

In the third grade? Each student had to sit for the weekend. I brought home the class rat. Come Sunday night, it was missing.

SANDRINE

I don't remember.

PARKER

So much of my childhood you don't remember.

SANDRINE

So how can I be blamed if I don't remember?

CY

We're going to eat the cheese?

CLAIRE

Don't worry, dear. Sandrine said we just have to smell it.

CY

You know what happens with me and cheese.

SANDRINE

You're allergic to cheese?

KE

If you call that an allergy, then I'm allergic to fiber, prunes, and coffee.

CLAIRE

Cy's lactose intolerant.

CY

Just the smell of cheese does it for me.

SANDRINE

Oh, my Lord! Am I training a bunch of whiners or what!? "I won't lick a rock." "Don't make me see a rat." "I can't smell cheese." "I am ALLERGIC TO ALCOHOL!"

CLAIRE

No one said that—

SANDRINE

If you want to fail, then find a reason and you will! But I don't train failures! I'm here to succeed, and you're not getting in my way! My trainees PASS! DO YOU HEAR ME!

ALL

Yes, ma'am!

SANDRINE

Good! Now in your places!

SANDRINE stands at the end of the table. The other stand around the table. CY is on the end, farthest from SANDRINE. The kylix stands table center.

SANDRINE

If you are going to regain your crowns, you're going to make some sacrifices. First off, everyone's giving up salt, spicy foods—

CY

No!—

SANDRINE

—and coffee.

CLAIRE

Coffee? I'll never wake up—

SANDRINE

Quiet! This isn't an option. Also, hot foods like soup, cannot be hot. Tepid or cold.

CLAIRE

Great. Who doesn't love cold clam chowder-?

SANDRINE

Burn your tongue, and you *will* fail. Also, no perfumes. They interfere with our sense of smell and thus, our sense of taste. So, no cologne.

KE

I don't wear cologne anyway.

CY

Yeah, right.

KE

I naturally smell like the woods after the rain.

Pluck the Day

PARKER

A two-hundred-dollar rain.

KE

What?

CLAIRE

Park! - hush!

SANDRINE

And only scent-free laundry detergent. (*Hand out papers*) I've printed a diet for you all to follow. When I passed the Master exam, I ate only granola. Every meal. It gave me a great baseline to work from. We will meet every day. We have only a few weeks to get you in shape. Tomorrow we will do alcohol.

CLAIRE

Just alcohol?

SANDRINE

Yes. We start with rubbing and move to moonshine. You'll need to distinguish between 10 percent and 90 percent, just by taste.

CLAIRE

I can't drink it.

SANDRINE

Right. You can't taste wasted. Anyway, who said anything about drinking? I said "taste" the difference. No one's *drinking*. We smell. We look. We sniff. We taste. We swirl. We swish—

KE

I don't swish.

PARKER

Yes, you do.

CLAIRE

Park! - hush!

SANDRINE

And then we spit. We do not swallow. Understood?

KE

There's something I can agree with.

Pluck the Day

SANDRINE

Okay! You're aware of the three parts of the test. The written, with all of the biology, and farming, and the grapes—You all know those things. And then the service—

CY

We know the ritual—

SANDRINE

Yes, but it's all ritual. And as my trainer, a Greek, taught me, and his trainer before him, we must bless our practice. He'd say: "Be wise, strain the wine; and since life is brief, prune back far-reaching hopes! Even while we speak, envious time has passed. Pluck the day! Putting as little trust as possible in tomorrow!" (Beat.) Everyone!

ALL

(Like a cheer) Pluck the day!

SANDRINE

Blindfolds! On!

KE

You know we know how to do this—

SANDRINE

Hush! We do this my way, or the—

KE

The EZPass express way. I know.

PARKER

Play along, Ke. You might learn something.

They don their blindfolds. Some of the blindfolds are very funny with cartoon eyes, and sunglasses. Meanwhile...

SANDRINE

Hail, hail, hail, to Dionysus,
god of abundant clusters!
Hear my prayer,
awak'n, arise and share
your gifts with us.
Come dwell with humankind,
favorably come, with much-rejoicing mind.
Come, blessed, fruitful, horned, and divine,
and on these rites with joyful aspect shine;
Accept our general good sense and this prayer,
and make these holy fruits your care. Amen.

Pluck the Day

CY/ PARKER/ KE/ CLAIRE

Alleluia! /Amen/Ah-men/Thank god.

SANDRINE places quarter-sized rocks in front of each trainee.

SANDRINE

To be able to taste, to distinguish mineral flavors, we are starting with rocks.

CY

To be able to base what?

KE

Taste, dear. Listen!

SANDRINE

Listen!! Take one of the rocks.

CY

Did you say socks or cocks?

KE

Shhhh.

SANDRINE

Put it in your mouth—

CY

Oh, no—

They all put a single rock in their mouths. CY hesitates.

SANDRINE

Put it in!

KE

(with rocks in his mouth) Come on, Cy, put it in.

SANDRINE

This also makes your tongue stronger. Swish it in your mouth...

CLAIRE

(with the rock in her mouth) We did this in choir.

KE

(Taking the rock out) Me too. But after the concert. Under the risers. With the pianist.

Pluck the Day

SANDRINE

Keep it in your mouth. Feel it.

CLAIRE

(with the rock in her mouth) To sit in solemn silence in a dull dark dock; in a pestilential prison with a lifelong lock.

CLAIRE/KE

(with the rocks in their mouths, fast) Awaiting the sensation of a short sharp shock; From a cheap and chippy chopper on a big black block!

SANDRINE

Now, spit it into the bowl!

Each one spits their rock into the bowl in order from nearest SANDRINE to the end. The bowl rings with a ding as the rock hits the empty metal. Ding! Ding! Ding! Ding!

SANDRINE

Good. This time, faster. Take a new rock. (She speaks fast) Put it in your mouth. Commit it to memory. Taste it. And spit!

Ding! Ding! Ding! Nothing.

SANDRINE

Cy?

KE

Cy?

CY

I swallowed it.

KE

You what?

SANDRINE

What'd I say about swallowing it?!

KE

Don't do it.

CLAIRE

Are you okay?

Pluck the Day

CY

Yeah. Will it kill me?

KE

(*with laugh*) Swallowing rocks? No. Pop rocks, yes.

PARKER

Can we please, focus!

KE

Let's lick the nuts next!

SANDRINE

No. Next, we're doing wood.

KE

Wood in my mouth? I'm down with that.

SANDRINE

Grab the wood. Smell it. Smell the forest. The oak.

*They all pick up wood, except CY, who can't hear well,
picks up the cheese.*

KE

It's hard.

CY

Mine's soft.

CLAIRE

Is wood supposed to be soft?

PARKER

Makes me think of camp.

KE

Choir camp. In the pianist's bunk.

CLAIRE

I think of Central Park—

SANDRINE

How nice.

CLAIRE

At night. When I had to climb a tree to get away from the muggers, and this family of squirrels attacked me.

SANDRINE

Smell the raw earth, the years of time that goes into the tree. Put it down, and smell, what can only be described as the city.

CY

(groaning and holding his stomach)

SANDRINE

That's it! That's why we drink. To return to the earth, and to forget the grunge of New York.

CY

I can smell cheese?

CLAIRE

Oh no.

SANDRINE

I told you to grab to wood, not the cheese.

CY

Is that cheese I've been sniffing?

SANDRINE

It's all over your hands.

KE

Oh dear—

CY

Oh, I feel my tummy churning.

SANDRINE

Let's move on to the habanero.

CY

(hunching over) Ohhhhhh.

KE

Mind over matter, Cy

CY

I'm tryin'.

Pluck the Day

SANDRINE

The habanero's right in front of you.

PARKER

I thought you said, "no spice".

SANDRINE

Except in tasting.

CY

(hunching over) Ohh. I might have to excuse myself.

PARKER

Just do it quietly!

SANDRINE

We need to break-down the palate and commit to memory. Okay, now, lick the pepper.

As she speaks, she places the urine samples from the refrigerator on the counter. She takes off the plastic tops. KE licks his pepper suggestively.

SANDRINE

You can do it, Cy.

CY

I don't know.

KE

Try Cy. It's a pepper.

SANDRINE

When I say so, we're going to sip the white wine in front of you, and feel how the pepper reacts with the acid of the wine.

CLAIRE

But we don't swallow—

SANDRINE

No. Just feel the flavors. Ke, it's a pepper, not a date.

KE

Just thinking about this guy I'm meeting later. He said he'd call at three.

Pluck the Day

SANDRINE

It's almost three.

KE

Well, when he calls, I'll take a break.

CY

OOOO—I might have to break now.

PARKER

FOCUS! PLEASE! I want to pass this test!

SANDRINE

Okay, now bite the pepper, and feel the heat.

CY

I feel it—

KE

Ooooh. Mine's like really hot.

SANDRINE

Feel the spice—

KE

I don't know if I can take it—

CY

Me, either—

SANDRINE

Notice the little burn on the hairs of your teeth?

KE

Hell YES! I CAN'T TAKE IT! WHERE'S THE WINE!

SANDRINE

It's right in front of you!

KE spits out the pepper and rips off the blindfold. He downs the "wine"! KE pours it on his lips. The rest of them remove their blindfolds.

KE

Ahhhh. That's so much better!

Pluck the Day

Um... Ke? CLAIRE

Ah— What? KE

That's not wine. CLAIRE

What? KE

That's from your cousin's. CLAIRE

Sung's. KE

From his lab—? CLAIRE

KE CY
AHHHH! 'Cuse me!

KE *CY runs out of the room, hits the door frame...*
Get it out! Get it out! CY
Owww!

KE puts his face under the sanitizer pump and pumps sanitizer on his face, and in his mouth.

KE
Oh, that's so much better. The burning's gone.

CLAIRE
That's good—

KE
Good. Yes. But... I can't feel my face. It is going numb.

CLAIRE
Maybe you used too much of it.

KE
I can't feel my lips. How am I going to make out with—

Pluck the Day

His phone rings.

KE

(Face numbing) Shit!

PARKER

Isn't that your phone?

CLAIRE

Your date?

KE

(lips numbing) I'll take it in my room! I need to change my shirt, anyway. (Answering the phone) Hello?

KE exits.

SANDRINE

Anyone going to explain the wine?

KE (off-stage)

(numb mouth) WHO WAS IN MY ROOM!!!

SANDRINE

I'm not feeling so well.

PARKER

Mom, sit down.

KE re-enters holding receipts.

KE

SPIES! Snoopys!

CLAIRE

Ke, it's not—

KE

(numb mouth) Who went through my files! Someone did! Don't just stare at me! I don't have a lot of things, we don't when we come to this country, and I am very careful with my things, because I have to! Was it you? You?

CLAIRE

(To Parker) Parker? Do you have something to say?

Pluck the Day

PARKER

Let's take a break.

Black out.

ACT TWO

*Acoustic guitar players perform during the intermission.
All the while crew, ushers, and audience members partake
in the “Petition Meeting” with wine.*

Scene 1:

*Lights on the apartment a few days later. CLAIRE and CY
look at papers from a folder.*

CY

So, all but these two from the petition party could identify the wines?

CLAIRE

It was only four wines. It doesn't prove anything.

CY

But you proved these two are the most likely.

CLAIRE

Most likely, probably.

CY

Everyone else got the Steen.

CLAIRE

Except Parker.

CY

Again.

CLAIRE

Again.

CY

And this guy didn't get the Teso—

CLAIRE

He's the Korean guy with all the tats.

CY

But he got all the other wines correct and—

CLAIRE

And Parker didn't. I know.

Pluck the Day

CY

Nada out of cuatro.

CLAIRE

Zero.

CY

You have to ask him.

CLAIRE

He'll just deny it.

CY

Then he does. But—

CLAIRE

And he'll know I what I was doing. That at the same time of his great petition signing party, I was trying to uncover the cheater for the reward, and I suspect my own husband of it all.

CY

What do you want to do?

CLAIRE

Save my marriage.

CY

Maybe there's an explanation.

CLAIRE

Like what?

CY

Like—I don't know. Well, I did warn you.

CLAIRE

You did, but this mighty Mississippi went ahead.

(From down the hall PARKER is heard)

PARKER

Clare? You seen my shoes?

CLAIRE

Shit.

PARKER enters dressed for a run.

Pluck the Day

CLAIRE

Your shoes? No. I wasn't—

PARKER

Morning, Cy.

CY

Morning. Hate to remind you two, but rent's due.

CLAIRE

Right.

PARKER

Workin' on it—

CY

You're always welcome, but you just might have to bunk with strangers who pay.

PARKER

(Finding his shoes) Got it, Cy. Oh, and thanks for helping Claire on the petition party. Turned out great. I think the Court will listen. *(Tying his shoes)* Clare? Did I tell you: the real estate guy— He thinks the escrow is a loss. If the indictment hadn't happened then we'd have grounds, but as it is—

KE enters in his restaurant uniform, and bike helmet.

CLAIRE

Good morning, Ke.

KE ignores CLAIRE.

KE

Coffee?

CY

I can make some.

KE

No, thank you. I'll snag one at the restaurant.

CLAIRE

Still not talking to me?

Silence.

CY

Ke?

KE

You want to know why I'm leaving so early. My cousin, Sung, needs me to stop by and do some odd jobs around his lab. For a few bucks.

CLAIRE

Ke? Before you leave, umm.... We have something to tell you.

CLAIRE looks at PARKER. He looks away.

CLAIRE

I'm sorry, Ke. We shouldn't have done it. We shouldn't've gone into your room, I mean. We shouldn't've messed your receipts, and things. It wasn't what you think. We.... I got.... I didn't suspect you, not for—. It was—I'm concerned. Your visa being revoked—

KE

Who told you!?

CLAIRE

I guessed.

KE

Stay out of my business.

CLAIRE

You're not going to work at the restaurant, are you?

KE

Yes.

CLAIRE

No. I know, Ke. You've been spending every day at the library.

KE

I like the library. Except for the books and the homeless. And the rules for the computers. Otherwise, it's a nice place.

CLAIRE

You're in trouble, and I want to fix it—

KE

And what?

CLAIRE

Make it right.

KE

I don't trust you, any of you. And I am stuck. Do you know how stuck!? I got a letter. Makes me hate American mailmen, but I got a letter from INS. And that's where I'm going. They call it an interview, but really it is a hearing. They're sending me back. And how can I go back? I am Chinese and I hate China. You don't know what it's like to walk in the streets. They spit everywhere! And stand in line? No way! The train doors open, and they push and push. Many times I never got off the train. I would just ride it to the next stop, fight my way off, and walk home, avoiding all of the spit on the sidewalk. Now I have thirty days. And then they send me back to a country and a family that hates me. Thirty days. Can you find the cheater in thirty days?

CLAIRE

I have to, and I will.

CY

We have the re-test before that—

KE

The exam? How can I pass? Every time, every test... I hope for miracles, but they don't really happen. Not to people like me.

CLAIRE

Do you want me to go with you?

KE

You? No.

CLAIRE

But you need someone there with you.

CY

I can go.

KE

I have to stop at the lawyers' office, then I meet you there. It's at one.

CY

Text me the address, and I'll be there.

KE

They might ship me off today. You never know—

Pluck the Day

CY

They won't.

KE

Can you only see half of what's going on? ICE is doing raids. Immigration is sending people to wait in other countries.

CLAIRE

I still have hope.

KE

Hope can't happen without the first step of the journey. I'll see you there, Cy.

KE exits the apartment.

CY

That was.... Well, Better jump in the shower. You two working later?

PARKER

Yep. Closing.

CLAIRE

Me, too. And I'll have rent to you. I swear.

CY exits to the bathroom.

PARKER

Wanna join me?

CLAIRE

No.

PARKER

We can run the route you like.

CLAIRE

No. Parker— Why didn't admit it was you?

PARKER

You mean with Ke?

CLAIRE

Yes.

PARKER

I don't know—

Pluck the Day

But he's our friend—
CLAIRE

Your friend.
PARKER

Your friend first!
CLAIRE

So? We fooled around and we worked together—
PARKER

Who the hell are you?
CLAIRE

Things change. And, you never know, he might be the one—
PARKER

Ke? He wouldn't cheat—
CLAIRE

Why? Because he's Chinese? They cheat like the best of 'em.
PARKER

Oh my God!
CLAIRE

It's just... We don't owe him anything.
PARKER

Can you tone down your high and mighty attitude?
CLAIRE

Are you saying I'm acting all privileged?
PARKER

Yep.
CLAIRE

Privileged? Beware of labels 'cause I'm not privileged. I'm not! I might've gone to private schools, but I've struggled.
PARKER

You've struggled?—
CLAIRE

PARKER

Yes. It's hard being a som when your mother keeps it over your head and how my older sister is a VP at Goldman-Sachs. I'm so like poor, and this hasn't made it easy for me to prove—

CLAIRE

Easy?

PARKER

My life isn't easy—

CLAIRE

Private school, and two parents who paid for college, and for your trips to France to taste wine—

PARKER

Oh, please. It's just France!

CLAIRE

France? At the age of ten!

PARKER

And eleven and twelve, and thirteen—

CLAIRE

What a rough life spending summers in France! I spent mine helping my aunt at her bodega in the Bronx selling sandwiches.

PARKER

It's not like France was *fun*.

CLAIRE

Oh? What—no Paris Disney? No Eiffel tower of power?

PARKER

No. We didn't do Disney.

CLAIRE

Oh no. Oh how sad. While you were flirting with girls and flashing your gold card, I was wrappin' subs, and stocking shelves—

PARKER

I told you, I didn't flirt with the girls.

CLAIRE

Okay. The boys.

Pluck the Day

PARKER

I didn't have time.

CLAIRE

You didn't-. Right. So. What'd you do instead?

PARKER

Picked grapes.

CLAIRE

In France?

PARKER

In Champagne. Yeah.

CLAIRE

GAWD! You have no idea!

PARKER

What?

CLAIRE

Mannn! - We're in this, we're stuck, because someone cheated, and don't get me started, but I don't like what I'm learning from all this!

PARKER

Clare. Maybe I should've said something to Ke, but what do you want me to do? I can't fix his visa. I can't get us a license. So? What's this really about?

CLAIRE

I can't sit with what I think went down.

PARKER

And what do you think "went down"?

CLAIRE

Forget it.

PARKER

You can't just bring up something and ask me to forget it.

CLAIRE

You didn't used to do this.

PARKER

Do what?

CLAIRE

Speak down to me, and condescend like a master over a servant, but now you constantly act like you're so much better than me—

PARKER

(In a high pitch) I wasn't aware I was doing that! If I was condescending, then I didn't know.

CLAIRE

Don't act all naïve.

PARKER

(In a high pitch) But I didn't speak down to you on purpose.

CLAIRE

Yes, you did. You do.

PARKER

(In a high pitch) No, really. I wasn't aware I did it so—

CLAIRE

Aware? Yeah- You're aware you're doing it. Just like you're aware when you flirt with Ke, or walk around half-dressed—

PARKER

I like what I got—

CLAIRE

Of course you do. Your freedom and privilege, and you do it all with ease. It comes with your up-bringing, your lack of restrictions. You move in and out of so many places all because you think you can, because of your class, your so better than thou attitude—

PARKER

How rude—!

CLAIRE

And to top it off, you got worse since you've won, and you rubbed in my face every day! Master Parker and all that shit! All because you passed the exam the first time, and I didn't.

PARKER

But you didn't. And I did.

CLAIRE

I wouldn't expect your punk-ass to understand what I just said.

Pluck the Day

PARKER

Now who's being racist?

CLAIRE

That's wasn't racist.

PARKER

Rude and racist!

CLAIRE

You...? You want to know the truth, what I think went down?

PARKER

Yes—

CLAIRE goes to the kitchen drawer and retrieves the sixteen wine labels.

CLAIRE

I have a sneaky suspicion you're the reason we're in this position.

PARKER

Me?

CLAIRE

Yah—

PARKER

You think I'm the one?

CLAIRE

I'm not sure—

PARKER

You have no proof. I mean, if you're going to make accusations, then you better back them up. I'm going to go for a run. I hope when I return you've dropped this. And then, maybe, we can start thinking like a team, rather than as rivals.

PARKER exits the front door. CLAIRE tosses the labels into the trash.

CLAIRE

Shit! Shit-shit-shit.

CLAIRE paces the room, rubbing her hands. She goes to a bottle of wine moves it, revealing a bottle of scotch. She

grabs a glass, and pours the scotch. She smells it, contemplates it, pushes it away, and then grabs the glass. CY enters. She sees CLAIRE and the scotch.

CY

You serious?

CLAIRE

It was.... I wasn't going to drink it. I haven't.... It's just....

CY

With the baby!?

CLAIRE

I haven't done it—

CY

But you were thinking about it.

CLAIRE

It was just.... Parker can be such an ass—

CY

Yeah. He can be. But don't blame him. You have a choice here. Drink or not. Baby or not. I'm not standing in your way. He's not standing in your way. It's your choice, not mine, not Parker's. You'll find any reason you want, and we know that. And if you give in to it now, you'll mess up that new life you got. It's not worth it chicka.

CLAIRE

My bad.

CLAIRE dumps the scotch from her glass down the drain.

CY

And?

CLAIRE

I'm getting' to it.

CLAIRE pours the rest of the scotch down the drain.

CLAIRE

I know— You're right. And I hate to say it, but... God, I love you.

Pluck the Day

CY

Back at ya.

CY opens the refrigerator and takes out a bottle of water.

CY

Do you want some of Master Sandrine's agua?

CLAIRE

Sure.

CY

Only a few left. Clare—I know this is hard.

CLAIRE

Word—

CY

(CY hands CLAIRE a bottle of water.) But, in three days it's all over. One way or another. And I've got hope. We're going to kick butt. Ke will pass. You'll pass. Me? That's another story, but I'm getting better, and I haven't run into anything in a few days. That's an improvement.

CLAIRE

I'm just... Who thinks their own husband cheats—

CY

To get a jump in salary by one hundred thousand. I would. Even St. Teressa would.

CLAIRE

Would you cheat?

CY

No, but I agreed with you. Most people would cheat if the prize is as high as a hundred-thousand dollars.

CLAIRE

Most people, but most wives wouldn't accuse their husbands.

CY

If they saw the clues we saw—Yeah, they would.

CLAIRE

I just feel like a bad wife.

CY

I would've done the same thing.

CLAIRE

I don't like how those letters, this one exam, has made me question my friends, my husband, question our values, and get us digging into each other's trash or going through each other's rooms. But see, that's where are. Not trusting each other. All because of the stupid wine test. And I don't like that about me.
I even got suspicious of you.

CY

Me?

CLAIRE

Sorry. My suspiciousness. I shouldn't have... You know.... Can you.... Forgive me?

CY

Chicka, we'll make it through this. Trust me.

CLAIRE hugs CY.

CY

People will understand. You don't have to take the test.

CLAIRE

I do. But I won't harm my baby.

CY

Okay.

They grab their water bottles, and...

CY

I have to get. Recycle?

CLAIRE

One last swig.

CLAIRE downs her water. She looks at the bottle, looking through it to the back of the label.

CLAIRE

Holy shit. Look at your bottle.

CY

Why?

Pluck the Day

CLAIRE

Look at the back of the water.

CY

Just a normal label.

CLAIRE

A normal water label? Read yours.

CY

Oh, please. Vody.

CLAIRE

Not that. The back of the label. You can only see it when the bottle's empty.

CY

(Reading) Mon. Cal. 2015.

CLAIRE

What water has two thousand and fifteen calories?

CY

Fat water.

CLAIRE

Really? What's "Mon. Cal.?"

CY

Monday? Money? Mono?

CLAIRE

Mondavi? 2015?

CY

Mondavi? 2015? The Mondavi pinot was the first wine we tasted at the exam.

CLAIRE

Read the next one.

CY

CDP. Two thousand and ten percent?

CLAIRE

What's "CDP"?

Pluck the Day

CY

Census Designated Place? Continuous Data Protection?

CLAIRE

What's that?

CY

I don't know.

CLAIRE

What's the only thing we know that is CDP?

CY

Only thing that comes to mind is—

CY/CLAIRE

Châteauneuf du Pape.

CLAIRE

20-10. It's the year, not a percent.

CY

They're the wines—

CLAIRE

In the exact order as the taste test—

CY

S.T.E. 2005.

CLAIRE

Steen.

CY

SCT. 2009?

CLAIRE

For—

BOTH

Sierra Cantabria Teso.

CY

Shit.

Pluck the Day

CLAIRE

Beware of labels. Son of a bitch.

They read their water bottles as the lights fade to black.

Scene 2:

The apartment. CLAIRE, KE, PARKER and CY stand around the table holding large flat envelopes. CLAIRE is starting to “show”. CY is not wearing eyeglasses as now she can see.

PARKER

Any one sick of wine?

CY

God yes.

KE

I don’t know. Depends.

CLAIRE

Ke, let’s just open our envelopes and see. We don’t know. You might’ve passed. And if you didn’t—

CY

I hope you did. Hope we all did.

CLAIRE

Just open it.

KE

Hope springs external.

PARKER

Eternal.

KE

Whatever. I never thought a cheap piece of paper would make me more nervous than my first-time having sex.

PARKER

Do you want a drink?

KE

Hell no.

Pluck the Day

CY

I can't taste one more grape.

CLAIRE

Ke? Let's get it done.

KE

At the same time?

PARKER

Three, two—

CLAIRE

Okay—

CY

I'm not waiting—

KE, CLAIRE, PARKER, and CY open their envelopes, and each retrieves a certificate.

CLAIRE/ CY/ KE

I PASSED!! / BOOJA!! / I COULD FART RAINBOWS!!

CY

I'm framing mine.

KE

I will tape it my chest and wear it under my suit at the hearing!

PARKER

Oh please.

CY

I am making copies and sending them to my family!

CLAIRE

I might sleep with it!

PARKER

I'm keeping mine under lock and key. Be right back—

PARKER attempts to exit the party.

CY

Park- I'm surprised your mom's not here.

Pluck the Day

PARKER

She's acting weird—

CY

(To KE, hinting something's afoot) It is weird she's not here—don't you think, Ke?

KE

I sure do.

PARKER

She hasn't returned my phone calls all week.

KE

But she's on the board, so why wasn't she there?

PARKER

Maybe she did all this then went home—

CY

Call her again—

PARKER

I don't know. With her it's hard to tell.

KE

I agree. Call her.

PARKER

One sec. Let me put this away.

CLAIRE

Face-time her. She'll be all trill about our certificates!

CY

She can dig hers out, and we can compare!

KE

Hers is probably on papyrus.

PARKER

She probably doesn't even know where hers is.

SANDRINE, with a small suitcase, enters through the front door.

Pluck the Day

SANDRINE

But I do. I know where my “stupid” Master of the Court of Sommeliers certificate is. I know exactly where it is.

PARKER

Mom?

SANDRINE

Surprise. And congratulations on passing the exam.

PARKER

Well, thanks Mom.

CLAIRE

Most of us.

PARKER

What’s that supposed to mean?

CLAIRE dangles the water bottle labels in front of PARKER.

CLAIRE

Have you seen these?

PARKER

Mom’s water bottles—

CY

Sandrine—

PARKER

--of course—

CY—

you print these?

CLAIRE

Were you in on it, Parker?

PARKER

In on what?

SANDRINE

I did it. And they figure it out.

Pluck the Day

KE

What? —

PARKER

You—Mom? You did it?—

CY

Like you didn't collude with her—

PARKER

Those don't show anything—

CLAIRE

Yeah, they do—

PARKER

There's no collusion with anyone—

CLAIRE

None?

PARKER

None!

CLAIRE

But the wines for the exam are on the label of these water bottles—

PARKER

I never saw them!

SANDRINE

He was never aware of what I did. They were to remind him in case he forgot—

PARKER

And I didn't forget!

KE

(Finally getting it) Sandrine, your water—

SANDRINE

My water—the labels were to help him—

PARKER

Mom?!

Pluck the Day

SANDRINE

I was thrown off the board, Parker.

PARKER

They wouldn't do that.

SANDRINE

They did. And they revoked my credentials.

PARKER

Why?

CLAIRE

Because you cheated.

SANDRINE

Because I cheated. Just me.

PARKER

(To KE and CY) I didn't cheat.

SANDRINE

They narrowed it down. Only one of us on the Board knew what wines were on the test—

KE

Can I see your certificate, Parker?

PARKER

NO!

KE

Just show me what it says.

PARKER

I don't have to show you anything!

KE

Did you cheat or didn't you?!

PARKER

Ke- get over yourself—

KE

How could you?—

Pluck the Day

PARKER

I didn't!—

CLAIRE

No, your mom did—

KE

--Still you go through my things and tried to frame me?! Risk losing my visa!! And the whole time your mother did it! I don't believe you didn't know—

PARKER

I didn't!—

KE

--So did you cheat on the god-damn test or not?!

PARKER

NO! But now it's all better.

KE

How?

PARKER

We're all Masters!

CLAIRE

Hon, you didn't pass, did you?

PARKER

I passed the first time and that's all that I need! I'M A MASTER SOMMELIER! AND THEY CAN'T TAKE THAT AWAY FROM ME!

CY

So, you did cheat?

SANDRINE

I did. He didn't.—

PARKER

No.

SANDRINE

And it wasn't really cheating!

CLAIRE

What was it then?

PARKER

IT'S WHAT I DESERVE!—

KE

No, it's not! And I see you're just like those parents, just like those loaded jerks who cheated for their kids, just for an Ivy League education.

PARKER

This isn't the same at all!

CLAIRE

How isn't it?

SANDRINE

I didn't photoshop faces to all-star tennis players!

CY

No- you glued labels on water bottles—

PARKER

She did that— I didn't! I memorized every single one of these bottles! Every bottle in here I tasted, I crammed in here! I memorized. Hell! I know wine—grew up around it. The grapes, the dirt, the presses, the chemistry. I took AP bio just so I could blend better wines with my mom. And I got a frickin' double major in business and chem just for these bottles!

PARKER takes a bottle of wine.

PARKER

You've seen me, Clare. You've seen me peel these, study them, learn all the history of these, and that's not cheating!

CLAIRE

Studying isn't what we're talking about—

PARKER

These have been our focus—

CLAIRE

(Talking over him) Taking advantage of the system, getting the list of the wines that were on the exam *was cheating!*

PARKER

Their stupid test doesn't prove anything. Test me! Take any bottle in here and I'll prove it to you!

CLAIRE

Stop, Parker—

PARKER

Take this one? (He sips it.) It's a red zin. Russian River—Hartford!

PARKER throws the bottle against the wall. He grabs another wine bottle and drinks it.

CLAIRE

(screams!) Parker!

SANDRINE

Stop this!

PARKER

And this! It's a (He drinks.) It's a STEEN! South Africa 2014!!

PARKER throws the bottle at the wall.

KE

Talk about white fragileness. You take the cake!

PARKER

I'M NOT FRAGILE! I SWEAR!

PARKER grabs another wine bottle and drinks it and pours it on himself.

PARKER

I DON'T NEED TO CHEAT! I know wine! I got it inside and out! It's in me! In my DNA! It's my blood! Try me! Take any of 'em! I know em!

SANDRINE

Oh, please, dear. It's over.

PARKER

It's not over!

CLAIRE

Don't make it any worse than it—

PARKER

Worse? I failed the damn exam, and you think all along I was the reason, and fuck you all, 'cause I wasn't! I didn't do it! I'm not like my mom. I don't cut corners! I tip! I even pay my taxes! Not like Mom!

SANDRINE

What?

PARKER

Oh, don't give me that. "What?" Since 2001 you've never filed your taxes!

SANDRINE

That's not cheating.

CLAIRE

Sure, it is.

SANDRINE

No, it's not! The wealthier you are, the less they bother you.

CLAIRE

So, you don't ever pay taxes?

SANDRINE

Only the little people pay them.

CY

Aren't you worried you might get caught?

CLAIRE

But you did get caught—

SANDRINE

Well—

KE

On this, you got caught.

SANDRINE

If I am, I've got lawyers who have lawyers.

CLAIRE

You think just because you're rich, you deserve special treatment—

SANDRINE

I never said that—

Pluck the Day

CLAIRE

But that's what it is. You just don't see it.

PARKER

Boo, let's talk in private.

CLAIRE

Park. Don't touch me.

PARKER

Boo. I see why my mom did this. For us. For our baby.

CLAIRE

I didn't think the man I married would do this.

SANDRINE

You're pregnant? And an alcoholic?

CY

She's not an alcoholic.

SANDRINE

She's not?!

CY

We said that to cover up her pregnancy—

SANDRINE

You're having a baby!?

PARKER

We didn't tell you 'cause—

SANDRINE

'Cause you're embarrassed by her—

PARKER

No!

SANDRINE

I would be. Heck, she embarrasses the hell outta me!

CLAIRE

SHUT UP! Shut the hell up! I've put up with you long enough! All your put-downs, your racist bullshit! I love your son, but you make it impossible! When you're not here, when you were off

in Australia, we were fine, but when you're here, when you spout your hate and vile, my husband goes from the man I love back to a boy I can't stand. Around you he de-evolves into a spineless ass-clown!

SANDRINE

He's no "ass-clown"—

PARKER

Please, Clare. I know you're mad, but—

CLAIRE

Are you crazy?!

PARKER

Tone it down and don't be so angry—

CLAIRE

You want to see me angry!!

SANDRINE

Here it comes—

CLAIRE

I'm not putting up with this anymore! (To SANDRINE) Get out!

PARKER

Listen to me— You're still my wife—

CY

You don't own her, dick-breath.

CLAIRE

(TO PARKER) You too! Out!

PARKER

I don't get this—You've never acted like this—

CLAIRE

I held my tongue, you bet I did, and I am so mad I did that, but I prayed we could fix us, prayed you'd come to your senses, but you never did, and now I don't see how we're possible, how we can stay married with all this bullshit and with her always—

PARKER

Hey? Did you turn in my mom?

Pluck the Day

SANDRINE

No, dear. I was caught.

PARKER

So, you ratted me out, Mom?!

CLAIRE

No— Don't put the blame on me—

SANDRINE

They suspected me, and called me in. Once they showed me what they knew—

CLAIRE

She had no choice.

SANDRINE

I turned myself in.

CY

For the reward, I'm sure.

SANDRINE

Oh, please. Of course. (Beat.) But they wouldn't give it to me.

CY stands between PARKER and CLAIRE.

PARKER

Clare. Please understand.

CLAIRE

Either you leave, or I will—

CY

She doesn't want to talk to you right now.

PARKER

Boo, come here—

CY

You take one more step and I will take you down myself.

PARKER

My wife and I will work this out, Cy. Move!

CLAIRE

I'm not workin' on shit with you!—

Pluck the Day

CY

She's fine right where she is. If she wants to walk with you, then she will say so. Not you!

KE stands next to CY.

KE

Back off, Park!

PARKER

Oh look. The Dynamic Duo. Bend-over tiger and blind dragon.

CY

I'll take you now! I got both my eyes!—

SANDRINE

Parker. Stop playing around. We're leaving.

CLAIRE

Yes, you bet you are!—

SANDRINE

We're going to take a vacation, and sort this out.

PARKER

Let me talk to my wife!

CLAIRE

Go to hell!

SANDRINE

Later, son.

PARKER

I'm not going to just let them win!

CLAIRE

Let *them* win? This is fraud. Your mom cheated for *you*!!—

PARKER

But I didn't do it—

The doorbell buzzes.

SANDRINE

That must be our limo. (As she buzzes the limo driver; she speaks into the intercom) Hello?

Pluck the Day

(UNSEEN DRIVER)
Mrs. Lueur?

CLAIRE/SANDRINE
Yes?

(UNSEEN DRIVER)
We need to get to the airport, or you'll miss your flight.

SANDRINE
We'll be right down.

(UNSEEN DRIVER)
(through the intercom) Sure.

SANDRINE
Thank you. (To Parker) Parker, we have options, and we need to address them.

PARKER
Mom? What?

SANDRINE
We must consider my image.

PARKER
But, what about—

KE
You can't think you're getting away with this?

SANDRINE
Get away with what, Ke? No one got hurt.

CLAIRE
I did.

PARKER
(Sardonic) Oh please.

CY
(with a laugh) You don't get it, do you?

PARKER
Yes—I do—

SANDRINE

And I'd do it again. For my son, and maybe you don't understand, but for my kid, I'd do it again. He belongs to me. (To Parker) Please, take that bag. I threw some things in there.

PARKER

I'll stay, if you don't mind. I want to talk to Clare—

SANDRINE

Yes, dear, but later. For now, we need to leave. Our limo is here, and the Board of the Master Sommeliers wants to talk to us on the way to the airport.

PARKER

(backing down) Now?

SANDRINE

Now. Son, in a year people will have forgotten this. Maybe in a few months. You never know how the news cycle goes. Heck, with this administration, people might forget in a week. If the exam means that much to you, you can do the European som test. I know a guy who can proctor it while we're there, if it means that much to you.

KE

Are you going, or do I need to kick your ass Asian-style?

SANDRINE

We're leaving. Come on, Parker. I packed you some things. Just some things your dad left. Let's re-group.

PARKER

Boo? Believe me. I passed without cheating. And I failed without cheating. Please, don't let this ruin what we have.

CLAIRE

Let me think.

PARKER

I'll call you from the limo.

(He walks past the luggage.)

SANDRINE

(To Parker) Your bag.

PARKER

I'll carry it for a fifty.

Pluck the Day

SANDRINE

You'll carry it, or you won't have any clothes.

He grabs the luggage and moves to the door.

SANDRINE

For what it's worth, I had fun training you all. And I am so proud of you for passing. Take care.

SANDRINE at the door.

SANDRINE

Parker? Move.

PARKER

There's still one loose end I don't get.

SANDRINE

What is it?

PARKER

You printed the labels to help me, in case I forgot, which I didn't, and I didn't use the labels, because I never even knew they were there. Believe me or not. *(The others scoff and shake their heads.)* Trust me. Okay- But what I don't get: all of us passed the first time, except Claire. Ke didn't cheat. Cy didn't.

CY

Hell no!

PARKER

I didn't. Claire didn't, yet she failed the test. Right?

SANDRINE

(Silence.)

PARKER

Or she didn't fail, did she, Mom?

SANDRINE

The Court of the Sommeliers wants to see us NOW. We have to—

PARKER

Did you alter any her results? Did you alter Claire's answers on the first test?

SANDRINE

I didn't change anyone else's test answers.

Pluck the Day

Just Claire's?

PARKER

SANDRINE
(*Silence.*)

Just mine?

CLAIRE

SANDRINE
(*Silence.*) (*She exits.*)

PARKER

Claire? I'm sorry. I am. And I know you need some time, some space, and I need to go talk to the Board, and clear this up, or whatever, but you deserve better, and I think I can give you better. I can do better. If you'll let me, if you want me. Please.

Call me.

CLAIRE

PARKER closes the door, exiting.

Sashay away, bitch!

KE

CY hugs CLAIRE.

I'm so proud of you, chicka.

CY

Proud of me? I feel like crap.

CLAIRE

You deserve better.

CY

KE

As we say in my country: Zhùhè (zoo-huh). Congratulations. You're having a baby.

CLAIRE

We are having a baby.

CY

You're sure?

Pluck the Day

CLAIRE

Yeah. You are my family. You always were.

KE

We're family?

CLAIRE

If you'll have me—

CY

Of course, we will. Won't we, Ke?

KE

I don't have a great track record with family of blood, but family of choice—I like that.

CLAIRE

And Uncle Ke sounds good, don't you think?

KE

Uncle Ke? Sure. I'd rather be called "Daddy". But "Uncle" is good for starters. And if I'm going to help raise this baby, I'm going all the way. Dual languages, Mozart 24/7, violin at two, programming classes at three—

CLAIRE

Slow down—

CY

I'm good with Aunt Cy!

KE

This is exciting!

CLAIRE

You bet. Let's do this.

CY

We're here for you. Aren't we, Ke?

KE

Yes, we're here for you.

CLAIRE

Cheers to that!

They clink their glasses- lights fade to black. End of play.

AD LIB STORIES

Author's Note: The following stories may be used during the prologue while the sommeliers serve the audience wine. Use these as guides to work with.

PARKER

As the Master Sommelier here at Le Bernardin, and this is one of my favorites. From Provance. Imagine. The south of France. An old abandoned farmhouse. Straight out of a Cezanne painting. Smelled like a hippy haven. An old woman showed me around the farm and allowed me to pluck the grapes. She said, "This is St. Martin." She said it just like that. "Sang Martang." And her house. It looked out over the vineyard. Part of her tile roof—missing. But at her table, looking out the open windows, no shutters to block the view, just rolling vineyards, live oaks and olive trees... I never felt so alive.

KE

You know what old W. C. said: "All should cook with wine; sometimes even add it to the food." You're ordering lamb? We master sommelier's have a cliché: What grows together goes together... May I suggest madeira? Bual—not too sweet. Refresh your palette and ready you for the lamb. Do you realize that Charlton Heston split the Red Sea when this wine was made? Blandy 1957. The year of the Ten Commandments. Hard to believe, but Eisenhower was still alive when these grapes were plucked. Right there is the best of life.

CY

(Droll) Any other sommelier here would tell you some crazy story of walking through a vineyard or sitting in a tasting room with a celebrity like Caleb Reece¹. Exactly. A celebrity you've never heard of, just like the wine, but they make it sound oh so groovy. Let's be honest. They've probably never even set foot in Europe, and never met any celebrity other than Caleb Reece². They just read a National Geographic and made the wine sound "yummy". Kill me. I won't lie. I've been to this vineyard. I've drank it with normal people. It's in New York. Niagara. And yes, New York makes good wine. Better than New Jersey, or Arizona. For me, wine is what you like. Niagara Landing merlot. (Pointing to the bottle) See? It won gold.... (Looks again) Okay, silver at the 2017 Florida State Fair. Not bad. It was an international competition. Smell Niagara Falls. Sweet, but nice. Like you two.

CLAIRE

We like to think, here at Pearl and Ash, we're artists with wine and food. The colors, the flavors, the smells, are all gifts from the gods. Wine starts with the seed and the soil. It grows. The hot air, the dry breeze, and the rains. And it grows. The seed takes root. Stretching down. Stem reaching up. Growing into greens and reds, purples and blacks. It grows to the gods. The vines spread toward the heat. The roots dig through rocks. Ever look at the leaves? They look like hands holding the grapes. The berries fill up, teased by the heat and hands, and jam with juice. Ready for release. It's like kisses they pluck and placed in a barrel for us to taste. And the kisses rests for time in a barrel as they mature into a story. It ferments in its juices; it ferments in its time; and it rests into a mystery. Taste it. Wine, like love, is a blend of nature's nectars. Nice,

¹ Name a local celebrity.

² [the local community theater heart-throb]

Pluck the Day

right? Now some winemakers try to fool the gods, fool you and me, but this wine can't fool anyone. The gods are never fooled. And when vintner's try to fool us, the gods retaliate.