

WITHOUT QUESTION

by Greg Vovos
© January 2014

CHARACTERS:

JOHN: A man who's just as eager as he is nervous in his quest for love.

KATHARINE: A careful woman who's looking for answers.

WAITER: A joyous fast talker who's just as romantic as he is perverse.

CHEF: A scrumptious dish who makes a living cooking for the love-starved.

SETTING:

A nice restaurant on a pleasant, albeit long, evening.

SYNOPSIS:

John and Katharine go on a first date that seems to last a lifetime.

NOTE: This play was written specifically for Dobama Theatre's *Spring Fever* benefit with a theme that centers on the vagaries of love.

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Lights up as JOHN and KATHARINE sit at a table in a restaurant that appears to be nice. John's tapping leg and manic survey of the space give away his eagerness and nerves, while Kathrine's well-postured stillness suggest that she's the careful type.

They stare at each other a moment, not sure what to say. Then...

JOHN

Nice place?

KATHARINE

Is that a question?

The WAITER bounds on. He's so friendly it's disturbing.

WAITER

Welcome! Welcome! Kalo Gyro! Welcome to my restaurant. Please to enjoy. Are we on a first date? Eh? Are we? I'll have you know the last couple to sit here ended up getting married -- no pressure. But that's special, right? Don't you think that's special? Okay, so, I must recommend the Chef's Whimsy to you. It's a series of courses prepared by our world renowned chef guaranteed to surprise, delight, and bring meaning to your lives. Would you like to try it? Doesn't it sound fun? Whimsy? Whimsy is fun, right? Well?

JOHN

What could it hurt?

KATHARINE

Why not?

WAITER

Beauteous. Lovely. I admire your courage.

JOHN

Why do you admire our--

WAITER

Remember, no substitutions. Did I mention that? No substitutions and no send-backs. I'll be back in a moment. Remember, the last couple that sat here got married. Isn't that wonderful?

The Waiter does a spin and hops offstage.

JOHN

Was that weird? Or is it just me?

Katharine nods her head, unsure what to say.

Why was he talking about marriage?

KATHARINE

You don't believe in the institution of marriage?

JOHN

You don't think discussing that is adding pressure to what's already a stress-filled situation?

KATHARINE

Is there some kind of rule book we should be following?

JOHN

How would I know?

KATHARINE

Have you not been on a first date before?

JOHN

Have you?

KATHARINE

Does this conversation feel a bit contentious to you?

JOHN

How do you mean, contentious?

KATHARINE

Are you asking me the definition of contentious?

JOHN

You mean, am I quizzing you?

KATHARINE

Are you always this confrontational?

JOHN
May I start again?

She gestures, encouraging him to start again. And he does...quickly.

What are your likes? Dislikes? Are you career minded? Republican? Democrat? Do you want kids? What's your family situation? Your favorite color? On a scale of 1-10 how crazy are you? Deepest secret? What rhymes with orange? And what are you looking for in a man? Would it trouble you if he enjoys dressing in women's undergarments? Any finally, any chance we go on a second date?

Pause as she takes those in.

KATHARINE
What do you say we sidestep the silly questions and move on to the most pressing one of all?

JOHN
And what is the most pressing question of all?

KATHARINE
Would you like to have--

The Waiter runs on screaming.

WAITER
SEX! SEX! SEX! GET YOUR HOT JUICY SEX HERE!

The Waiter sets down a dish, nearly burning himself. [It should be noted that all the props may be imagined, as they are in OUR TOWN.]

Chef has prepared this course especially for you. It's appropriately called "Sex." Perhaps a bit obvious but I admire the economy of the name. Be careful, it's hot, juicy, addictive, and often leads to danger. Do you like danger? Enjoy your Sex. May I watch?

KATHARINE
What did you just say?

WAITER
I'll take that as a no.

They look at each other, uneasy, unsure how to proceed...

JOHN
You want this?

KATHARINE
You want to give it to me?

WAITER
Give it to her.

JOHN
Would you get out of here?!?

Waiter exits. John begins to spoon-feed her.

Do you like it?

She closes her eyes. Begins to moan.

Do you want some more?

More moans. He spoons more.

Faster? Faster? Faster?

He spoons it faster and faster until it spills on her. More Moans.

John struggles to get more on the spoon.

KATHARINE
Are you stopping? Why are you stopping? You're not stopping, are you?

He smears the food in her face now. So she reaches her hand into the bowl and smears it on his face and in his mouth.

You're a dirty boy, aren't you? You like this, dirty boy?

She smears the Sex all over him. More moans.

JOHN
(Ecstasy) What are you doing to me?

They slop the Sex all over each other, moaning in unison.

KATHARINE

Is that God? Do I see God?

The loudest moans of all. Then...

Silence.

JOHN

Was that as good for you as it was for me?

John loosens his tie; Katharine kicks off her heels.

The Waiter returns.

WAITER

Is good, am I right? I'll just clean up this sticky mess for you.

*The Waiter cleans some of the mess, even towels them off.
He sets down a plate of food.*

Chef calls this next course "Love is a Many Splendid Thing Because Everything is Perfect and Lovely at First So Get It While the Getting's Good." Dig in.

The Waiter exits. They sample the dish.

JOHN

Where have you been all my life?

KATHARINE

What took you so long to find me?

JOHN

Do you know how much I love you?

KATHARINE

Can anyone love another person more than I love you?

John gets down on bended knee.

JOHN

Would you join me in my supreme certainty of the power of our love and make me the happiest man in the world by marrying me so we can raise a

family together, grow old, and remain forever in bliss, despite the odor of my farts?

KATHARINE

Are you just asking me this because I'm pregnant?

JOHN

You're pregnant? For real? Like you're currently with child?? This very second??? How could we possibly be ready for this?!?

KATHARINE

Didn't your marriage proposal suggest that this is exactly what you wanted?

JOHN

Did you think I meant now?? That I wanted kids NOW???

The Waiter enters.

WAITER

Aren't you two just the cutest little lovebirds in erotica, ornithologica history? This next dish prepared especially for you by our surprisingly flexible chef is called "Ready or Not These Damn Kids 'bout to Turn Your Minds into Putty so Hold onto the One You Love Because this Shit's about to Get Real."

The Waiter sets down the dish and exits.

John and Katharine each taste it and then SCREAM.

KATHARINE

WHY ARE WE ALWAYS SCREAMING?

JOHN

WHAT?

KATHARINE

WHY? ARE? WE? ALWAYS? SCREAMING?

JOHN

DO YOU THINK THE KIDS ARE TRYING TO DESTROY US? CAN WE PLEASE GIVE THEM AWAY? (*Standing and addressing the other restaurant patrons.*) ANYONE? ANYONE? FREE KIDS?

Katharine slams down her fork. Pushes her dish away.

KATHARINE
Waiter? Waiter?

Waiter bounds on.

WAITER
How may I serve you? Ask me anything.

KATHARINE
Can I have something else?

WAITER
Ooh, I'm sorry. No substitutions. But take solace in the fact that the rugged consistency of this dish will add deep depth and complex complexity to your dining experience. Enjoy.

The Waiter exits. They both struggle with the taste of the dish.

JOHN
Am I right to ascertain that you're not enjoying this date any longer?

KATHARINE
Do you think we'd still be here if we didn't have kids?

He struggles to eat the food but it's clear that it's not to his liking.

JOHN
Don't you think you're just over-tired?

KATHARINE
Isn't that simply an excuse people use so they can live a lie and not disappoint their kids by getting a divorce?

JOHN
Is this because I don't discipline them enough?

KATHARINE
Are you bringing that up to make me feel guilt about how much I work? Are you suggesting I'm not there enough for my kids? That I don't love them?

JOHN
How did you get that from what I just said?

KATHARINE

Do you ever feel like our life is just one unanswered question after another?

Pause. He doesn't know.

How do we know if we're doing the right thing?

John takes another pained bite of food.

JOHN

Did you hear that Frank and Mandy are getting a divorce?

KATHARINE

Did you know that Jason's been having sex with his divorce attorney and Sally has it all on videotape?

JOHN

Are we the only couple we know who's not divorced yet?

KATHARINE

What do you mean "yet"?

Pause.

Can you answer the question?

JOHN

What do you want me to say?

Katharine stands.

Where are you going?

KATHARINE

Is it okay if I use the bathroom?

Katharine exits quickly.

JOHN

(Yelling after her) Are you coming back?

Waiter enters. Happy as a drunk at a bar.

WAITER
How's the date going? Will there be a second?

John grabs the Waiter's arm.

JOHN
How do people do it?

WAITER
You're the first person to ever touch me.

The Waiter flees from the stage overcome with emotion.

John pokes at the food and then SMASHES his dish on the floor.

Chef enters. She fancies herself to be a pretty scrumptious dish herself and she might be right.

CHEF
Did you not enjoy what I prepared for you?

JOHN
It was tough to swallow.

CHEF
And that's my fault?

No response.

My husband wants to leave me. He finds me unpleasant and hard to look at.

Katharine comes back onstage but stops when she sees Chef and her husband together.

Do you think I'm hard to look at?

JOHN
(A bit in his own world) After a while, it all becomes so weird. Even the simplest questions become difficult to answer. The simplest ones. It's easy to lose sight of each other, of who you really are.

CHEF
I asked if you think I'm hard to look at.

He looks at her.

JOHN

You are not hard to look at.

CHEF

Thank you.

Chef pulls out a dish as if by magic and sets it down.

For you. I'll have the waiter clean up this mess.

She leaves, passing Katharine as she goes.

KATHARINE

How could you do that to me?

JOHN

What?

KATHARINE

How could you talk to her about us?? IN SENTENCES??? Have you ever once answered a question I asked you with a sentence? A real sentence? Not a question masquerading as a sentence but a real, down-home, good-as-gold, smack-your-ass-with-a-morning-wood, life-affirming sentence?

JOHN

Have you ever answered any of mine?

KATHARINE

Can't you just answer the question I asked you before you turn it on me?

Pause. He's at a loss.

You want to answer her questions? You want to eat her food?

Katharine starts to shovel the food into his mouth. Bite by bite. He starts to choke as she does so.

How's that, huh? How does that taste? How does that feel going down? How does the end of our marriage taste to you?

John coughs and hacks.

Why are we so horrible to each other? What happened to us, huh? What? WHO? WHAT? WHERE? WHY? HOW? WHO? WHAT? WHERE? WHY? HOW? WHO? WHAT? WHERE? WHY? HOW? (*Repeat as necessary.*)

John's coughs give way to the inability to breathe. Katharine stops when she realizes that John is choking.

Katherine gets behind him, gives him the Heimlich. As she does...

(In rhythm to the maneuvers) What happened to us? (Thrust.) What happened to us? (Thrust.) What happened to--(Thrust.)

The food launches out of John's mouth and across the room. PLOP.

John and Katharine stare at each other.

Are you okay?

JOHN

How can you--No. No, I'm not okay. I can't tell you the last time I was okay. All I can tell you is I'm scared. I feel like I'm failing as a father and husband and I fucking hate this restaurant. I don't know why I spoke to her like that or why I betrayed you. I just know that I've spent this entire evening trying to keep you from walking away from this table, trying to do whatever necessary to put on a face that would be good enough so you would go on a second date with me. Trying to hide the real me because I'm afraid that person isn't enough for you. Because I'm not so special. So rather than ever answer a question, I just volley them back because at least that way the conversation can't end, right?

KATHARINE

Is that what you think of me? That I would see you for who you are and walk out on you, walk out on us, walk out on everything we are? Do you have that little faith in me? In us?

JOHN

Aren't you just as scared?

KATHARINE

You know what scares me, John? What if love's not enough? What if it's never been enough? What if we've been kidding ourselves all these years and everyone else we know is right? What then?

JOHN

I don't know if love is enough. Or if it even matters. Maybe there are other things in a marriage that mean more, like how much money we make, or how healthy we are, or whatever. Look I don't know if we'll make it to old age without eating each other's hearts out because I don't know what the fuck. And I certainly don't know if any of my answers satisfy any question ever asked. I just know what I feel. I feel like love is enough. I feel like we'll last. And I know I love you. Is that enough? I don't know. But I feel like it is. Don't you...

KATHARINE

But what if--Oh fuck it.

Katharine grabs John and kisses him. Then...

I feel it too.

The Waiter ambles on, lumbering under the weight of a large platter.

WAITER

And now for dessert--

JOHN

Not interested.

WAITER

But I have many special offerings --

KATHARINE

No, thanks--

WAITER

--ranging from watching the sunset on a beautiful Greek isle as you drift off to your final slumber together to something more bitter like not knowing each other's names as one of you--

KATHARINE

--We prefer to make our own dessert. Together.

The Waiter is at a loss, dumbfounded.

JOHN

Second date?

KATHARINE

Was there ever a question?

John laughs. They exit hand in hand. The Waiter calls after them.

WAITER

But what about me? Did that touch mean nothing? Are you really going to leave me? Why am I always alone? Oh, Love, why art thou such a cruel and wretched beast??

Chef enters, and holds a plate right under his nose.

CHEF

Would you like to taste my latest dish?

WAITER

Would I?

The Waiter nods his head like a mad fool. And as they exit together...

You mean the sex, right?

Lights fade to black.

END OF PLAY