

*At Rise: A small table in a dark, recessed nook inside the Café Grottesquerie. At the table are seated AUBREY and AUDREY. AUDREY is examining a menu. After a few moments, she swiftly throws it down onto the table and emits a heavy sigh of discontent.*

AUBREY

For goodness sake, Audrey, do try to buck up a bit. You're beginning to put a real damper on things.

AUDREY

Well, why shouldn't I?

AUBREY

But I thought you liked this place.

AUDREY

I do like this place. I wouldn't be seen dead anywhere else.

AUBREY

Then why all the sighs and the long face?

AUDREY

Well, honestly, it's the same scenario all over again, isn't it? I mean, here we are once more, in one of the most exclusive restaurants there is, one that even the best people have to fight tooth and nail to get into, and yet again we're stuck way in the back at this poky little table instead of our rightful place at the big table.

AUBREY

But I told you when I made the reservation that they'd informed me the big table was already reserved for the—

AUDREY

Yes, yes, I know, I know – the Chinese Ambassador. And the last time it was the American Foreign Secretary, and before that...oh, who would even remember him now? Some little upstart with a lot of leverage. The point is *we* should be at the big table and we're not.

AUBREY

I rather like it back here. It's cozy, more intimate.

AUDREY

I don't want intimate, I want to intimidate. I want to radiate and dominate. Fat chance of doing that in this dingy little alcove.

AUBREY

Well, things are what they are, so I say let's just be grateful that we're here at all. You know, there's a great many people out there who will never have the opportunity to enter these doors – ever.

AUDREY

*(Irritably.)*

Do you think I don't know that? And believe me, my heart goes out to each and every one of them. But I also think it's fair to remember that of all the hardships a person may be forced to endure, feeling less important than someone else has to be among the cruelest.

*(AUDREY takes a sip from her glass, then pulls a look of disgust.)*

AUDREY

And to top it all, this blood is most definitely off.

AUBREY

Off?

AUDREY

Yes, off.

AUBREY

*(Taking a sip from his glass.)*

Are you sure?

AUDREY

Of course I am. I'm surprised you didn't notice. Heaven knows you were gurgling and swilling it around in your mouth long enough in front of the sommelier.

AUBREY

Perhaps it is a little. When he comes by I'll have a word.

AUDREY

Ah! There he is.

*(Calling out.)*

You! Sommelier!

*(The SOMMELIER appears from stage R.)*

SOMMELIER

Yes, Madame?

AUDREY

This blood is off.

SOMMELIER

Off?

AUDREY

Yes, off.

SOMMELIER

How so?

AUDREY

I don't know how so. Perhaps it's corked?

SOMMELIER

Impossible, Madame. I opened it this evening in front of your very eyes. You both inspected the cork – it was flawless.

AUDREY

Look, I may not be a seasoned connoisseur of all the various blood groups in the world, but I do know when one is off, and this one is most decidedly off.

SOMMELIER

*(Picking up the bottle and examining it.)*

Let me see, Sir ordered the...ah, that would explain it.

AUBREY

What would?

SOMMELIER

The Uzbekistan 2004. I'm surprised it's still on the list. It's our dirty little secret.

AUBREY

Was it a bad year?

SOMMELIER

It's never a good year in Uzbekistan, Sir. And of course, this is a varietal in name only. The blood is in fact a blend that is extracted – or rendered, if you will – from detainees hailing from any number of unspecified regions of the world, all with

SOMMELIER (Cont'd.)

poor dietary habits. Combine this with the extremely unhygienic conditions under which the extraction takes place and what you are left with is not a varietal at all, but an extraordinary and barely palatable rendition.

AUDREY

Yuck!

SOMMELIER

Naturally, the quality and country of origin are reflected in the price, which is what makes this particular blood so appealing to the...how shall we put it... fiscally vigilant.

*(AUDREY shoots an incriminating look at AUBREY.)*

AUDREY

I see.

SOMMELIER

Perhaps Sir would like to see the blood list again?

AUBREY

Yes, I think that—

AUDREY

No, he wouldn't. I think, under the circumstances, it might be wisest if you recommended something.

AUBREY

Steady on, Audrey.

AUDREY

Look, Aubrey, if I'm going to be stuck back here all night like some sort of social cast-off, then I'm damned well going to enjoy myself, and what's more, I'm going to do it at someone else's expense – i.e. yours.

*(To the SOMMELIER.)*

Please continue.

SOMMELIER

Well, without knowing your dinner selections for this evening it's a little difficult to say, but to my mind a 1995 Srebrenica tends to compliment just about most things.

AUDREY

A Srebrenica? Mmm, that sounds yummy.

SOMMELIER

It's a full-bodied Bosniak, aged in oak casks in the picturesque mountains of the Republika Srpska. From there it is exported to Holland where, in a sleepy Dutch village where life just seems to happen without anyone noticing it, it is bottled with a mixture of willful abandon and callous indifference.

AUDREY

It sounds heavenly.

AUBREY

And, uh...what, um...what does that run at, then?

SOMMELIER

The price? *Very* high.

*(The SOMMELIER exits stage R.)*

AUDREY

*(Excitedly.)*

Oh, look!

AUBREY

What?

AUDREY

The Chinese Ambassador's wife – she's heading to the ladies room. I'd better follow.

AUBREY

Whatever for?

AUDREY

To chitchat, of course.

AUBREY

What if she doesn't speak English? What if she comes back at you in Mandarin or some such nonsense? What'll you do then?