

CAFÉ STENGEL

A Short Comedy

By D. Richard Tucker

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

RONALD, a restaurant patron  
CELESTE, a restaurant patron  
LINDA, a waitress  
JERRY, a waiter  
TOM, a waiter  
CINDY, a restaurant patron  
SANDRA, a restaurant patron  
COACH, the restaurant manager

Setting

Restaurant interior – At least two tables for patrons. A waiters' table with napkins, silverware, etc. A doorway to the kitchen is on the opposite side of the stage of the main entrance.

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Lights up on a restaurant interior. An arch way to the lobby is visible and on the opposite side of the stage, the kitchen entrance. RONALD and CELESTE are dining at one table. The other table is empty. LINDA, a waitress, is folding napkins at a serving table. Enter JERRY another waiter from the main entrance. He approaches LINDA.

JERRY

Hi, I'm the new guy. Jerry.

LINDA

Oh, great, we wondered when you'd get here. I'm Linda. You're pretty late.

JERRY

They told me just to come in toward the end of the shift – to get a little orientation.

LINDA

Okay. So where are you coming from?

JERRY

I was at the mall location, working lunch, mostly.

LINDA

Oh, good. We have the same menu as the mall location, but the specials are based on the chef's decision for the day. You'll need to learn those.

(handing him a note card)

Coach is real particular about that.

JERRY

Coach?

LINDA

Yeah, he's the manager.

JERRY

What kind of name is Coach?

LINDA

That's just what they call him. Now, there are a few things you should know-

JERRY

Oh, please don't do this to me.

LINDA

What?

JERRY

Give me that whole "new guy" speech. Look, I've been serving for years now. I know what to do, so don't talk down to me, okay?

LINDA

Well, I just thought that you might want to –

JERRY

We're talking about brain surgery here. We're serving meals, not saving lives, so don't get all uppity about it.

LINDA

It's just that Coach is a –

JERRY

Please. I've worked with lots of managers before – good, bad, and stupid. I can deal with any of them, so you don't have to give me a big run down on how to deal with the boss.

LINDA

All right.

Enter TOM, another waiter from the kitchen.

TOM

I'm back. Everything okay?

LINDA

Oh, yeah – slow night. This is Jerry. He's starting tonight. Jerry, Tom.

TOM

Hi

JERRY

Hi.

LINDA

Jerry just came from the mall location, so he's not exactly new.

TOM

Oh, good. Glad to have you on board.

(to LINDA)

Did you tell him about –

LINDA

He didn't want to know.

TOM

Huh?

JERRY

Look, I've been in this business a long time. I don't need any condescending speeches from you guys, okay?

TOM

(puzzled)

Okay.

SANDRA and CINDY enter and wait to be seated. TOM moves to them.

TOM (cont'd)

Good evening. Table for two?

CINDY

Yes, please.

TOM seats them at the other table.

TOM

Can I get you something to drink?

CINDY

Coffee, please.

SANDRA

I'd like a glass of your house Merlot.

TOM

Certainly. Let me tell you about our specials and I'll give you some time to look over the menu while I get your beverages.

SANDRA

That's fine. We'd just like dessert anyhow.

TOM

Oh, well in that case, you'll find the dessert menu on the last page, and we have a few specialties that our chef is rather proud of. My favorite is the Chocolate Marble Cheesecake, served with raspberry sauce and whipped cream.

Enter COACH from kitchen. He stands and watches TOM's delivery.

TOM (cont'd)

We also have a Bourbon Street Pecan Tart served with vanilla ice cream and –

COACH motions to TOM and TOM stops in mid sentence. COACH then goes through a series of signs – left hand to right elbow, left hand brushing chest, right hand pats top of head twice, right hand brushes down length of left arm, claps twice. TOM watches the signs and then resumes his speech.

TOM (cont'd)

I'm sorry but we're out of the Pecan Tart, but we do have an apple cranberry pie with -

TOM looks back at COACH. COACH brushes right hand down left arm and claps twice. COACH exits as TOM resumes his speech.

TOM (cont'd)

Vanilla sauce, a Torta Tiramisu with Kahlua, , and a Cappuccino Cream pie, which is Cappuccino Cream on a fudgey brownie lavished with fudge topping.

CINDY

I think we'll need a minute to decide.

TOM

Take your time, and I'll be right back with your beverages.

TOM exits through kitchen.

JERRY

(to LINDA)  
What was that all about?

LINDA

What?

JERRY

That guy – with all the waving and clapping.

LINDA

That was Coach. He just let Tom know that the Pecan Tart had been replaced.

JERRY

Like that?

LINDA

That's the way Coach works.

JERRY

That's different.

LINDA

Well, it's like this – when you deal with –

JERRY

No, don't tell me. It can't be that bad. I'm not going to have everybody telling me how to do my job. I'll figure it out.

LINDA

All right.

Enter TOM with drinks. He stops at waiters table to get cream for the coffee.

LINDA (cont'd)

(to TOM)

Good job. Way to adjust.

TOM

Thanks. Kind of caught me off guard. I didn't want to have to work out of a jam.

LINDA

No way. You were in command the whole time.

TOM moves to table and serves beverages to SANDRA and CINDY.

TOM

Coffee. Cream and sugar. And a glass of Merlot. Are you ready to order yet?

CINDY

Not just yet. I still haven't decided.

TOM

Take your time. I'll be right back.

TOM starts toward kitchen when RONALD signals for him. TOM moves to RONALD's table and they engage in an inaudible conversation. After a few seconds, CINDY looks around for TOM.

CINDY

Excuse me.

TOM is still tied up with RONALD, so LINDA starts toward table. JERRY stops her.

JERRY

Let me take it. I can do this job just as well as you can.

JERRY approaches toward CINDY.

JERRY (cont'd)

May I help you?

COACH enters and watches JERRY from the distance.

CINDY

(pointing to menu)

Yes, this Apple Frangipane Tart – is it glazed with apricot preserves?

JERRY

(taking menu and staring at it)

Umm. Oh, is the ...uh... Apple Frangipane Tart...um...is it glazed with preserves?

CINDY

Apricot preserves.

JERRY

Apricot preserves. Oh...um...good question -  
 (starting to ask LINDA, but decides to fake the answer)  
 Well, actually ....um...no....um, since it's apple, ...we use.... apple ...preserves.

CINDY

Oh, that's unusual. What kind of apples do you use?

COACH moves to JERRY and slaps him on the back.

COACH

Nice try, son, but I think you're done. You gave it your best shot; now it's time to hand it over to somebody else.

COACH takes menu from JERRY and slaps him on the butt with it. JERRY moves back to waiter table. COACH motions for LINDA who moves to him and takes the menu. Meanwhile, TOM has completed his conversation and moves to JERRY at table.

COACH

(to LINDA)  
 It's in your hands now. Make me proud.

COACH exits.

LINDA

We use only Granny Smith apples the Apple Frangipane Tart. It is glazed with an apricot preserves glaze, made by heating the preserves with water and then straining out the remaining lumps of fruit. Afterwards we sprinkle it with toasted sliced almonds and serve with vanilla ice cream.

CINDY

Okay, well..... I think I'll have the strawberry rhubarb tart.

LINDA

It's very good. I'm sure you'll like it.

SANDRA

And I'll try the apple cranberry pie.

LINDA

All right. I'll have those right out to you.

LINDA collects menus and moves to waiters table.

JERRY

I can't believe he did that.

LINDA

Jerry - one apple cranberry, one strawberry rhubarb.

JERRY

Sure.

JERRY exits through kitchen.

TOM

What happened?

LINDA

He was a bit shaken up. Good stuff, but his mechanics were off.

TOM

That figures. The first outing is always a little rough.

JERRY enters with dishes and moves to SANDRA and CINDY. He serves them.

JERRY

One apple cranberry pie.

SANDRA

That's mine.

JERRY

And a strawberry rhubarb tart.

CINDY

Thank you.

JERRY

Is there anything else I can get you?

CINDY

This will be fine, thanks.

JERRY moves to waiters table.

JERRY

I still can't believe he did that to me.

LINDA

Hey, you can handle it. You've worked with lots of bosses – good, bad, and stupid.

JERRY

Okay, but this is the weirdest thing I've ever seen.

TOM

Get used to it. That's how things are run around here.

SANDRA

Excuse me?

JERRY moves to SANDRA

JERRY

Yes. Can I help you?

SANDRA

This portion seems to be rather small. And there's too much sauce.

JERRY

Oh, I'm sorry. Here, let me take that back for you.

SANDRA

Thank you.

JERRY takes dish and moves toward kitchen. COACH enters and meets him half way and turns him around escorting him back to the table.

COACH

(to SANDRA)

Good evening. Is there a problem here?

SANDRA

Yes.

(pointing to dish in JERRY's hand)

That portion is too small. And there's way too much sauce.

COACH

(examining dish)  
Well, actually this is the size of our standard portion. And the vanilla sauce is measured according to that.

SANDRA

I think it's too small.

COACH

I can assure you that this is the standard size.

SANDRA

When I was in here last week, the dessert I got was much larger.

COACH

Well, I can't speak for last week but I can guarantee that this is the standard size.

SANDRA

Well, I don't think it is.

COACH

I'm sorry, but I'm not going to argue portion size.

SANDRA

But this is too small.

COACH

Well, I suppose it doesn't really matter anymore, does it?

SANDRA

I beg your pardon.

COACH

You can't argue portions and sauces with me. YOU'RE OUTTA HERE!

COACH gestures wildly and points to door.  
SANDRA and CINDY quickly gather their things and run out of the restaurant.  
COACH moves to JERRY.

COACH

One more stunt like that and you'll be relegated to the lunch shift. You're not at the mall anymore, Rookie. Welcome to the show.

COACH exits through the kitchen. TOM goes to clear table.

JERRY

Okay, I give up. Tell me about Coach.

LINDA

Are you ready to listen?

JERRY

I'm all ears.

LINDA

Coach use to be a manager in the minor leagues. He's efficient, manages well, but he's still got a lot of baseball left in his methods.

JERRY

Okay.....

LINDA

If you just think "baseball," you'll get along fine.

JERRY

Right. Baseball. Think baseball.

TOM

And show some enthusiasm. Coach likes that.

TOM exits with dishes.

LINDA

Give it a try. A big tipper is about to order dessert. What do you tell Coach?

JERRY

Ummm.....I don't know.

LINDA

"Here's the payoff pitch."

JERRY

Here's the payoff pitch.

LINDA

Right. A server has had complaints from four consecutive customers.

TOM enters.

JERRY

Ummm.....

LINDA

“ He's been roughed up in his last four outings.”

JERRY

Okay.

TOM

You're at the end of your shift, a big party comes in, Coach wants to send you home early, but you don't want to miss out on the extra tips.

JERRY

Um.... Oh...I've got it – “It's okay, Coach. I can go the distance.”

LINDA

You'll get the hang of it. Just think baseball.

RONALD and CELESTE are getting ready to go. RONALD approaches the waiters.

RONALD

Excuse me. I'd like to speak to your manager, please.

LINDA

Certainly, I'll get him for you.

LINDA exits through kitchen. RONALD returns to table and helps CELESTE with her coat.

TOM

Here's another one - you've just completed a double shift when you're asked to serve a party of twenty-four – a college fraternity reunion.

JERRY

Um.. oh, that's easy – “Stick a fork in me – I'm done.”

COACH enters followed by LINDA and goes directly to RONALD's table.

COACH

Can I help you?

RONALD

Are you the manager?

COACH

Yes, what can I do for you/

RONALD

My wife and I just wanted to thank you for your service here. This restaurant has been our favorite for years and it just gets better every time we come.

CELESTE

The food is wonderful. And your servers are so attentive.

COACH

Thank you very much. I'll be sure to pass that on to my staff.

RONALD

Please do. And here's something else you can pass on.

(hands COACH money)

Thanks very much.

RONALD and CELESTE exit.

COACH

Thank you. Come again.

(counting money)

A hundred dollar tip! How about that?

All engage in high fives and back slapping.

COACH (cont'd)

This is great. Just goes to show how hard work pays off. You watch these two, Rookie, and you'll be an ace in no time.

JERRY

Thanks. Oh, just a minute!

JERRY runs into kitchen. COACH watches him go and rolls eyes.

COACH

You two keep an eye on him. He's got potential. I think he's got good stuff – just a little nervous. You know, when I first got into this business, I just wanted to contribute – be a part of the team – and I was just happy to be here. I knew that if I just worked hard and gave it my best shot, Lord willing, everything would work out. Well, you two have given it everything you've got.

COACH (cont'd)

You've stepped up and brought us to a new level, doing the little things that make the difference, giving a hundred and ten percent, and doing it one shift at a time. I'm proud of you. You've looked adversity in the eye and overcome. You're championship material, and don't you forget that.

JERRY rushes in with container of water  
and pours it over COACH.

COACH

What the hell is wrong with you?

JERRY

Um.... I just .... Um..... I was celebrating.

COACH

By trying to drown me?

JERRY

Yeah, I've seen them do that on TV. With Gatorade.

COACH

Get him out of here before I kill him.

TOM helps COACH into kitchen.

LINDA

That's football you idiot! The Gatorade shower is football! I said "Think Baseball."

JERRY

I didn't know there was a difference.

LINDA

You'd better figure it out soon, or you won't be here long.

TOM enters with mop.

TOM

Jerry, Coach wants to see you.

JERRY

Oh, no. What do I do?

LINDA

Go see him.

TOM begins mopping floor.

JERRY

Am I in trouble?

LINDA

Don't worry. Coach is a reasonable guy.

JERRY

I hope so.

JERRY exits through kitchen.

LINDA

He's in trouble, isn't he?

TOM

Oh, yeah.

LINDA

Is Coach going to ship him down to the lunch shift?

TOM

Worse than that.

LINDA

He's fired?

TOM

Worse than that.

LINDA

No!

TOM

Yep.

LINDA

He's been traded?

TOM

Yeah. To Hooter's.

BLACKOUT