

In Three Courses

Dani Worthington: A 31-year-old Gender nonbinary, Maître D' of the restaurant.

Aaron Zachary Styles: A 26-years-old, banker that once wanted to be a theatre teacher.

Elizabeth (Betsy) Kohan: A 27-year-old paralegal for a successful law firm in New York City.

Zachary Aaron Matthews: A 27-year-old novelist and Aaron's former college roommate.

Elizabeth Allison (Bella) Bell: A 25-year-old music teacher and violinist.

David Paul Martin: A 24-year-old Lead singer and guitarist of a band, he is currently working as a waiter and bartender.

Saturday March 25th 2023

Lights up on a quiet table in the corner of a restaurant. Set for two with a candle centerpiece.

The Maître D', Danni walks in leading Aaron & Betsy, they are all dressed in formal wear.

Danni: I have this secluded table all set up for you. Privacy, but you have a view of the main dining hall, without being directly connected to all the hustle and bustle.

Aaron: Very Romantic.

Betsy: This is nice.

Danni: I hope you two enjoy your evening,

Aaron: Danni, we're going to have a fantastic evening, thanks to you.

Betsy: We walked in two minutes ago and you already know her name.

Danni: Danni helped me make the reservations and pick out the table. Danni is both the owner of the restaurant and the Maître D' which is short for the French title Maître D'hôtel meaning "master of the house" also Danni is non-binary just so you know. They- them are the pronouns not she.

Betsy: I regret that.

Danni: Don't think a thing of it, it happens all the time. This evening is about you two. The ice water is on the table, and I will have the wine and appetizers out in no time.

Betsy: Silverware on the correct setting sides, soup spoon properly placed, linen napkins, a real candle and woke wait staff. I'm having trouble believing this is my hometown. Maybe you did find a classy restaurant this time. I'm surprised my mother and I didn't find this place years ago.

Aaron: Impossible, they just opened last year. Danni moved here from Seattle with her- I mean- their partner Mikie.

Betsy: Is Mikie male, female, or neither?

Aaron: I don't know, I didn't ask. I don't think I mind in any case. It's food, not a burlesque show.

Betsy: You have a point. At any rate, it's an improvement over the hotel we're staying in.

Aaron: I thought you liked the hotel I chose. That hotel is historic.

Betsy: I know, I had a third-grade field trip to that hotel. The oldest hotel in town. The building itself is fine. I've always thought it was elegant and classy. However, the staff there seem like they should be in an asylum.

Aaron: They seem nice to me, but I have to admit, I'm a little glad to find out you don't like them. With the way Arlando was looking at you.

Betsy: Who?

Aaron: Arlando, that young handsome bell boy you were flirting with.

Betsy: How do you remember those names?

Aaron: I'm not sure, they seem to remember mine.

Betsy: You thought he was handsome?

Aaron: In so much as it's a man's instinct to size up the competition and know when another man is a threat.

Betsy: You need to work on those instincts - the help is *never* a threat. Look, I don't think I've hidden that fact I did not want to come back here, but I did because it meant so much to you to introduce me to your father and you wanted to meet mine. I've got to admit, it's not as bad as I was expecting. I've been using it as a kind of style safari. I was making note of the design choices and architecture for our home town versus New York City. This place sort of blends them, did you notice the foyer of this place when we walked in? It's reminiscent of the rainbow room in decor. The color of the walls and that lighting at the entrance are very nice. Don't you think that would be a nice style for a living room?

Aaron: Why are you thinking about redecorating? I thought you were finding a new apartment next month.

Betsy: I was thinking of your living room.

Aaron: You suggested redecorating my living room, and I was thinking about your suggestion, but I haven't actually thought about the style or anything. That seems a little formal, doesn't it?

Betsy: You're always missing this little town, I thought you may like to incorporate some of the style from here. I still don't understand why we needed to spend the whole weekend here to celebrate an anniversary. We could have had our fathers to visit the city.

Aaron: Fate. (He raises his glass to toast, perhaps stands. I really like leaving blocking for the director and actors.)

Betsy: Fate? Says the atheist.

Aaron: Fate has nothing to do with faith. It just is, whether you believe it or not. It had to be fate that brought us together. Two people find each other in one of the largest cities in the world. Millions of people are in New York. Hundreds of them came through my bank that day, and you were the only one that asked to borrow my pen. The two of us that were born and raised in this little town of Crestview, out of hundreds of customers- YOU were the only one that spoke to me that day. That can't be just a coincidence. We should celebrate that shared beginning, in the very spot we both begun. Here's to fate, and here is to us. (she is looking at him like he's insane)

Betsy: (I imagine she pulls him back and sits him back down) I ran out of ink. That's no reason to come back to the start, when we've come so far. We both fled from this town for a reason. You went to New York with your whimsical artistic dreams, then evolved into a financial force. You improve yourself, then you look towards ways to improve that version of you. You make gains, not losses. Personally, I would rather forget this little town existed.

Aaron: I think fled is a little harsh. I was just heading toward Broadway. I suppose you must have your reasons. I just don't like the idea of forgetting my roots.

Betsy: You can remember where you're from without visiting. You should always be improving your situations.

Aaron: That's something that I love about you, how much you've improved me. I almost don't feel like the same person I was when we started dating.

Betsy: You have made progress, but that doesn't mean there's not more to be made.

Aaron: Yeah. I was thinking a lot about what you said. My job pays me well, and it's time I start acting like it.

Betsy: It just feels better when you focus on the benefits, doesn't it?

Aaron: Yes, if I must sell my soul to the financial industry, I should at least start spending some of that money on enjoying the other parts of life.

Betsy: Always so dramatic. Selling your soul. (She sneezes)

Aaron: Bless you.

Betsy: (Sneezing again) I thought (Sneezes again) I thought you were an atheist. (Sneezes)

Aaron: Bless you.

Betsy: Why would an atheist say bless you?

Aaron: It's just polite. You don't need to fear hell to be polite. (She sneezes again)

Betsy: Something has gotten to me, excuse me for all that sneezing. That's not really something you want to do in a classy place. (sneezes)

Aaron: Sneezing is human, it's fine. (he's laughing at her a little for being embarrassed about sneezing)

Betsy: (sneezes) Excuse me.

Aaron: Of course you're excused, that's implied with the bless you.

(Danni enters, this time with a small tray of appetizers and a bottle of wine. Danni places the appetizers on the table and pops the cork to pour the wine.)

Danni: Would you care for a tissue?

Betsy: No, no. I should be fine.

Danni: Shall we begin your first course? Oysters Rockefeller, and a bottle of 2021 Hampton Sauvignon Blanc.

Aaron: It looks and smells incredible.

Betsy: Oysters and a white wine? (Sneezes)

Aaron: Danni: Bless you.

Danni: Would you prefer something else?

Betsy: Are there other options?

Aaron: I'm sorry, I'm the one that choose the meal- if you don't like it, that's my fault. I know how much you hate making decisions on food.

Betsy: Since when do I hate making decisions about food? (She sneezes)

Aaron: Bless you.

Danni: Shall we go with the menus then?

Aaron: Yes please, you were right. Danni tried to warn me. I would like to stay with the Oysters Rockefeller, if that's okay, I've never had them before. I always wanted to feel fancy and try them. I thought you loved shellfish.

Betsy: Crab and lobster Arron, not oysters. I don't think that's actually a shellfish.

Danni: I have a wonderful appetizer of crab meat stuffed mushroom caps. Served on portabella tops.

Betsy: That sounds more like it, and a bottle of red wine would go nicely.

Danni: On the way. (They exit)

Aaron: Thank you! I am so sorry I (Betsy sneezes again) Bless you.

Betsy: Oh, stop it. What makes you think I don't like to make decisions about food?

Aaron: You complain every time we go out to eat about the menu, there are either not enough options or too many options. (She sneezes again)

Aaron: Bless-

Betsy: Don't. That doesn't mean I don't like choice, I'm just pointing out how they could do better at offering. (She sneezes again) I need to use the restroom. Do you know where one is?

Aaron: Yes, it's down this hall on the left. I could take you. (He stands offering his arm)

Betsy: I can manage, don't worry (She exits sneezing he begins eating his oysters.)

Aaron: So basically, she just enjoys complaining. Got it. (He tries his oysters.) This is good, I didn't know I liked oysters. I mean really, they are from the ocean and they have shells, that's a shell fish? Right? I mean crab isn't a fish per se- A crab is more closely related to a spider. Honestly, they don't feel that fancy to eat. (One of the servers enters to refill their water glasses while he eats) Thank you very much- Zach?- Zachary? Is that you?

Zachary: Aaron? Oh my god, it's been so long. (He sets down the pitcher sloppy- they are attempt to hug. a little water gets on Aaron's pant leg- Aaron laughs it off) I'm so sorry.

Aaron: Don't worry about it. It's not the first time you wet my pants.

Zachary: That dunk tank at the Renn faire!

Aaron: (They laugh) Let's finish that hug. (They hug) you haven't changed a bit since college. What's it been two? Three years? It's like you haven't aged a day.

Zachary: I think it's closer to four at this point. I thought that was vaguely familiar, hearing you mumbling to yourself-

Aaron: You heard that? Sorry.

Zachary: From that hug, it feels like you've been working out.

Aaron: I have. There's a gym at the bank where I'm working. I go in the morning to stall going into the office, and sometimes in the afternoon when my clients really stress me out. There's this

punching bag in the place that's just about the height and shape of my supervisor. It's kind of an inspirational health advantage to hating your job.

Zachary: A bank? I thought you wanted to teach drama? Wasn't your degree in performing arts?

Aaron: Good memory, but my minor was accounting, (Betsy re-enters) I actually moved to New York to get a break in show business, but ended up just plain broke. None of the schools in the area were hiring from quarantines at the time, so I fell back on my minor. Being able to eat won out. Betsy! Betsy this is Zachary Aaron Mathews, he was my- my-roommate in college, also my best friend. Neither one of us were supposed to have dorm mates, but there was some administration mix up because I was Aaron Zachary and he was Zachary Aaron- and so we ended up in the same room. Had to share a double bed and a couch for the first two weeks-

Zachary: I think it was closer to a month.

Aaron: Then just became so close we stayed together all four years. Even moved out the last bit into our own apartment.

Betsy: You would think they could've looked up the last names instead of being confused by the first two.

Aaron: Yeah, but they didn't. Zach this is Betsy Kohan- We've been dating for a year, four months and three days this very evening. We wanted to celebrate a one year, but she's been busy and my job sucks.

Zachary: Not in the good way.

Betsy: Pleased to meet you. Aaron, do you realize you have something wet down your pant leg?

Aaron: I got excited when I saw Zach (The guys laugh, Betsy stares) A little accident with the water. Linen napkins are useless when you actually need a napkin.

Besty: Maybe your friend can get you a towel.

Aaron: I'm fine, I'll dry. Last I heard of you, you had moved to California and you were writing a novel. How did you end up back home in the restaurant industry?

Zachary: Yes, I did that.

Betsy: Not every novel is a best seller Aaron, you shouldn't be so rude. He may need to get back to wor-

Aaron: Oh, I'm sorry if I was bringing up something bad-

Zachary: Actually, I have two best sellers. My last installment of my first trilogy is coming out at the end of this year. I write under the pen name A.J. Carpenter.

Aaron: That's you? - That werewolf love story? That's really you? I love those books. What's that title? The Moonlight side, the-

Betsy: Our side of the moon.

Aaron: Yes!

Betsy: That is a popular one. I've heard that it could become a movie.

Zachary: Yes, I've heard that rumor too, but I haven't gotten a check yet.

Aaron: That pen name! was that-?

Zachary: Yes. That was the time you tried to wear overalls and a tool belt and call it a Halloween costume.

Aaron: That was a same year you were a werewolf. I was an inspiration to a best-selling novel!

Zachary: I said I was the wolf man and you couldn't get away with just being some random carpenter and call it a costume.

Aaron: Then I said, fine I'm A.J. Carpenter. I can't believe I missed that! It's like you were telling me it was you.

Betsy: Why does a best-selling novelist need to moonlight as a busboy?

Zachary: I don't. I just moved back to the area last month because my mother is dealing with dementia. More accurately my father is dealing with it. My mother has it. I've been staying with my friend Danni until I can find an apartment of my own here, and she- I mean - they- damn, I have to fight my English degree on this- Danni, needed extra help down at the restaurant this weekend. That's the only reason I'm here.

Betsy: You must be a good friend. Willing to wait tables.

Aaron: He is the most generous friend you could ask for. Wow, that's a lot you're dealing with. Will you be moving back to the area? I guess no idea how long.

Zachary: Not, really. My parents need help, but then you never know.

Aaron: Yeah. I'm glad we got to run into you this way. We're only in town for the weekend. I wanted her to meet my dad, and I wanted to meet hers.

Zachary: I'm glad you said something. I thought I freaked you out with that letter. I wasn't sure you ever wanted to talk to me again-

Aaron: What letter? Of course I missed you. I thought it was you who wanted to get away from me, well - not me alone, my ego is not that big, but everyone from your former life. The way you skipped town after- you know, I guess it was your full moon phase.

Zachary: You didn't get the letter? I handed your father a letter for you the week before I left.

Arron: Was it a goodbye letter? I was a little hurt you never said goodbye, then your number was disconnected. I assumed you wanted nothing to do with me. Obviously, we need to catch up. (Danni enters with the stuffed mushrooms and bottle of red wine)

Zachary: I need to get to some other tables. We'll catch up little later, enjoy your date.

Betsy: Now that is more like it.

Danni: We aim to please. I took the liberty of bringing his selection of meal out with the menu, so you could choose to keep or change the order as you wish.

Betsy: Very thoughtful. (She takes the paper and the menu in hand, looks and sneezes again)

Aaron: Thank you. And bless you.

Besty: I don't know what it is with me tonight. This is a wide selection. It doesn't come alphabetized or by genre of food? (She sneezes)

Danni: No, sorry about that. It's listed by appetizer, main dishes, desserts and drinks.

Betsy: (Giving up on being overwhelmed by choice) The New York strip is a very good choice, Arron. Medium rare though? Do you want worms?

Aaron: Not particularly, but I wanted it to taste good.

Betsy: Could you make my strip medium well, and replace the baked potato with the cranberry spinach salad.

Danni: Consider it done.

Aaron: If we are going off the menu, may I change my order too? Or is it too late?

Danni: Of course you can change it, it wasn't pre-cooked.

Aaron: Instead of New York strip could I get the bourbon burger? Still medium rare please.
(Betsy sneezes) with no worms.

Danni: You've got it.

Aaron: Thank you.

Betsy: I think it's the candle! That's it, it's Lavendar, isn't it? The candle is making me sneeze
(she sneezes)

Aaron: No problem there. (He blows out the candle. Her sneezing fit gets a little worse as the smoke heads her direction)

Danni: I'll remove this, and I'll put your orders in.

Betsy: Blowing out a scented candle just makes the scent worse. (She finishes her sneezing fit- I imagine blowing her nose with a linen napkin very un-lady like, then being embarrassed about it and hiding it in a line or two from now.)

Aaron: It's gone now. (He's attempting to fan away the smoke with whatever he's got) You know that place we ate at last weekend, when you were laughing at it for having glow sticks in globes.

Betsy: Yes, that always amazed me about you. How you could live in a city that is world famous for fantastic dinning and you found the worst dives to eat in.

Aaron: The glow sticks didn't make you sneeze.

Betsy: That it true. You ordered a cheese burger? You finally take me out to someplace with class and you order a cheese burger?

Aaron: I only had the New York strips ordered because I know that's your favorite. The bourbon burger has blue cheese crumbles and is made with ground fillet. It's a forty-dollar sandwich, so don't worry, it's still a pretentious cheeseburger.

Betsy: I think perhaps I should help you plan anniversary dinners from this point on.

Aaron: Maybe you can. I can't believe Zach wrote me a letter I never got.

Betsy: Did you want to get a chair for him?

Aaron: You think- No, no. tonight's about us. I've been thinking about the future. I was reading that book you gave me. The one about where I see myself in five years.

Betsy: You are reading that? I thought you said that was way too uptight to plan out your life like that.

Aaron: Like I said, you are making changes in me. That was one of the reasons I tried to plan out this three course meal. Which is kind of ironic that this isn't going too smoothly. Planning out what's going to happen in five years, when I'm having trouble planning out what's going to happen in three courses.

(A violinist enters, playing from behind her, playing "it had to be you". Her face lights up*)

Betsy: Is that a violinist? A live violinist? Okay, I'll give you points back for that.

Aaron: I didn't know there was a point system. Dance with me?

Betsy: Really? No one else is-

Aaron: No one else is in our part of the room, don't worry- we have the room. (At first, she is shy, then the fun of the moment takes her)

(As the violinist stands closer, we can see that Betsy starts to recognize her and her dancing becomes distracted. Aaron on the other hand is visibly getting stomach pains, which is distracting him from her distracted dancing. She finishes the first song and Aaron immediately begins to clap.)

Bella: Thank you.

Betsy: Aaron, you don't clap like that in this setting. Bella? Is that you?

Bella: Oh my, Betsy? Betsy Kohan?

Betsy: It's lovely to see you? What are you doing here?

Bella: What I love best, playing the violin.

Aaron: You two know each other too? We're both seeing old friends tonight. I told you, getting back to your roots is important.

Betsy: Aaron, this is Elizabeth Bell, she goes by Bella. We were in high school together.

Bella: We were the two Elizabeths in Mrs. Towarts biology class, but she went by Betsy I went by Bella.

Aaron: Not to be rude, but how does Elizabeth become-

Bella: From my last name, it's a story in itself.

Betsy: Bella went off to a school for the arts while I went off to Columbia for law. (Aaron's tummy makes some noises)

Bella: Juilliard, I have a degree from Juilliard.

Betsy: Aaron.

Aaron: Juilliard is really impressive. (His stomach makes louder noises) I wanted to teach theatre.

Betsy: What is that rude noise you're making?

Aaron: I'm not too sure, but I have an idea. It's very nice to meet you Bella, but I am having a little tummy trouble at the moment. Please excuse me. (He runs off to the rest room)

Betsy: Excuse him for the rude noises, and referring to his stomach as tummy. I wasn't attempting to insult you. Your Juilliard degree must not have a lot of pull if this is how you make your living. Why are you still here? In this little town?

Bella: I love this place. Haven't you heard there's no place like home? Being an artist in the world is so much nicer in a small town. But this isn't how I make my living. I'm an orchestra instructor at the local college and the conductor for the Crest Ridge Ballet. I just do this little side gig because I don't have the chance to actually play the violin very often in my work. I haven't seen you, or heard about you in so long. There were rumors going around you were abducted in Mexico or something, then you went to law school and you and your mother were killed by your father.

Betsy: Just the law school one is true. I don't live here anymore, just visiting for the weekend. I met his father this morning, we are supposed to see mine tomorrow.

Bella: When did you start seeing this guy?

Betsy: About a year ago, this evening is some anniversary that he feels bad about missing. Really, I think he plans on proposing tonight. He has a cute little condo about five blocks north of central park. You think he's attractive right? I mean, he is in need of some polishing on the mannerisms, but he's cute and is currently making ninety-five a year. He originally went to New York to do something artistic with the theater, then started babbling in the financial district and really found his calling. I can see big success with him. Do you think he's cute?

Bella: Yes? He seems nice. Weren't you dating David Marin for the longest time? I thought you two had been engaged?

Betsy: Yes, were married- briefly after high school, but that's long over.

Bella: Oh yeah, that was another rumor. Oh, I need to warn you. He works here.

Betsy: Who?

Bella: David.

Betsy: Here?

Bella: He's the head waiter here, and I mean tonight.

Betsy: He's a waiter? I guess my mother was right, I did dodge a bullet on that one. What are the odds?

Bella: David is probably going to be the one serving your main course. Is that going to be awkward?

Betsy: Incredibly. I don't know how he feels about me. Maybe he won't recognize me.

Bella: Didn't you date all through high school?

Betsy: You're right. That's not going to work. We started flirting in seventh grade, but once we were married, he got interested in other girls- no, I'm pretty sure he'll know me.

Bella: Really? That's strange I've never seen him with anyone. There was a rumor he was gay, because he's never with a woman. He gets a lot of offers too. You know he still sings in that band. Every Thursday and Friday night, here, then the weekends they play three shows down by the dock art center all spring and summer. You've never seen it?

Betsy: He still does that? No, I don't know any of that. You really hear a lot of rumors, don't you? This is the first time I've been dragged back to this town since I left him. When I agreed to come back for the weekend with Aaron, I was assuming David moved somewhere else as well. Why are you all still here? Doesn't anyone from my high school get lives and move on?

Bella: You moved to get away from him?

Betsy: I moved in with my mother in New York, there were more lucrative law firms there. I don't want to be here. I belong in New York. I have no idea how David would react to this. I kind of just left one morning and filed the papers for an annulment.

Bella: Maybe I can tell Danni to change out the waiters.

(Aaron re-enters)

Aaron: I'm so sorry to be rude. I think something was off with the oysters. They were delicious, but something wasn't right.

Betsy: Aaron, we need to leave.

Aaron: Because of that? No, don't worry about that. It may not have been the oyster. I also had a convenience store hot dog for lunch. Either way I'm fine now.

Betsy: No, this has nothing to do with your tummy. (she is dragging them away from the table as she speaks) We have to leave now, this isn't the time for explaining myself. There are some things about my past I haven't told you. Coming back here was a bad Idea and I was right not to want to - (She's interrupted by Danni entering with David and Zachary all carrying out the main dishes)- shit.

Danni: The main course is served. (They begin presenting the meal to the couple and David sets eyes on Betsy)

David: Elizabeth. Oh my god Betsy? Is that really you?

Betsy: No.- No? No habla inglese.

David: Well, what do you know? I could not have imagined seeing you here tonight.

Aaron: This is such a small world, we are running into all kinds of old friends tonight. Hi, I'm Aaron, Betsy's boyfriend. (Aaron is attempting to shake hands with David)

David: Nice to meet you, I'm David. Betsy's husband.

Aaron: I- Okay- I wasn't quite prepared for that introduction. I'm sorry. You must be the thing about her past she hasn't told me. Betsy didn't tell me she had a husband.

Betsy: That's because I don't. That marriage was annulled. We were young and stupid.

David: That was only two years and seven months ago,

Betsy: What is it with the men I pick? Why the hell are you all so detail oriented about stupid anniversaries?

David: I'm just saying we're not that much older, however I do agree we were stupid. Whether you realize it or not, we are still married. You didn't take the time to stand before the justice and sign the paperwork with me. You left, but we have stayed married.

Betsy: That can't be- I- I've been busy, but I will need to look into that.

Aaron: It's so nice to meet the husband of my girlfriend. I'm sorry I've been dating your wife for the past year- in my defense- I didn't know she was or had ever been married. To the best of my memory- I've never heard her mention the name David before. This burger looks incredible, thank you, I think- I think I'm going to enjoy this burger. I'm sorry, this is a lot to take in. So, tell me, when did you two get married? (Zach finds this funny)

Betsy: Aaron! Small talk might make you feel better, but it doesn't help me.

Aaron: Sorry, I guess I just needed to feel better myself. I don't know that you can imagine it, but I may have a few feelings about this too. (Awkward silence falls over the table for a time, then Aaron decides to pull his burger towards him and start in on dinner, probably takes a bite here.)

Bella: Should I play something?

Zachary: I don't know.

Danni: I'm non-binary, I go to gyms, I go to waters parks and I have never gotten to this level of awkwardness before.

Aaron: I've got to admit this is a new level for me too, but at least it can't get much worse at this stage, feel free to play on. (See begins to play *- a violin version of any quasi-romantic song that gets played far too much. Aaron tries to take a bite of his burger.)

Zachary: Aaron, is that the song you chose?

Aaron: Yes, that was my request.

Zachary: Do you remember that was our song?

Aaron: It's still one of my favorites.

Zachary: Mine too. (They laugh, as everyone stares at them- then they stop laughing)

Aaron: I was wrong. The level of awkwardness did get worse. This burger is incredible, by the way. Now when he says - our song- he-

Zachary: You're right, that sounded weird. I'm sorry, I just blurted out. Every time we got in the car to go to the store or anywhere that would be randomly playing, we joked that it was our song. As friends, you know buddies, roommates. Do you need ketchup? I think you need ketchup. You always liked ketchup with potatoes.

Betsy: That's a twice baked potato. Why would anyone put ketchup on twice baked potato?

Zachary: It's okay, I'm going to get the ketchup anyway. (He exists.)

David: Maybe you could tell your boyfriend about why you left our marriage on day three of the honeymoon and never bothered signing the annulment papers, refused all my phone calls and just basically ran away from me and hid?

Danni: I don't think that's appropriate at the moment, I think maybe-

David: Maybe you could tell me? Bets? I'd really like to know what happened. I'd really like to know Betsy. What did I do?

Aaron: Not to take sides, but this does seem like an interesting topic. I won't get offended or jealous. I'd love to hear your answers to his questions.

Danni: We need to go check on table five, they haven't seen us in a while (Danni drags David from the table. Bella plays on, Aaron continues eating, hanging on to some idea he's out at dinner. Betsy reaches her point)

Betsy: You can stop playing now Bella! (She does. Aaron goes to take a drink, hates the red wine and adds a scoop of sugar to it)

Bella: I understand. I could switch songs if you like, maybe change up the mood. Closer by nine-inch nails perhaps?

Besty: I don't think the mood can be repaired at this point. You did your best.

Bella: I understand. I'll see you around. We should do lunch sometime. (she exits)

Aaron: Thank you! That was lovely.

Besty: You won't see me around. I'm going back to New York. Aaron, did you just put sugar in red wine?

Aaron: Yeah, it was way too bitter.

Betsy: If you don't like red wine, you should order the white wine.

Aaron: I did. You sent it back. Speaking of taking things back, let's talk about this annulment. Or the lack there of. What is this about?

Betsy: I obviously don't have all the facts I need. I'm going to need to call my mother on this. I was getting my information from the family attorney through her. And I am obviously missing some information. There are some legal issues I have a few questions about at this time.

Aaron: I thought you had a law degree?

Betsy: In policy and procedure, not family law. I compose contracts. I'm not actually that type of lawyer. (She begins dialing)

Aaron: You did know you were married before. You could've mentioned that in the past year, four months, three days and (he looks at his watch) two and a half hours. I'm not sure that having your husband tell me was the best way to break the news.

Betsy: I didn't have! - Of course, I knew I was married, but it was over and annulled, so I didn't have to worry about that anymore. I was leaving the past in the past.

Aaron: Hakuna Matata. Who are you calling?

Betsy: I just told you. My mother.

Aaron: Now? Your food is going to get cold.

Betsy: I can't eat right now; I can't understand how you can.

Aaron: I'm hungry. Probably a little stress eating too. Honestly, I'm not sure anymore. This is a really good burger.

Betsy: Hello. Hello? Yes, is Phyliss Kohan available? I think she'll want to speak with me, this is her daughter, Elizabeth. -Yes- I'll wait.

(Zachary enters with ketchup)

Aaron: Thank you.

Zachary: Just try the twice baked potato first without ketchup. If you think it's dry you can add it. Deal?

Aaron: Deal. I appreciate it.

Zachary: He's the only guy I've ever known to put ketchup on a loaded potato skin. I think you may want it, but please take a bite without, the chef is a bit sensitive. Very upset she wanted her steak well done.

Aaron: The chef, the ghost of the cow, and probably half the population of Texas. Now she's not even eating the wasted steak.

Betsy: I'm on hold I can hear you.

Aaron: I wasn't trying to whisper.

Zachary: I'll catch you later.

Aaron: Hey Zach? I feel bad for asking, but could I get a coke?

Zachary: Sure, but they serve really good sweet tea here.

Aaron: Even better.

Zachary: He turns to exit quickly (He exits)

Betsy: Is your boyfriend mental?

Aaron: No, and he's not my boyfriend. I haven't seen him in years. You could at least eat your salad, the chef is sensitive. And we are paying for it- since that matters to you. (She starts picking at her salad while on hold)

Betsy: You really think I base all of my decisions on cost? It is a very good salad.

Aaron: See?

Betsy: Mother. - Yes, it's good to hear from you too, but - yes I know- look that's not why I called, no. -I came back to Crestview for the weekend.- With my boyfriend, who also grew up here. -No-It's not that either. This has nothing to do with my father, I haven't even seen him yet. I don't know if he missed you, I'll ask tomorrow. - Mother. Please focus. I'm out at dinner, and you will never guess who I just ran into. -No- no, -mother- no- stop trying to guess. - I know I said that. - It's a figure of speech. Look. Mother. My waiter this evening is David. -Yes, that David- He's a waiter yes, but – look that is not the point right now. - Which I thought was annulled. - Was there going to be a better time to talk to me about it? -I'm out at dinner with my current boyfriend- Arron. We're celebrating our year and some odd months anniversary. – It's to celebrate the year, but we were late. - He was working, then I had plans - that's just what happened! -That's why. - Arron. - No, not him- the shorter one. You met him several times. - Paul's birthday party, that fourth of July and last Thanksgiving. -Yes, that one - correct 95. - I'm twenty-seven years old mother, that's not going to happen. -When did you think, you were going to get around to that? My next wedding? - It's been over a year! -I started dating other people and you just haven't gotten around to telling me I need to complete my annulment papers? - That is most certainly a- Yes, why? – For what? - Why would you want to protect me and Arron? You couldn't even remember his name five sentences ago! (Zachary brings the tea in, is about to talk with Aaron again- they both decide to remain silent)

What? -Say that again- I – NO- I can hear you- I actually can't believe what I'm hearing. -What the Fuck? - No Mother, this is absolutely the time I can use that fucking language. I can't think of a better Fucking time! That's some shit- He could've what? – well he obviously didn't- You knew this all this time? - I need to stop talking to you right now. - What? -Why don't go to your therapist and tell her what you did? Then when she explains to you how fucked up you are, you call me back and apologize. (She hangs up and slams her phone down. Zachary exits as fast as he can.)

Aaron: So...um, did you want to eat? Did you want to leave?

Betsy: This is a good salad.

Arron: Good, this is an incredible burger. Did you want a bite?

Betsy: No. How are you not horribly upset?

Arron: First off, I don't really know what your mother did. What else is there? You're married. So what? It's not like we don't learn new things about each other every day. At least you didn't know it either from what I can understand.

Betsy: You know, you are incredibly understanding. No, I didn't know I was still married. My mother hired a private investigator to follow him- my ex- I mean- my husband. When we were engaged.

Aaron: You just now found out?

Betsy: No, that part I knew. Because on the third day of our honeymoon my mother sent me the pictures of him with another woman. She told me she had caught him red handed. She had proof he had been having an affair for months.

Aaron: Which is why you asked for an annulment.

Betsy: Correct. However, I needed to meet with him to sign those papers. My mother withheld that information from me. She did not want me to meet with him or even talk to him because she didn't want him to be able to talk to me. To be able to give me his side of the story.

Aaron: Why not?

Betsy: Because the photos were fake! She didn't have any evidence he was cheating on me, she just knew I could do better. She was disappointment I married a musician, and didn't want me teaching middle school.

Aaron: You wanted to teach middle school?

Betsy: My mother suggested a law degree would have much better pay.

Aaron: We both wanted to be teachers, that must be why we connected so well. I just didn't know you wanted-

Betsy: There are a lot of things I wanted, and I guess I was just told not to want them and I listened, and when I didn't listen, my mother wasn't supportive. No, no- She just decided crush my soul and have me have me ruin my life by running away from the one true love I ever knew- to – to do better. Go into extreme debt that I am still working my way out of with my miserably boring high paying job! - She wanted me to do better!

Aaron: Well, that's – that's a lot. But look at what we are learning about us. We both wanted to be teachers, and we both hate the jobs we ended up with. You've been gone for over a year. He really couldn't get the marriage annulled without you?

Betsy: Apparently! He could have, apparently after the first year. My mother was thinking he would, and she wouldn't have to tell me any of this. He just didn't- I don't know why.

Aaron: Maybe because you were his true love too, maybe he didn't want to give up on you?

Betsy: Do you realize...My own mother staged his affair to make me leave him. That is the part that I just found out about. Do you know how- how? -

Aaron: She is fucked up. But, could you tell me, in that conversation- when she recognized me by the number 95. Is that like my code? The number of guys you've been with or my yearly salary?

Betsy: Salary.

Aaron: You know that's a little fucked up all by itself, right?

Betsy: I'm aware. My father always said she was a shallow manipulative bitch.

Aaron: He seems like a reasonable judge of character, but I was referring to the fact that you were labeling me by my salary when you spoke to her. Why would you speak about my salary at all with your mother?

Betsy: You said yourself selling your soul for the job, it makes sense you want to know the value of your soul.

Aaron: My salary is the value of my soul? I don't doubt that my boss is going to meet the devil one day, but I don't think he is the devil, I'm not selling my soul- per se. You know you really allow your mother to influence your thinking far more than you think-

Betsy: Now you're talking about the devil, are you sure you're an atheist? (Betsy's stomach is hurting now)

Aaron: Wow, you really get hung up on that. I'm an agnostic atheist- I'm really not all that into it. Why is my being an atheist so important to you?

Betsy: My mother wanted me to date a nice Jewish boy.

Aaron: You're married. Is it really alright to be dating any type of boy when you're married? Have you told her you don't practice anything about Judaism except for the dreidel song once a year? And wait a second. Why the hell do you care what that lying manipulative bitch thinks about anything?

Betsy: You- you're right. David wasn't Jewish either.

Aaron: At least he has the whole star of -thing going with his name. You do realize not everything I say is at face value, I do have humor and sarcasm, like everyone else. I'm more thinking of how I spend my time, then my money.

Betsy: Time is money, that's a standard. (Tunny issues, she's trying to ignore)

Aaron: Not quite, humans at least us humans- we rent our time for money. Money and time are not the same because you can earn back spent money, but once you spend time it's just gone.

Betsy: That's fairly profound.

Aaron: There are twenty-four hours in the day, roughly three-hundred sixty-five days in the year that is eight thousand, seven-hundred and sixty hours in a year of your life.

Betsy: Are you going to start singing the Rent song?

Aaron: No, I'm just trying to logic this out. If you work eight hours a day five days a week then there are fifty-two weeks in the year that's two-thousand eighty hours of work. Then you sleep eight hours a night by three-hundred sixty-five- That's Two-thousand nine hundred twenty hours of sleep.

Betsy: You can see how you have a knack for banking.

Aaron: Just because I can do something doesn't mean I enjoy doing it.

Where was I? This means work is about twenty-three percent of your life, you sleep about thirty-three percent of it away. But what happens if you want to enjoy one hundred percent of your life? You can't do that if your miserable for twenty-three percent of it.

Betsy: Still comparatively small amount, and that then funds the other-

Aaron: Forty-two point nine three- something percent. It's under half- unless I give up sleeping, which most commonly I do. This is also not factoring in the working overtime or on my days off because some other slacker called out. Or did they really? Maybe they're just realizing how much of their lives are being wasted and decide to something more enjoyable that day. My career choice takes up about half my waking life. If I don't see myself as a banker making one hundred thousand a year in the next five years, could you see yourself with me?

Betsy: You think in five years they'll only raise your salary by five thousand? Are you planning on underachieving or do they have a reputation-

Aaron: That is not the point at all. What happens when your mother thinks you can do better? And what about David? He didn't cheat on you, doesn't that matter? Do you still have feelings for him now that you know this?

Betsy: I, well- this is kind of a lot of information. He is a waiter.

Aaron: That doesn't matter.

Betsy: I doubt the salary (Her stomach rumbles)

Aaron: Damn it Betsy, your feelings for someone cannot be based on their salary. With as rude as you have been to most of the staff here tonight you have at least handled the waiters tip before.

Betsy: From what I can tell, you've blown the bus boy. I wouldn't be dwelling on the past if I were you. It sounds like there's more than a few skeletons hanging out in your closet. That book you inspired is about gay werewolves if you didn't figure it out.

Aaron: I know that, I read the books. (her stomach rumbles) Are you okay?

Betsy: I feel sick, I am not running from this conversation, but I am running to the restroom. I'll be back. (She exits quickly. He contemplates life and the decisions he was going to make. Zachary enters with the dessert and coffee.)

Zachary: Danni decided to send me in with the dessert. She's not letting David come back your way.

Aaron: That's not necessary. I think they need to talk. David and Betsy. She just found out that her mother lied to her. Faked evidence for an affair he didn't actually have and then prevented them from talking to each other.

Zachary: Wow. Okay, I owe my dad an apology. I thought he was horrible for taking a couple of months to accept I was gay. Really, compared to that he's very open minded.

Aaron: I thought he had you so upset you wanted everything in your life changed. I thought that's why you took off like you did.

Zachary: Yeah, we had one hell of a fight. Dad wasn't happy, he had to come to terms with the fact he wasn't going to be a grandfather. He always saw himself being a grandfather in his old age, then my older sister became a nun and I came out of the closet, needless to say, he was a little upset.

Aaron: You can still adopt.

Zachary: You know, the biological traditional way of being a grandfather. That is what my dad's mind was set on then.

Aaron: Your sister was a cheerleader. We are talking about the same girl, right? Carrie is a nun? Really?

Zachary: Not anymore, she found out what they mean by nun. It was maybe six months in when she left the convent. She's married with two kids now, living on a farm in Oklahoma.

Aaron: Then your dad got to be a grandfather.

Zachary: Yeah, and he's cool with me being gay because I can drop everything and come out to help him. I don't have the kids and wife keeping me in Oklahoma.

Aaron: That makes me think of having kids with Betsy. I don't think I could. She refers to her mother as Mother. All the time. It creeps me out.

Zachary: I need to tell you something- I'm not sure if this is the time to tell you about this, right before you propose to your girlfriend.

Aaron: I'm not proposing. This isn't right. Even if she is, which- right now- I really don't think she is, this isn't the time for it.

Zachary: Then I need to tell you that your father did something rotten to you too. Maybe? That, um letter, that I gave him- because you had gone over to the hardware store to get your paycheck- not because I was too afraid to hand it to you myself- Okay- maybe a little bit of both. That letter was where I came out to you. Personally.

Aaron: You didn't have to come out to me, I knew. -Sort of first hand.

Zachary: You haven't forgotten those times?

Aaron: How could I? You were three years of my life. That first time you walked in on me in that- Um- I don't know that now is the time or place to discuss the past.

Zachary: He swallows hard.

Aaron: What?

Zachary: Oh, no- I wasn't trying to reference any particular time, I was just saying that- like you know a book description.

Aaron: Yes, you randomly described things like narrating a story (They laugh nervously) "They nervously laughed remembering old times".

Zachary: "Trying desperately to hide old feelings under the chuckles"

Aaron: Yeah, I – mean. I mean, yeah.

Zachary: That letter I handed to your father was declaring my love for you. Asking you to move out with me to California and start a new life together, still as roommates, but a different kind. My apartment is- and was then, two blocks away from a school for the performing arts. I thought you would be interested in it.

Aaron: My father opened my mail and read it?

Zachary: It wasn't stamped or official. Just a folded piece of paper, tucked in an envelope. I don't even remember if I sealed it properly or just tucked the top in. After you didn't respond, I – I just- I left mad at the world and cut off all connections, because I thought I made things too serious and freaked you out. I was just too embarrassed, to try to call you. I was thinking you read that note and simply didn't respond or reach out to me. - You know, maybe he just set it down and forgot about it.

Aaron: I'll have to ask my dad if he still has that. Probably worth a fortune, written by a best-selling novelist. (They laugh)

Zachary: Where is your girlfriend?

Aaron: Sick in the bathroom. Probably same thing I had earlier. Which reminds me, you may want to have them look into the spinach. I had the oysters Rockefeller and she had the spinach salad. That's the only ingredient we shared.

Zachary: Why is it always the spinach? I'll let them know. I put the engagement ring in the center white rose of the icing, just like you had you asked.

Aaron: (He removes it) Thank you.

Zachary: That's quite a rock.

Aaron: She made it clear she wasn't going to look at a ring under 22carats. Which, in retrospect was kind of a red flag right there. -Look, I'm not ignoring the letter issue, I just don't know what to say. I don't know how I would've reacted, but I am sorry I didn't get your letter. Sorry for both of us. I spent the past what three or four years going on with life as if I was straight. It's not like I was looking for guys. I kind of thought I was one of those guys that got experimental in my college years.

Zachary: I can understand that.

Aaron: Then when I saw you tonight, I got – how can I describe it? I giggled when you poured water down my pant leg. Hugging you I could- wait a second- How is it phrased in your book? I could “taste your sent in the air” Not the Axe spray you wore back then, but that pheromone, the bare smell of you. Maybe I am gay. Maybe not. Maybe it's just I'm only gay for you. I don't really know, but no one ever understood me like you did. You were and still are the best friend I ever had. I don't want to not have you in my life anymore, I want you back in it, but I can't make promises on how. I was just about to propose to this girl, who was married. But yeah, I'm seeing she's kind of a bitch like her mother too. I don't even understand what I feel right now. Does that any make sense?

Zachary: So much. You actually did read my book. I wish I would've thought to add that Axe comment in there.

Aaron: I want to exchange good phone numbers before we leave here tonight. Look, I don't think I'm going to be able to keep Betsy here once she's done in the bathroom. Can we get David out here? They really need to talk.

Zachary: I'll get him.

(Aaron, contemplates everything he just laid on the table polishes off and tucks away the engagement ring. In the process getting a little icing on his jacket. Betsy then re-enters)

Betsy: I think that spinach was bad. We should go.

Aaron: I agree with the spinach, but not with the going. We haven't had our desserts.

Betsy: I've had my fill of this night, I'm going.

Aaron: You would go without me?

Betsy: I can call a cab. What's that on your jacket? Did you and the busboy have a little fun while I was in the bathroom?

Aaron: Oh, that? That's just the icing on the cake. I hope you realize I have spent this evening trying to list off all the things I loved about you. Or at least thought I did. I had every intention of ending this meal with a diamond ring on your finger and the two of us plotting out our new life

together, but that is not how this evening went. Everything I said to you to complement you was met with a gripe, you managed to spend a meal at a nice restaurant getting everything you want without once saying thank-you or please- to anyone. When we got here you insulted the owner of the place with the gender identity topic and wiggled out of the conversation without any apology. Just an “I regret that” Not that you regretted the mistake, but you regretted speaking so you could be corrected. Once I caught that, I started seeing how clever you are in conversation. Then I realized looking back on the past year. That is every time. You don’t apologize, you aren’t grateful, you are entitled and spoiled. All of these things you’ve been “improving” about me. Those aren’t improvements, you’ve been training me to be a member of your staff. - Yet, for some reason... I also see how misguided and lost you are. I do not want you making a mistake that’s going to leave you lumbering down this shallow, empty road in front of you. You need to talk to your husband. You need to open your mind and give yourself the chance to grow. Really grow, you know that thing you always prattled on to me about?

Betsy: Come off it, you run into some old boyfriend and now-
(Danni, Zachary and David enter and stop her siliques)

Danni: I don’t like scenes in my restaurant, but this seems to be important for all those involved. I won’t stand in the way of the fate that seems to be playing out here. Please, just try to keep this scene a one act.

Betsy: That should be easy, I’m making my exit.

David: Again? Is that really the only trick you have? Not yet, please.

Betsy: I have nothing to say to you.

Aaron: You don’t want to mention anything about how you just found out this evening that your mother faked the photos she had to prove his infidelity?

David: She what?

Zachary: Sick, isn’t it?

Aaron: You could tell him about how she hired a private eye to try to actually catch him all through the engagement, then faked it when there was nothing to catch. What was her reason? I didn’t quite catch that. He wasn’t Jewish?

David: Still not. Is she? Other than the dreidel song.

Betsy: She didn’t want me stuck with a musician that didn’t make enough money.

David: You thought I was cheating on you?

Betsy: I didn’t actually. I didn’t believe her at all. She had been telling me for years, that was the way musicians were. I never believed her. She told me you were just some sexy, clever guy that was toying with my emotions and manipulating me. I never thought she was right. Until she sent me the photos. That I thought were real. Until tonight. (She opens her phone and flips to photos. Then hands the phone to David)

David: I am so sorry, you got- these. It’s sad to think you thought- this about me. That must’ve hurt you.

Aaron: What he did there, that’s called empathy. It means he’s not an asshole.

David: Oh, that's funny, I remember this time. That was my buddy Mark, I was helping hold the ladder for him to install a new stage light. Actually, kind of clever to photo shop a chick in that position. I was not indeed looking up Mark's dress. If I remember correctly, he wasn't even wearing a dress at the time. Still, you thought that. It's no wonder you just ran away.

Betsy: My mother told me if I talked to you, you would just use your man-musk on me and seduce me into believing you were innocent.

David: I have man musk? Do I have man -musk?

Danni: Yeah. **Zachary:** A little.

Aaron: Almost a Kirk Cobane meets River Phoenix vibe- you know- if they had lived.

David: Lucky me, I didn't get into drugs or hit the big time too soon, even though I did have a couple chances. The guys signed a record deal last year. They're releasing a set in November. I passed as part of it to stay here.

Betsy: Why would you stay in this stupid little town when all of your dreams could come true?

David: Because my music isn't all of my dreams, and this stupid little town is the only place I thought I could ever see you again. I went to New York twice trying to find you, and couldn't. That is a big ass city with way too many people.

Betsy: It is, it's easy to get lost there. That's why I liked it.

Aaron: He couldn't find you there, but I could. Then I bring you back here, at the same time Zach comes back into town- fate. Fate works in some mysterious ways. Sorry, go on. I think you were about to apologize and tell him how much you missed him and still love him.

Betsy: I can't imagine what I did to you- by – by running away. I'm – I'm sorry I did that to you.

David: Leaving me on our honeymoon in Cancun. A trip I could barely afford, but you said it wasn't a honeymoon unless we went on a real honeymoon. I wake up on our third day there to find her not in the bed, not by the pool, not on the beach where we were the day before. I assume she had been abducted by some Mexican drug cartel and I go to the authorities, The hotel security, the police, the embassy- I spend two days thinking she's kidnapped or dead. No answer on her phone, no answer on her parent's phones. I can't even get in touch with that weird cross-eyed cousin of hers that attempted to hit on me at the wedding while she was drunk. It wasn't until the second night of searching that the police find footage from the airport showing her boarding a plane back home- all by herself. I go to our apartment to find all of her stuff has been moved out. I go to her mother's house to find her mother and her moved out. I drive over to her dad's house to ask him what he knows, and he tells me the only thing they told him was that they were moving. He congratulates me on the wedding, because he didn't know we had been married. By the way, I thought you invited him and he declined?

Betsy: So did I - I thought- I – My mother was in charge of RSVPs. She told me not to worry about sending out the invitations, she could handle that.

Aaron: That tracks. (At some point I picture everyone else absent mindedly eating things off trays, Bella has wandered over to join them and it's kind of like watching a television show. – any time after the “make it a one act” line)

Zachary: Kind of like your dad withholding the letter inviting you to California with me.

Danni: I thought my parents were a lot to deal with.

Bella: No parent has manipulation down like Betsy's mom. She spent years threading the strings to manipulate her.

David: But she didn't have her show up to annul our marriage, and she didn't send a lawyer. I just got a letter from her mother's attorney saying she filed for an annulment, I had to go to the court house at this time, on this date. I get there and she's not there. No attorney, no Bets, just me and the judge. We decide we aren't going to do anything about this. Then I set off to find you. At first, I thought Chicago then Philadelphia then New York. I was pretty sure New York was it, but I couldn't find you. When I couldn't, I just figured I'd wait here. Your dad is going to call me, by the way. If you ever stop by to say hi to him. I didn't want to give up hope we could talk again.

Aaron: We were supposed to go visit her dad tomorrow.

Betsy: Is that why? Is that why you never requested to move on with the divorce without my consent? You didn't want to give up on me?

David: I didn't know that was an option to complete that without you.

Betsy: Apparently it is, after the first year I was gone you could've.

David: Damn, I've been missing out on some hot dates being a married man.

Betsy: Really? You haven't moved on?

David: I tried once. It was weird. I've just been filling my days with work and music. The set the guys are releasing in the fall has my song "Where the hell are you?" on it. I wrote that for you.

Betsy: I'm right the hell here. Now- if you were still looking.

David: I'd hate to crash your date.

Betsy: It's okay, I think he just dumped me.

Aaron: Yes, I think we can agree on that. I've never actually dumped anyone before. I've always been the one being dumped, so I'll take that as a win. I'm sorry, it's just not going to work out between us. I don't like dating married women. Especially when they're still in love with their husbands.

Betsy: That doesn't make sense you know. Being in love with you. You don't have a salary to support us.

Aaron: You do.

Betsy: Yeah, I guess I do.

David: Do you really think you can just walk back into my life and pick me back up like a bad habit?

Betsy: If I did, that would really piss my mother off. So, I'd like to try.

David: I guess, as long as it's for a good cause. (They kiss)

Zachary: Aaron: Bella: Danni: Awww.

Zachary: Who would it piss off if we kissed?

Aaron: Social conservatives.

Danni: Worth it.

(While it is the director's/actor's choice here. I do picture Zachary and Aaron kissing along with Danni and Bella. – First two couples to continue on the potential love stories and the last couple- just to make ignorant people uncomfortable. As the lights dim to out.)

* I suggest “It had to be you” because it’s fun yet classy- so anything really that floats your boat.
*While it is also directors’ choice, violin song options are “Something to talk about” “Can you feel the love tonight” “Kissed by a rose” -just keep in mind it was an over played song from sometime prior to 2020.

Lights out on the first play that I don’t consider a comedy, but I like it anyway- Tim