Risotto Reimagined

‘What is this monstrosity? This is not what was ordered. It’s not even food.’

The loaded dinner plate clanged onto the metal workbench, making the kitchen staff jump, and ricocheting risotto around the pristine kitchen. Chef’s tirade continued afresh, yelling as loud as an SP bookie on Cup Day.

‘Do it again. If it’s not perfect in fifteen minutes, you’re fired,’ threatened Chef, sweeping dramatically from the room.

‘Damn,’ mumbled Freda, wiping perspiration from her face, and tucking her wayward fringe under the hairnet. Rising to her maximum height of five-foot-two, she took a deep breath and started again.

‘Stock’s ready. Add rice, prep veg, reduce,’ she whispered, ‘Then plate, garnish, serve. Easy!’

She flung a handful of rice into the bubbling liquid and ran to the fridge. Eyes darting left and right, her hands indiscriminately grabbed ingredients like a contestant in a cash grab machine. Freda raced back to her station and half-slipped on the wet tiles, losing most of her haul.

‘Oh, no’ she whined, chasing errant peas and brussels sprouts across the floor. All escapees were reluctantly binned.

‘What have we got? Broccoli, artichoke and jalapenos?’ she laughed nervously, ‘Ten minutes to unemployment.’

Freda diced the random vegetables with delicacy, completely forgetting the boiling rice now overflowing on the stove. The hiss of stock hitting the gas jets and the acrid aroma of burnt toast finally alerted her. Too late, she spun round to reduce the heat. Only half the liquid and a miserable clump of nicely browned, congealed rice remained.

Freda’s eyes glazed over, brain flicking into autopilot. The mushy mass was transferred to a frying pan and the carefully diced ingredients haphazardly thrown in.

‘If I’m going down, I’m going out with a bang,’ Freda resolved, checking the clock, ‘Five minutes left.’

Chef was returning. You couldn’t miss his booming voice sweeping through the hallways, swatting apprentices with curt insults till they admitted defeat.

Right at that moment, Freda decided never to cower again, no matter what. Why, she might even yell back the way she was feeling. Chuckling at her own bravado, she plated the creation, adding fresh coriander and tarragon garnishes like a croupier dealing blackjack. With one minute left she tasted the mess, recoiling from the burnt offering.

‘Well, that’s it,’ she mused, and deposited her plate on the pass.

As Chef waltzed in, Freda wiped her bench and washed her hands. She watched as he tasted the abomination and grimaced.

‘You, Freda,’ Chef yelled unnecessarily, ‘This is vile. You dare to present this to me?’

‘Yes, Chef,’ she replied respectfully, looking straight at him.

A slight grin flashed over his usually sullen face.

‘You serve this to me, knowing the consequences, and face me like a man, er, woman. You have attitude,’ said Chef, ‘Attitude makes a good cook. You can stay.’

‘Not sure I want to,’ Freda replied, pausing before adding the obligatory, ‘Chef.’

‘That’s too much attitude,’ grumbled Chef, ‘Work hard and learn fast before you poison someone.’

‘Yes, Chef,’ Freda grinned.

**Actual entry**

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Her eyes glazed over, brain flicking into autopilot. The mushy mass was transferred to a frying pan and the lovingly prepared ingredients haphazardly thrown in.

‘If I’m going down, I’m going with a bang,’ Freda resolved, checking the clock, ‘Five minutes left.’

Chef was returning. You couldn’t miss his booming voice sweeping through the hallways, swatting apprentices with curt insults till they capitulated.

At that very moment, Freda decided never to cower again, no matter what. Why, she might even yell back the way she was feeling. Chuckling at her bravado, she plated the concoction, adding fresh coriander and tarragon garnishes like a croupier dealing blackjack. With one minute left she tasted it, instantly regretting her decision.

‘Well, that’s that,’ she mused, and deposited her plate on the pass. As Chef waltzed in, Freda wiped her bench and washed her hands, watching as he tasted the abomination and grimaced.

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