

Toddler Tartare

By

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FADE IN

EXT: OUTSIDE RESTAURANT - EVENING

VIOLET, stepping confidently in pumps and glittering jewelry, arm-leads ADAM, a middle-aged man attired in a bespoke suit and nervous face, to the weathered door of a dingy building. EVELYN, a pre-teen girl sporting a sundress and iPhone, waits a few paces behind in her own world.

ADAM

This is it? Are you sure?

VIOLET

My dear Adam! It doesn't look like much, but trust me, this is it.

Violet opens the door, ushering in Adam and Evelyn.

INT: LOBBY

CHARLOTTE, a young woman in an elegant dress leans over a hardwood podium facing the door, smiling warmly.

CHARLOTTE

Hello. Welcome to The Restaurant.
May I see your membership cards,
please?

VIOLET

There you are.

Violet hands her a glossy gold card engraved only with "Violet Mayhew".

VIOLET

I've brought my two guests, as
promised.

Adam rests his hand on Evelyn's shoulder. Evelyn purses her lips, and pulls away, returning to the refuge of her phone. Charlotte inspects the card, glances downward, then smiles warmly at Violet as she returns it to him.

CHARLOTTE

Welcome back, Ms. Mayhew. It is
very nice to meet you, Mr. Felix,
Miss Felix. My name is Charlotte,
and I will be taking care of you
this evening. Please, come this
way.

Charlotte leads the three through an opulent foyer. A brawny SECURITY GUARD wearing a suit and a bluetooth headset stands with his arms crossed near the staircase. Evelyn trails behind, texting on her phone, head down. Charlotte and her guests continue up the staircase. Adam's eyes steal one last glance at the guard.

They pass through an archway into a dining room.

INT: DINING ROOM

Four tables are staggered throughout the small dining room. At two candle-lit tables, elegant couples engage in whispers over crystal-cupped wine and porcelain plates of gourmet fare. Charlotte leads Violet's party to an unoccupied table. Adam pulls a chair out for Evelyn who squats with indifference. Charlotte passes the adults a pair of slender wine menus.

CHARLOTTE

I'll give you a moment to peruse
our wines.

Charlotte dips her head then pivots toward another table.

ADAM

(leaning towards Violet)
What kind of restaurant requires a
membership?

VIOLET

Only the most exclusive restaurant
in the world. It's never in the
same place twice. My first time was
in Malta. Clarence brought me.

ADAM

Clarence? Your brother?

VIOLET

Yes, when were yachting in the
Baltic he was just raving about
this place. It was only a short
flight and I wanted to show him my
new jet. The food - absolutely
transformative, I'm telling you -
wait until you try it, Adam.

ADAM

Sounds like we're in for a treat,
Evelyn.

EVELYN
 (Not looking up from her
 phone)
 Yeah, okay.

Adam glances apologetically to a suddenly distracted Violet.

CHARLOTTE
 Have we made a selection?

Adam busies himself with the rather expensive wine menu.

VIOLET
 We'll have a bottle of the 2009
 Chateau Haut-Brion, my treat.

Adam looks up, nods, and slumps back in relief.

CHARLOTTE
 Right away. And for Miss Felix?

EVELYN
 A Sprite?

CHARLOTTE
 Of course.

Charlotte returns and places a small plate with three
 crostini on the table. The crostini appear to be topped with
 thin slices of beef, sage, and a balsamic reduction.

CHARLOTTE
 Compliments of the chef. Enjoy.

Evelyn reaches for a crostini.

EVEYLN
 Finally! I'm starving!

Adam gently slaps Evelyn on the wrist.

ADAM
 Ett-ett-ett! We don't just shove
 fine cuisine into our mouths! No,
 we must enjoy it with our minds as
 well as our stomachs.

Evelyn groans loudly and leans way back in her chair,
 staring at the ceiling. Adam smiles.

ADAM
 First we admire the presentation.
 Beautiful. Delicate! Look how

ADAM
 finely sliced the strawberries are!
 (Beat) And is this... beef? Lamb?

Evelyn sighs loudly, and puts on her headphones, shoulders scrunched, eyes buried in her phone. Adam chuckles, slightly embarrassed, and looks at Violet.

ADAM
 Kids these days.

VIOLET
 (squeezing Adam's hand)
 You worry too much, my dear! We
 used to be like that, remember?
 Except without the cell phones.

Charlotte returns and pours the wine, leaving the bottle on the table. She splashes Evelyn's soda over ice, then hands them each a menu.

CHARLOTTE
 Feel free to take your time
 deciding. I'll be back in a little
 while.

Charlotte leaves as the three peruse the menus.

ADAM
 What, no specials?

VIOLET
 Adam, at The Restaurant, everything
 is a special.

EVELYN
 (pulling one ear bud out)
 Really? A children's menu?

ADAM
 (leaning to read her menu)
 Come now, Evie. These look good.
 Viennese sausage with buttery
 mashed potato. Rustic Italian
 meatballs in linguini. Mmmm, or a
 simmering bowl of onion-seaweed
 Japanese gyūdon, that sounds
 interesting!

EVELYN
 Seaweed? Really, Dad?

Evelyn puts her headphones back in and looks intently at her phone. Adam sighs and picks up his menu. He scans the menu, and furrows his brows in slight confusion. He chuckles a little.

ADAM

What is this? A themed restaurant?
Authentic Greek peasant salad,
male, aged 37? Charred Chinese
forearm fillet with wonton crisps?
Toddler Tartare? Really?

VIOLET

Oh, no, it's legit. Exactly as
advertised. Like I said, food like
you've never had before.

Her radiant gaze stiffens in anticipation.

ADAM

But this is... but... so
then... Oh, my God. Oh God. I'm
going to be sick.

Violet's face darkens as Adam stumbles out of his chair and rushes to the bathroom. Evelyn pulls a ear bud out of her ear and looks at Violet.

EVELYN

What's with Dad?

VIOLET

Oh, I'm sure it's nothing. Just
wait here while I go check on him.

Violet hesitates, looks down, then pops a crostini into her mouth with a cheeky grin and saunters away.

INT: MEN'S BATHROOM

Adam stands in front of the mirror, leaning on the sink, breathing heavily. He splashes water on his face, trying not to panic. Violet opens the door and leans casually against the wall.

ADAM

Violet! This is the men's roo...

Adam purses his lips in silent frustration. Violet leans casually against the wall.

VIOLET
Seriously, Adam? You're
overreacting.

ADAM
(desperately)
It's a joke, right? You're just
joking with me. Violet, please tell
me you're joking.

VIOLET
No, I'm not.

ADAM
But... but you're eating people!
(feels his stomach)
Oh my god. I'm going to be sick.

Adam claws at his head, his eyes searching for answers that aren't there. He stumbles, but Violet, prepared, manages to catch him. Violet claws Adam's shoulders firmly and gives him a small shake.

VIOLET
Darling, pull yourself together! I
vouched for you, damn it! My
reputation is on the line here. I
spend half a million dollars a year
on my membership, and by God, if I
lose it, I'll never get it back -
and I don't mean the money. I mean
I'll never eat here again.

Adam desperately resists Violet's grip.

ADAM
But... they're cannibals! You're a
cannibal! I mean... oh, my God,
Toddler Tartare?!

Adam pulls away from Violet in revulsion, who raises his hands in nonchalant concession.

VIOLET
OK, I'll admit, that one grosses me
out. I mean, eating people is one
thing, but raw meat? Ick. And I
know it's safe 'cause it's prepared
very fresh and all, but... it's so
slimy.

ADAM
Prepared... fresh?

VIOLET
Oh yes, very fresh.

Adam cocks his head, then dashes out the bathroom door.

VIOLET
Oh, Adam.

INT: KITCHEN

Two CHEFS with knives in white, bloody aprons, oblivious to the intrusion, are moving arms and legs onto cutting boards, chopping meat. The chefs are relaxed and jovial, enjoying their jobs. When they touch body parts, they are cavalier. They don't notice Adam in the doorway. Adam is horrified. A DELIVERY MAN holding a living BABY walks in the back of the kitchen.

DELIVERY MAN
I've got two more in the truck.
Where do you want them?

CHEF 1
Oh, next week's rotisserie special!
Put them in the back. We'll prep
them later.

ADAM stumbles backwards out of the door.

INT: RESTAURANT

Adam rushes up to a nearby occupied table and slams his hands down, rattling plates.

ADAM
(loud and shaky)
Do you know what you are eating?!

The startled guests react with silence, ended by a melodious giggle.

WOMAN AT TABLE
Yes! Sinful, isn't it? And so good.

The woman tosses a morsel of meat into her mouth, chewing with sass. Her friends all laugh. Adam pulls away.

MAN AT TABLE
Must be his first time.

The table laughs again. Violet puts his hand on Adam's shoulder. Adam spins around and pushes Violet into a wall.

ADAM

They are killing people back there!
And not just people, babies! How
could you bring me here? And my
daughter! I'm going to put a stop
to this!

Adam spins and hesitates abruptly, as Charlotte approaches, busy uncorking a bottle of wine.

CHARLOTTE

Is everything all right, Miss
Mayhew?

Charlotte glances with understanding toward the frowning security guard, currently blocking the exit.

Violet steps up to Adam and loops her arm around his.

VIOLET

We're fine. Aren't we, darling?

Violet smiles as she leans in to whisper in Adam's ear.

VIOLET

(whispering sternly)
Smile and nod.

Adam sees the security guard talking through his headset.

BEGIN IMAGINING:

Evelyn sits across from Violet. The girl bites a piece of steak from his fork and chews.

VIOLET

Your father was a great man.

Evelyn swallows.

EVELYN

Great tasting!

VIOLET

(chuckling)
You do have some of your father's
humors in you after all!

The two laugh.

END IMAGINING

Violet elbows a terried Adam in the ribs. He smiles nervously and nods with earnest.

ADAM

Yes, yes, everything is fine.

Violet leads Adam back to their table. Charlotte and the security guard silently observe from a distance.

ADAM

Evelyn?

Adam slows his approach as Evelyn slurps pasta off her fork, her phone and headphones set aside. Adam resolves to sit calmly. Violet joins, maintaining her calm demeanor.

EVELYN

Hi, Daddy. Feeling better?

ADAM

Oh, yes, sweetie, much better.

(beat)

What are you eating?

EVELYN

Daddy, the meatballs are so good.
You were right. I didn't know food
could taste this good.

Evelyn eats another bite. She smiles angelically at her father. Adam sits stiffly in his chair, his hands gripping the seat of the chair, knuckles white.

ADAM

(nodding)

Good. Good. I'm glad.

EVELYN

Here Daddy, try one.

Evelyn, smiling sweetly, hands Adam a meatball on a fork. Adam stiffens, taking the fork slowly. Violet nods slightly and makes a small "try it" motion with his hands. Adam reluctantly scrapes a tiny bit of meatball off his fork. His brows lower as his eyes bulge. He looks around in amazement.

ADAM

This is good. God, forgive me,
but...

Adam devours the rest of the meatball in one bite. His eyes roll upward as he chews.

ADAM
(with a stuffed mouth)
Mmmm... It's so good.

Violet leans back and sighs happily. Adam leans over to Evelyn, pointing.

ADAM
Say, is that... Justin Bieber?

Evelyn snaps her head around to see a bewildered guard. Adam quickly stabs a meatball off her plate. Charlotte purses her lips and points at Adam. Evelyn turns back.

ADAM
(chomping down)
Mmmmm!!!

EVELYN
(playfully shrieking)
Daddy!!!

Adam hands Evelyn back the fork. Evelyn is still giggling while starting in on her food. Adam scoots his chair over and hugs her, earning yet another giggle in protest. He picks up the menu and Violet waves Charlotte over.

ADAM
I'd like to order the Imperial New Yorker tenderloin with Bordelaise sauce, and why don't you throw in a side of the roasted Malaysian sweetbread. I'm curious.

CHARLOTTE
Yes, of course, Mr. Felix. Will that be all?

ADAM
Could I also get a membership application please?

FADE OUT