

Toddler Tartare

By

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FADE IN

EXT: OUTSIDE RESTAURANT - EVENING

SPENCER and ADAM, both middle-aged men with impeccable grooming, attired in bespoke suits, along with EVELYN, a pre-teen girl sporting a sundress and iPhone, approach the weathered door of a dingy building.

ADAM

This is it? Are you sure?

SPENCER

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

SPENCER 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?

SPENCER

There you are.

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

SPENCER

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 Spencer as she returns it to him.

CHARLOTTE

Welcome back, Mr. 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 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 Spencer's party to an unoccupied table. Adam pulls a chair out for Evelyn who squats with indifference. Charlotte passes the men 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 Spencer)
What kind of restaurant requires a
membership?

SPENCER

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? From prep school?

SPENCER

Yes, when we 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
Spencer.

CHARLOTTE
Have we made a selection?

Adam busies himself with the rather expensive wine menu.

SPENCER
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
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 Spencer.

ADAM
Kids these days.

SPENCER
Eh, don't worry about it. 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?

SPENCER
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?

SPENCER

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

ADAM

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

Adam stumbles out of his chair and rushes to the bathroom. Evelyn pulls a ear bud out of her ear and looks at Spencer.

EVELYN

What's with Dad?

SPENCER

I'm sure he's fine. Wait here. I'll go check on him.

Spencer pops a crostini into his mouth with a reassuring smile then heads for the bathroom.

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. Spencer opens the door and leans casually against the wall.

SPENCER

Seriously, Adam? You're overreacting.

ADAM

(Desperately)

It's a joke, right? You're just joking with me. Spencer, please tell me you're joking.

SPENCER

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 Spencer, prepared, manages to catch him. Spencer grips Adam's shoulders firmly and gives him a small shake.

SPENCER

Pull yourself together, man! 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 matches Spencer's grip in desperation.

ADAM

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

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

SPENCER

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?

SPENCER

Oh yes, very fresh.

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

SPENCER

Damn it, 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. Spencer puts his hand on Adam's
shoulder. Adam spins around and slams Spencer into a wall.

ADAM

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

Adam spins and stops short, blocked by a man in a gray suit,
his arms crossed, flanked by uniformed muscular guards.

OWNER

Hello Adam. I don't think you'll
want to do that.

ADAM

Who are you? What do you mean by
that?

BEGIN IMAGINING:

Evelyn sits across from Spencer. She bites a piece of steak
from his fork and chews.

SPENCER
Your father was a great man.

Evelyn swallows.

EVELYN
Great tasting!

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

The two laugh.

END IMAGINING

Adam snaps out of it, glancing at the three fearfully.

OWNER
This is my restaurant, and,
...relax. See for yourself.

The owner gestures to the his daughter's table. Adam lunges toward her, bumping into a guard. The owner nods and the guard allows Adam to rush by.

ADAM
Evelyn!

Adam slows his gait and freezes as Evelyn slurps pasta off her fork, her phone and headphones set aside. Adam resolves to sit calmly. Spencer joins them warily.

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. Adam shoots a glance at Spencer. He glances the other way and notices the owner and the guards standing behind him. Spencer 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.

Spencer leans back and sighs happily. The owner nods, pats Spencer on the shoulder, and leads the guards away. Adam leans over to Evelyn, pointing.

ADAM
Say, is that... Justin Bieber?

Evelyn snaps her head around. Adam quickly stabs a meatball off her plate. 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 a giggle. He picks up the menu and Spencer 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

ADAM
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