

THE BEAR

"TBD"
Episode #203

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BLACK SCREEN. THEN --

A CRAIGSLIST job posting. "COOK (FULL-TIME). CHICAGO, IL."

We POP TO another posting, on MONSTER. "Local favorite The Beef returning as upscale venture in River North--"

POP TO: A posting on CULINARY AGENTS. "Seeking cooks, servers, and sommelier".

POP TO: A posting on INDEED. "Apply now, be part of something special! WE WILL TRAIN YOU!"

PULL OUT TO FIND --

EXT. PEORIA PACKING WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

SYDNEY, scrolling through all these postings on her phone. Clicks "Messages". No responses.

Refreshes her email optimistically. Nothing.

Opens Indeed again. Still zero messages. Frustrated, she pockets her phone.

She's in the bustling PEORIA PACKING wholesale butcher shop. Fluorescent lights illuminate red-tinged water on cement floors. Cart after cart is piled high with SLABS OF RAW MEAT. Plastic tubs hold ground beef, sausage, pig hearts, ears, and necks. Sydney peruses the aisles, examining the cuts and prices.

INT. PEORIA PACKING WAREHOUSE - COUNTER - MOMENTS LATER

Syd leans against the metal counter, chatting with the SELLER.

SELLER

Best I can do for short rib is \$12
a pound.

SYDNEY

Seriously? For wholesale?

He shrugs.

SELLER

(weary)
Gotta put inflation back in the
box.

SYDNEY

What if we pick it up here?

SELLER

That is the pick-up price.

Sydney sighs. With slight desperation --

SYDNEY

What if we do whole animal?

SELLER

(sizes her up, skeptical)

You know how to break down a cow?

She doesn't, but resents the implication.

Her phone *CHIMES*. She almost drops it in the scramble to get it out of her pocket. Saves it, pulls up the message. A reply to one of the postings!

She opens it, clicks the attached file labeled "RESUME". It's a blurry picture. Weird.

She zooms in...

Grimaces.

SYDNEY

Annnnnnd that's a dick.

The Seller glares at her.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

Not you.

Off Sydney, as she reconsiders -- the Seller actually was sort of a dick, so...

INT. CARMY'S APARTMENT - DAY

CARMY is in the middle of recipe development, seven or eight different cookbooks spread out around him as he chain smokes and makes notes for his beef tartare amuse bouche.

His phone *RINGS*. Unknown Number.

CARMY

Hello?

CLAIRE

Did you really give me a fake number?

CARMY

Claire?

CLAIRE

Correct. Should my feelings be hurt? I think they're hurt!

CARMY

(lying, caught)

No, no, must have been a mistake--

CLAIRE

You know I know your entire family and all of the Faks right?

CARMY

Are you sure you know all the Faks?

CLAIRE

I know all the Faks and there are a lot of Faks.

CARMY

There's so many Faks--

CLAIRE

But I was originally calling you before I realized I got fake numbered and had to ask Neil for your real number to see if you were busy today so now I have two questions.

CARMY

Shoot.

CLAIRE

1. Is it okay that I have your number or did you really not want me to have your number?

CARMY

I want you to have my number.

CLAIRE

K. 2. Are you busy today?

CARMY

(panicking)

Uhhhh--

CLAIRE

This is not in like a date way--
I'm sort of in a jam and my cousin
bailed on me--

Carmy leans back against the couch, relaxing now.

CARMY

Big Denny?

CLAIRE

No, Mac. Denny's dead.

CARMY

Damn Denny.

CLAIRE

Totally sucks. But I gotta get all
this shit from my mom's place, who
is not dead, into storage. Still
have that van?

CARMY

We still have that van...

Carmy considers. There's actually no real reason for him to
say no. So --

CARMY (CONT'D)

Let's do it.

CLAIRE

Really?

CARMY

Yeah, really.

CLAIRE

I'll text you the address.

CARMY

I remember it.

Carmy hangs up. Takes him a moment to realize he's looking
forward to seeing her again. He smiles.

INT. KASAMA - COUNTER - DAY

A GLASS CASE of beautiful PASTRIES -- black truffle
croissants, cardamom kouign-amann, foie gras danishes, pecan
sticky buns, and so much more.

Sydney stands in front of the case, peering hungrily at the options.

INT. KASAMA - TABLE - MINUTES LATER

A WAITER sets down Sydney's plate -- mushroom adobo over garlic rice with a runny fried egg, plus a foil wrapped BREAKFAST SANDWICH. She eagerly unwraps it -- a thick square of egg, longanisa sausage, and hash browns, with orange cheese on a spongey white bun.

SYDNEY

Thank you.

A half-eaten black truffle croissant and blueberry muffin already sit in front of her, along with a large coffee and her book -- LEADING WITH THE HEART, by Mike Krzyzewski.

WAITER

(off her book)

Courage and confidence.

SYDNEY

Huh?

WAITER

Coach K fan?

SYDNEY

My dad gave it to me. What's courage and confidence?

WAITER

It's Krzyzewski's thing. "Courage and confidence is what decision making is all about".

SYDNEY

Got it.

WAITER

Go blue.

She bites into her breakfast sandwich as she pores over her book, intent on perfecting her management style.

Checks her phone. Still no responses to her job postings. And then a text from Carmy comes in: *Sorry, have to bail today. Keep jamming on hiring or just take the day off, whatever you want.*

Syd's annoyed -- of course she'll keep working -- but shrugs it off, texts back the thumbs up emoji.

Looks at her RECENT TEXTS. Scrolls through -- CARMY, DAD, MARCUS, FISH GUY, TINA, SAM HINGE, TOMATO GUY. Lands on someone named JAKE. Considers, then starts typing...

INT. COFFEE SHOP - DAY

CLOSE ON a flier-- sleek font, eye-catching colors. Sydney spent a long time designing it.

"Want to learn to cook? Can you work five days a week? Email Sydney thebearhiring@gmail.com".

Syd pins it to the BULLETIN BOARD in a hip coffee shop. Steps back, looks at her work. The flyers to the left and right also advertise open kitchen jobs.

She sighs.

EXT. CHICAGO STREET - TELEPHONE POLE - DAY

Syd tapes up another flier. Behind her is a shuttered restaurant, the FOR LEASE sign looms large in the window. A smaller sign on the door: *Thank you to our customers for twelve wonderful years.*

She glances up, then crosses the street to avoid the failed restaurant.

INT. PUBLICAN QUALITY MEATS - RETAIL COUNTER - DAY

A case full of beautifully marbled STEAKS, house fabricated SAUSAGES, and thick cut BACON. The DRY AGER holds massive chunks of meat, all tagged for individual buyers.

Sydney chats with CHEF ROB (the actual Chef/head butcher at PQM, a kind, fatherly type).

SYDNEY

... And it's really coming together, but that doesn't mean anything if we can't afford the short rib. I don't know. I just want it to work.

CHEF ROB

You're gonna use the short rib for a pasta?

He's genuinely asking, not patronizing her.

SYDNEY

Yeah. Why?

CHEF ROB

I mean it's delicious, don't get me wrong. But it's also an expensive cut with a low yield.

SYDNEY

What would you do?

He considers a moment, then, demonstrating on his own body --

CHEF ROB

Short ribs technically end here right? And the front part, here, is beef navel -- which is maybe 3 or 4 dollars cheaper a pound. But flavor and texture are the exact same.

Sydney nods, getting into it.

CHEF ROB (CONT'D)

You could still call it short rib pasta too, technically it's not a lie. Want me to call Slagel, see what they can price?

She grins, excited, then, wind out of her sails a little --

SYDNEY

I need to talk to my partner first.

INT./EXT. BROWN LINE - THE L - DAY

Sydney rides the L, a twelve pack of BEER in her lap. Refreshes her phone again. We don't even have to see it to know there's no replies to her job postings.

EXT. AVEC - ALLEY - DAY

A nondescript alley. Syd knocks on a BLACK DOOR.

It opens to reveal JAKE (late 20s) an old friend. Syd holds up the beer in greeting. He SMILES at the beer, then her.

INT. AVEC - CONTINUOUS

Light paneled wood lines the intimate dining room. The FOH and BOH teams are gathered, finishing up FAMILY MEAL and enjoying a few beers. Syd sits at a table with Jake and some others -- ABBY, SWEDISH JOE, and MAX. All laughing.

JAKE

I'm telling you -- half the time she's alone, half the time she's with a random man. Always pays in cash. Then we never see the man again.

SWEDISH JOE

Sharon's not a black widow.

JAKE

She totally is.

ABBY

Yes she is!

The GENERAL MANAGER (50s, slicked back hair) enters, followed by CHEF JOSH (30s).

GENERAL MANAGER

Alright, pre-service, let's go.

CHEF JOSH

And leave Sharon alone. I don't want you talking shit about our regulars.

Everyone is slightly chastised, until --

CHEF JOSH (CONT'D)

And I asked her out last night.

Everyone laughs again, loving it. Sydney is paying careful attention, taking notes on everything -- she's not just visiting a friend, she's here to learn.

GENERAL MANAGER

Service was awesome last night guys, loved the energy and the flexibility. Had a review from a diner in Jake's section--

(reads)

"Our server was incredibly knowledgeable and helped accommodate my son, who has severe allergies."

A few people CLAP for Jake.

GENERAL MANAGER (CONT'D)

Great work, you really made a moment with a guest there. And Swedish Joe got a \$1000 tip last night, everyone say thank you to Swedish Joe.

ALL

Thank you./Fuck yeah!

SWEDISH JOE

Y'all are lucky I'm hot.

More laughter.

GENERAL MANAGER

Looking at tonight -- we've got 148 covers coming in, so let's look alive. You're okay until 7, but from 7 to 7:45 expect to be double seated. Going to need to see some hustle. PONs for tonight are Gerry Hersh, table 18 with Abby, he's a friend of the investors and he's left handed, let's have his place setting fixed in advance, thanks. And on table 3 with Jake we have the head of Hart Wines, so we're letting him bring his own bottles. One time special exception, don't let other guests see. And for the last time -- no one touches the fucking thermostat okay? If you're cold you're not working hard enough. Chef?

CHEF JOSH

Changes to the menu tonight -- no white asparagus in the nage, just going to be white wine and fennel. Adding walnuts to braise for the pork cheeks so watch that with allergens. For counts -- we got 2 porterhouse and 4 uni, listen for the 86's.

The front of house staff, plus Sydney, scribbles notes down as he speaks.

CHEF JOSH (CONT'D)

And finally the special for tonight is Dungeness crab meat, resting in basil and almond oils, with a delicata squash ragu.

From the kitchen, a COOK brings out a few BOWLS and a handful of FORKS.

CHEF JOSH (CONT'D)

Try some, let's talk about the flavor profile. I don't want to hear you telling diners what it's "like", I want them to know what it is before they fucking order. Okay? Okay. Eat up.

Everyone grabs for forks, excited to try the new dish. Sydney continues to jot down notes.

INT./EXT. AVEC - ALLEY - LATER

Jake opens the door for Sydney, who steps out into the alley.

SYDNEY

Thanks so much, seriously.

JAKE

Anytime. Service is tight under the new GM, and Chef Josh is the best. Feels like he really wants us to be happy here.

Syd pauses, then, suggestive --

SYDNEY

You know, for the new restaurant, we're hiring servers...

JAKE

I make \$150k a year here.

SYDNEY

Oh wow. Yeah. No. Sorry. Thanks again.

EXT. CHICAGO STREETS - MOMENTS LATER

Sydney cuts across the alley, passing a group of WAITERS AND DISHWASHERS, chatting in Spanish and smoking by the dumpster.

She hesitates a moment, then doubles back to them.

SYDNEY

Hey.

They pause their conversation, look at her.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

Hi. You guys work at Twine, right?
You happy here?

(without giving them time
to respond)

You know The Beef? On Orleans? Me
and my partner are revamping it,
gonna be this legit fine dining
joint, but with real, homestyle
food. We need front and back--

CHEF (O.S.)

Yo what the fuck? You trying to
poach my guys?

Syd turns to see the restaurant's CHEF, CLEAVER in hand,
hovering in the doorway.

SYDNEY

No, no--

CHEF

Fuck outta here!

He gestures with the cleaver, and Syd turns to go. Then, over
her shoulder --

SYDNEY

You know where to find me! Just
think about it!

She breaks into a RUN, laughing to herself as she sprints
down the alley. No one is chasing her, but she zigzags,
making herself laugh harder. Totally giving into the
absurdity of how damn hard this whole thing is.

EXT. CHICAGO STREET/PIZZA FRIENDLY PIZZA - MOMENTS LATER

Sydney rounds the corner, out of the alley and back onto the
street. She stops running, breathing heavy, still chuckling a
little to herself.

Pulls out her phone, refreshes... no new emails.

She looks up, finding herself in front of PIZZA FRIENDLY
PIZZA, a window counter serving Sicilian-style slices.
Glances back down at her phone, then... *fuck it*. She pockets
her phone and heads for the window.

EXT. CHICAGO STREETS - DAY

Sydney walks through the city in a sequence reminiscent of Agnès Varda's *Cleo de 5 à 7* (or it would be, if Cleo ever chowed down on a massive slice of springy pepperoni pizza).

She savors the amazing slice, licking her fingers. FLASH TO:

CRUMBLING BRICKWORK AT A FACTORY ON THE RIVER, THE SAME RED AS THE PEPPERONI

TAUT HEIRLOOM TOMATOES, DEEP RED AND GREEN

ARUGULA SALAD SERVED ON A PIZZA FLATBREAD

She grabs her notebook to jot it down, and we understand -- we're seeing the inside of Sydney's mind as she lets the sights, smells, and tastes of the city inspire her. Hiring can wait until tomorrow.

INT. LOCAL FOODS MARKET - DAY

An elegant grocery store featuring exclusively local products. Syd wanders through the aisles.

In front of an array of local mushrooms, she pauses, considering. CLOSE ON the wooden basket of BLUE OYSTER MUSHROOMS, their skin almost iridescent.

A CREAMY MUSHROOM RISOTTO. POP TO: A beautiful HEN O'THE WOODS MUSHROOM growing out of a tree, then:

CLOSE ON shaggy-haired LION'S MANE MUSHROOMS, and we see the RISOTTO again, this time prepared with lion's mane.

She continues examining the varieties, wild and beautiful in their uniqueness, as we FLASH TO DIFFERENT VERSIONS OF THE DISH. She scribbles ideas in her notebook.

INT. KOREAN GROCERY STORE - DAY

Sydney examines several different jars of GOCHUJANG, the Korean chili paste. FLASH TO:

KOREAN CHICKEN WINGS DRIPPING WITH GOCHUJANG SAUCE

A MASON JAR FULL OF BRIGHT RED AMARYLLISES

A MEATBALL AND ARRABIATA PASTA SAUCE, MADE WITH GOCHUJANG INSTEAD OF CHILI PEPPERS

She considers. *Could work.* Grabs four different jars and hurries up to the cash register.

EXT. CHICAGO STREETS - DAY

Sydney takes in the bustling street. Closes her eyes for a moment, feeling out where she wants to go next.

A series of QUICK CUTS:

- A plate of PIEROGIS placed in front of Sydney.
- A plate of CHINESE DUMPLINGS placed in front of Sydney.
- A plate of EMPANADAS placed in front of Sydney.
- Massive bite of the dumplings.
- With a knife and fork, she dissects the pierogi, considering the technique.
- Massive bite of the empanada.
- She cuts into the empanada, examines the shredded beef inside.
- FLASH TO: the short rib pappardelle she and Carmy worked on in Episode 202.
- Sydney stands in front of a grocery store bulk bin display, all stuffed to the bursting with vibrantly colored lentils and grains.
- Sydney pops some Tums.
- Another OUT OF BUSINESS restaurant.
- A plate of beef short ribs, slathered in BBQ sauce, placed in front of her.
- Out on the street, her tote bag getting heavier with every stop, Sydney passes two WOMEN in bright purple coats and red hats. They stand out against the sea of dark jackets and beanies. FLASH TO:

A SMEAR OF PURPLE JELLY ON A RED SWEATER.

A JELLY DONUT, ONE BITE MISSING, EXPOSING THE RICH PURPLE INSIDES.

AN ITALIAN BEEF SANDWICH.

THE DUMPLINGS FROM EARLIER.

THE PIEROGIS.

BACK TO SYDNEY. Eyes wide with excitement, she grabs her phone, texts Carmy: *we can afford the beef pasta if we do it as a ravioli w/ navel!! call me!*

She grins. Pleased with herself. Then burps. Takes a Tums.

INT./EXT. THE L - DAY

THE GREEN LINE

ROOSEVELT, ADAMS/WABASH, WASHINGTON/WABASH, STATE/LAKE... We land at the bustling CLARK/LAKE STATION. Sydney checks her CTA app. She rushes downstairs and *just* makes it to--

THE BLUE LINE

We're underground now. Alone with our thoughts. A STUDENT near Sydney pores over a thick textbook. Tiny post it flags jut out of every other page. Sydney opens her book and digs in her tote for her pen. She jots down: "courage and confidence"...

GRAND, CHICAGO, DIVISION, DAMEN...

Back in the light of day. Fewer commercial buildings, more apartment buildings and homes. Lots of oranges and browns against the blue of the sky. Suddenly, she sees a mural: "THIS BEAUTIFUL MOMENT IS OURS." *Hmm.*

Sydney focuses on the pops of greens between buildings.

We get FLASHES:

CHILDREN PLAY IN THE WICKER PARK FOUNTAIN CIRCA 1900

A CHILD'S DRAWING OF A ROW HOUSE - A TREE ON EITHER SIDE

ROSEMARY, TARRAGON AND SAGE PLANTS IN AN INDOOR PLANTER

STRIPPED HERBS ARTFULLY PLACED IN THE CORNERS OF A PLATE

EXT. ROYAL PALMS CHICAGO/TAMALE SPACESHIP FOOD TRUCK - DAY

A line snakes from the window of this Chicago staple. Someone scarfs down a barbacoa with salsa verde. Someone else hoovers up a roast pork with tomato habanero sauce. At the window, Sydney reaches out to grab her confit duck tamale.

SYDNEY

No, I know. It's been way too long. But, first time I'm out during the day in forever, what do I do? I come here. And I'll come by again next week, I promise. Thank you, Araceli.

She spoons a bite of tamale into her mouth. Her eyes close in ecstasy. These tamales are too good.

Sydney turns and quite literally bumps into an old friend, LISETTE, 20s, hair spilling over a THICK NECK BRACE.

LISETTE

Sydney?

SYDNEY

Lisette? Wow. It's been... Forever.

LISETTE

Right? I didn't know you came out during the day.

SYDNEY

No, I do. I do... now.

LISETTE

Oh okay.

An awkward beat. There's not really a way to get around the--

SYDNEY

So are you--? What's with, uh...

LISETTE

You can say it. How did I break my neck in two places? Here's a hint--

She holds her arm out and body rolls. Sydney's face falls.

SYDNEY

Lisette. Are you...? I mean, obviously sex work is work, but when Sheridan fell apart, I didn't think you'd have to--

LISETTE

(laughing)

Huh? Girl, calm down! I teach pole fitness. At the Y. To moms. One of them fell on me a couple weeks ago. Her fat ass really got up there, though. I'm proud.

SYDNEY

Oh okay. That's great then. So you're not cooking anymore?

LISETTE

Just for myself. It was fun with you while it lasted, but that life ain't for me. Too much hustle, too much disappointment. I'd rather just... be happy.

SYDNEY

I'm happy.

LISETTE

Sure you are. But for real, Sheridan's in the past now. I've moved on. We're good.

SYDNEY

I'm glad to hear it.

And because she can't help but relapse a little--

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

Hey, maybe once you're outta that thing, I've got a new place opening-

LISETTE

Oh, so you're still--

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

Yeah I'm still... and this new spot is opening soon, if you are in fact looking for work. We can put you front of house so--

LISETTE

Sydney. Honey. No.

A straight up, "no". Today really can't be about hiring.

SYDNEY

Okay, that's fair.

LISETTE

Take care of yourself, Sydney.

Lisette awkwardly turns her whole body without turning her neck and heads to her idling car. Sydney watches her go.

EXT. CHICAGO RIVERWALK - DAY

Sydney finds herself on the riverwalk. She settles down on a concrete step to do some people watching. Are all *these* people happy?

A STRAY TODDLER runs toward a PALETERO. His MOM jogs up after him. She realizes she could also use a sweet treat. She buys Italian ices for herself and her kid. Sydney smiles.

Her attention's caught by a crowd of selfie-happy tourists headed for Navy Pier. They all wear the same blue polos.

TOUR GUIDE

We have to get a move on if we're gonna make it.

Sydney squints. Make it where? She follows their likely direction with her eyes to a Shoreline Sightseeing boat, loading up for its next tour. Sydney HMPHS. How lame. She looks down at her shirt. It's also blue. So lame-- Wait...

EXT. CHICAGO RIVER - ARCHITECTURE TOUR BOAT - DAY

Sydney slips in with the tour group for this evening Chicago River cruise. The Tour Guide struggles to count everyone.

TOUR GUIDE

Twenty-eight, no wait, twenty-seven... Could you just-- Forget it. If you're not here, say so.

He hands over a stack of tickets to the BOAT TOUR GUIDE. Sydney shuffles to the back of the group and prepares to see her city through the eyes of a tourist.

The boat creeps along. Sydney marvels at the architecture. She takes copious notes and makes freehand sketches.

Marina City, the twin buildings with scalloped edges remind her of her plan for ravioli.

Again, we see FLASHES:

MARINA CITY DURING ITS CONSTRUCTION IN 1962

GEORGE CHARNEY'S FUTURISTIC ILLUSTRATION OF THREE TOWERS

TWO, NO THREE SQUARES OF RAVIOLI WITH FRILLY SCALLOPED EDGES

Sydney sketches this as they ease past the Merchandise Mart.

More FLASHES:

A 1920 SIGN ADVERTISING THE MERCHANDISE MART AS THE LARGEST BUILDING IN THE WORLD

THE BUILDING HALF CONSTRUCTED, THE UNFINISHED TOP GIVING IT A DARK, LIGHTER LAYER

THE RAVIOLI AGAIN, THIS TIME WITH BLACK TRUFFLE SHAVINGS CAREFULLY BALANCED ON TOP LIKE SCAFFOLDING

Sydney focuses on the design of the plate, it's almost perfect. She sketches out another circle, trying again when--

TOURIST

Could you take a photo of us?

SYDNEY

Huh?

TOURIST

A photo? With the sunset in the background?

SYDNEY

Oh yeah, sure. Where is--

She turns. Whoa. Sunset. When did she last see this? The warm purples, pinks and oranges paint the sky, and its marvelous reflection in the ripples of the river. She's truly wowed.

She takes the TOURIST'S picture, but with the lackluster effort of a woman with eyes for only one thing. She hands the phone back. The Tourist frowns down at the result and hands her camera to someone else. Sydney doesn't notice.

She just sees FLASHES:

AN ENDLESS LINE FOR THE DOUGLAS PARK NATATORIUM IN THE 30S

A GIRL IN A NEON ORANGE SWIMSUIT EATING A PURPLE POPSICLE

BACK TO THE RAVIOLI -- THE SCALLOP EDGED PIECES ARE NOW CIRCULAR AND SURROUNDED BY A RED RASPBERRY BROWN BUTTER.

She struggles with how to add purple. She makes a list: purple cabbage pesto? Purple carrots? She looks up again, okay with not knowing just yet. She stares as the sun dips past the horizon, wholly sated, by this serene moment.

INT. VERDANA - NIGHT

Sydney sits at the corner of the bar, her table space covered in Verdana's finest offerings. She tears into the eggs five ways, pulls at dry aged duck, nibbles garlic mushrooms.

As she eats, she watches over the counter for glimpses into the kitchen. She's here with intention. She flags down her SERVER.

SYDNEY

Can you tell me what's in the crepes...?

Syd tests the mouth feel of the crepes. She breaks one apart, examining its thinness.

SERVER

(frazzled)

Oh, um, I'm new but it's really simple, cake flour and butter, and--

CHEF NAYIA (O.S.)

It's just timing. You can't flip too early. Nayia.

CHEF NAYIA LEWIS, 30s, box braids in a top knot, covered in tattoos -- this woman is cool af -- extends her hand.

SYDNEY

Yo! Hi, Chef.

CHEF NAYIA

It's Sydney, right? I remember you, from when I was the Saucier at Danku--

SYDNEY

Yes, of course. I didn't last long there...

Sydney takes a beat, deciding how to say this next thing.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

Did you ever cross paths with Leon?
The Operations guy?

They measure if the other's picking up what's being put down.

CHEF NAYIA

Yeah. He's... a fucking dick.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

He's a dick! Yes!

CHEF NAYIA (CONT'D)

(looking around)

It's nice to see you. I don't usually touch tables.

SYDNEY

But you're the exec. You just don't have time, or..?

CHEF NAYIA

I just can't take the double take. The "oh... oh! You're the chef?!" Yes, I am motherfucker. You see the coat.

(pointing)

With my name on it.

SYDNEY

Shit. What do you say?

CHEF NAYIA

Oh, I swallow it. You have to. I have to control my narrative. This is my legacy on the line. I gotta leave yesterday in yesterday.

Sydney nods. Feeling that.

CHEF NAYIA (CONT'D)

Where are you at right now?

SYDNEY

Opening a new spot, on Orleans. It's kind of a long story but... I just wanna be the best, you know?

CHEF NAYIA

As you should. And not the best black chef. The best chef.

Sydney feels great. Finally someone gets it.

SYDNEY

Whole chef, too. Best leadership, best ingredients, best experience.

CHEF NAYIA

Heard. That's exactly why it's taking me a while to do *my* menu here. They want me to revive some of my old stuff, but that's yesterday. I'm trying to create something new.

SYDNEY

That's where my head is at too.

CHEF NAYIA

I'm just happy no one's tricked you into soul food yet.

SYDNEY

Why is it always soul food?!

CHEF NAYIA

You know why it's soul food!

(then)

Don't get me wrong, smothered greens hit when you salt 'em right. But come on! Hashtag ask me more!

They laugh. Sydney softens. She seems more comfortable than we've probably ever seen her.

SYDNEY

My mom used to make *the* most bomb mac and cheese. And I know what you're thinking-- "sure she did, blah blah blah" but I'm serious. It was creamy, tender, savory... She didn't even have to watch the roux. Her timing was second nature.

CHEF NAYIA

Please tell me she taught you.

SYDNEY

Never had the chance. That first Thanksgiving after she died, I'm in high school so I figure it's time I take my rightful place as woman of the house. As in-- the woman who makes this mac and cheese for our extended family. But I could never get the roux right. I tried once...

CHEF NAYIA

Oh no. How bad? They spit it out?

SYDNEY

They said *nothing*.

CHEF NAYIA

That's brutal.

SYDNEY

The next year we got Ruth's Chris takeout. So yeah, no soul food for me.

(then)

(MORE)

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

What about you? When you do your menu, you gonna stick to French?

CHEF NAYIA

Yes, French. Well, somewhat. I always think about the show and the story, right? What are other people not doing? Instead of France proper, what about where they colonized? Morocco and Vietnam are just as French. So I'm like, what's my couscous, what's my Bahn Mi? Where can I throw in foam and seasonal colors and theatrics? There's different ways to play with the food "black people should be making.

SYDNEY

"Food we should be making". Jesus. When it's all ours. All everyone's, really. Well, to an extent. It's the ecstasy of influence. Okay, no-mansplain, but have you heard of James Hemings?

CHEF NAYIA

Hemings, isn't that--

SYDNEY

Thomas Jefferson's enslaved teen victim, not mistress, by the way--

CHEF NAYIA

Fucking Lin Manuel.

SYDNEY

Fucking Lin, dude. So James was her brother and Jefferson's personal cook. When Tommy boy was traipsing around France at the end of the 1700s, he took James with him. Had him trained in French cuisine. He was basically in culinary school, had a stipend even, and didn't know he could buy his freedom.

CHEF NAYIA

That's fucking cold.

SYDNEY

So cold. But wait, there's more. When he comes back to the US, he passes on his knowledge.

(MORE)

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

He's positioned over white people teaching them how to make cheese pie -- mac and cheese. A soul food staple came from France through a man who didn't even belong to himself. Eventually, he bought his freedom, started his rice empire and lived happily ever after.

CHEF NAYIA

You fucking with me? This nigga was Uncle Ben?

SYDNEY

I am 100% fucking with you. He bought his freedom and committed suicide a little bit later.

CHEF NAYIA

Shit.

Sydney nods. Big shit. They sit in this for a moment. Is this just a story or is it a warning? Nayia shakes it off.

CHEF NAYIA (CONT'D)

On that light note! I gotta get back to it. Let's hope things work out better for you. How long's your rent hold?

SYDNEY

No rent, actually. My partner, Carmy, his family owns the place. His uncle's helping bankroll the reno. It's a family affair sort of.

CHEF NAYIA

Hmm. *His* family, though.

SYDNEY

Yeah, technically. But it's cool. We're really sitting down and doing it together. He hears me, you know?

Chef Nayia SIGHS, deciding how to say this next bit.

CHEF NAYIA

I *do* know. Watch your back, Sydney. Seriously. Remember that when those menus are printed, there's only going to be one name at the top. Don't give him your best stuff, and don't be afraid to get shit in writing. For real.

SYDNEY

Heard.

Sydney nods for the sake of it as Chef Nayia walks away. Nayia doesn't know what she's talking about... Right? Suddenly, she's not hungry for dessert.

EXT. CHICAGO STREETS - NIGHT

It's dark now, evening fully upon us. Sydney walks slowly down the street. She walks past a YOUNG MAN carrying a heavy schoolbag, an OLD MAN with a push shopping cart, a WOMAN jogging with a huge husky on a leash...

No flashes of inspiration, though. She's spent. Worn. Down. It's hard to stay inspired when you're not sure if a stranger knows your situation better than you know it yourself.

She passes another restaurant space with a FOR LEASE sign in the window. She might not even notice this one, but we do.

She continues down the street until she sees something that makes her half-smile in spite of herself. She heads into a--

INT. BASKIN-ROBBINS - DAY

-- Of all places. She nods to the TEENAGE CASHIER.

SYDNEY

Can I get a scoop of this one with a second empty cup?

The Teenage Cashier looks down at the fluorescent blue bubblegum ice cream, then back up at Sydney.

TEENAGE CASHIER

Are you sure?

Sydney nods. So sure.

She pays and the Cashier hands over the ice cream and the cup. Sydney goes to a corner booth to eat her ice cream.

We're back to the FLASHES, but these feel more personal:

IN THE EARLY AUGHTS, A LITTLE GIRL IN A THAT'S SO RAVEN T-SHIRT STANDS AT AN ICE CREAM COUNTER WITH HER MOM.

HER MOM HANDS HER A SCOOP OF THE BRIGHT BLUE ICE CREAM WHILE BRANDISHING A HUGE SMILE AND A SECOND, EMPTY CUP.

Back to our adult Sydney, she follows suit, and spits gum into the cup, fully intending to save it for later. The Cashier sees, but Sydney doesn't care. Because her mom never cared.

She's suddenly struck. Another FLASH:

THE RAVIOLI AGAIN, BUT ON A DEEP BLUE PLATE. A SUNSET AFTER A CLEAR DAY. REBIRTH AND RENEWAL IN ONE PLACE. ON ONE PLATE.

Sydney smiles to herself. That's how you build a dish. She gets a text from Carmy: *At bear. Where r u?*

She writes back: *You told me to take the day?* Carmy replies: *Just come.*

She rolls her eyes. He's all over the place. But it's all good. She's happy to head back.

EXT. THE BEAR - NIGHT

Finally, to end her day, Sydney walks back to The Bear. She blows a huge bubble. Ew Sydney. But also-- good for her.

In one hand, she carries a bag of purple cauliflower, carrots and cabbage, eager to figure out the purple of her dish. In her other hand -- a greasy paper bag full of tacos.

INT. THE BEAR/FOH - NIGHT

Sydney knocks at the locked door. Carmy greets her, dirty.

SYDNEY

Hey-- what's... how long have you been here, I would've come.

He unlocks the door and Sydney pushes her way in.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

I brought some-- oh my god.

She stops, stunned. The restaurant is SHREDDED. The dividing wall between the kitchen and dining area has been blown out, there's no floor, everyone's covered in dust and-- mice shit?

RICHIE crawls on his hands and knees, smashing a mess of cockroaches with a hammer. FAK and ANGEL run around stomping on them, MANNY is bleeding from the neck for some reason.

Syd drops the bag of tacos as Carmy emerges from the chaos.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

What... happened?

FAK

(like he's seen some shit)

The wood was so wet... All of it.

CARMY

Someone had to make the call...

He moves past her to bring Manny a rag for his neck.

This lands on Sydney. Why did no one hit her up? Also-- how the fuck are they gonna pay to fix all this? "Just a facelift" has officially become a full-on gut. Nayia's words ring in her ears. This is such a fucked way to--

END AN EPISODE