

CLYDE. Well damn? How come you never told me that story?

MONTRELLOUS. I dunno.

CLYDE. So, like, why are you telling me this now? I mean, are you looking for sympathy? Or what? Cuz I'm sorry, I just don't.

MONTRELLOUS. I dunno. I thought you might be, um, moved.

CLYDE. Yeah? Well, you wanna know the last time I shed tears?

MONTRELLOUS. When?

CLYDE. Nevah. It's true. My mama used to stick me with her finger-nail, kept it sharpened like a talon designed to inflict maximum pain, and every so often she'd poke me just to see if I'd cry. And you know how I reacted?

MONTRELLOUS. How?

CLYDE. Exactly as I'm reacting now.

Clyde's face is devoid of any emotion.

MONTRELLOUS. Yeah, but, were you really listening?

CLYDE. I was.

MONTRELLOUS. And?

CLYDE. Is there more you wanna say, or can I get on with my life?

MONTRELLOUS. That's it, that's your response?

CLYDE. Look, I'm not indifferent to suffering. But I don't do pity. I just don't. And you know why? Because...dudes like you thrive on it, it's your energy source, but like fossil fuels it creates pollution. That's why.

Clyde laughs and lights a cigarette. She finds herself amusing.

MONTRELLOUS. Well damn, apologies, it's only my life.

CLYDE. Whatevah. I did my time, you did your time. What the hell more do you want me to say?

MONTRELLOUS. I don't want you to say anything, I just want you to...try the sandwich.

Montrellous cuts the grilled cheese sandwich in half, passes her the plate with a sandwich.

(Sensually.) Melted cheddar, garlic butter, on toasted sourdough bread, hand baked... Try it.

SIDE A - MONTRELLOUS

START

CLYDE. You know I don't eat that fancy crap.

MONTRELLOUS. (*Seductively.*) Go on, expand yourself, it's better than that processed shit you force on e'rybody. Just taste it.

Clyde eyes Montrellous and then the sandwich.

CLYDE. Nah. I'm not hungry.

MONTRELLOUS. C'mon, one bite. It won't kill you.

CLYDE. Jesus Christ enough already.

Montrellous pushes the sandwich a little closer to Clyde.

Look, I've seen a million dudes like you. You get a little education inside, think you can buck the system, but you want my advice, don't strain yourself trying, you're too old for the rodeo.

MONTRELLOUS. It's going to be like that, huh? I don't need to know what kinda hustle you got going with those dudes from down south. But, I hear you got yourself in a little bit of...gambling debt.

CLYDE. Just keep the fuck out of it.

MONTRELLOUS. You don't need 'em. Really. You, me, a few tables, we can make this place do more than break even.

CLYDE. Excuse me, but you don't know the first thing about running a business, much less the sacrifices ya gotta make. And let me tell you something, that bitch ass sandwich ain't gonna change a damn thing.

MONTRELLOUS. If that's what you wanna believe, but there's always a way out.

CLYDE. Ha! Don't fool yourself.

A moment.

MONTRELLOUS. You know, you're a beautiful woman. Don't sell yourself short.

CLYDE. Put the mojo back in your pants, Montrellous. Not interested.

MONTRELLOUS. Why can't you just receive a compliment without it being loaded? Why do you always wanna pick a fight?

CLYDE. Whatever game you are playing at, stop it. I'm not gonna do this little tango with you. I don't need a pimp.

MONTRELLOUS. Is that what you see?

He eases the sandwich even closer to her, it appears to glow.
Stay open.

A moment. Clyde contemplates the sandwich.

CLYDE. You know that story you just told me, if it was me, you know what I would've done in your situation?

MONTRELLOUS. No, what?

CLYDE. Walked the fuck away.

MONTRELLOUS. How could I?

CLYDE. Easy. Like this.

As she leaves, Clyde extinguishes her cigarette in the sandwich, which spontaneously bursts into enormous flames.

Transition. Montrellous begins another sandwich—

END

Scene 2

Letitia (20s), direct, self-possessed, and perhaps too quick to offer an opinion, and Rafael (20s), a recovering addict who wears his emotion on his sleeve, watch as Montrellous, in master-chef mode, finishes the final touches on a sandwich. It's a heightened moment. It should feel monumental, graceful, poetry-in-motion.

LETITIA. Listen up. My perfect sandwich? I got this. Peanut butter, grape jelly wit' a touch of cinnamon and nutmeg.

MONTRELLOUS and RAFAEL. Oooo.

RAFAEL. Cubano sandwich, with sour pickles, jalapeno aioli, and...and sweet onions.

LETITIA. Yo!

MONTRELLOUS. Nice.

Rafael shoots Letitia a triumphant glance.

LETITIA. Okay. What about a tuna melt, red onions, tomatoes... heirloom, romaine lettuce—

Scene 3

Radio plays. Letitia does a fun, sexy dance, tightening an apron around her waist to accentuate her swaying hips and add a little style to her work ensemble. She wears a hairnet over her elaborate braids. Rafael gives playboy attitude, though his game is a little lame. He wears a red bandanna around his head.

Rafael meticulously salts the chicken breasts, then turns them on the grill, salts the other side.

Letitia preps a sandwich.

SIDE B - TISH/RAF

START RAFAEL. Whatcha do last night? I rang you twice.

LETITIA. Never mind what I did, it was done.

RAFAEL. You missed out.

LETITIA. So it goes.

RAFAEL. (*Flirtatiously.*) No really. You...missed...out!

LETITIA. Guess I did. But, I had real things to do.

RAFAEL. You gonna ask me what you missed?

LETITIA. Nope.

RAFAEL. A'ight. But, you missed...la celebración.

Rafael does a show dance.

LETITIA. (*Flirtatiously.*) Okay. Whatevah.

RAFAEL. Your loss, mama. You're chasing ants, I can teach you to catch fireflies.

LETITIA. Guess what? Not interested.

RAFAEL. // Oh really?

LETITIA. So take my number out ya speed dial.

A hand posts a new order.

CLYDE. (*Offstage.*) Look alive in there!

Letitia rips down the order. Reads.

LETITIA. Oh, c'mon. Really? What do that say?

RAFAEL. Lemme see. Damn, shit, dunno.

Rafael attempts to decipher the order.

That... Uh, that look like a C and a...J, so it gotta be the fiery Cajun turkey wrap.

Letitia sucks her teeth.

LETITIA. You better be right! (*Frustrated.*) Damn, that woman loves messing with us.

Letitia, frustrated, takes it out on the bread and turkey meat, angrily preparing the sandwich.

RAFAEL. Oh my God.

LETITIA. What?!

RAFAEL. Slow down. Remember what Montrellous said 'bout preparing a sandwich. There's too much anger in your fingers, girl. The sandwich is your pulpit, it's where you preach the gospel of good eating.

LETITIA. I know, I know he always be saying that, but I don't really get what he means. It's like bla bla bla. Sandwich. Whatevah.

Letitia resets.

RAFAEL. Relax. It's all about the process, mami.

Letitia hurries through making the sandwich.

LETITIA. Clyde don't have time for process. Nobody cares as long as it tastes right.

A hand posts two more orders. Rafael rips them down and reads.

RAFAEL. What? For real? Oh hell no!

LETITIA. What?

RAFAEL. The double bacon blue cheese burger and cheesy bacon fries. Extra sauce. (*A string of Spanish expletives.*) I feel like the fucking hangman. Why does Clyde keep this shit on the menu?

LETITIA. Monty be trying. You know, he still thinks we can turn this joke into a real spot.

RAFAEL. Yeah, right.

LETITIA. Like that joint on the hill that got that write-up in the *Sentinel*.

RAFAEL. It ain't gonna happen. Clyde launders money for some pendejo from down south.

LETITIA. You're lying.

RAFAEL. You seen them? They are from the underworld. Like seriously el inframundo. I looked into this one dude's eyes, and it was like staring into the abyss.

LETITIA. The what?

RAFAEL. Abysssss.

END

Rafael places chicken breasts in the fryer, it sizzles ominously. Just then, Jason, late twenties, moody, white supremacist tats on his face, enters tying his apron. Letitia and Rafael stop what they're doing and stare.

LETITIA. Who you? Where's Ronnie?

JASON. Who?

LETITIA. Ronnie Golmolka?

JASON. I dunno, was told to come back here by Clyde.

RAFAEL. Clyde?

JASON. Yeah.

LETITIA. Ain't nobody said shit to us. This is Ronnie's shift.

JASON. I don't know anything about that. But, Clyde said Ronnie was in violation. Got picked up. Possession. That's all I heard.

LETITIA. Damn! When?

RAFAEL. Coño. Knew it. Told ya.

LETITIA. // Damn.

They look at Jason.

So, you know what you doing?

JASON. Yeah. Got trained over the weekend.

LETITIA. By who?!

JASON. Dunno, some guy who smells like patchouli and canola oil.

They always say Montrellous's name like he is a high holy man.

LETITIA and RAFAEL. Montrellous.

RAFAEL. Man, you're lucky.

SIDE C - J/R/T

START JASON. So, where do I go?

LETITIA. Nowhere, as far as I'm concerned. We don't do that gang bullshit here.

JASON. Whatever. I'm not looking for trouble.

Rafael stares at Jason, assessing.

(To Rafael.) What do you want? You the dishwasher?

RAFAEL. Do I look like the muthafucking dishwasher? I'm a sous-chef, bitch...but for now we're all just line cooks. The grill and fryer are mines. This is my territory, like the yard. Don't step across the line. Got it. Tish is on prep.

LETITIA. This mine.

Letitia draws an air square around her area.

JASON. Yeah, so what—

LETITIA. Golmolka, he also on prep. But, we all gotta do the sandwiches, cuz we're known for our sandwiches. But, when Montrellous is here—

RAFAEL and LETITIA. We watch.

JASON. Yeah, I heard they got truckers drive miles outta their way for sandwiches.

RAFAEL and LETITIA. Miles!

RAFAEL. None of us know what Montrellous does or how he does it, but all I know is you gotta respect it.

JASON. We're talking about a sandwich, right?

RAFAEL. *(Snaps.)* Don't say that! When you taste his food you'll understand.

JASON. Understand what?

RAFAEL. Ohhh. That it ain't just about the sandwich.

LETITIA. Montrellous is a sensei. Drops garlic aioli like a realness bomb. He knows what we only wish to know.

JASON. What the fuck are you guys talking about?

RAFAEL. *(Like a revelation.)* A little salt makes the food taste good, too much salt makes the food inedible.

JASON. No shit.

RAFAEL. But, really think about it.

JASON. Okay, whatever. Just tell me where I stand.

RAFAEL. Over there. No. There. And dude wash your fuckin' hands.

Jason washes his hands.

Hey you got a name?

JASON. Jason.

RAFAEL. I'm Rafael.

LETITIA. Letitia. But, people call me Tish.

JASON. Good to meet y'all.

LETITIA. We'll see about that. **END**

RAFAEL. So... Where you serve?

JASON. Upstate.

Letitia sizes him up.

LETITIA. Yeah. Shoulda guessed. You're one of them.

JASON. Nah, I'm just Jason. All right. Left the bullshit inside. I'm not looking to stir the pot. I wanna paycheck and peace.

LETITIA. That's what you all say. We'll see how long you last.

RAFAEL. I give you like three months, and you're back in.

LETITIA. Three. I give 'em two weeks. Haaaa!

JASON. Ain't gonna happen.

LETITIA. HmmMmm. Okay. Heard that before. Ask Golmolka, he was a haughty bitch like you.

Clyde pops up in the pass-through window armed with an order ticket, catching the crew off guard. Letitia and Jason both reach for the ticket, ending up in an uncomfortable proximity.

Sweetheart, we don't have time for socializing. We ain't on a date. Pans and utensils get scrapped and go in the machine. Ovah there. We move fast, so keep the fuck up. No time for breastfeeding or babysitting. You got it?

Scene 4

Another day.

Jason struggles through making a sandwich. It's a mess. He licks his fingers clean, then continues making the sandwich.

Letitia stares at Jason. Disbelief! Rafael silently flips burgers and chicken breasts on the grill.

SIDE D - JASON/TISH

START LETITIA. Oh my God.

JASON. What?

LETITIA. Whatevah.

JASON. Is there something I can help you with?

LETITIA. I don't think so!

JASON. Something wrong? Every time I look up you're staring at me.

LETITIA. Well excuse me, if you don't wanna be looked at I suggest you make better cosmetic choices.

JASON. You know what?

LETITIA. What?

JASON. Fuck off.

LETITIA. Oooo. That language don't help, it's like hostile, and its implications made me feel, like, unvalidated. All right! I'm sensitive. And I don't have time for it.

JASON. Fuck off.

LETITIA. What's your problem?!

JASON. I don't have a problem.

LETITIA. Clearly you does.

JASON. I'm just trying to do my job. You're not gonna get into my head. Okay.

LETITIA. I didn't start this conversating.

JASON. You know what, can we make this a quiet space?

Letitia sucks her teeth.

...

Letitia sucks her teeth again.

They prep food in silence.

LETITIA. So, what's up with them tats? **END**

JASON. We talking again?

LETITIA. Hey Rafael, what was that dude's name? The one Clyde fired?

RAFAEL. Jeff Babbit.

They have a opinion about Jeff, and it's not good.

LETITIA. Yeah Jeff.

RAFAEL. Jeff.

LETITIA. JEFF-REY.

RAFAEL. Jeffrey.

LETITIA. He had to go—

RAFAEL. Cuz he was, like, this close to getting hurt.

LETITIA. He was a nasty one. Had them gang tats like yours. Liked to flex his “muscles.” Stupid ass thought he was still in the prison yard. That shit don't fly 'round here.

JASON. You don't know anything about me.

LETITIA. That's what you think. I been around. I know all about breaking wild white horses.

JASON. Look. Good for you. I don't bother you, you don't bother me.

LETITIA. Well, you need to—

JASON. This is my lane, that's your lane. Can we like respect each other's lanes, keep moving, no talk—

LETITIA. I certainly don't need to talk to you, Mr. At-ti-tude...Mr. Ta-toos. Mr.—

JASON. Enough! Fucking hell. What's your problem?

LETITIA. Tone?! Tats! You started this conversating. I was like minding my own business. Thank you. I'm gonna be quiet, cuz I don't got nothing more to say to you.

JASON. Thank you! Can I focus on my food? Jesus!

LETITIA. And btw, you need to shower.

JASON. That qualifies as talking.

LETITIA. Somebody needed to tell you. I'm done talking. Right, Rafael?

RAFAEL. A shower with soap. It's true. Don't be afraid to make soap your friend.

Rafael and Letitia laugh.

JASON. Ha, ha, ha. You guys done?

A moment. They make sandwiches. Jason slaps a mess of pickles onto the sandwich, and then slathers it with creamy Parmesan dressing.

LETITIA. Yo, yo, yo. Hold up. Hold up.

JASON. What now?!

LETITIA. You ain't doing that right. Why are you putting pickle relish on that sandwich? And so you know, you're not supposed to put that sauce on there. Is that the creamy Parmesan?

JASON. Yeah.

RAFAEL. Aw shit!

LETITIA. That's what I thought. You know, if somebody got hypertension, that sauce on that sandwich right there will kill 'em. Seriously!

RAFAEL. Homicide. Fourteen years to life. Right there, baby!

LETITIA. Cuz you know that's what happened to a guy—

RAFAEL. In August.

LETITIA. The bacon chili cheeseburger with—

RAFAEL. Extra pickles. // Died—

START LETITIA. Died in the cab of his truck. Five bites. Salt. Fat. Bacon, chili, beef. Bam. Dead before 911 even got dialed. Hypertension. That's what they said. You want that shit on your conscience?

JASON. Who gives a fuck?

Jason makes a show of wrapping the burger in wax paper.

LETITIA. Clearly not you. Let it be, but it's gonna get sent back, cuz it ain't right. But, that's on you. I don't give a fuck. Hey Rafael, you give a fuck?

RAFAEL. Nah.

SIDE E - TISH

LETITIA. And you know how Clyde do when you don't get it right?

RAFAEL. She yell at you, and then she don't pay you.

LETITIA. Okay. See. But, you don't give a fuck! Whatever your name is. I'm not even gonna bother to ask you again, cuz I know you won't be here for but a minute.

A moment. Rafael and Letitia make a show of watching Jason assemble the sandwich.

Now you're just disrespectin' the lettuce.

JASON. Okay. You win. Tell me again, what am I supposed to put on it?

LETITIA. Oh now you want to know?

JASON. Yeah.

LETITIA. Is that the Manuel Luis Echegoyen La Fiesta Burger?

JASON. Yeah.

LETITIA. Three jalapeños, avocado, a tomato, lettuce—

RAFAEL. Cotija, onion, a dab of salsa verde and cilantro—

LETITIA. And, no fucking pickle relish!

Jason remakes the sandwich. Letitia watches.

That's it. Respect the recipe.

RAFAEL. There it is!

LETITIA. R-E-S-P-E-C-T!

RAFAEL. That sandwich was invented by Manuel Luis Echegoyen. It's one of our classics. // Yeah.

LETITIA. You want no problems, you stick with the recipe and Clyde won't give you no trouble. And believe me, you don't want trouble with that chick, cuz she's cray-cray.

RAFAEL. You'll see. Don't ask her nothing. Nada. And bro don't smile, cuz she don't like for nobody to be happy. Straight face. Don't even lift the corners of your mouth. Nothing!

LETITIA. Cuz if you're like me, you need this joint. You been out there, right?

JASON. Yeah.

LETITIA. You know what it's like. Ain't shit but misery. Seven

months ago, I got out, that cold wind hit me hard, and things got real real. Seventy-five dollars in my pocket, nobody to hold my hand, nobody to say it's gonna be okay baby. I dialed the same number you dialed. And Clyde answered. And let me tell you something, you here cuz you done run outta options, ain't nobody gonna hire you except for Clyde. Especially you. The way you is. Cuz if you here, you done something. We all done something. And we just biding our time 'til we can get to another place.

RAFAEL. Straight up.

LETITIA. No, Clyde ain't nice, she may make ya crawl before ya walk. But, she knows the deal, she's the gatekeeper. And ain't no getting around it, so that muthafucking creamy Parmesan don't go on nothing but the Roma Mama Chicken Wrap. Comprende?

JASON. Yeah, I got it.

LETITIA. That's right.

END

Jason finishes making the sandwich. Letitia rings the pick-up bell.

Transition.

Scene 5

Time has passed.

Rafael works the grill and all of the prep stations alone. The tickets keep piling up. He's frantic. Rushing. Sweating.

It is a mad virtuosic dance to keep ahead of the tickets.

Jason, hot and bothered, enters.

RAFAEL. Jesus, you're late. We're getting backed up. Quick, quick. Get on your apron.

JASON. Fucking Clyde.

RAFAEL. // Where you been?

JASON. I just asked for an advance to fill up my tank.

RAFAEL. C'mon, move it.

JASON. A simple request. And you know what she says? Walk. Walk. What's her deal?

RAFAEL. You gotta earn her trust. That's how she works, bro.

JASON. I mean, c'mon. I had to walk like eleven miles to get here. FUCKING BITCH!

Jason puts on his apron.

RAFAEL. Dude, don't even say that shit out loud, because I swear to God she can hear through walls. You call her bitch and she will eviscerate you.

He makes gestures with knives.

She don't play that sexist bullshit.

CLYDE. (Offstage.) Jason!

RAFAEL. Oh shit.

CLYDE. (Offstage.) Jason!

RAFAEL. Oh no. You're in trouble now.

Jason smiles.

Don't smile. (Whispers.) I'm serious, it makes her crazy.

Clyde comes barreling in. She takes a sip of her beer, studying Jason and Rafael.

(Whispers.) Don't smile.

SIDE F - JASON

CLYDE. What the hell's going on? How come there's no food coming outta my kitchen? What's burning on the grill? Rafael?

RAFAEL. ...

CLYDE. You!

JASON. ...

CLYDE. You!

JASON. Yeah?

CLYDE. Jason.

JASON. Yeah.

CLYDE. Aggravated assault. Right?

JASON. Something like that.

CLYDE. So, you couldn't keep your hands to yourself? I hear you're a real tough one. See you were messing with that gang shit.

JASON. Not really.

CLYDE. You gonna make this work or what?

JASON. Yeah, whatever.

CLYDE. Cuz I'm talking doesn't mean you stop working.

JASON. Okay.

CLYDE. You want Rafael to run down the rules?

JASON. Nah. I got it.

CLYDE. He tell you what happens if I catch any of you morons stealing? Breaking my rules?

JASON. Yeah.

CLYDE. I don't go to the police. I deal with it my way. Understand?

JASON. I understand.

Jason involuntarily smiles.

CLYDE. Do you? Then what the hell are ya smiling at?

JASON. Nothing.

CLYDE. Oh, I'm nothing?!

Clyde takes a sip of her beer.

Don't look at me like you wanna fuck me. I bet you haven't seen pussy in a long time. That's right, I said it.

JASON. I'm not—

CLYDE. How long were you inside? Don't tell me you're not horny as a muthafucka.

JASON. Really?!

CLYDE. I'm playing with you. Ease up. You're cute. C'mon, I'm just playing with you. **END**

Clyde slaps Jason's ass.

JASON. Don't they got laws about that kinda thing.

CLYDE. You gonna call the police?

She slaps Jason on the ass again and grabs his butt cheeks.

Oh c'mon lighten up, I'm playing with you. And where's Tish? Huh?

CLYDE. The hell if I know.

LETITIA. What are we supposed to do with it?

CLYDE. Figure it out. You're welcome. Playtime is over. I'm losing money. Don't gimme that look, if you don't like the way I run things, you're welcome to leave, but good luck with that.

Clyde laughs and finally leaves.

SIDE G - RAFAEL

START RAFAEL. Hijo de puta. How the fuck did we get stuck here?

JASON. Tell me about it.

RAFAEL. You know I tried for like two months to get another gig, and Clyde's the only person who would even look me in the eye.

LETITIA. Yup! Real talk!

JASON. Dude, why were you locked up?

RAFAEL. I held up a bank.

JASON. No shit.

RAFAEL. Yeah.

LETITIA. That's gangsta, right.

RAFAEL. If only.

JASON. How long you serve?

RAFAEL. Too long.

JASON. Where they have you?

RAFAEL. Frackville.

JASON. No way.

RAFAEL. Yeah. I was strung out, thought I could withdraw money from Wells Fargo with my nephew's BB gun. I don't know what I was thinking. Downtown. Six days before Christmas. I was like outta my head with love. I had all these big muthafucking plans. I was gonna buy my girl a dog, but not like any dog, it cost like fifteen hundred dollars.

JASON. Why didn't you just go to the pound?

RAFAEL. It was like a pure breed. A Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, bitch. You can't get that at no pound. So, middle of the day, I go into the bank, pull out my gun, and I say shit like from the movies. "Everyone put your hands up this is a robbery!" I was so high, bro,

I shot one of the security guards in the mouth with the BB, that got me like an extra year for assault. The BB like cracked his tooth and got caught in the back of his throat and he started to choke. And I had to like do the muthafuckin' Heimlich on this dude. And then the police was on me so fast, I didn't have time to blink. It was like "blink!" I'm cuffed and a felon. That shit's true.

JASON. Not true!

RAFAEL. True. I'm a romantic. I love with every part of my body. What can I tell you, dope makes you do dumb ass shit.

JASON. (*Jokingly.*) So, you know where I can get some?

RAFAEL. Shut up. Don't wanna hear it. I'm totally clean. Sober. There it is baby!

Rafael takes out his medallion, kisses it and then shows it to Jason. Rafael's cell phone rings. He answers.

No, who's this? You called me. I didn't call you. No, I didn't call you muthafucka—

LETITIA. Is that Keith? Gimme the phone.

Letitia grabs the phone.

(*On phone.*) Keith! How come you didn't answer? Just answer when I call you, I don't care if you don't recognize the number. Rafael! No, he's not my man. // No, I said he's not my man.

RAFAEL. I could be.

LETITIA. (*On phone.*) What if it was an emergency? Well, it could have been. Yes. Yes. NO! I just wanted to make sure that you feed Carmen. Just feed her! I don't need to know that. No McDonald's bullshit this time. Real food. Fruit. Vegetables. Goodbye.

Letitia hands Rafael back his phone.

Oh my God. He's soooo stupid.

RAFAEL. Everything okay?

LETITIA. Yeah. Thanks Rafael.

RAFAEL. You know, this wouldn't happen if you had somebody to—

LETITIA. No // no.

RAFAEL. Your mistake. I can give you excellent references. Satisfaction guaranteed.

Scene 8

Montrellous meticulously prepares a sandwich. Rafael, Jason, and Letitia watch. The symphony.

Montrellous cuts the sandwich into four sections.

MONTRELLOUS. Take in that aroma. What do you smell?

Montrellous passes around a sprig of thyme and a chili pepper. They each take a turn smelling it.

That thyme is from the garden that I planted out back this spring. A lil bit of sunshine and rainwater and there you go. Look at that color. Dope, right?

RAFAEL. Damn!

MONTRELLOUS. It took two months to grow. From the soil, to my hand, to a stranger's mouth where it will awaken a new sensation. Try it. C'mon, quickly, quickly, before Clyde docks our pay.

They each take a section of the sandwich. Bite in. Ecstasy.

JASON. What the hell?!

RAFAEL. Seriously?! // Unbelievable. **SIDE H - MONTRELLOUS**

LETITIA. Damn, I don't understand what I'm eating? It's like, like heaven.

START MONTRELLOUS. Yeah. I've been experimenting with that sandwich. Simplicity. New flavor profiles. I baked the bread myself. Herb focaccia.

RAFAEL. What is this?

MONTRELLOUS. Grilled halloumi.

JASON. THIS is everything!

MONTRELLOUS. Beautiful. I'm glad you dig it. You know why I love the sandwich, cuz it's a complete meal that you can hold between your fingers. It's the most democratic of all foods. Two pieces of bread, and between, you can put anything you want. It invites invention and collaboration.

RAFAEL. Jesus, I make a sandwich every day, but somehow your shit always tastes like the truth.

MONTRELLOUS. It's about order, baby. I'm interested in the composition, it's not merely about flavor. Dig? I think about the balance of ingredients and the journey I want the consumer to take with each bite. Then finally how I can achieve oneness with the sandwich.

LETITIA. I've been trying to do what you say, but—

MONTRELLOUS. It's because you bring all the chaos from home into this kitchen.

LETITIA. I try not to.

MONTRELLOUS. Let it go for two minutes, Tish. Be here and nowhere else, let whatever you're feeling become part of your process, not an impediment.

LETITIA. I'm like trying, but I can't shake what's out there. I'm supporting all of them on this gig. And everybody wants something that I can't give 'em. And my baby's daddy is like hittin' me up for money and pressuring me to move back in.

MONTRELLOUS. I hear you. But, think about your daughter, what if you could create something perfect for her? Something that reflects your love. What if you took the few minutes it takes to really prepare that sandwich? What if you decided to say with every drop of your special sauce "I love you, Carmen." What if this sandwich represented your love. Think about it. When I made that sandwich, you know what I was thinking?

LETITIA. No, what?

MONTRELLOUS. This sandwich is my strength. This sandwich is my victory. This sandwich is my freedom.

Tears well up in Letitia's eyes. She cries.

LETITIA. I'm trying.

MONTRELLOUS. And what I find is that you gotta surprise yourself with an ingredient that shouldn't work, something that pulls it all together. Think about that challenging flavor that's gonna defy expectation, and elevate your sandwich, even if the mouth tasting it doesn't receive it that way.

LETITIA. Yeah. I hear you.

MONTRELLOUS. You know, I've tried to share this with Clyde,

you know, get her in the kitchen to feel the ingredients between her fingers. Make her see that this sandwich is the culmination of a long hard journey that began with a wheat seed cultivated by a farmer thousands of years ago.

JASON. (*A revelation.*) Whoa!

MONTRELLOUS. Have another bite.

END

Jason bites into the sandwich.

JASON. Can you show me how to make that sandwich?

MONTRELLOUS. I can show you how to make it, but balance is as important as imbalance. Where my hand leads, may not be where your hand takes you. It's the intangible grace of flavors and aromas that tell your story, and that's only achieved through practice.

JASON. What if I can't do it?

MONTRELLOUS. You can.

RAFAEL. Man, don't sweat it, I've been trying for almost eight months to capture somethin' like that joint right there. But, I don't get it. I just don't fucking get it.

MONTRELLOUS. You will.

RAFAEL. And if I don't.

MONTRELLOUS. All you can do is control the intention. You'll get there, baby.

JASON. Are you this smooth all the time? Cuz your lady must, like, love you.

MONTRELLOUS. She does.

LETITIA. Yo, hold up, Monty I didn't know you had a lady.

MONTRELLOUS. Yeah.

RAFAEL. Yeah?

MONTRELLOUS. Vanessa.

LETITIA. Where have you been hiding Ms. Vanessa? How come we don't know about her?

MONTRELLOUS. Now you do.

RAFAEL. I bet she's fine.

MONTRELLOUS. Let me tell you something about Vanessa. She's

RAFAEL. I thought it was good.

LETITIA. I'm sorry. I'm not gonna get there. And Montrellous don't tell me I will. Just stop.

Letitia can't fight back the emotions. Tears.

MONTRELLOUS. Hey. Hey. Don't give up. You know, cooking—

LETITIA. I don't want to hear it. It's like, I can't!

MONTRELLOUS. Okay.

LETITIA. I mean, I'm like no further along than I was six months ago. I'm gonna be thirty on Friday, and I can't even make a sandwich taste right. Yesterday, I caught my daughter staring at me, and I kept thinking what does she see when she looks at me? This woman who can't even hold it together.

RAFAEL. We all got them days.

LETITIA. But, it's like every day.

Bell rings.

SIDE I - MONTRELLOUS

Montrellous takes the slip and begins to prepare a sandwich as he speaks. Frustrated, Letitia butchers a head of lettuce.

START MONTRELLOUS. A couple months after I got out, I sank into a very deep place. I couldn't see beyond my depression. I couldn't bear it. And then one day I walked into the supermarket, and I saw this absolutely perfect artichoke. It was beautiful. Green. Symmetrical. A grace note. And I needed to have it. And when I got home I stared at it for a long time, then realized I didn't know what the hell to do with an artichoke. So I went online, found a recipe. The five easy steps to preparing an artichoke.

Montrellous takes the knife from Letitia's hand.

And I began to clip the petals. Soaked 'em in lemon water. Steamed 'em, then ate it. And I realized there must be other things in the produce section that I've never tasted. And the next day I went back, and soon I found that going to the supermarket gave me this...renewed sense of purpose, I wanted to find the most perfect things to combine to make something delicious. I could spend an hour studying the produce, smelling it, feeling it, thinking about its journey, all the hands that touched it. And then I'd go home and prepare a meal for myself and my lady, that made me happy. And

slowly those meals for us resurrected my spirit. It awakened something. Until then, I thought I needed more to give me joy, to complete me. And right then, I understood that the most essential thing, sustenance, was enough to make me content. Here.

Montrellous hands the knife to Letitia.

Do you want to help me?

END

Montrellous slows Letitia's hands, she gets into a more even and relaxed rhythm of cutting.

LETITIA. Thank you.

RAFAEL. Hey Tish. I know Friday's your birthday, and if you ain't doing nothing, I'd like to help you celebrate.

LETITIA. I dunno.

RAFAEL. Why not?

LETITIA. Cuz.

RAFAEL. Cuz, you ain't got nothing to wear.

LETITIA. I got stuff to wear.

RAFAEL. Then what?

LETITIA. ...

RAFAEL. I will turn it out. You ain't seen me on a Friday night.

LETITIA. I can imagine.

RAFAEL. I don't think you got that much imagination, mami, otherwise you'd already woulda said yes.

LETITIA. Oh, please.

RAFAEL. Why not?

LETITIA. Okay... Maybe.

RAFAEL. I can work with maybe. You won't regret it!

Transition.

lick her wounds. She's out there recharging her battery. Trust me, she's gonna make our lives hell.

JASON. Shit, can't get any worse than it is.

LETITIA. Oh yes, it can.

JASON. Well, I already had a bad ass day. It rained last night, and all of my stuff got soaked, and then when I woke up, some drunk had swiped my tarp and my burner.

LETITIA. Where the fuck do you live?!

JASON. I camp out near the Pagoda on Mount Penn.

LETITIA. Seriously, why?!

JASON. What do you care?

LETITIA. I mean like, why?

JASON. Because it's easier than shuffling around the shelter with those sickos. Okay. I don't gotta talk to anybody. Cuz, I'm talked out.

LETITIA. You ain't got nobody you can stay with?

JASON. There's my mom, but she's strung out.

LETITIA. I know how that is.

JASON. I feel safer out in the woods. And it's nice and quiet at night. Smells good. And my mom's got some fuckin' guy hanging around, I don't like 'em. I know me and him gonna get into it. And I'm not looking to give 'em reasons to trip me up. I see guys come out, and like a month later they're back in cuz of petty shit.

START

LETITIA. Word. My ex. Keith. When I got released I thought we could, you know, work it out. I thought he'd be all happy and whatnot. Ten days home, it became real obvious that he had no interest in being a lover, being a parent, being a participant in our lives. Only thing he was interested in was getting and staying high.

RAFAEL. I know all about that. You want me to talk to him? I can—

LETITIA. It ain't even worth the saliva.

RAFAEL. Sure it is.

LETITIA. You're sweet, isn't he sweet? But, let me tell you something I learned real quick when I got out. People like Keith don't give a shit about anything. First sign of hardship and they wanna straddle you with their misery. All they see is the fucking black hole

SIDE J - TISH

looming out there. And rather than moving away from it, they let themselves get sucked right in. A black hole. I seen that shit on television, and it's scary as hell, you know what's in a black hole?

RAFAEL. Nothing?

LETITIA. That's right motherfucking nothing. Everything that gets sucked into it gets trapped, light, gas, mass. And you know the problem with a black hole?

JASON. Nah.

LETITIA. It grows larger, it sucks you in and consumes everything around it. That's the truth. I used to be one of those people stuck in the gravitational pull. But, being incarcerated taught me two things: Number one, I love freedom and number two, you have to fight to protect your freedom—

RAFAEL. Yo.

LETITIA. Truly. Back then, I didn't get it. I was the most finger-pointing bitch you'd ever encountered. My negativity was legendary. I could pass blame like a magician. Everyone was responsible for my unhappiness, but me. And that darkness is still there, but now I can see that I can't let it or anybody get a hold of me. I'm being one hundred percent serious. But, that hole's pullin' atcha, and you don't even know it. Cuz you've been wearing that white ass male privilege for too long, it's like blinders keeping you in the darkness. But, I bet you understand something right now, prison is the great equalizer.

RAFAEL. Fuck, yeah. They strap a bag of rocks to your back, and won't never let you put 'em down.

JASON. Shit is true.

RAFAEL. Too true.

LETITIA. True. (*Whispers.*) Black hole. Fight the gravitational pull.

Rafael flips food on the grill.

Us, here. We're the resistance!

END

RAFAEL. Viva La Resistencia!

Rafael raises his spatula in the air. Jason allows himself a smile.

Transition.

SIDE K - JASON

JASON. How'd you know?

MONTRELLOUS. It's bitter, assertive. Trying too hard.

JASON. So, you don't like it.

MONTRELLOUS. I didn't say that. You want it to do too much, and didn't trust yourself with the ingredients. They're at war. Let the natural flavors do the work. You put everything into this one sandwich. Edit. Pull back. Overcomplication obscures the truth.

JASON. Do you think Clyde's right?

MONTRELLOUS. Clyde answers to people who don't want us to succeed.

JASON. But, do you think it's possible that this place could become something?!

MONTRELLOUS. It could, but whether it will, that's an entirely different story.

Jason smiles. He reveals the framed restaurant review.

START JASON. I got it framed. "Sublime."

MONTRELLOUS. Nah. You put it up someplace.

JASON. No. It's for you.

MONTRELLOUS. (*Genuinely touched.*) Thank you, man.

Montrellous examines the picture on the frame. He gathers strength from it.

JASON. No, thank you. I hate that every time I look in the mirror I see all my shit on my face. But, when I'm here I kinda forget, don't think about it.

MONTRELLOUS. Yeah, I dig it.

JASON. You don't know what this means to me.

MONTRELLOUS. I do.

JASON. I had this whole fantasy of what life was gonna be like when I got out, thought it would be easier to leave all the bad shit behind, start where I left off...you wouldn't know it, but I had a good life going before I got incarcerated. I had an apartment in the heights, for real, a 401k, then shit went south.

MONTRELLOUS. (*Reflecting on Clyde's biting words.*) Ain't that how it always goes.

JASON. (*Reflective.*) Yeah. I guess. I lost my job, got locked outta my factory by some greedy corporate assholes, and it felt like the world was over. Kept looking for people to blame. Anybody, everybody, fuck 'em all. And then when these...scabs started crossing the picket line like it was nothing, all I could think was, you can't have my vacation on Hilton Head, my Harley, my ice-cold beer after work, you can't fucking have it. And...I wanted to destroy 'em. I got drunk, like real drunk, found a bat in my hand and picked this one guy to release on.

A moment. Jason speaks as if talking to the victim.

I know I was wrong. I'm sorry. I'm so fucking stupid and sorry, and I hate thinking about it, cuz it hurts all of the time. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

END

Tears.

Jason gives Montrellous an awkward hug.

MONTRELLOUS. Hey. You wanna try that sandwich again?

JASON. Yeah.

Letitia rushes in, catching the men in the hug.

LETITIA. Oh...

Jason pulls away and goes to his station.

Sorry I was late. Had a night. My man surprised me with a cake, he never does shit like that.

JASON. I thought he was bad news.

LETITIA. Yeah he is. But, you know. Thirty! Y'all. This is what it looks like!

JASON. Happy birthday. I meant to get you something.

MONTRELLOUS. Happy birthday, baby.

Rafael enters, sullen, not his usual sunshine. He's not quite as put together as usual. He carries a teddy bear under his arm and a box of chocolates.

Hey.

RAFAEL. ...hey.

LETITIA. Hey.

JASON. Yeah it's a garnish! Fuck you!

MONTRELLOUS. We all make our choices. You never know whatcha gonna do when you meet the devil at the crossroads.

JASON. I hate this place. If I wasn't in the bar that night trying to drink myself stupid, I—

RAFAEL. We've been there. We've all done things we ain't proud of.

LETITIA. Word.

MONTRELLOUS. But, we ain't bound by our mistakes.

Montrellous has grown quiet and remote as he finishes the sandwich.

JASON. What about you? I don't get why you're stuck here.

RAFAEL. // Yeah.

LETITIA. Yeah, you've never told us what you done.

Montrellous places the sandwich in the window, rings the bell.

MONTRELLOUS. I haven't? Don't talk about it much. A couple of you know, I'm the oldest of two brothers. My mom died when I was twelve and my father wasn't the saint you'd want at a time like that. He hit the bottle hard, then slowly disappeared, until one day he was just gone. So, it was me and my little bro Darius looking out for each other. And despite all that, Darius managed to do good in school, you know get into one of those fancy prep schools, and then drag his ass through college working maintenance. He was a brilliant little dude. I watched in a constant state of wonder and admiration. Darius had one of those brains that could cut through bullshit like a laser, he knew from the time he was five exactly what he wanted. And me, I was trying to get through the day, and doing what you do to keep food in the fridge. Nothing more, nothing less. You feel me?

Montrellous voice gets tight with the emotion of the memory.

Darius got into Yale Medical School on a full scholarship. No joke! I can't tell you how proud I was, honestly I thought my heart was gonna explode. Cuz I know how hard he fought to get there. And then...three weeks before entering medical school Darius was hanging out on the hill with some of his rich white prep school friends. And he caught a ride home with this teammate, Brad Larkin, his father wuz sumptin' important in, um, banking. This white boy

SIDE L - MONTRELLOUS

START

asks Darius to hold a duffel bag for him overnight. And being the good dude that he is, Darius says “No problem.” Next day Brad calls up and asks him to drop the bag off at this bodega a few blocks from our crib. You know, Darius doesn’t think anything about it, grabs the bag, slings it over his shoulder. Gets to this bodega, and the minute he walks in, there are something like ten cops on him.

LETITIA. That’s wack.

JASON. What?!

MONTRELOUS. Ain’t it though. Turns out the bag is full of dope.

Collective moan.

Yup! His friend Brad disappears like a genie, his family won’t talk, and my brother, who never even stole a cookie from the cookie jar, is looking at serious time. There was nothing he could say, nothing he could do, cuz he got caught holding the damn bag. And this punk ass lawyer was pushing him to plea bargain and take five to seven years and shit. But, Darius wasn’t going to surrender without a fight, and I knew the fight would break him. I knew that there was no way the system was gonna let this smart young brother go. I knew the fight would change him, and that he’d never get to medical school and that would be a fucking loss. Darius had to make it. At the time, and I’m gonna be totally honest with y’all, I wasn’t in a good way, done some things I ain’t proud of. Was smoking too much weed, moving from job to job trying to keep one step ahead of anything substantial, and I was well on my way to squandering a perfectly good life. Then this happened...and...um, when I saw Darius sitting in that jail, hardening by the day, that was it. I was gonna kill somebody. I was straight up homicidal. Everything about the situation was wrong. I didn’t know what I was gonna do, but I knew I had to do something. So I walked into the DA’s office and told ’em that I’d given Darius the bag, the dope was mine and he didn’t know nothing about it. I told ’em, I was sorry but I couldn’t let him take the blame for something I’d done. Darius begged me, “Don’t do it!” but I told ’em I was willing to carry the burden so he could succeed, and the only thing I wanted in return was for him to excel. I loved him, and I believed he had more to give to the world than I did at that moment. Didn’t even go to trial, I copped a plea, did the time.

RAFAEL. And what happened to Darius?

MONTRELLOUS. He's a surgeon //

LETITIA, RAFAEL, and JASON. Ooh!

MONTRELLOUS. with Doctors Without Borders working in a refugee camp on the border of Chad and the Sudan.

LETITIA, RAFAEL, and JASON. Aah!

Gentle gasps.

MONTRELLOUS. He's saving lives every day, specializing in pediatric trauma surgery.

END

LETITIA, RAFAEL, and JASON. Wah!

Letitia gasps, this information is almost too overwhelming.

RAFAEL and JASON. Holy Shit!

MONTRELLOUS. Yes.

Letitia, Rafael, and Jason begin to cry.

LETITIA. I knew you were dope. But that may be the dopest thing I've ever heard.

JASON. That's beautiful. How the fuck are we supposed to live with ourselves?! I feel inadequate in your presence. I'm the most selfish pig.

RAFAEL. Yo.

JASON. I mean, I could never ever do anythin' like that.

MONTRELLOUS. Of course you could. Can't be afraid of the hard choices.

Jason absorbs this.

JASON. Yeah. Yeah.

Clyde reenters.

CLYDE. What the fuck is going on back here?

Clyde drops the sandwich on the counter.

Where's my relish?!

A moment.

MONTRELLOUS. Not doing it.