

LIVE AND LET DINE

A short play

by

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Characters:

Stephen
Melanie
Annie
Waiter

A nonsensical tale of dining out, secret affairs and murder with a 15% service charge.

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IT'S A RESTAURANT.

THERE ARE TWO TABLES. ANNIE SITS ALONE
AT ONE TABLE; HER ONLY COMPANY, AN
ALMOST SPENT BOTTLE OF WHITE WINE,
WHILE MARRIED COUPLE STEPHEN AND
MELANIE SIT AT THE OTHER.

MELANIE: The service in this restaurant is terrible. How long have we been waiting here now?

STEPHEN CHECKS HIS WATCH.

STEPHEN: Twenty-five seconds.

MELANIE: Disgusting.

MELANIE LOOKS ACROSS TO ANNIE, THEN
BACK TO STEPHEN. SHE'S NOT SUBTLE IN
HER PUT-DOWN OF THE LONE WOMAN.

MELANIE: Look at the state of her. She's almost conquered a bottle of wine already, and she hasn't even been served with the first course yet. Clearly a hopeless drunk.

ANNIE DOESN'T VOCALLY REACT, BUT IT'S
OBVIOUS SHE CAN HEAR THE WOMAN.

STEPHEN: Melanie, must you belittle people everywhere we go? You don't even know the lady.

MELANIE: I'll have you know I'm a very good judge of character. Remember that weird man with the camera who always stood outside the school gates? You know, the one I said was up to no good? Well, last week, the police raided his flat and discovered thousands of dodgy images on his hard drive.

STEPHEN: What, of children?

MELANIE: No. Of school gates. Turns out he had a bizarre fetish for wrought iron.

STEPHEN: Oh. Right. Takes all sorts, I suppose.

MELANIE: (INDICATES TO ANNIE) Yes. Like Betty No Mates over there. She's either been stood up or is hoping some old single saddo will pay her bill.

ANNIE: (WITH A SCOWL) I can hear you, you know.

MELANIE: Oh, good. Glad to hear my precious breath isn't being wasted.

ANNIE: It happens to be my birthday. Therefore, I'm allowed to drink as much as I like.

ANNIE DEFIANTLY POURS OUT THE LAST
REMNANTS OF THE WINE INTO HER GLASS.

MELANIE: Huh. Alcoholic.

STEPHEN: Oh, stop it, Melanie. People can't all be happily married like us.

MELANIE: Stephen, if you don't remove "happily" from that sentence, I'll report you to Trade Descriptions.

ENTER FROM STAGE LEFT, THE WAITER. HE
WALKS OVER TO MELANIE AND STEPHEN'S
TABLE. THEN UH-OH, RECOGNITION --

WAITER: Melanie? What are you doing here?

MELANIE: I was just about to ask you the same question. You told me you were a fireman.

WAITER: (RUMBLED) Oh, erm... all right, so I might have been slightly economical with the truth.

MELANIE: Slightly?

THE WAITER IS SAVED BY --

ANNIE: (WAVES A HAND) Waiter.

WAITER: (TO MELANIE AND STEPHEN) Do excuse me.

HE SCUTTLES OVER TO ANNIE'S TABLE.

ANNIE: Care to join me for a birthday drink?

WAITER: No, thank you. I don't partake in the consumption of alcohol.

FROM HIS POCKET, HE PRODUCES A SMALL BOTTLE OF MINERAL WATER.

WAITER: Mineral water is my tipple of choice. Now, is madame ready to order?

ANNIE: Not yet. But I would like another bottle of white wine. This one looks to have evaporated.

WAITER: Doesn't madame think she's had enough?

ANNIE: And doesn't sir think he should keep his big nose out of my business? I happen to be thirsty.

IN DEFIANCE, SHE DOWNS HER DRINK.

WAITER: Right you are, madame.

AND THE WAITER EXITS, STAGE LEFT.

WE NOW FOCUS ON STEPHEN AND MELANIE'S CONVERSATION.

STEPHEN: How come you know that waiter?

MELANIE: Oh.... um.... we're... old friends. We go way, way back.

STEPHEN: That's odd. You've never mentioned him before.

FEELING CORNERED, MELANIE STANDS UP.

MELANIE: You'll have to excuse me. I have a strong compulsion to touch up my make-up.

AND SHE HASTILY EXITS, STAGE LEFT.

A MOMENT LATER, THE WAITER RETURNS AND WALKS OVER TO STEPHEN'S TABLE.

WAITER: Would sir care for something to drink?

STEPHEN: Yes. A bottle of red please.

WAITER: Red wine coming up.

ANNIE: Oi! Where's my wine?

WAITER: Patience is a virtue, madame.

AND HE EXITS AGAIN, STAGE LEFT. NOW IT'S JUST STEPHEN AND ANNIE.

ANNIE SCOWLS AT STEPHEN.

ANNIE: Stephen, what the bloody hell are you playing at? You were supposed to meet me here tonight...

OHHHH. THE PLOT THICKENS.

ANNIE: ...straight after ending it with your wife.

STEPHEN: Yes. I know. But things didn't quite go to plan.

ANNIE: Hah, I'll say. At what point did, "Sorry, darling, I'm leaving you for another woman," become, "Hey, darling, I've got a terrific idea. Let's dine out at the exact same restaurant where I'm planning to hook up with my mistress?"

STEPHEN: Oh, Annie, I do apologise, but it was the wife's decision to come here. She would have grown suspicious if I'd suggested eating elsewhere.

ANNIE: Shhh! The waiter's coming back.

ANNIE AND STEPHEN ACT INNOCENT AS THE
WAITER RETURNS WITH TWO OPENED BOTTLES
OF WINE. HE POURS THE RED WINE INTO
BOTH STEPHEN AND MELANIE'S GLASSES.

WAITER: There you go, sir. The finest red wine.

STEPHEN: Oh. You've already opened it. Aren't you supposed to do that at the table and let me smell the cork?

WAITER: No can do, sir. Health and safety. Last week, a customer got the cork stuck in one of his nostrils. I had no choice but to perform the Heimlich manoeuvre.

STEPHEN: Bet he was glad you were there to save his life.

WAITER: Not really. The cork shot into his wife's mouth and choked her to death.

STEPHEN STARES AT HIM, AGHAST.

THE WAITER LEAVES THE BOTTLE ON
STEPHEN'S TABLE, THEN SAILS OVER TO
ANNIE AND FILLS HER GLASS WITH THE
FRESH BOTTLE OF WHITE.

WAITER: And the finest white wine for you, madame.

ANNIE: About time too.

HE PUTS DOWN THE BOTTLE AND WALKS
TOWARDS STAGE LEFT. THERE, HE MEETS
MELANIE RETURNING FROM THE LADIES.
ANXIOUS, HE STOPS HER.

WAITER: Melanie, we need to talk.

MELANIE: Careful, they'll hear us.

THEY LOOK ACROSS TO ANNIE AND STEPHEN
WHO BOTH SIT IN SILENCE, DRINKING THEIR
WINE, STARING INTO SPACE. GOOD, THE
COAST IS CLEAR. WE NOW CONCENTRATE ON
MELANIE AND THE WAITER'S CONVERSATION.

WAITER: What in God's name are you doing, flaunting another man in front of my face? Or is this all part of your sick plan to make me jealous?

MELANIE: Oh, don't be so paranoid. Besides, he's not just another man. Stephen happens to be my husband.

WAITER: You didn't tell me you were married.

MELANIE: Well, if you'd been more truthful about your choice of career the night you talked me into bed, we wouldn't now be in this situation.

WAITER: Oh, have it your own way.

THE WAITER STORMS OFF, STAGE LEFT.
MELANIE RETURNS TO HER TABLE. SHE ROLLS
HER EYES AS SHE POINTS TO THE BOTTLE.

MELANIE: Stephen, what the hell is this?

STEPHEN: A bottle of wine.

MELANIE: I meant the colour. What made you ask for red? You know I planned on ordering sea bass tonight.

STEPHEN: So?

MELANIE: Oh, for....! Red goes with meat dishes. White wine is served with fish.

STEPHEN: Now you're just being pernickety. (MOCKING VOICE)
Red wine for this, white wine for that, whine,
whine, whine. (END MOCKING VOICE)

HE STANDS UP.

STEPHEN: What does it matter? It all goes down the same way.

MELANIE: Now where are you going?

AS HE HEADS STAGE LEFT --

STEPHEN: Little boy's room.

MELANIE: (UNDER HER BREATH) That'll be right.

MELANIE LOOKS AWAY AND SIPS HER WINE.

BEFORE STEPHEN CAN LEAVE THE STAGE, THE
WAITER RETURNS AND STOPS HIM.

OKAY, HERE'S WHERE IT GETS A LITTLE
COMPLICATED. TWO CONVERSATIONS NOW
BEGIN, ONE WITH MELANIE AND ANNIE, THE
OTHER WITH STEPHEN AND THE WAITER. WE
HEAR BOTH CONVERSATIONS PLAY OUT
EXACTLY AS IT IS WRITTEN. HOWEVER, THE
IDENTICAL LINES ARE NOT SPOKEN
TOGETHER. THEY FOLLOW EACH OTHER.

WAITER: Stephen, why did you come here tonight?

ANNIE: Melanie, why did you come here tonight?

AH, SO THEY KNOW EACH OTHER.

STEPHEN: (TO WAITER) To make you jealous.

MELANIE: (TO ANNIE) To make you jealous.

WAITER: (TO STEPHEN) You're supposed to be my lover.

ANNIE: (TO MELANIE) You're supposed to be my lover.

OH! THEY'RE SAME-SEX LOVERS.

STEPHEN: (TO WAITER) It's over between us.

MELANIE: (TO ANNIE) It's over between us.

THE WAITER LOOKS DEVASTATED.

WAITER: (TO STEPHEN) I thought you loved me.

ANNIE IS UPSET. SHE STANDS UP.

ANNIE: (TO MELANIE) I thought you loved me.

STEPHEN: (TO WAITER) My heart belongs to another.

STEPHEN QUICKLY LEAVES, STAGE LEFT.

MELANIE: (TO ANNIE) My heart belongs to another.

ANNIE BURSTS INTO TEARS AS SHE RUNS
PAST THE WAITER AND EXITS, STAGE LEFT.

AND IT'S THE END OF THE DUAL
CONVERSATIONS.

THE WAITER SHRUGS AWAY HIS HEARTBREAK -
SOD THIS - AND APPROACHES MELANIE. AS
SHE STANDS UP AND FACES HIM, HE
ROMANTICALLY TAKES HER IN HIS ARMS.

WAITER: Melanie, my sweet. We have an opportunity to run away together into the night.

MELANIE: But... we can't.

WAITER: Why not?

MELANIE: Well, for starters, you haven't even told me your name. I only know you as Waiter.

WAITER: That's because my actual given name is Waiter.
Waiter Waight, to be exact.

MELANIE: What?

WAITER: Blame my father. He always wanted a son who would follow him into the restaurant industry.

MELANIE: I... don't know what to say.

WAITER: No need to utter a word, my dear. Kiss me and say you'll be mine.

HE'S JUST ABOUT TO PLANT A KISS UPON
HER LIPS WHEN --

-- STEPHEN AND ANNIE RETURN. THEY'RE
BOTH NOT BEST PLEASED AS THEY MARCH
OVER TO THE EMBRACING PAIR.

STEPHEN: Unhand her, you brute. That's my wife.

WAITER: Not for much longer. We've been seeing each other behind your back. And tonight is the night we plan to elope.

STEPHEN: Melanie, have you been knocking him off?

ANNIE: (TO MELANIE) Unhand him, you little trollop. You are going nowhere with that waiter.

MELANIE AND THE WAITER BREAK THE EMBRACE.

MELANIE: Swivel on it, Annie. You're just jealous because you're not married.

ANNIE: Hah, spoiler alert. That waiter you think you know so well... is my husband.

BOTH MELANIE AND STEPHEN ARE SHOCKED.

MELANIE: Annie, have you been knocking him off?

ANNIE: Yes. And I plan to rekindle our marriage.

STEPHEN: Annie, you can't. We're supposed to be having an affair.

MELANIE: Stephen, have you been knocking her off?

WAITER: Annie, have you been knocking him off?

ANNIE: Stephen, I only went with you to get close to your wife.

MELANIE: Yeah, we've been secret lovers for months.

STEPHEN: Melanie, have you been knocking her off?

WAITER: Annie, have you been knocking her off?

STEPHEN: Waiter, forget Annie. I didn't mean what I said earlier. I love you.

ANNIE: Waiter, have you been knocking him off?

MELANIE: Stephen, have you been knocking him off?

WAITER: We've all been knocking each other off, left, right and centre, and I've had enough of it. This is the very reason why I did what I did. To nip it all in the bud.

MELANIE: What do you mean you did what you did?

WAITER: (WITH A GRIN) You'll find out soon enough.

GROGGY AND CONFUSED, ANNIE, MELANIE AND
STEPHEN BEGIN TO SWAY AND STUMBLE.

MELANIE: I feel dizzy.

STEPHEN: So do I.

ANNIE: Me too.

THEY STAGGER TO THEIR CHAIRS AND SIT
DOWN, NOT LOOKING AT ALL WELL.

ANNIE: Waiter, what have you done to us?

WAITER: Can't you guess? I've poisoned your wine.

THE WAITER CHUCKLES AS HE PRODUCES HIS
BOTTLE OF MINERAL WATER AND TAKES A
SWIG.

STEPHEN AND MELANIE SLUMP FORWARD ONTO
THE TABLE, DEAD.

ANNIE SLUMPS ON HER TABLE, BUT BEFORE
SHE MEETS HER MAKER, SHE HAS JUST
ENOUGH STRENGTH LEFT TO SAY --

ANNIE: I had a feeling... you'd do something... like this... so I... poisoned your mineral water.

AND SHE DIES.

AT FIRST, ANNIE'S REVELATION DOESN'T
SINK IN. BUT THEN --

WAITER: What? (TO THE AUDIENCE) Oh, bugger.

AND HE COLLAPSES ON THE FLOOR, DEAD.

BLACK-OUT

CURTAIN