

ASHBE: Well, not always. The thing about voodoo is that both parties have to believe in it for it to work.

JOHN POLK: Do the girls in school believe in it?

ASHBE: Not really, I don't think. That's where my main problem comes in. I have to make the clique believe in it, yet I have to be very subtle. Mainly, I give reports in English class or Speech.

JOHN POLK: Reports?

ASHBE: On voodoo.

JOHN POLK: That's really kind of sick, you know.

ASHBE: Not really. I don't cast spells that'll do any real harm. Mainly, just the kind of thing to make them think—to keep them on their toes. (*Blue drink intoxication begins to take over and John Polk begins laughing.*) What's so funny?

JOHN POLK: Nothing. I was just thinking what a mean little person you are.

ASHBE: Mean! I'm not mean a bit.

JOHN POLK: Yes, you are mean— (*Picking up color.*) and green too.

ASHBE: Green?

JOHN POLK: Yes, green with envy of those other girls; so you play all those mean little tricks.

ASHBE: Envious of those other girls, that stupid, close-minded little clique!

JOHN POLK: Green as this marshmallow. (*Eats marshmallow.*)

ASHBE: You think I want to be in some group . . . a sheep like you? A little sheep like you that does everything when he's supposed to do it!

JOHN POLK: Me a sheep—I do what I want!

ASHBE: Ha! I've known you for an hour and already I see you for the sheep you are!

JOHN POLK: Don't take your green meanness out on me.

ASHBE: Not only are you a sheep, you are a NORMAL sheep. Give me back my colors! (*Begins snatching colors away.*)

JOHN POLK: (*Pushing colors at her.*) Green and mean! Green and mean! Green and mean! Etc.

ASHBE: (*Throwing marshmallows at him.*) That's the reason

you're in a fraternity and the reason you're going to manage your mind, and dates—you go out on dates merely because it's expected of you even though you have a terrible time. That's the reason you go to the whorehouse to prove you're a normal man. Well, you're much too normal for me.

JOHN POLK: Infant bitch. You think you're really cute.

ASHBE: That really wasn't food coloring in your drink, it was poison! (*She laughs, he picks up his coat to go and she stops throwing marshmallows at him.*) Are you going? I was only kidding. For Christ sake it wasn't really poison. Come on, don't go. Can't you take a little friendly criticism?

JOHN POLK: Look, did you have to bother me tonight? I had enough problems without—(*Phone rings. Both look at phone, it rings for the third time. He stands undecided.*)

ASHBE: Look, wait, we'll make it up. (*She goes to answer phone.*) Hello—Daddy. How are you? . . . I'm fine . . . Dad, you sound funny . . . what? . . . Come on, Daddy, you know she's not here. (*Pause.*) Look, I told you I wouldn't call anymore. You've got her number in Atlanta. (*Pause, as she sinks to the floor.*) Why have you started again? . . . Don't say that. I can tell it. I can. Hey, I have to go to bed now. I don't want to talk anymore, o.k.? (*Hangs up phone, softly to self.*) Goddamnit.

JOHN POLK: (*He has heard the conversation and is taking off his coat.*) Hey, Ashbe— (*She looks at him blankly, her mind far away.*) You want to talk?

ASHBE: No.

The Art of Dining

Tina Howe

Characters: Elizabeth Barrow Colt (30s), David Osslow (mid-50s)

Setting: The Golden Carousel, an intimate, elegant restaurant on the New Jersey shore

Premiere: New York Shakespeare Festival, New York City, 1979

Publisher: Avon Books (in *Three Plays by Tina Howe*)

A young couple, Ellen and Cal, have recently opened the restaurant of their dreams. On this raw, freezing day in November, three different parties have made reservations. Publisher David Osslow, "a man with a glowing appetite and glowing literary taste," has asked the writer Elizabeth Barrow Colt to meet him for dinner. Elizabeth is nearsighted, hysterically timid, and terrified of food. This is their first encounter, and it began with the stricken Elizabeth spilling a bowl of soup in her lap. The waiter has just brought her a new bowl of soup.

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: (*Her shoulders giving way, looks at it.*) Oh dear.

(*A slight pause.*)

DAVID OSSLOW: Elizabeth, I'd like to publish your short stories.

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: (*Looking into the soup, stunned.*) Oh my.

DAVID OSSLOW: They're wonderful.

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: Mercy!

DAVID OSSLOW: What did you say?

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: (*Softly.*) I don't know what to say. . . .

DAVID OSSLOW: . . . really wonderful!

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: I never imagined . . . (*Starts fishing around in her pocketbook.*)

DAVID OSSLOW: You're incredibly gifted. . . .

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: Oh no, I'm . . . (*Pulls out her lipstick, lowers her head, and sneaks on a smear, hands shaking. Suddenly she drops the lipstick. It falls into her soup with a splash.*) Oh no!

DAVID OSSLOW: What was that?

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: (*Dives for it.*) Oh nothing, I just dropped my lipstick. . . .

(*She repeatedly tries to retrieve it with her spoon, but it keeps splashing back down into her soup. She finally gives up, fishes it out with her hands, and drops it into her purse.*)

DAVID OSSLOW: Don't you like the soup?

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: (*Hunched over her pocketbook.*) Oh yes, it's . . .

DAVID OSSLOW: It looks delicious.

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: (*Staring at it.*) Yes, it's very nice.

DAVID OSSLOW: I've always loved French Provincial. ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: Would you like it?

. . . I'm sorry. . . . I . . .

(*A pause.*)

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: OH, YOU HAVE IT!

DAVID OSSLOW: No, really, I . . .

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: (*Picks up the bowl with trembling hands and starts lifting it across the table to him, her spoon still in it.*) I want you to have it!

DAVID OSSLOW: *Careful!*

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: (*Giddy, the soup sloshing wildly.*) I never have soup!

DAVID OSSLOW: *Look out!*

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: In fact, I hardly ever have dinner, either!

DAVID OSSLOW: Really, I . . .

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: (*Sets it down in front of him, spilling some.*) THERE!

DAVID OSSLOW: (*Looks at it. Weakly.*) Well, thank you.

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: (*Incredibly relieved, looks at him and sighs.*)

DAVID OSSLOW: (*Picks up her spoon and dips it into the soup.*)

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: This is nice.

DAVID OSSLOW: (*Starts eating it.*)

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: How is it?

DAVID OSSLOW: Very good. Would you like a taste?

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: Oh, no thank you!

(A silence.)

DAVID OSSLOW: Do you cook at all?

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: Oh no.

DAVID OSSLOW: (Reaches a spoonful of soup across the table to her.) Come on, try some.

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: (She tastes it.) My mother didn't cook either.

DAVID OSSLOW: Now isn't that good?

(Gives her another taste.)

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: Mmmmmmm . . . (Quickly wipes her mouth with her napkin.)

DAVID OSSLOW: (Takes a taste himself.) My mother was a great cook.

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: She didn't know how. She grew up with servants.

DAVID OSSLOW: Her Thanksgiving dinners! . . .

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: We had a cook. Lacey. She was awful and she smelled.

DAVID OSSLOW: I cook every once in a while.

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: We all hated her. Especially my mother.

DAVID OSSLOW: My wife is a great cook! Some night you'll have to come over for dinner!

(He settles into his soup, eating with less and less relish as her story progresses.)

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: In fact, when I was young I never even saw my mother in the kitchen. The food just appeared at mealtime as if by magic, all steaming and ready to eat. Lacey would carry it in on these big white serving platters that had a rim of raised china acorns. Our plates had the same rim. Twenty-two acorns per plate, each one about the size of a lump of chewed gum. When I was very young I used to try and pry them off with my knife. . . . We ate every night at eight o'clock sharp because my parents didn't start their cocktail hour until seven, but since dinner time was meant for exchanging news of the day, the emphasis was

always on talking . . . and not on eating. My father bolted his food, and my mother played with hers: sculpting it up into hills and then mashing it back down through her fork. To make things worse, before we sat down at the table she'd always put on a fresh smear of lipstick. I still remember the shade. It was called "Fire and Ice" . . . a dark throbbing red that rubbed off on her fork in waxy clumps that stained her food pink, so that by the end of the first course she'd have rended everything into a kind of . . . rosy puree. As my father wolfed down his meat and vegetables, I'd watch my mother thread this puree through the raised acorns on her plate, fanning it out into long runny pink ribbons. . . . I could never eat a thing. . . . "WAKE UP, AMERICA!" she'd trumpet to me. "You're not being excused from this table until you clean up that plate!" So, I'd take several mouthfuls and then when no one was looking, would spit them out into my napkin. Each night I systematically transferred everything on my plate into that lifesaving napkin. . . .

DAVID OSSLOW: Jesus Christ.

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: It's amazing they never caught on.

DAVID OSSLOW: (Lights a cigarette and takes a deep drag.)

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: I mean, you'd think Lacey would have noticed the huge bundles of half-chewed food I left in my chair. . . .

DAVID OSSLOW: I have never had trouble eating!

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: We used cloth napkins, after all. They were collected after each meal.

DAVID OSSLOW: I can always eat, no matter where I am!

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: We had a fresh one each evening.

DAVID OSSLOW: Believe me, I could use a little of your problem. . . .

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: Lacey washed and ironed them.

DAVID OSSLOW: That is, if you call not eating a problem.

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: To launder them, she had to dump the food out.

DAVID OSSLOW: (Patting his stomach.) I should have such problems!

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: She must have noticed. I left so much, at least a pound. . . .

DAVID OSSLOW: I'm so bad, I start thinking about my next meal before I've even finished the one I'm eating!

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: I wonder what she thought? If she was hurt that I could never get it down . . .

DAVID OSSLOW: Now *that's* serious! . . .

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: I lived in constant fear that she'd tell my parents. You see I was terribly underweight. . . .

DAVID OSSLOW: I love to eat!

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: Or worse, that she'd sneak into my room some night, lugging all those bulging napkins . . . and spill everything out . . . from one end of my bed to the other . . . and *force* me to eat it . . .

DAVID OSSLOW: I've always loved to eat. . . . It will be the death of me. . . . Every time I see my doctor, he says the same thing. He says, "David, you've got to lose some of that weight!"

(A silence.)

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: I used to bite my nails. I think it was because I was so hungry all the time.

DAVID OSSLOW: *(Hands her back her empty soup bowl.)* Thank you, it was delicious.

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: *(Hiding her hands.)* I still bite them sometimes. *(A silence. She looks around the room, a sigh.)* This is wonderful.

(Another silence.)

DAVID OSSLOW: Oh! I forgot to return your spoon!

(He hands it to her, covering her hand with both of his.)

ELIZABETH BARROW COLT: *(Grasps it, turns it gently in her hands, sneaks it up against her cheek for a moment . . . and then drops it into her pocketbook.)* I can't believe this is happening.

(The lights fade . . .)

Asian Shade

Larry Ketron

Characters: Tom (19), Kaylene (21)

Setting: A lakeside cabin in East Tennessee, 1967-68

Premiere: WPA Theatre, New York City, 1983

Publisher: Dramatists Play Service, Inc.

It is June 1967, and Tom and Ernie are going to Vietnam. They have finished Basic Training and now have a one-week furlough before they go overseas. Neal, a World War II veteran, gives the two boys the use of his lakeside cabin so they can escape from their sentimental families and "raise a little hell." They spend a large part of the week with two local girls, Casey and Jean, roasting hot dogs, swimming, and trying to stave off their fears about going to war. Neal tells them that a World War II buddy of his can pull a few strings and change their posting to Fort Ord, California. The boys are initially dubious, but as their departure gets closer, they cling more and more to this hope. When it turns out that Neal's contact has retired from the service and can't do them a bit of good, the boys are devastated. Neal is mortally embarrassed, and promises them he'll do something good for them when they come back.

This scene, the play's last, takes place one year later. Tom has come back from the war alone; Ernie is dead. Neal brings Tom out to visit the cabin, leaving him there with his daughter, Kaylene.

Note: Harry (of Harry's Market) lost a son in Vietnam.

(TOM looks the joint over. With one finger he tips the lamp that kept falling over last year. KAYLENE reappears in the door frame with a paper bag; she startles TOM.)

TOM: Jesus Christ! *(She comes in, sets bag down on coffee table.)*