

Darcy Makin (12M) – Senior Runner Up

HOT TOWELS

“Reservation for four?”

The waitress with a kind smile looked at my father, nodded and uttered

“Of course, right this way sir.”

She took our party up a flight of stairs. Every step taken felt like I was further ascending into the sky, stepping on fluffy white clouds with my poorly tied leather laced shoes. Reaching the summit she led us to our table.

The way to our table had been clear allowing us to be seated promptly. Taking my hand I pull out my chair, the floor being wooden I expected some form of resistance, but it felt as if it was gliding.

Finally I seat myself, it felt like a throne with comfort that could only be described as heavenly. With my smile spanning from ear to ear the waitress presented our table with the menus, finely bound binders with a leather exterior.

“Excuse me miss, could you tell us about the specials for tonight?”

By my father’s request she began to list the specials of the venue, and from the first words she spoke I couldn’t help but salivate. She took my tongue across the world to regions unheard of to me, I couldn’t escape the flavours she spoke of whether it had been the most exotic of the aquatic realms or meat so tender it’d melt on your tongue. With this was a wine list with bottles from times before I knew existed, places lost to history.

Finally I wake from my trance and look around the table to see the spell hadn’t been placed on me alone. When all had woken from their trance we gave our orders, the waitress was then whisked away into the kitchen. As we waited for our food we filled the time with lively conversation, the room echoed with hardy laughter as tears of joys would slip from our eyes. The smiles shared by the table were enough to light the room themselves.

Time had passed and now I felt my nose twitch, I look around the room and see our meals resting ready to come to our table. The aroma the came from our food flooded the room like the sea, each element of the plate hitting me like a wave. Such a scent could have very well lifted me from my seat and led me by the nose, but there was no need as we received our food shortly.

Before me a fine cut of beef laid on a bed of potatoes, steam flowing from the plate as the blood of the meat seeped into the meal. I take my cutlery and dive in, knife slicing through like butter as a perfect medium is revealed. I take a piece to my mouth unable to wait another moment. Experiencing such a delicacy only made me dread the thought of finishing,

but I did with a mess being made. Seeing this the waitress smiled and brought a tray of hot towels to our table.

I take my hand and grab one of the towels from the tray. Such a delicate yet stable feel, I take it from the pile and unroll the towel. Finally I put the fibres to my lips, the warmth it produced was confronting. Every time the fabric touches my skin I would be met with the same feeling as before, as if being brushed by angel feathers. I hold it tightly, eyes closed, and I see a pale blue sky as I sit on the clouds. I hold on a little while longer before letting go and returning the towel to the now dirty pile on the tray.

“Reservation for three?”

I ask as the waitress carelessly lifts her head and groans

“Of course, been a while since we’ve seen you here, right this way sir.”

With this she turns and begins to move towards the stairs. I pause for a moment and look to the top of the staircase, the others are already moving but my legs don’t seem to agree. I finally muster the strength to take the first step, my foot feels as if its sinking, but up I go. My head feels awfully light.

With the aid of the rail I reach the precipice only to see a labyrinth with our table at the centre. My head is spinning as it’s filled with a dozen empty conversations, I move forward but every couple of steps I’m forced to stop. Only now did I notice the tightness in my chest. My ears begin to ring as my sight leaves me. I close my eyes and take a few deep breaths before feeling something on my shoulder, a cold hand.

“Are you alright, do you need help?”

“No... no, I-I should be fine.”

My feet dragging behind me I reach the table and attempt to pull my chair, it wouldn’t move. Again I pull the chair, gripping the back, but once again it wouldn’t move. A final time I go to pull at the chair, but it refused to budge. The waitress had seen my struggles and helped me with my chair, and thanking her kindly I take my seat. A sharp pain shoots through me, as if seated on broken glass and nails. She had bought us the menus, a decaying binder with a rotted leather exterior. It felt quiet, what is it he had said?

“Uh... Th-the specials, could you tell us about tonight’s specials?”

By my request she began to list specials of the venue for tonight, but I don’t listen, I didn’t really care. She speaks of exports from around the world while I focus on my breathing, breath in, breath out, breath in, breath out. Eyes up I see the wine list, I take it and look at what they had to offer, but the words don’t want to stay still.

“Are you ready to order?”

Startled I look around, the others appear ready and eager, but I hadn't had time to look. I decided to go with my old reliable as the others try the specials. The waitress took our orders and disappeared into the kitchen. As we waited for our meals no one spoke, there were attempts of small talk, but the silence was far too inviting, so we sat and waited as the room grew darker with the night.

Time had passed and I hear a bell ring, I look over to see our meals resting ready to be brought to our table. I take a deep breath through my nose, attempting to take in our meals, but I take in the scents that engulf the room. Everything melds together to create a dubious aroma, piercing my nostrils and making me nauseous. About to leave for some fresh air, I'm interrupted by our meals being brought to our table.

I stare blankly at the plate before me, a bloody slice of flesh thrown over burnt potatoes. Hesitant I take my cutlery, it feels heavy in my hands. I stab the steak that laid before me, it pulsates as blood begins to pour from the gash. I take the piece and put it to my mouth, the meat was vile and rancid, but I manage to swallow. Reluctantly I finish what laid on my plate, seeing this the waitress brought a tray of hot towels to our table. I grab one from the tray.

But it's cold. I put the towel to my face only to feel a damp sensation, no warmth.

"Ex-excuse me miss, could we get some hot towels please."

Seeing the tray on our table, she is met with confusion.

"Sir, your table has a tray already."

"No, we don't, I asked for hot towels."

She goes and touches the tray that lies on our table, she picks up a towel.

"Sir I assure yo-"

"NO! I WANT HOT TOWELS, HOT! Please... Just have it be like last time, please..."

Tears begin to pour.

But the towels were hot, they were just fine, everything was fine. The food was fine, the chair was fine, the stairs were fine. But I wasn't, it wasn't fine, it would never be fine. I imagine if the towels had been hot, just as they had been when he was here.