

King Creases

KING CREASES

(or Humble Pie)

Written by
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Based on an original short story

1 **EXT. INDISCERNIBLE DARKNESS**

THUNDER, then a HEAVY DOWNFALL of rain diminuendos into a LIGHT DRIZZLE.

As it fades out, a soft CHOIR OF CRICKETS rise in the distance.

Abruptly, more thunder rolls when:

A baritone, charming VOICE cuts through the reverberation.

UNKNOWN (V.O.)
Somewhere familiar - in an ancient
unknown time, all that mattered was
food. Our key to survival. But
somewhere along the way, even that
became obsolete.

2 **EXT. ONION FIELDS - NIGHT**

An indistinguishable SUNRISE-TONED BLURRY BLAZE - A FOREST FIRE pulverizing ONION FIELDS. *The Lake's waves reflect the only visible light.*

The flames engulf the fields - vanishing into BLACK SMOKE. The voice continues:

UNKNOWN (V.O.)
When the first living beings
discovered fire, food became
better.

Illuminated by the wild flame, casting dark pulsating shadows, a depression in the land consumes all the aflame crops, revealing a massive abyss.

3 **EXT. MASSIVE ABYSS - CONTINUOUS**

A militant brigade of deft soldiers with an unknown figure larger than anyone else behind them, puffing out his chest yet breathing heavily.

As a unit, they cautiously creep closer to the sinkhole before an eerie powerful whistling wind from far below as if something is inhaling the pungent fumes.

A SOLDIER pauses from combat to wipe his red eyes full of tears.

SOLDIER
I can't see! Why did it have to be
onions?

The vapor of burning onions cause everyone to cry, but not out of fear until; a boar-like unidentifiable creature stretches taller than the depths, extending its neck high enough to glare at the battalion with squinting poison-green eyes.

Its sharp cheekbones move up and down as if it's munching on something.

The squadron ambushes the Behemoth, shattering the faint mastication from the beast with blood-curdling rallying cries.

They siege as the large figure behind them spectates the battle, sipping from a leather canteen.

He is the KING (75) of the Onion City, expanding his territory every day, puffing out his chest to take up as much space as possible.

SOLDIER
Oh, it smells horrible!

ANOTHER SOLDIER
We should've invaded a Maple orchard, why are we here?!

KING
This is the last area Atys was seen
It's not going to kill 'ya, now,
they're only vegetables - seize
forward! We can't let this creature
get away with it!

SOLDIER
Get away with what exactly? It was
just another casualty-

KING
Not just any casualty! It took what
was mine, we'll burn this whole
island down until that Behemoth is
dead!

Every one of his warriors vanishes as the smoke clears, leaving the figure alone from a distance listening to the beast regurgitate his loyal troops - defeated and doubled-up in pain. The unknown voice continues:

UNKNOWN (V.O.)
The ebbs and flows of digestion
have carried us to this grand point
in time, yet we're left with so
little to remember it by. Most
historians agree that the origin of
our great leader started something
like this...

FADE TO BLACK.

4 **EXT. ONION CITY - ROYAL PALACE - AFTERNOON**

The noise silences but remains outside. At the ROYAL PALACE during a cold, damp, misty meaningless morning.

FADE IN against the cream regal monument, vertically aligned GOLDEN-BROWN HAND-WRITTEN TEXT appears:

14 YEARS LATER

5 **INT. ONION CITY - ROYAL PALACE - SUNDOWN**

After trapping the BEHEMOTH that terrorized the city with waves of fire, he spends his golden years enjoying the finest cuisine by the CHEFS in-and-out of the royal kitchen.

6 **INT. ROYAL PALACE - KING'S THRONE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER**

Abruptly, a SHORT PROPER ANDROGYNOUS FIGURE swiftly pitter-patters into the KING'S THRONE ROOM - they are only as tall as the King's knees, having to look straight up, wearing a two toned black and royal blue tunic.

They are referred to as the KEEPER, primarily the food keeper for the royal kitchen.

The King is in the middle of chatting with ROYAL CRONIES who're eating away, barely listening - before they interrupt loudly:

KEEPER
Your Majesty!

Everyone stops; then faces the Keeper. The King, red in the face - he glares, frozen -

KING
Kieta! What is your problem?

KEEPER
(blushing)
... there is a very tall - and handsome - wise man named Melvin asking to see you. Should I make him wait in line?

The King turns his attention to the Keeper without moving from his throne.

KING
(satiated; chuckling)
No, he's an old friend of the King
- send him through.

A TALL, DARK HANDSOME MAN wrapped in beige linen and a bear-skin jacket hunches over to avoid hitting his head on the door frame as he enters the King's chambers, grinning from ear to ear.

MELVIN, the wise man of the west - in his late-30s - big stature, with tall black hair - easy-going and full of levity in a manner and with a smile that warms up the whole room.

Pinched behind his ear, a small twig of sharpened bamboo for writing. A brass disc etched with cardinal directions hung by twine laid on his chest hair, striking up genuine conversations out of child-like wonder wherever he goes.

We are familiar with his charming baritone as soon as he speaks - he is the UNKNOWN NARRATOR:

KING
Look who's back already.

MELVIN
You know, last time I was here I
accidentally let one of your cats
outside.

KING
(underlying anger)
It's... fine - I have plenty. It's
been too long... a whole lot has
changed.

MELVIN
Except for you, friend, you haven't
changed a bit!

KING
I heard a stupid little rumor you
became a sage.

MELVIN
What you heard is true.

Melvin stares at the construction of sandstone and wet mortar, still in progress.

MELVIN
Nice place!

KING

Better than those wattle-and-daub
roundhouses we built. Remember when
we were baking acorn-bread and
carving out caves?

MELVIN

Spent my childhood in a cave - I
turned out fine. Now, I'm a sage.

KING

(changing the subject)

I missed you more when you were a
statesman - you were more useful to
me then, not when you ran off to go
polish rocks... playing with toys.

MELVIN

With all the iron you dig across
the Great Lake I could build so
much... speaking of which, I've
been working on a new toy-

The King steps off his throne and begins to walk away
towards a grazing table the length of the wall with wicker
baskets of fruit, burlap sacks of roasted seeds and nuts,
and chunks of cured, dry meat topped with slices of blue
cheese.

MELVIN

(laughing)

I'm serious, I'm working on
something new. A device that can
predict the stars.

The King picks out a chunk of cheese, sniffs it, takes a
nibble, then places it back in a different spot.

KING

You hear yourself? I'd rather use
the iron on spearheads and arrows.

MELVIN

More like skillets - I've seen more
food in this palace than anything!
Is it only iron you're smelting in
your crucible? Or perhaps you're
hiding something else more
valuable? Hmm?

The King and the wise man stare at each other only to
abruptly grin like little kids.

7

INT. ROYAL PALACE - BALLROOM - NIGHT

They begin to make their way out the throne room into a ballroom filled with cats rummaging around at ankle-level.

KING

Possibly.

(changing the subject)

This... device. How does it... tell you anything?

MELVIN

It's all about its positioning. Kinda like how a sundial tells you how much light we have left.

KING

Only tells you. If you were telling me that you could make a sundial that I could control, then I'd be interested.

MELVIN

You wish to control the sun, or do you wish to change the past?

KING

There's plenty I'd like to change...

MELVIN

Hm. That's... interesting.

His attention drifts.

KING

How so? I'm certain everyone wants to change the past at least a little.

MELVIN

I thought you were the supreme leader, the chosen one. Always going on about predetermined positions. What on this side of the Turtle could you possibly want to change?

KING

(ignoring)

You know... we have a mailing system here. Could've saved you the three-month walk.

MELVIN

I don't mind. So, what's new in this old kingdom?

KING

A change, man of the west, I'm... thinking about shaking things up. You should come back - I'd treat you good. You can even keep your title - we are west enough.

MELVIN

The mid-west. Yes, however, my connection and only family is the coast.

KING

You can always start a new family. No shame in tearing down the foundation and starting fresh. Keep my offer in mind.

MELVIN

You know, sir, being King is an otherworldly experience - it comes with real responsibility. However, like any occupation, you serve a myriad of generations...

KING

... serve?

MELVIN

But what happens if sometime during your golden years, after you've established this golden age that feeds everyone, gives them a specific role in this community -

KING

Melvin, get to the point.

MELVIN

Well... why? Why not... let people choose?

KING
Because my kingdom requires
obedience more than it needs
people.

A silence wafts past their ears, they both turn to
acknowledge the rumbling purrs that filled the room. Melvin
resumes their conversation:

MELVIN
(bluntly)
What if they don't want to cook? Or
fish? Or... mine iron across the
Great Lake away from their
families?

KING
But they won't.

MELVIN
But what if they don't?

KING
(heated)
Then they are choosing to be
deviants of the status quo -
traitors of my kingdom and should
be shamed! Thinking about only them
and their own families instead of
everyone else's and mine. Only the
lowest lowlife would do something
like that.

CUT TO:

8 **EXT. SOUTHPORT - PIER - THE NEXT DAY**

On a COLD, WET, SPRING MORNING below a gray cloudy sky - we
spot a CROWDED PIER OF FISHERS their lines trailing like
comets.

9 **EXT. SOUTHPORT - BOARDWALK - SAME TIME**

Behind them is the boardwalk which bleeds into weeded
ground, but introducing everyone not by boat is a short yet
incredibly wide sycamore tree with rugged bark and thick
branches stretching out its arms and leafy canopy as if it's
trying to claim the entire coast as it's personal kingdom.

People unknown to us have long ago carved an arrow pointed
towards a clutter of cottages being slowly overgrown by the
unscathed forestry, underneath it is labeled: "Turtle Creek
Circle".

Some people are born to cook, but ZUZU was the daughter of a fisherman. Therefore, she must carry on her family's role in the kingdom and fish like she's supposed to.

Once left to herself the only thing she wanted to do was cook.

10 **INT. SOUTHPORT - MUSHROOM HOME - SUNRISE**

Like all kids her age, she learns the folklore of TURTLE ISLAND - it regards those who can nurture humanity with meats and plants as magical.

However, she has hidden her passion within the sanctuary of her mushroom-shaped cobblestone home.

Living in one of the ports outside the city under the King's reign. She was born after his accomplishments and has never had another ruler during her lifetime.

11 **INT. MUSHROOM HOME - ZUZU'S BEDROOM - SAME TIME**

We catch her in the middle of trimming her bangs with a chipped IRON BUTCHER'S KNIFE and only cooks in the privacy of her home with her bulbous eyed black-and-white cat RIGBY licking their unkempt fur watching slumped in a cupboard, perched on Zuzu's shoulder or in a bowl providing quality assurance.

She fumbles a blood red t-shirt over her head with two pin-sized holes.

Then grabs all her hair and throws it all back into a ponytail, tying down her slick black locks with a daffodil-patterned ribbon as her bangs flop back into place.

12 **INT. SOUTHPORT - MUSHROOM HOME - MORNING**

Rigby keeps running in between her legs tripping up Zuzu as she scatters from her bedroom to the living room.

Her father is concentrating on slowly tying a knot in a fly-fishing lure with a feather of a yellow warbler.

Without turning his attention away from the lure to see Zuzu scrambling to get ready, her father yells out to her:

DAD

Zuzu!

She pokes her head out to respond as Rigby grabs at her leg while she's stopped and lets out a long 'look-at-me' meow.

ZUZU

Yes, dad? I'm-

DAD

Are you heading out yet? You're going to be late... again!

She runs past a table with a wicker basket full of apples, oranges and a bunch of ripe bananas, grabbing the banana giving her trouble ripping off the stem and using her shirt folded up to carry it as she runs out the front door.

Through a window, her father watches as she jumps into a busy street attempting to wade through the exodus of MERCHANTS and FISHERMEN towards the pier - the sun almost fully over the horizon.

13

EXT. SOUTHPORT - BOARDWALK - MOMENTS LATER

Alongside the assertive crowd of FISHMONGERS, their fish lasses, merchants and produce runners - Zuzu runs into a haze, stopping her in her tracks with a sharp distinctive smell that cut through the pungent raw seafood and its partial decomposition.

She quickly finds the source of what smells like smoked meat and fried garlic from a line of grills trailed alongside the dirt path of SOUTHPORT as buckets, wheelbarrows and pounds of fish heaped over shoulders being rushed into the fish market.

A deep inhale and a broad smile revealing curiosity - she's already late anyways.

14

I/E. SOUTHPORT - TAVERN - CONTINUOUS

Zuzu peeks into the kitchen of the TOWN'S TAVERN. Soot-streaked ceramic vases, pots, vats, and a whole butchered hog hung by sweaty chains.

A LARGE POT resting on warped, burnt wooden beams placed above a pit with a one log FIRE.

VEGETABLES boil inside a SEASONED BROWN SAUCE sharing the same HOT COALS with skewers of diced MEATS.

MR. MOJIKO

(to another chef)

The secret to the best fish fried rice is oyster and fish sauce. It'll bring the flavor out of any fish!

With a sharp bamboo reed, cutting into a soften tablet of clay, Zuzu writes down all that is said, along with scribbled illustrations.

15

EXT. SOUTHPORT - PIER - MOMENTS LATER

ZUZU is late for her class as usual. Most of her schooling is being patient while fishing. There are about 30 KIDS and 1 TEACHER. RIGBY stays in her bag - popping out his head occasionally for whereabouts.

TEACHER

In order to be an efficient angler,
Zuzu, one must learn to wake up
early.

ZUZU

But we're going to be waiting
anyways, and I never catch anything
cool-

TEACHER

(cutting off)

Zuzu! Stop, grow up and cast your
line. And, please, for the sake of
my job, don't get it stuck in your
leg again!

Zuzu creates some distance between her and her fishing line, dangling a weighted hook with a worm wiggling on the end, then whips it into the lake.

ZUZU

Then what do I do?

TEACHER

Then... you wait. Be patient.

ZUZU

I've been patient all my life-

TEACHER

Well... wait longer.

(to another pupil)

Very good, Cyrus. Now that's a
contest-winning yellow perch!

Rigby loudly meows out of boredom from inside her bag. A short kid with a missing tooth and long hair holds up a small yellow fish with black fading stripes chimes in:

CYRUS

Really?

TEACHER

Well... you'd have to give it to a chef to cook it first, unless you want to violate the law.

All the kids begin to giggle. Zuzu gulps and tries recasting her line.

CYRUS

You mean like a deviant?

TEACHER

(surprised)

Hey! How do you know what that is?

ARYENIS

Why doesn't the contest judge 'fishes' instead of dishes?

TEACHER

Great question, Aryenis! The King created a contest for every chef in his kingdom.

The system that already favored those closest to the kitchen gave the opportunity to only chefs.

The kids are barely listening, watching their lines be nibbled at.

TEACHER

Unless you mess up! You should all be grateful to be a part of the lucky generation that never faced the terror of the Behemoth.

CYRUS

Will you be there?

TEACHER

No, no, no, I stick to what I know here at the docks. I'll sure enjoy my day off though.

ARYENIS

Why is he called King Creases?

TEACHER

I'm not exactly sure as to why...

ZUZU
(retorting)
Maybe because of all the creases in
his clothes...

The entire dock begins to chuckle. Zuzu wedges her fishing rod into a crack in the dock and leans on it with her weight, already bored.

TEACHER
Zuzu! That's our King you're talking about.

ARYENIS
Why can't our King iron his clothes? Does he not have one?

TEACHER
Of course he does, that is all this city mines, so... I think he does.

(shaking her head)

You see what you started, Zuzu?

All her classmates attempt to quiet down on their own yet keep snickering.

CYRUS
(snorting; whispering)
... King Creases.

They all burst out laughing - suddenly; Zuzu's line jerks her whole body forward - almost slipping out of her grasp!

She catches a large fish she's never seen before with glistening scales that reflect a rainbow.

TEACHER
There we go, Zuzu! What a good-lookin' trout. The padres are going to love it!

ARYENIS
Why don't we get to eat all the fish we catch?

TEACHER
Another excellent question! You see, the nobility receives the best cuts of fish and meat first, then it trickles down to us.

(MORE)

TEACHER (CONT'D)

We can keep the bones after the butcher has fileted them for a stew, but the meat and roe go to our noble padres.

(turning away)

If we were raising cattle or poultry, we'd only be given the offal.

CYRUS

Who's offal?

TEACHER

It is the entrails and internal organs... the other stuff.

ARYENIS

Yucky!

16 **EXT. SOUTHPORT - BOARDWALK - AFTERNOON**

As the STUDENTS are turning in their catches for the day to the FISHMONGER, ZUZU continues to look at hers.

Instinctively, she sneaks it home under her shirt to cook - the tail-fin of the fish appears as a collar, popping out of her low-cut t-shirt.

17 **INT. SOUTHPORT - MUSHROOM HOME - LATER**

The FISH spanned across both her forearms as she studies its scales - her fingers tracing delicately around the short and sharp Dorsal fin, as the rainbow appears within the reflective glow off its murky mud scales.

She places the fish onto an oiled tree slice, pulling back her shining black hair - tightening and tying a red ribbon over her bangs.

Beside her, she flicks open a BABY BLUE CERAMIC POT with a painted white lamb, reaching in for a handful of COARSE SEA SALT, sprinkling, smearing and rubbing the fish in and out. There's a pouch of BRIGHT ORANGE FISH EGGS.

Zuzu removes it and CURES it in a JAR OF SALT. She stuffs the fish into a large terracotta vase to be forgotten.

Stretching out and pinning down an unknown animal skin. She pops off a top of a small pot full of squid ink.

Taking the other end of her dainty knife, she dips it and begins to write: "FISH FRIED RICE - Ingredients".

Her FATHER catches her in the middle of tossing a salad. She flings vegetables and splatters the walls with oil.

DAD

Are you out of your mind! Zuzu, you cannot be seen like this.

It was cute when you were a kid but now you need to grow up and stop acting like a chef! Before someone sees and reports you.

His words freeze Zuzu in her place, in the middle of a mess.

ZUZU

I-

DAD

(over)

-was just cleaning this up and getting ready to go out. Come on, now, Zo.

ZUZU

Do we really need to go to the bistro, why can't we-

DAD

No! If you want, you can take your secret little knife I know you have and quarter an apple. That's it!

Better yet, it would be amazing to see you grow up a little and eat around the core like everyone else.

Instead of... this.

ZUZU

But I did that! I washed and diced the apple, then put it onto a salad... along with other things I found.

DAD

What other things? Things... you didn't turn in!? You've been... putting apples on a salad?

ZUZU

I-

DAD

Look at me. Zuzu! You... are going
into town...

She immediately begins to rock back and forth. Turning
herself to face the door and her attention away from her
father.

DAD

Hey, hey! Into town and you are
going to take this.

He hands her a POCKET-SIZED CINCH-SACK - she opens it
inside- out revealing five reflective tangerine rocks.

Each one illustrates a combat scene between a blood-hungry
lion leaping towards a fearless bull. Flipped over: it is
stamped with a punch - made for quickly counting.

ZUZU

But-

DAD

I don't want to hear it! We're not
doing this again. I had dreams once
too. But dreams don't feed us.

ZUZU

Please, listen to me for once. We
can save our coins...

DAD

Enough! Zuzu, stop! I'm already
saving coins - don't you worry
about that.
You can tell me how I should spend
my earnings once you've been saving
yourself, sweetheart. Alright?

She doesn't reply verbally but rests her head down.

DAD

I don't know if you've noticed but
this isn't the royal palace where
you can do whatever you want.
Especially not here. You and I, we
fish. We fish. We count our fish
then hand it over.

No more 'do-it- yourself'-ing,
please sweetheart, before the
neighbors notice, it's a small-
town...

(MORE)

DAD (CONT'D)

Trust me - you don't want to be a chef.

ZUZU

But I do! I really want to-

DAD

(snapping)

Enough!

You don't know what you want - you're a little kid that needs to grow up. If it were winter, you'd want it to be summer, then when the heat comes along, you'll want snow.

That's what kids do. Impossible to please... it's always something...

He looks back at her and takes a deep breath. She nods her head despite wanting to cry.

DAD

You don't understand, we can't do any of this anymore!

They'll render you defective and then it won't matter how much fish I catch. You'll squander everything this family has worked for.

Everyone has to sacrifice something.

Not able to make eye contact with his little girl, he caves:

DAD

(noticing)

I have something that'll cheer you up.

He turns to leave as Zuzu watches him walk down the pier a few yards and grab a large turtle shell from his rowboat.

DAD

Here! Take this turtle I caught on the pier. The padres didn't want it...

He walks out and back into the house with something wrapped in a worn-out blanket. Unraveling it, he hands her a SMALL SNAPPING TURTLE by its shell - it's dripping wet. Her curiosity is sparked in her eyes.

ZUZU

What's wrong with them?

She inspects the turtle's shell like a fine hat slowly spinning it with her fingertips.

DAD

It's dead.

Her inward smile sours as her eyes full of wonder shrivel and die. He begins to walk outside again towards the boardwalk.

18

I/E. SOUTHPORT - BOARDWALK - CONTINUOUS

He turns back to his daughter, commanding her through the open window.

DAD

You can deshell, skin, and clean
the meat but do not cook anything,
Zuzu! That's for the bistro to do.
Ask for soup so we get all the good
stuff.

He drifts away in a rowboat for a couple hours, waving back at Zuzu who's watching until he's far enough to start cooking.

19

INT. MUSHROOM HOME - ZUZU'S BEDROOM - SUNDOWN

She opens up a WOOD-AND-BRASS TACKLE BOX that reveals a myriad of polished FLORAL CERAMIC SILVERWARE, fishing tools with worn out wooden handles, and sharp shining iron fillet knives laid on top of lace pocket squares.

20

INT. MUSHROOM HOME - LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

After deshelling, cleaning and butchering the meat she begins to boil water in a shabby IRON POT, as she skims the foam with her most worn-out KNIFE.

With one of the knives, she quarters a yellow onion, then tosses it into the pot with one hand sprinkling a bay leaf, Cayenne pepper and sea salt on top with the other.

She mixes the stew with a porcelain three-prong fork. Curled up inside of a wicker fruit basket, Rigby stares at her hands.

She keeps her eye on the pier for her dad's return - it's not far from their house - so she goes through her collection of miscellaneous kitchenware hiding in her closet and finds a clay jar.

She pops off the cork to add the coins to a collection of hundreds.

Back into her tackle box, she opens up the top sections by the knobs to reveal a large compartment.

She struggles to pull out the largest utensil in her make-shift kitchen arsenal: a SMALL ONE-HANDED FISHING NET.

Her dad starts to come back before the sun completely sets and she notices in the window last second.

Zuzu runs back to the fireplace, with a COPPER CLUB-HAMMERED SAUCEPAN.

She fishes out the turtle loins and places them onto a board, then dices the meat into smaller pieces.

21 **EXT. SOUTHPORT - BOARDWALK - LATER**

Her father calls from a distance as his rowboat roughly hits the dock. He steps out into the ankle-shallow water towards home. No fish in hand only folded empty nets.

DAD

Zuzu! Did you grab dinner yet?

22 **INT. MUSHROOM HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

Her dad gently blows onto a spoonful of steaming soup then sips. His eyes widen and he cocks his head, galvanized with approval.

DAD

Wow... man, this is delicious! Make sure next time to take an extra fish to Mr. Mojiko, and tell him: my compliments to the chef.

Zuzu hides her dampened smile behind a spoonful of broth.

23 **INT. MUSHROOM HOME - ZUZU'S BEDROOM - LATER**

LATER at night, Zuzu is scratching Rigby's twitching ears.

ZUZU

Boy, Rigby - I wish I had your life. You eat and eat... and eat some more. Nothing in your way.

Rigby lets out a long and loud meow.

ZUZU

Yeah, you're right - that's what we do too - eat. But I can't help thinking there's more to life than that.

Rigby nuzzles his wet nose into her stomach.

ZUZU

When I die, I hope I come back as a chef. Then, I'll cook you fish treats everyday... and this time not in secret.

24 **EXT. SOUTHPORT - BOARDWALK - THE NEXT DAY**

On her way to class, she is hated in her tracks as soon as she spots the pier. Instead of crowded with her peers, there's a large crowd and a make-shift stage.

ZUZU

Sweet! Look Rigby, no class. Must be an event on the pier.

25 **EXT. SOUTHPORT - PIER - MORNING**

In the midst of cumulus clouds - we view clear blue gradient skies as if they were painted with oil and brush, full of swarms of SEAGULLS attempting to land and waddle close to a table full of FRUITS and MEATS.

The hoarse voice of an OLDER MAN scares them into a flight, THEN goes back to picking his teeth with dirty nails.

26 **EXT. SOUTHPORT - STAGE ON THE PIER - CONTINUOUS**

A theatrical STAGE, built on a pier, surrounded by SOLDIERS below, a MAN stands on a pedestal, barely visible from the back of the crowd.

In the background, wooden sailboats docking and unloading willow nets full of crustaceans and schools of fish, tangled in algae and seaweed.

27 **EXT. SOUTHPORT - PIER - SAME TIME**

A proud fisherman holds a trout the size of a newborn baby above his head like a trophy, with a wide grin showing the dirt in the crevices of his face.

28

EXT. SOUTHPORT - STAGE ON THE PIER - MOMENTS LATER

Back on the stage - peering over the crowd; the KING layered in a white animal fur coat strapped tightly with a royal blue sash, sweat dripping from his chin as he clears the mucus out of his throat without covering his mouth.

He flashes a wide forced smile - exhibiting shreds of food in between his teeth.

A string of SHIPS behind him - their ROYAL BLUE SAILS feature an insignia and illustration of the King's smile.

UNKNOWN FISHER

... what is he saying?

KING

Chefs, instructors, workers,
farmers, our siblings who've fallen
under the yoke of the Behemoth. I
promise you the golden age you
deserve, on this 14th anniversary
of the Great Fire.

BEGGAR

Shh! I can't hear.

KING

(clears throat)

Replacing our barbaric trade system
with coins. Coins for goods - the
perfect marriage between producers
and consumers.

While he speaks, the crowd murmur amongst each other:

TEACHER

My marriage only lasted six days.

KING (O.S)

With collective efforts, I will
solidify a society where everyone
can reach their fullest
potential...

FISHMONGER

That's not what our Majesty meant,
thy meant a pairing... like liver
and onions - how did your marriage
only last six days!?

KING (O.S)

Together, we form a city-sized
grapevine to shield us from any
threat...

TEACHER

He died.

From all the way in the BACK of the crowd, as the King
continues on with his speech - it is out of ear shot - TWO
MEN with muddy hands exchange confused glances.

Behind them, another MAN with much cleaner hands, a scribe
documenting this historical moment - furiously writing down
the speech.

FISHMONGER

So, you're single? Nice to know...

The trio of mismatched men hush them from behind.

SCRIBE

Did you hear what that last part
was!?

KING (O.S)

-with hope, determination and unity
that binds us all.

MAN WITH MUDDY HANDS

Something about food, I think.

SCRIBE

Nuts!

The King's voice interrupts - exclaiming and enunciating his
final words louder.

KING

The current hierarchy will be
replaced with a kitchen brigade,
inheriting nobility themselves!

The CROWD goes crazy, with a wild round of applause,
cheering for their King - then, immediately chats up one
another, with wonder of what their new role will be.

29

INT. ROYAL PALACE - KING'S THRONE ROOM - AFTERNOON

Contrary to the roaring, lively crowd, the no-longer smiling
KING lives a retired life in the solitary and silence of his
single-room unfinished palace - we can see through the
wooden frames of future rooms.

The King shows off all his riches and treats the wise man to the best cuisine.

The wise man enjoys his time with the King being served and entertained, until the King begins to boast about being the happiest man alive.

KING

Why didn't you bring me any of that sun-dried salmon? All of ours here make me sick.

MELVIN

I did but we ran out around the pinyon-juniper woodlands. Speaking of which, I'm starving!

KING

So am I! Come... follow me!

30

INT. ROYAL PALACE - KITCHEN - LATER

In the kitchen, a dining table topped with ROASTED GARLIC BULBS, FRESH WHITE BREAD, and CARAMELIZED RED ONIONS shredded to fit on a slice of bread or a cracker.

Chefs in white jackets with royal blue stripes bring out bowls of soup.

MELVIN

Chicken noodle soup? Oh, man, today is a good day.

KING

They used a whole rooster so it's 'rooster noodle soup'.

A chef, unknown to us and apparently the King too, begins to strip and slice a SMALL ROOSTER, neatly organizing a mise en place of bone-in skin-on pieces - TWO DRUMS, TWO BREASTS, TWO WINGS, and ONE NECK lay before him.

In a stew pot full of water, he adds a pinch of the caramelized onions, along with two pierced cloves of the roasted garlic, two sprigs of fresh thyme and two bay leaves.

HEAD CHEF

Chichi- whatever your name is! I need these grilled and hurry up with it!

UNKNOWN CHEF (CHICHIBÌO)

Yes, chef!

HEAD CHEF

Stewie, where are my noodles?

STEWIE

Here, sir!

HEAD CHEF

Well, then - what are you waiting for? Add them to the pot already!

STEWIE

Yes, chef!

The head chef presents and serves the dish himself.

HEAD CHEF

(huge grin)

Here you are, your Majesty! Chicken noodle soup and extra roasted garlic, caramelized onions and fresh white-

KING

(interrupting)

Alright, that's enough, chef. What'd you waltz here? And something to drink too - hurry up with it!

HEAD CHEF

(grin fades)

Yes, sir. Right away.

He screams at his kitchen crew before even leaving the room:

HEAD CHEF

Give me something to drink! What're they supposed to wash this down with?

His voice disappears into the background noise of the kitchen, everyone scrambling around. The King takes a spoonful; sniffs it then slurps it slowly and loudly.

He processes the taste and cocks his head with somewhat approval.

KING

It's... acceptable. Needs a little salt maybe.

MELVIN

Are you kidding? This is splendid!
I don't get many home-cooked meals
like this, y'know.

KING

What now? What's the difference
between cooking at home and cooking
in a cave, Melvin?

The head chef brings out a clay pitcher of water and a
squash gourd containing an unknown drink, all on a gold
platter.

MELVIN

(smiling)

Good company.

He raises his glass, as the head chef pours into it - the
King chuckling and nodding his head, impressed, raises his
too.

KING

(giggling)

Oh, ho, whoa- alright, alright.
Excellent point...

MELVIN

(mouthful)

So, how has this good year been
treating ya, old friend?

KING

(serious)

Melvin?

MELVIN

(guilty)

Yes, sir?

KING

... what on this side of the Turtle
is around your neck?

MELVIN

(slightly smirking)

... you want to know?

KING

Well, that's why I'm asking - it
looks like-

MELVIN

(teasing)

Like a star chart? You'd only be partially correct, let me show you!

KING

I cannot wait.

MELVIN

(excited)

It's an astrolabe, it takes what we know about astronomy and astrology, combined with a star catalog - up to date - it can tell you when the summer and winter solstice are about to occur, or document the duration of travels, and can even be used to gauge a level or slope when surveying land... you could use it for the construction of your place-

KING

(over)

It's almost finished. How... is this thing powered?

MELVIN

It's easier to show.

He takes it off from around his neck and flicks open a nozzle on the top. Then, after slurping up his drink without swallowing, he blows it into the nozzle, the device's cogs begin to rotate as the horizon adjusts.

KING

(no reaction)

Wow, you can make it... spin. Is that it?

He stops blowing as water flows out the bottom onto his shirt, the bronze dial and inscribed cylinder halt.

MELVIN

It can tell you where certain stars are, and other planets, and almost a thousand other uses - this... is the universe in the palm of your hand. Someday maybe even wrapped around your wrist.

As long as you have a constant flow of water, it will keep on running, keeping track of-

KING
(retorting)
-the waste of water?

Melvin bites his lip to keep himself from responding with his first thought.

MELVIN
No, it's... it can outflow into a basin or a trough if you wanted it to-

KING
And give it a bronze after-taste?
I'd rather drink it while it's still boiling. Anyways... I have something nicer to show you.

31

INT. SOUTHPORT - MUSHROOM HOME - THE NEXT DAY

The next morning, as routine, ZUZU wakes up, ties back her hair and goes into the pantry. RIGBY continues to head butt the cupboard door closed as Zuzu keeps opening it to slip her hand in and grab a jar of treats.

ZUZU
Rigby! I can't feed you if you won't let me open the cupboard.

Rigby continues to head butt the cupboard door closed as Zuzu keeps opening it to slip her hand in and grab a jar of sun-dried chicken hearts.

Suddenly, when attempting to open the door, she accidentally bumps Rigby of the head,, sending him in a scurry.

ZUZU
(heated)
Rigby! What's your problem?

Rigby goes zooming into the pipe works of the house, through a rat-sized hole in the wall.

ZUZU
Rigby! No!

Her voice trails high suddenly silent to hear for movement through the walls.

Zuzu goes pale and begins to freak out. She tries talking to the wall wherever she hears movement to apologize to Rigby, pleading for him to come out.

ZUZU

I'm sorry! I didn't mean it.

Rigby eventually comes out on his own. He brings a dead rat as a peace offering. Before Zuzu can react, he picks it up and runs off again.

This time Zuzu catches him with the rat in his clutches, the rat's jaw twitches open with a floral glass tear vial lodged down its throat.

Zuzu takes the vile and pops off the cork as a skinny scroll slides into the palm of her hand.

Written down on thinned misshaped calfskin with squid black ink in miniscule cuneiform characters poorly kept within the lines they drew.

Zuzu began to make out a list from the chicken scratch.

INSERT - RECIPE SCROLL

"INGREDIENTIA:

1 short crust pastry; 1 fresh lamprey (NO eel/monkfish can substitute!); 1 cup red wine vinegar; 2 slices of brown whole meal bread; 1 tsp ground cinnamon; $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp ground black pepper; $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp sea salt; $\frac{1}{2}$ cup red wine; $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp ground ginger; Lastly, wine-soaked bread for serving. Follow instructions carefully, but do not worry because if you mess it all up - we can always make another one."

BACK TO SCENE

ZUZU

A... recipe? Here? Who could've made this, all my ancestors were fishers, Rigby?

Rigby keeps scratching his head against her leg. She began to gather the ingredients according to the instructions, at least as much as she had on hand.

ZUZU

(to herself)

What on Turtle Island is a lamprey?

She begins to read more to Rigby who continues to nudge her arms holding the scroll.

ZUZU

(reading)

"A living fossil of a half-fish
half-eel creature. The seven-holed
vampire pest of the Great Lake has
a bone in its back. Take it out,
then scald and scrape on the side
of the skin."

DAD

Zuzu! Time for class you're going
to be late... again!

Zuzu quickly rolls up the scroll, slides it back into the
vile and slips it in her shoe.

ZUZU

So... dad? Do you ever come across
any lampreys?

DAD

What? The eels? Yeah, I suppose
they've been a nuisance lately.

ZUZU

Sweet! Can I borrow one?

DAD

Borrow?

(laughing)

What're gonna do, give it back?
Besides, I don't think I can give
you a lamprey, honey.

ZUZU

What? Why not?

DAD

Well, they might be small but if
they latch onto you, they can be
dangerous.

Anyways, it doesn't matter even if
your teacher says you can. All
lampreys I see find their way on
the bottom of my boot.

ZUZU

Do they eat boots?

DAD

No, you knucklehead! They're a pest of the Great Lake and everyone on the docks gets rid of them immediately before they suck our food dry. Why do you want one anyways?

ZUZU

(thinking)

Uhh. Uhm. They're kind of cute looking?

DAD

Mmmhm. Sure, have you ever - you know what - never mind.

ZUZU

Maybe they're not so bad, have you-

DAD

They're an invasive species, Zobo.

If you want the stupid thing, you'll have to catch one yourself. There's plenty of fish, or eels, or... 'whatever' in the sea- I mean, lake.

(frustrated)

You know what, I'm done talking.

ZUZU

But daddy-

DAD

Zuzu! Stop! Go to school!

32

EXT. CHICKEN FIELDS - HUNTER'S SHACK - MORNING

On her way to school, she can't stop thinking about the recipe. She finds an open field to sit cross-legged in and pulls out the vile to begin copying to her own notes.

Although she thought she was alone, Zuzu stops when she notices a hunter displaying all his game out and went up to him.

His straw hat spans past shoulder-length casting a shadow over him. Raven black hair with a pale young face.

A dozen dead ducks buckled onto the brim like a basket - their limp necks hang and flail over the brim.

The pipe of a rotisserie rests on his shoulder, his left hand holding a fresh catch by the neck and carrying the butt of the giant prong in his right.

Two wooden trays strapped onto his chest holding plucked and quartered wings, legs, thighs and drumsticks.

Surrounding the carved-out piece of forestry, a variety of chickens roam within their fenced in grasslands.

HUNTER

I see a question mark on your face, friend.

ZUZU

You don't by chance have any eels?

HUNTER

Eels? As in... the fish? I'm sorry, friend, I'm a hunter not a fisher.

Now, if you're looking for quail or chickens, I can help you with that. I have a whole farm of chickens at home, exactly twenty-five.

ZUZU

(sighs)

It's alright. Maybe I'm not supposed to be doing this anyways.

HUNTER

Must be tough being an angler, no need to be tough on yourself. I couldn't ever be patient, but I suppose that's why the King ordered for my birth on the hunting grounds. Traps, stealth, and when all else fails, give chase.

Rigby jets out his claws through the fabric,

ZUZU

Stealth? Like... waiting for the duck?

HUNTER

Exactly, my fisher-friend.

ZUZU

(beat)

Hm. You ever feel like you weren't supposed to hunt?

HUNTER

Oh, you mean like a deviant. I knew someone like that, I think, I never had certainty. Have no idea where they are now.

ZUZU

What'd they leave the city?

HUNTER

No, they... disappeared one day. No letter, no goodbye.

ZUZU

Was he... arrested?

HUNTER

No, can't exactly remember him being arrested. Suddenly there was a new butcher. Just vanished.

ZUZU

Great...

HUNTER

Many of those were already abandoned by most already. So people barely noticed they left.

ZUZU

You noticed. At least you talked with them.

HUNTER

I'm a hunter not a landowner. I am friends and talk with everyone. I'm even talking to you.

His honesty stuns the shy red-faced girl. Noticing her mood change, he looks at it from another angle.

HUNTER

But I suppose even the greatest fishers in the world never live long enough to catch every fish in the world. Know what I mean, friend?

ZUZU

Yeah, I suppose you're right. I still can't believe I'm upset over a stupid fish.

HUNTER

Wait, you're upset over a fish?

ZUZU

It's actually an eel, I think.

HUNTER

Don't you go to class for that or something?

Zuzu's eyes widen with conviction, and her face brimming red with embarrassment.

33

EXT. SOUTHPORT - PIER - MOMENTS LATER

Once she reaches class on the pier, late once again, Zuzu goes straight to her teacher with a request.

TEACHER

You want a what now?

ZUZU

A lamprey... eel. 'The pest of the Great Lake', y'know.

TEACHER

Why?

ZUZU

Uh, someone told me about them...

TEACHER

And?

ZUZU

They said they were cute looking - I need a new pet.

TEACHER

Don't you have a cat?

ZUZU

It's dead.

A loud, aggressive meow can be heard from Zuzu's sack, along with a rummaging around inside.

ZUZU

They're almost dead.

TEACHER

I suppose you can have one, but you'll have to be careful. Don't let it latch onto you.

ZUZU

What will happen if it bites me?

TEACHER

They are only attracted to cold-blooded creatures. But accidents do happen. Let me show you!

The teacher grabs a hold of a caught mud lake trout with a long black snake-like tail dangling around.

They rip the tail off revealing a funnel for a mouth with spiraling layers of sharp jagged teeth.

Up close you can see it's eye and nostril on top but couldn't tell the difference, and seven more holes along its side.

ZUZU

What's that!?

TEACHER

(laughing)

That's a lamprey, girl. They call 'em 'nine-eyed eels.' You want it or what?

ZUZU

Why do they have so many teeth?

TEACHER

They use them for eating, I presume.

ZUZU

Would it kill you if you... ate it?

TEACHER

(pauses)

... you want to eat it?

ZUZU

I want to try.

TEACHER

(hesitant)

Good luck finding someone who'll cook it... but I suppose as long as you bleed it dry, you can cook it like any eel.

Sounds like a real funny prank you're trying to pull on somebody, tell me how it goes.

The teacher teases Zuzu a little by dangling the eel closer.

ZUZU
It's dead, right?

TEACHER
Well, when 'ya hold it like this it
doesn't look very scary.

ZUZU
But it's dead, right!?

TEACHER
Yes, Zuzu, now go give it to your
least favorite butcher.

The teacher hands her the motionless eel and walks away
while giggling.

ZUZU
Wait! Don't I have to... pay for
it?

TEACHER
(chuckling some more)
They're worthless, Zuzu!

(from a distance)

You probably would've caught one
yourself if you had waited some
more.

34

INT. SOUTHPORT - MUSHROOM HOME - NIGHT

Zuzu uses her knife to slice the eel open and pulls it apart
revealing a canoe of entrails. Rigby, lazing in a fruit
bowl, reacts with open-eyes, mouth agape, horrified.

ZUZU
(to herself)
Alright. No 'do-it-yourself'-ing.
Just... follow the recipe.

She reads her clay tablet.

INSERT - ZUZU'S NOTES

"Holding up the thin Season the inside with black pepper,
coarse sea salt, crushed cloves, mace and a little minced
onion..."

ZUZU
(to herself)
Wait! You're supposed to eat this
thing?

"... then close it together again as it were whole; you must
season the outside."

ZUZU
I really want this, Rigby. I really
want to make a change... maybe then
daddy will understand.

"Make a round coffin of Rye, according to how wide is your
Eel, when turned round therein; if your coffin be very high,
you may lay one upon the other pie."

ZUZU
What if I'm wrong? What if I ruin
everything?

"Place two onions in the middle, season them as well, add
half a dozen bay leaves and a few knobs of butter, then
close the pie very high..."

BACK TO SCENE

ZUZU
(reading)
"With your funnel and garnishing,
bake it, and fill it up with
clarified butter when it cools
down."

She pauses once the smoke clears revealing a beautiful
golden-brown crust, and an earthy fragrance of meat and
fruit. Scraping her knife against the top, her handshakes by
the thought of cutting into it.

ZUZU
Alright, Rigby, time for a taste.

Rigby, for the first time, is not interested in eating it
after watching her cook, leaving the quality assurance to
Zuzu alone - she closes her eyes and slips a piece into her
mouth.

ZUZU
It's... amazing! It's like a
Sheppard's pie, only... better!
Come on, Rigby - try it.

Rigby nibbles at a piece, then begins to dive into the rest
of the pie, headfirst.

Zuzu twirls out excitement, filled to the brim with energy.

ZUZU

Next time, I'll fold the eels into
the crust more, so no one sees.

Rigby gives an agreeable meow. She looks around an empty dark room as if a crowd was behind her, out the windows the daylight drained completely.

Her smile slowly disappears. She sighs.

ZUZU

They'll never let me do this, will
they?

FADE TO BLACK.

35 **INT. STAIRS TO THE DUNGEON - NIGHT**

Past a short lattice gate to keep the cats away, downward a spiraling staircase, we watch the cobblestone darken and turn fire-cracked like it was being baked in a furnace as the two men wander further into the ABYSS.

The light subsides the more they descend into darkness, they run into an unbothered SOLDIER wearing an iron Pileus cap with an ornamental olive branch who offers a blazing torch made from a tree branch - presumably guarding something.

36 **INT. DUNGEON - MOMENTS LATER**

Sweating out everything they drank, prompting Melvin to take of his bear-skin - draping it over his forearm.

The King's prize possession is the containment of the BEHEMOTH but has no control over it.

No one has been able to subdue the beast yet many attempt, hoping to appease the King.

KING

Don't get too close...

Every day, brave hunters attempt to at least tame the Behemoth. Unknowingly, the Behemoth fights them off - saving themselves from being plated to the King.

There has been no sighting of the beast, yet armed soldiers descend into the abyss, only to come back covered in muck or not at all.

KING

There it is - my prize possession.
It is... smaller than I remember.

MELVIN

Not enough food perhaps. If I
didn't eat for a day the weight
melts off of me.

KING

(jealous)

Yeah, well that doesn't work for
everyone.

37

INT. ROYAL PALACE - BALLROOM - SAME TIME

Out of the darkness, the sun shining above their heads
through a skylight, making both the men tear up. They both
have wandered down the hall, trailing behind a HERD OF CATS
running in between their legs, leading them to a BARE GARDEN
in an empty ballroom.

The cats brush up against the sprouting saplings to scratch
themselves.

MELVIN

So, the Behemoth isn't dead?
It's... trapped?

KING

Of sorts, yes.

MELVIN

How is it still alive?

KING

There's vegetation down there, that
is the theory - nobody can get
close enough to verify without...
becoming food.

MELVIN

How many people have you lost in an
attempt to kill it?

A sudden quake felt in both their feet and a beastly wail
follows. The KING drops his grin and looks around quickly -
paranoid.

KING

(regaining confidence)

Hm. Possibly a death rattle...

MELVIN

I don't know what to say, sir,
I'm... at a loss...

KING

(leaning in)
Would you like to hear my secret?

MELVIN

Your secret?

KING

How I captured the Behemoth.

MELVIN

You'd share that with me?

KING

I'm only telling you.

MELVIN

Alright then. How'd you do it?

KING

I didn't.

The WISE MAN'S sore smirk drops, the King's words leaving
him puzzled.

MELVIN

... what?

KING

(giggling)
This is where that stupid beast
lived and all I had to do was build
my palace around its home. Now it's
too scared to leave - giving us
infinite opportunities to slaughter
it...

Those who can subdue the Behemoth
will win a place in the royal
kitchen. And that'd feed the whole
kingdom.

MELVIN

You wish to eat the Behemoth? It's
really edible?

KING

(scrambling)

What? No, I don't - I'm not exactly sure if it is. But once it is dead, what else is there to do with it?

MELVIN

Once it is dead. Why not ante up, sir, and say... put your inheritance up for reward?

KING

The terror is over, reconstruction completed. Once the beast is dead everyone will have a feast in my honor.

MELVIN

What about when you go? Politely, but I have to ask, what happens when you die?

KING

I don't know, Melvin. I'm not dead!

MELVIN

I mean your regime, your heir. Not to be too brash, sir, however... who's next in line?

KING

I have plans. Instructions set in place... guides.

MELVIN

Well... could I review these-

KING

I'm not talking about this anymore. It's going to be a long time before I go anywhere!

The wise man stares into the dead space of the King's darting eyes who notices.

KING

You look at me, I bet I'm the happiest man you've ever met. Hmm?

MELVIN

(hesitant)

Can't... call a man happy until he is dead.

KING
That could also be arranged.

MELVIN
No! That's not what I mean...

KING
Then, what's your point?

MELVIN
Yes, my point is... well...

KING
Speak your mind, friend.

MELVIN
You say you're the happiest man to
ever live, however... I've met the
happiest men in the world... and
they were not you.

KING
Really?

Melvin looks at the wide-eyed King.

MELVIN
Really. You know what they say:
'there's always someone bigger.'

They both look to the cats meowing for attention.

MELVIN
I did want to... give you my
condolences. I heard about the...
incident -

KING
Stop! I-

(breaking his grin for a
moment)

Please... no.

MELVIN
I understand.

They both look back to the cats rolling in the mulch,
silent.

MELVIN
Wait a minute! I almost forgot!

He pulls out a wrapped-up scroll from inside his robe tied together with a red ribbon. It rolls out revealing a map of the Onion city, and the rest of the Kingdom.

MELVIN

Up to date... for now.

38

EXT. ONION CITY - STREETS - SUNRISE

The city's concrete reflected the sun brighter than the pier or even the shoreline.

In the distance, cast off on a blue horizon with white paint strokes of clouds, mammoth-sized royal blue insignia on white sails of wooden ships.

Upon her arrival to the city the King had been depicted as this grandfather of all, always smiling.

CITY CRIER

Today is the day of the royal cook-off! Ladies, gentlemen, and all fans of food - come and watch, donate and pay a small fee, to watch wealthy folks eat!

(long catch of breathe)

These rich folks sure know how to eat, come and see! Horse and cart parking is not free!

39

EXT. SOUTHPORT - STEPS TO STAGE - MOMENTS LATER

The stage on the pier has aged and weathered over the years with its larger settlement, spalling and cracking with royal banners. The KEEPER introduces themselves to Zuzu then announces the next dish:

KEEPER

Now, while the judges are... eating, we will reveal how the final dish was prepared!

Zuzu's eyes widen and cheeks burn red.

Gritting her teeth as the scrawny Keeper grabs a hold with an iron grip to her arm, leading the young girl onto the stage stairs.

ZUZU

We're... going on stage!?

KEEPER

You're going on stage - to tell
everyone how your dish was
prepared.

ZUZU

But... but... but-

They stop before the last step, the whole crowd in view
behind the Keeper.

KEEPER

But what? Don't tell me it's a
secret?

ZUZU

Yes! It is!

(searching)

My ancestor's secret recipe.

Behind her back, she has a firm grasp on the tablet,
chipping at the clay with her nails.

KEEPER

(disappointed)

Oh, that's unfortunate!

ZUZU

Yes, I'm sorry. It is-

KEEPER

For you. You already signed the
contest contract, the fine print
saying you will appear on stage and
present a brief list of ingredients
used for your dish.

ZUZU

I did? I thought that was to sign-
in?

40

EXT. SOUTHPORT - STAGE ON THE PIER - CONTINUOUS

The Keeper politely drags her into the center of the stage
as the crowd collectively calms down.

KEEPER

And now... the last dish's chef
will tell you what's inside this
wonderful-smelling pie!

They turn to Zuzu right beside them and WHISPER:

KEEPER

You ready?

Zuzu stands before the hushed crowd, a ribbon of blue in the background - the Great Lake is topped with clouds of white, the horizon's brightness shines over the stage, casting a sharp silhouette of the small chef.

She looks at the audience, then her hand - palming the shrunken clay.

ZUZU

I... the... pie... um.

(stumbling)

It has...

The Keeper confidently walks up and WHISPERS again into her ear:

KEEPER

You don't have to reveal
measurements - only tell 'em what's
inside.

Zuzu nods, takes a deep breath before slowly turning towards the crowd again.

ZUZU

What's inside?

MERCHANT (O.S)

Yeah! We're waiting!

A majority of the crowd giggles, immediately calming down once the Keeper walks back onto stage, beside the young girl.

They nod at Zuzu, who continues:

ZUZU

Inside... there's cinnamon...

She pauses; frightened and tongue-tied.

FISHMONGER

(from a distance)

That's it?

ZUZU

No. There's... there's more.
There's... also black pepper -
toasted.

(MORE)

ZUZU (CONT'D)
Dry white wine-vinegar, yellow
onions, and breadcrumbs.

Looking back over her shoulder for approval, the Keeper nods
back with a look that says, "keep going".

ZUZU
All in a rye dough... for the
crust.

There is sweet wine, powdered
ginger, and brown sugar - the sops
soak stale white bread.

She turns back to the Keeper, who asks the question the
whole crowd is harping on:

KEEPER
(quietly)
What's the meat?

ZUZU
(quietly back)
It's seafood.

KEEPER
(nudging her arm)
Tell them...

ZUZU
(gulping; to the crowd)
It's seafood.

The whole crowd makes a collective sound of understanding -
makes sense as they are on a pier.

FISHMONGER
What is it? Trout?

ZUZU
No... it's - it's...

The crowd gets impatient and begins to pester the young
chef.

ZUZU
It's eel.

FISHMONGER
What!? Like... a knifefish?

ZUZU
(deep sigh)
A lamprey.

A sailor holds his belly and lets out a uncontrollable wheezing laughter. Everyone, except the Keeper and Zuzu, begin to laugh loudly as well, before transitioning into a harsh boo. Thousands of pairs of aggressive eyes stare back at Zuzu.

FISHMONGER
You mean the pest!? What?

Zuzu looks into the hissing crowd to see if her father were present - to no avail.

Finally, all the shame she had contained inside was thrown in her face by the entire town's population. She could feel her cheeks burn red.

A whisper from behind the Keeper and the red-faced chef, telling them to serve the hungry LAST JUDGE - who hasn't denied the meal or any, ever in their life.

41

I/E. SOUTHPORT - PAVILION - CONTINUOUS

Every judge in the pit next to the stage after hearing the recipe list being announced, puts down their forks of pie - too disgusted with what they heard to take a bite at all.

The LAST JUDGE is a barely visible mysterious shadow of a man, in a seedy greenroom alone. A server hands the dish to the Keeper who walks into the dilapidated PAVILION with a lattice-patterned wrought-iron framework withering away with rust.

The building is surrounded by tall trees and appears integrated into a lush, manicured garden, reinforcing its role as a decorative leisure structure rather than a residence or functional building.

An OVERGROWN FOREST inside pushing against the tall arched stained-glass panels trying to escape, casting a dark shadow. The figure is sitting in silence staring at a wall surrounded by what used to be an elegant room.

He picks up his skinny two-pronged bone fork, presses the side into the crust, sniffs it then places it down to gather more unto it and takes a whole bite - clanking his teeth on the silver.

42

EXT. SOUTHPORT - STAGE ON THE PIER - CONTINUOUS

Watching from a stage, raised above the crowd, Zuzu soaks up the humiliation - her eyes beginning to tear up as the whole miffed town becomes riled up:

COMMONER

Disgusting!

MERCHANT

Cheap!

The operatic voice of the Fishmonger settles the crowd so we can hear his lone voice.

FISHMONGER

Wow, her cooking really is a bad as it looks!

Everyone laughs, directed towards the girl on stage - who's on the brink of sobbing by the crowds overwhelming displeasure.

FISHMONGER

Are you even a chef?

MERCHANT

(offhand)

Is she even from this village?

Louder than the aggressively annoyed crowd practically delirious from laughter - the KEEPER's voice, deep in their diaphragm, BOOMS louder:

KEEPER

The crowd's decision has been... vetoed!

The crowd goes silent with collective sound of confusion. A lone voice at a medium tone calls out.

COMMONER

(from a distance)

... what?

KEEPER

There has been a... change in the rules!

The LAST JUDGE uses the armrests of his chair to prop himself up as he slowly trots up the stage's steps, revealing a velvet coat in royal blue and a crown filled with glittering jewels.

Everyone goes silent out of fear; looking past her, Zuzu slowly rotates - nervous about who she'll see.

KEEPER

Introducing, the superior judge...
our King!

The KING doesn't speak at first, only glares at, scanning the crowd. He holds up his hand, signaling to the already quiet crowd to quiet some more.

Then, places his big palm on Zuzu's right shoulder; the Keeper peering over her left.

She freezes! He doesn't look at the chef who he's rested his hand on, but speaks loud enough for only Zuzu to hear:

KING

You... are going to love my palace.

FADE TO:

43

I/E. ROYAL PALACE - VESTIBULE - THE NEXT DAY

With not much of her own experience to share, she learns from all the chefs who've accumulated from countries around the world into one royal kitchen feeding one man.

Many of which have a single failure that sent them on the same exact journey as Zuzu years ago on the one chance they'd be able to land a spot in the resplendent palace.

As a resident junior-chef, Zuzu overhears beastly brutes with chef hats gossiping about a supposed BEHEMOTH.

Everyone who enters the kitchen as a chef works under the head chef, who seems to be the Behemoth that everyone talks about.

The King's palace has always been rumored to be the most pleasant place, but a cold and calculated reality is revealed to be in the reclusive King's palace.

44

INT. ROYAL PALACE - BALLROOM - MORNING

The royal ballroom is an indoor courtyard with a large, stained skylight and a narrow garden of fully grown trees and bushes growing plums, cherries, elderberries and grapes - everything is finished now!

A symmetrical checkered-tile floor paired with the sand rough tile walls that form an arching ceiling fifty times a person's height.

The ceiling aside from the ribbed vaults are made from a pattern of bricks that looks like scales from down below. As quiet as a place of worship, neat and orderly.

A large asymmetrical slab of Maplewood plastered onto the sweating tile to the left of a swinging tavern door with the neatly etched and burnt words proclaiming: "This kitchen was found to be in subsequent compliance with the King's code."

The sounds of a lively room full of chatter, but not a single soul in sight except for a tiny figure with only the visage of their face visible above a royal blue robe with enormously wide sleeves and a ribbon of royal medallions lining the collar.

Their back turns around to catch sight of Zuzu and yells in her direction.

KEEPER

You! Little girl! Come here!

Their voice booms with a short echo as they run up to her. They stop and smile.

KEEPER

Are you the new chef?

Zuzu is at first unsure but before she can speak, they interrupt.

KEEPER

Of course you are! I remember you.

ZUZU

I've met you before?

KEEPER

You won the contest! Correct? The King chose your dish.

A sudden quake beneath their feet turns Zuzu pale as she looks around to see no reactions.

KEEPER

We get a lot of those, comes with it when you construct a palace within a hill. Follow me, you have lots on your plate to do.

TWO CHEFS in white double-breasted, blue-striped oil-splattered jackets, with the collars undone, hunched over a glass chess set.

UNKNOWN CHEF

Nyet. No, no, no. You can't do that. You can either move it here or there.

The other playing chef moves the piece forward.

UNKNOWN CHEF

No, no. That's neither of those. Are you watching? You can only move it in these spots.

Following the Keeper through the swinging doors. An almost-identical younger CHEF with a large scar under his jaw is dragging a surly cow by a lead through the royal hall, leaving muddy hoof marks on the velveteen carpet, before stopping to catch his breath and speaking with a giant beastly MAN covered in curly copper hair, and palms the size of a newborn pushing the cow's rear.

STEWIE

Let's hurry up, we need to get this done for service before the Behemoth has us for dinner.

Zuzu gulps as she's led into the kitchen behind them only to immediately be halted by the beastly man.

EUSTACE

Whoa there, seamstress, kitchen is for chefs only. You know where you're going?

ZUZU

Well-

KEEPER

(finishing)

This is the new junior chef, Chef.

EUSTACE

Is this a joke?

KEEPER

Nope! And you get to train her! Her name is... uh-

(turning to Zuzu)

-what's your name?

ZUZU

Zuzu.

KEEPER

Chef Zuzu! Meet Chef Eustace.

EUSTACE

What! You're serious? This little girl is the new chef?

KEEPER

This little girl won the King's contest.

He looks down at Zuzu for a solid few seconds like paying respects at a wake.

EUSTACE

The Behemoth will eat her alive.

STEWIE

Eustace! Let's get this over with, come on. Xyola will give us the oyster cut to split if we're there before sunset.

The chefs leave with the cow as the Keeper shows Zuzu around in the lounge.

KEEPER

Don't mind him, he's miserable and wants you to know it.

KEEPER

You know the legend Atys was a brave soldier who didn't quite look the part.

ZUZU

But I'm not a soldier... or a man?

KEEPER

Close enough. The royal kitchen itself is a brigade.

However, before I can show you the kitchen everyone who enters the palace in a regal fashion must have an official meeting with the King. I hope you wore your best shirt.

Zuzu processes the information given as the Keeper leads the way.

ZUZU

Oh, okay... wait, with the King!?

JUMP CUT TO:

45

INT. ROYAL PALACE - HALL - MOMENTS LATER

The chatter of a lively crowd grows as the Keeper leads Zuzu down a rabbit hole of backrooms full of more chefs moving in silence.

Right before they reach the swinging double doors at the end that open momentarily - revealing a ballroom filled with a large crowd drinking and dancing.

Women propped up in cream crinoline dresses, their necklines brimming with pearls, the men wrapped in plaid tailcoats and extend their height with top hats, and more mingling folks in unfamiliar yet proper garments of various blues, browns and purples. She overhears the middle of some guest's gossiping:

FANCY-FOLK

Why are we here again?

MERCHANT

The old man's kingdom has been teetering ever since the mutiny of the well-liked legend, Atys.

FANCY-FOLK

(chuckling)

More likely thy Majesty is low on gold.

Zuzu is dropped off in a space outside the throne room by the Keeper who tells her she is second in line to speak with the King.

Alongside the wall steamed by condensation, right beneath a window into the entry hall, a row of three armchairs with the middle one taken by a pudgy clean shaven middle aged balding man fidgeting with a white cap.

His name is CHICHIBÌO, the roast and grill cook. He is nervous himself yet trying not to show it as he's about to ask the King for a personal favor.

They are the only ones in line to speak with him.

Zuzu reluctantly sits to the left of Chichibìo avoiding eye contact.

He immediately notices her and shoots a friendly smile attempting to entice one back.

CHICHIBÌO

How'd you end up here?

ZUZU

I... I just won a contest.

CHICHIBÌO

No, no I meant here... in line to see the King.

ZUZU

Oh, they said I have to. All new chefs have to.

CHICHIBÌO

You're... a chef?

ZUZU

(hesitates)

Yes?

CHICHIBÌO

Nice, well... welcome! I remember first meeting the King... seems like yesterday.

ZUZU

How'd you end up here?

CHICHIBÌO

I'm here to ask the King to stop calling me by the wrong name.

ZUZU

I meant how'd you end up working for the King.

CHICHIBÌO

Ohhhh... that's a whole other story. I'm here to become a better chef, to impress my wife. The key to a happy marriage is to always know what you want to eat because she never does. My name is Chichibìo.

ZUZU

Did you also win a contest?

CHICHIBÌO

No, my contract was sold to the King. But I didn't mind at all. In fact, I always wanted to work here.

ZUZU

Really?

CHICHIBÌO

Yes, ma'am... or ah- chef, I used to work for this wealthy landowner named Currado years ago. It was an... olive orchard, I believe.

ZUZU

Is that the whole other story?

CHICHIBÌO

Yes. Back in Venice.

ZUZU

Why was your contract sold?

CHICHIBÌO

Well...

The older chef cannot help but grin a little before launching into a story.

JUMP CUT TO:

46

EXT. VENICE, ITALY - CURRADO'S OLIVE ORCHARD - DAY
(FLASHBACK)

A long-winged falcon dives into a bushy furrow-filled field plunging its beak into a fat shell pink crane standing on one leg asleep.

The falcon and the crane crash into a pool of mud eventually the motionless neck of the crane is carried by the falcon's beak retreating across the field back where it came.

The crane's body is slumped onto a porch as the falcon perches on the cowhide gauntlet of the smiling landowner.

CURRADO

Beautiful job, Falcon. What a catch!

The older man named CURRADO, bends at the knee to pick up the dead crane by the neck.

CURRADO

Chichibìo!

The well-known, wealthy older gentleman removes the gauntlet and brushes dirt off the perched falcon's nape.

CURRADO

Look at this crane! Young and fat, let's have a barbeque tonight.

CHICHIBÌO
Absolutely, Master.

The chef tends to a pit of coals with a grill hanging by chains over a cloud of smoke.

On the grill, two crane legs, defeathered, seasoned, shaped with twine, dripping with juices.

The beautiful soprano in a sunbonnet skips alongside the Dutch door, pushing open the top half and taking in a deep breath of the smokey aroma.

ELISE
Chichibìo! Chichibìo!

She immediately pokes herself over the Dutch door, then rests her chin on her hands staring down the working chef.

CHICHIBÌO
Don't distract me today, beautiful.
I've got an important request to
take care of before I can take you
out on a date.

ELISE
(sarcastically)
What could be more important than
me?

CHICHIBÌO
As soon as I finish this I will
come and find you. And I promise I
will take you out.

ELISE
(halfheartedly)
Whatever you are making smells
delicious and gamey. I will forgive
your 'rudeness', and you can still
take me out if and only if you let
me have one of those legs.

CHICHIBÌO
Oh, please don't be unfair, Elise.
You know I would give you one if it
were mine to give.

ELISE
Oh well then.

She skips away still staring and smiling at him hoping to insight some drawback. Chichibìo smiles at first then begins to process her request.

CHICHIBÌO
Wait. Wait!

CUT TO:

47

INT. CURRADO'S OLIVE ORCHARD - DINING ROOM - NIGHT
(FLASHBACK)

After the sun set completely, Currado sat down to have dinner with some important guests.

When the grilled crane was brought out on a floral porcelain platter in between roasted kale and steaming hot rice mixed with peas, carrots all marinated in soy sauce and poultry seasoning, he immediately noticed it only had one leg.

Surprised, he called the chef over.

CURRADO
Chef! Where's the other leg?

They both pause to glance at the lone roasted leg.

CHICHIBÌO
Well...

CURRADO
Well?

CHICHIBÌO
Sir. I-

CURRADO
Sir, what? Speak your mind,
Chichibìo!

CHICHIBÌO
I don't know how to tell you this,
but cranes only have one leg.

They both stare at each other in silence for a second.

CURRADO
Are you trying to bust my lamb
chops?

CHICHIBÌO
No sir.

CURRADO
But you're going to pull their wool
over my eyes?

CHICHIBÌO

I thought we were talking about the crane?

CURRADO

We are! Are you trying to tell me that all cranes have only one leg and one thigh? You think I've never seen a crane before?

CHICHIBÌO

Yes, sir. If it pleases you, we can go out and see the cranes in the field... after your meal of course.

CURRADO

Of course I'll finish my meal! And then we'll see who's right.

48

EXT. VENICE, ITALY - CURRADO'S OLIVE ORCHARD - THE NEXT DAY (FLASHBACK)

The next morning, still fuming, Currado gets up early and drags Chichibìo out to the river where cranes were often seen.

Chichibìo, terrified and desperate, prayed for some miracle.

Suddenly then, they saw about a dozen cranes standing by the water all asleep, balanced on one leg, as cranes often do. Chichibìo points excitedly.

Currado said nothing but crept closer.

CURRADO

(abruptly)

Ho! Ho!

The cranes wake up wide eyed, drop their other legs, and fly away. Currado turns to Chichibìo with a sneer.

CURRADO

Do they have two legs now, or what?

Chichibìo, completely flustered and a face full of red quickly replies.

CHICHIBÌO

Sure, sir - but you didn't yell at last night's crane. If you had, it would've shown its other leg too!

Currado is STRUCK SILENT by his response but SUDDENLY bursts out laughing at the clever comeback.

The vein in his forehead disappears. The Chef recoils with a hearty laugh as well, unaware whether he's still in trouble or not.

CURRADO

Aye, Chichibio, you're right. I should've tried that.

BACK TO:

49

INT. ROYAL PALACE - HALL - SAME TIME

Chichibio's story has put a smile on Zuzu's face before they both jump from a booming voice.

KEEPER

Chimichurri! You're next.

Both, the Keeper and older chef, leave the dimly lit room into an array of daylight closing shut a tall Mahogany door behind them, leaving Zuzu all alone in the dark.

CUT TO:

50

INT. ROYAL PALACE - KING'S THRONE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Called in by the KEEPER's voice like a sheep to push the heavy door open herself. ZUZU struggles yet cracks it open enough to slip her skinny self through.

The KING comes into focus, as Zuzu walks into the Privy Chamber, and his nickname becomes apparent.

Reclined and relaxed in a rigid throne, suspended on a pyramid of stone steps, a heavy-set balding man with ash gray curls tucked behind a jagged crown with thousands on top of thousands of jewels.

The gold-leafed cement formed an octagonal skylight 20 meters above his head directed at his throne as it illuminates his copper skin, resembling an ethereal divine figure of radiating gold casting little to no shadow.

He has no discernible neck but carries a dozen heavy chains rattling around his broad shoulders, with a dark plum wrinkled robe fitted onto his entire body.

Throughout the kingdom the King's image is replicated, promoted and praised as the always-smiling grandfather of the Onion city and the hero who captured the Behemoth, the King seemed almost otherworldly, yet sitting in that throne was nothing but a letdown. Only a man failing to see the devil right beside him.

The Keeper introduces the King upon Zuzu's first steps in their presence.

While the Keeper speaks, Zuzu is unsure what to do with herself. The King continues to stare well into silence with dead-eyes.

KEEPER

Grand Title of the even Grander
King: His Imperial and Royal
Apostolic Majesty, By the Grace of
God Emperor of the Onions, King of
West Ridge, Near North Side and
South Shore, West Town, Lincoln
Park, North Lawndale, West Garfield
Park; King of Bridgeport, South
Onion City, Montclare, North
Center, West Elsdon, etc.; Archduke
of Lake View; Grand Duke of East
Garfield Park and Logan Square;
Duke of Jefferson Park, Near South
Side, West Lawn, South Deering and
Fuller Park; Grand Prince of Morgan
Park, Margrave of West Pullman;
Duke of North Park, Edgewater,
Uptown, East Side and Washington
Heights; Count of Grand Boulevard
and Hermosa, of Auburn Gresham,
Onion Lawn and Avondale; Prince of
Rogers Park and McKinley Park;
Margrave of Lincoln Square and
Lower West Side; Count of Humboldt
Park, South Lawndale; Lord of the
Loop, Riverdale, Washington Park,
Mount Greenwood, North Lawndale,
New City, Near West Side, Norwood
Park, Oakland, O'Hare, Portage
Park, Pullman, Roseland, South
Onion City, South Deering, South
Lawndale, Uptown, Washington
Heights, Washington Park, Grand
Voivode of the Voivodeship of West
Elsdon, West Englewood, West
Garfield Park, West Lawn, West
Pullman, West Ridge, West Town,
Woodlawn.

The Keeper WHISPERS into Zuzu's ear:

KEEPER

Don't get too close - our Majesty
speaks first.

ZUZU
(whispering)
You forgot to mention Southport.

KEEPER
(whispering back)
That's an unestablished
neighborhood; it's one of many
fishing moorings - not a city-
state...

Then, the King speaks, not to Zuzu but casually to the
Keeper, maintaining his glare.

KING
Is this a joke?

KEEPER
Is what a joke, Your Majesty?

KING
Kieta... there's a little girl in
front of me.

KEEPER
Sir, this little girl is the chef
that won your contest. You chose
her dish.

The King begins to chuckle.

KING
This... is the new chef?

KEEPER
It is as I tell you, however you
please.

KING
... right? So, this is the new
chef?

KEEPER
Yes, sir.

KING
Hm.

All three of them stand in silence.

KING
Well, then. Let's not harp on the
particulars.
(MORE)

KING (CONT'D)

I suppose I did say I'd offer the winner a position in the kitchen. And I always keep my word.

KEEPER

You said that 'whoever cooked that dish must be in the royal kitchen. For the royal kitchen only has the best chefs.'

KING

I know what I said! And my decision has been made. She will be the exception that proves the rule - if she survives. Any questions, little girl?

KEEPER

(correcting)

Chef.

The King and the Keeper both turn to Zuzu, expecting a response.

ZUZU

Um.

KING

Is there a problem?

ZUZU

Can I... think about it?

The King smiles and leans down resting his elbows on his knees.

KING

You don't have a choice. But since you are an unusual hire, I will help you in making the right decision. You can choose between serving troughs of slop at the royal dungeon or serving the finest cuisine in the royal kitchen. That's your choice.

The King flashes his teeth then shuts them tight into a snarl as Zuzu stares back at a whole different King than from what she was taught.

ZUZU

That's not fair. What if... I don't want to work here? Or... for you?

The King can't help but smirk a little.

KING

Aww. You think you're the first one to feel foisted, little girl?

Everyone is in their proper preordained position, including you and I... I know it may seem daunting but trust me, you're in an excellent position. Sure... you're not a...

(points to himself)

-a King, but... I mean...

He pauses to think.

KING

... you're not only a chef but soon you'll officially be a royal chef.

It could be a whole lot worse... you could be on a farm... or a fish boat. If you last that is. Kids only come here wanting an easy life, not to work hard. Anyway...

Zuzu goes pale as the King looks to the Keeper.

KING

I don't really care about this anymore... do you? Just... send her to the kitchen to be trained... perhaps correct her on regal elocution while you're at it.

He slightly swats his hand gesturing towards the exit.

ZUZU

My what-what?

KEEPER

Right away, Your Majesty! Thank you!

The Keeper walks towards the exit past Zuzu pinching her shirt like a leash.

KEEPER

Follow me, I will show you to the kitchen!

As the Keeper drags Zuzu out the door, the King doesn't stop staring her down, and neither does she, both still bewildered at the sight of each other.

The Keeper hauls a chain closing the tall Mahogany door, with the King's dead-eyes still peering back through the shrinking gap.

CUT TO:

51

INT. ROYAL PALACE - KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

The Keeper brings Zuzu into the crowded kitchen. Chefs, servers and servants flow in and out giving no notice to them, except for one smarmy goading man who mocks her:

STEWIE
(grinning)
Does your daddy know you're wearing
his jacket?

Zuzu responds only with her eyes as she walks past him, to the chef's surprise.

STEWIE
(dropping his smile)
You'll be gone in a day.

Zuzu begins as another piece to the conveyor belt of chefs that only serve the kitchen, in the cheapest and fastest way possible while all your customers are tired critical chefs.

A long table made from a section of a red oak tree, displaying the rings. Dozens of turtle shells, wet and covered in muck, rest on top.

KEEPER
Here you are! Time to make soup.

ZUZU
But my dish was a pie.

KEEPER
You're a chef, aren't you? Then,
you can make some soup. It's turtle
meat stew. Besides... Xyola really
out-did herself this time, you
wouldn't want to break her heart?

ZUZU
Who?

KEEPER
The butcher, Xyola.

ZUZU

Oh, when do I meet her?

KEEPER

(giggling)

You don't want too, trust me. Keep
your head down little chef, don't
draw attention to yourself.

A long-haired dog dodges into the kitchen, rummaging around until it sees Zuzu - runs up and snaps in her face before a chef unknown to her yanks back on a rope leash, halting the foaming vomiting dog from biting. Zuzu hears a hissing from behind her, Rigby's claws digging into her back leg.

KEEPER

Could you mind your dog?

ZUZU

Yeah! It's a beast!

SOUS-CHEF

Yeah, and he likes to eat little
girls and little cats.

ZUZU

My cat isn't little, and I'm-

KEEPER

Touring the kitchen as a new junior
chef.

SOUS-CHEF

(laughing)

The cat or the girl?

He leaves with his dog as Rigby takes a swat, barely reaching the giant mutt.

KEEPER

I wish I could say that's all but
there's a few more chefs, so...
I'll say good luck and leave 'ya to
it.

They exit. Zuzu pulls out a couple tablets of clay, finding the one that says "TURTLE SOUP".

52

INT. ROYAL PALACE - LIVING QUARTERS - NIGHT

After being insulted, suspected by the entire kitchen for being a deviant, Zuzu follows everyone back into main commons leading to the palace residences - Rigby trailing behind her.

The Keeper sidles up to her and explains the living situation.

KEEPER

All kitchen faculties, except for the porters, live here. Usually, you are partnered up but your recruitment was... unexpected, so I hope you don't get too lonely... it's like any monastery.

ZUZU

What's a monastery?

KEEPER

(sighing)

That's right, you're young. It's a... living situation where you live with others.

ZUZU

Like a home?

KEEPER

Sure. Any other questions?

ZUZU

What are porters?

KEEPER

They wash the dishes, silverware and all surfaces. After the food has been eaten, of course.

The Keeper opens a heavy barrel-looking door that reveals a room filled with pipes covered in grease, a large waterfall divided into three soapy chambers funneling out at the bottom - spraying out into a trench.

Standing in the middle chained by the wrists and ankles is a barely moving skeleton washing plates.

ZUZU

What food are we cooking?

KEEPER

I don't know. I don't cook, I only supply the food. Enough questions for today, get some rest.

The Keeper spins around in a split second, heading out the door before adding:

KEEPER

Oh, and today's soup was amazing!
Thank you, chef!

53

INT. LIVING QUARTERS - ZUZU'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Zuzu has trouble sleeping and vents to Rigby about her frustrations.

A distant whisper through the bones of the burnt concrete that held the palace together. Rigby mumbles into her side a long deep meow.

ZUZU

Maybe I am going crazy, Riggles.
Maybe this is all my imagination.

They must've run out of gold for her quarters. Zuzu thinks the voice she hears is all in her head and at first thinks it resembles her father who was stern but soft spoken.

ZUZU

And out of all the voices I
could've been haunted by, it had to
be this one... maybe everyone is
right about me.

A FAMILIAR VOICE (O.S.)

(hushed; barely made out)
Don't worry, honey. Everything is
going to be fine.

ZUZU

(to herself)
Or maybe they're all wrong.

FADE TO BLACK.

54

INT. ROYAL PALACE - KITCHEN - THE NEXT DAY

In the kitchen, the head chef briskly yet elegantly walks through his staff, all moving out of the way for him - except for Zuzu.

RUSE

You! Little girl.

ZUZU

... me?

RUSE

You're the only little girl here,
aren't you?

ZUZU

I'm not exactly sure, it's my first day as a chef.

RUSE

You think you're a chef?

ZUZU

I don't think-

RUSE

Obviously not-

ZUZU

(snapping)

I know I'm a chef.

The entire staff pauses to slowly turn and face the head chef and little girl, eyes wide, lips bitten - they don't say a word, but they all raise their eyebrows, a few even hide their smirks.

RUSE

You know you're a chef, alright... prove it.

ZUZU

... how?

RUSE

I'm hungry, I want a steak.

ZUZU

You... want me to make you a steak? Only a steak?

RUSE

Think you can handle that, child?

ZUZU

(mumbling)

A please would be nice.

RUSE

(steaming)

What did you say!?

ZUZU

Nothing.

RUSE

Nothing, what?

ZUZU
Nothing... chef.

RUSE
Now, get out of my sight! Only
return once you have my meal.

She scurries out of the kitchen with no idea of where to go, giving one last glare over her shoulder to the head chef's surprise.

The whole staff still staring until the head chef notices:

RUSE
What are you all looking at!? Back
to work! At least the kid has a
gallbladder, what about the rest of
you?

CUT TO:

55

INT. ROYAL PALACE - BUTCHER'S ROOM - MORNING

Iron cleavers, axe heads, swords, and daggers hang from the ceiling - most of the butcher's den is made of red oak-wood panels except for a WALL-SIZED WOOD-FIRED FURNACE roaring wild like jaws of death. The butcher's name is XYOLA. She's one of the youngest, yet older than Zuzu.

Incredibly tall, even without the heels, a thick leather pleated dress with overalls, all burnt black except for silver breast buttons.

XYOLA
Why exactly should I give you
anything, little lamb?

ZUZU
Because I have an order, from the
head chef. To make him a steak.

XYOLA
Oh, let me think on that.

(smirking)

I have no chops. You'll have to ask
Eustace for a cow and slaughter it
yourself.

ZUZU
Really?

XYOLA

No, not really. The only steak I have is aged. And you can't have any.

ZUZU

But, if I don't make the head chef his steak, I might be fired.

XYOLA

Fired? You? That sounds fine to me. Too many people here anyway. But they usually feed incompetents to the Behemoth.

ZUZU

Isn't that the head chef?

XYOLA

(laughing)

I forgot how young you are. Fine... you want a steak? What cut?

ZUZU

What?

XYOLA

What cut is worthy of the head chef's plate? Rib, sirloin, flank-how about a chuck roast?

ZUZU

I-

XYOLA

What's the matter? Don't eat steak? Possibly because you're not a real chef?

ZUZU

I can't afford steak! I eat... fish.

XYOLA

That lame excuse makes more sense than you being here.

ZUZU

Please, chef, I'm begging you. If you let me have a steak to make this meanie happy, I'll... cook you one - I can throw in some soup as well?

XYOLA

(pauses; stunned)

... did you call me Chef? And did you call Ruse a meanie? Well, then, if you're cooking for both of us make 'em from a tenderloin.

The butcher puts down her cleaver gently and puts her elbows on the olivewood board to peer down at Zuzu and burst into a heavy laughter.

The young chef shares a smile while nervously rubbing her arm.

ZUZU

(still nervous)

So... how'd you end up here? At the palace?

The butcher takes a long dagger with a toadstool pommel and smoothly scrapes it against a wet ceramic stone.

XYOLA

Me? I'm only the daughter of the greatest butcher in the mid-west.

ZUZU

Who's that?

XYOLA

My father. The butcher of Morgan Park.

XYOLA

He used to have a whole-roasted hog as his specialty.

Back when they let him cook. Now... he's retired... and also missing.

ZUZU

How's he missing? Where did he go?

XYOLA

I don't know, that's what makes him missing, woman. He taught me everything he knew though before he disappeared - not sure why so don't ask.

ZUZU

Then, that makes you the greatest butcher of the mid-west now.

XYOLA

(smiling; pondering)
I'm not perfect though, I could
always be better. Make less
mistakes.

ZUZU

I feel like I've been making
nothing but mistakes.

XYOLA

You won that contest though, didn't
you?

When I first started, I was working
with cows... was given a beautiful
calf and I butchered the whole
thing.

ZUZU

Isn't that what you're supposed to
do?

XYOLA

No... after that. The cow is cut
into sections, then into more
sections, and then into steaks,
ribs, roasts and such. If I recall
correctly, it was a five-pound
sirloin tri-tip.

ZUZU

What happened to it?

XYOLA

Messed it up too many times and
didn't use any of it. Now, not a
single piece goes to waste. Even
the bones are used for broth, and
hooves into gelatin. Everything
else is offered to the kitchen.
Here at the palace, we use 'nose-
to-tail' for a 'farm-to-plate'
experience.

ZUZU

What about the eyes?

XYOLA

You could make a good taco with cow
eyes. All the other parts of the
cow are offered to the crew, mostly
in the form of liverwurst or a
pate.

(MORE)

XYOLA (CONT'D)

As for if they're cooked to perfection is outside my realm and I'd rather not set myself up for disappointment anymore.

ZUZU

You don't get to cook? Can't you grind some liverwurst whenever you want and-?

XYOLA

Not here. I'm only the butcher. And I don't serve the King liverwurst.

She has moved on from sharpening her knife to using the edge to scrap off her cutting board.

ZUZU

Why not?

XYOLA

Because the King finds offal... err- the other parts... to be peasant food. The King prefers more... 'shock' and 'awe'.

ZUZU

Cow eyes aren't shocking?

XYOLA

I thought we were talking about liverwurst? You... ask a lot of questions, don't you?

ZUZU

Sorry.

XYOLA

Don't apologize - never apologize! You're only a chef so I don't expect you to know much about this.

ZUZU

I want to learn though, if I can.

XYOLA

Why on this side of the Turtle would want to go and do that?

ZUZU

I don't know. Feels like there's always more to it.

XYOLA

Not much more to liverwurst, chef.
Unless you're like my mother and
you stick it in between two slices
of raisin-bread.

ZUZU

Is that good?

XYOLA

I don't know... I never tried...
maybe I should've? Would you?

ZUZU

Couldn't hurt to try.

XYOLA

Always give something a try. Now,
go cook your steak - and remember:
everyone else settles for
perfection, great chefs seek
better.

ZUZU

Why are you helping me? I mean,
thanks, but... why?

XYOLA

(sighs)

It wasn't too long I was exactly
where you were.

Zuzu, full of positivity, immediately spins around to find a
grill with ember-kissed coals still glowing.

STEWIE

You can't use that grill, little
one.

ZUZU

I was told by the head chef to cook
him-

STEWIE

Don't care. You'll need to use a
stove top then. Grill is closed.

ZUZU

But there's still hot coals, it
will only take-

The older chef who's already unbuttoned his collar takes a wooden pale of water and splashes it over the coals, extinguishing the glowing orange embers in a cloud of white smoke.

STEWIE

Not anymore! Grill's closed.

XYOLA

(sighs)

The grill may be closed but you can make a great pan-seared steak in a cast iron. There's even some beef stock from today you can add. All you need is to find another stove top.

56

INT. ROYAL PALACE - SMOKE ROOM - MORNING

Peeking into the next room, following a trail of smoke, Zuzu sees a small horse walking around another large winch pulling the rope.

A machine that filled the room, built from box-jointed wooden panels, with a human-sized matching winch twirling slowly in the middle.

A rope wraps around, tightening over the threads stretching across the room into the next like spooling ribbon. Cubed chunks of skewered meat across ledges of an open fire pit next to slabs of beef and whole poultry.

Zuzu continues, following the smell of fish. She appears out of the smoke bumping into a tall beastly chef, much to the chef's surprise.

EUSTACE

You're... you're still here, little girl?

ZUZU

What are you making?

EUSTACE

Tea-smoked honey glazed salmon filets wrapped in sauteed rondelles of zucchini and eggplant... on a bed of white rice, and maybe some pickled cucumber on the side? I haven't decided.

ZUZU

You just said a whole bunch of words.

EUSTACE

It's a snack... for the King.

She pulls out a chunk of clay for writing.

ZUZU

Could you repeat-

He stops her mid-sentence by showing his own, shaped and stamped, clay tablet for her to have.

ZUZU

Thanks! Do you only cook for the King?

EUSTACE

Well, yeah. That's why we're here! Aren't you?

ZUZU

Does the King ever get tired of this fancy food?

EUSTACE

What do you mean by fancy? It's only food.

ZUZU

Has he ever asked for like a... grilled cheese?

EUSTACE

He? The King? You... you want me to serve the King a grilled cheese sandwich?

ZUZU

Uhh, no?

EUSTACE

Is that a question?

ZUZU

No, chef.

EUSTACE

Any royal cuisine offered to the King has to be a bit more...

EUSTACE

'proper' than grilled bread with butter and cheese.

ZUZU

Well, when you put it like that...
maybe a little caviar if you want
to make it fancy.

EUSTACE

Caviar is old school.

ZUZU

Then, what's salmon?

EUSTACE

Ancient, I suppose. People have
been eating this fish for ages.

Eustace's eyes light up an idea.

EUSTACE

Hey, wait a moment! You're a chef,
right? Can you do me a favor?

ZUZU

Well, I'm in the middle of-

EUSTACE

Perfect! You're not busy. I need
this trash to be thrown away.

He stops fiddling with the stone smoker's ventilation and
quickly hands her a familiar wood-and-brass tackle box.

ZUZU

My knives! Thought somebody stole
you.

EUSTACE

Nobody would steal that junk, you
need to fetch yourself some proper
cookware... at least those are
better than the sharpened lumps of
cobble my grandfather used.

ZUZU

But where am I supposed to get
actual cookware?

He sighs and rolls his eyes, then scans the room.

EUSTACE

Little gir- or uh- chef, there's
like a hundred pots hanging from
the ceiling, grab one and throw it
in the dish pit when you're done.

ZUZU

But-

EUSTACE

But what?

ZUZU

I can't reach that high.

EUSTACE

Oh. Ohhh.

He flips through a row of polished enameled iron cookware hung from hooks above their heads.

EUSTACE

This one looks clean. You need a knife as well?

ZUZU

Uhhh...

EUSTACE

That's a yes. How are you cooking this?

ZUZU

What do you mean? Can't I use the stoves here?

EUSTACE

Everything is already clean, therefore closed. But don't worry, there's so many chefs that are still cooking. Use their flame.

ZUZU

Where? I need to cook a steak right away!

EUSTACE

Whoa-oh, yes Chef!

(giggling)

Everyone's on break and in order to go on break, everything must be cleaned and prepared for the next meal.

Everyone except Muta, the pastry chef, he's always cooking- or, I mean, baking.

FADE TO:

57

INT. ROYAL PALACE - BAKERY - MOMENTS LATER

The room has high ceilings and a darker tone of royal blue.

One of the OLDER CHEFS in the kitchen, younger than the head chef. His name is MUTA, the pastry chef - he is short, scarred all over, and hides his gray hair with a cap - stands up straight, he's soft-spoken drawn-out displaying a prudence with his words, yet cut-throat and slightly impatient when it comes to achieving perfection with his pastries.

ZUZU

So... how did you end up here?

MUTA

Why do you say that as if we're in the royal dungeon?

ZUZU

No, it's-

She pauses. As Muta continues weighing out sugar, he looks down at her.

MUTA

Speak your mind, little girl. I won't report it... that's not my job, anyhow.

Zuzu lets out a labored sigh.

ZUZU

Seems like everyone here has a story. They all wanted to work here. I wanted to cook, but... I'm not too sure I belong here.

Muta lets out a slight smirk, springing back into a scowl. He scoffs.

MUTA

Do any of us really belong here, love?

She silently shrugs in response.

MUTA

I wasn't always here feeding goods to the King - I used to feed bullfrogs off the north river when I was your age.

ZUZU

What'd you feed them?

MUTA

The King?

ZUZU

No. The bullfrogs.

MUTA

Ohhh. I believe it was... a mixture of earthworms, dragonflies and... turtles! That's right.

ZUZU

Sounds delicious.

MUTA

Are you being smart with me, junior chef?

ZUZU

No, chef.

MUTA

This castle was always in sight. You couldn't stare off at the horizon without it in the way, so I kept my eyes to the dirt. Other kids made fun of me, made me feel like I didn't belong there because I was a baker's child... You still haven't told me what you want?

ZUZU

Chef Xyola sent me.

MUTA

Xyola is the butcher, she's not a chef. And what does she want this time?

ZUZU

A fruitcake... please.

MUTA

You added the please, didn't you?

ZUZU

Yes... was your dad a baker?

MUTA

My mother... used to bake focaccia every morning with hummus, she'd let me knead the dough.

ZUZU

You baked with your mother?

MUTA

Used to take it with me to class - everyone else were chewing on hardtack bread, ours was as fresh as a daisy. Those were my greatest memories... when I was your age.

ZUZU

Except for the other kids.

MUTA

Those kids... they loved this castle. They loved... their King. Under him, they were seen as better than me. We were merely peasants, until a charismatic King came along and traded our hides for cloaks. We... went from slaves to... rulers, but at the cost of holding back our true selves. I now accomplish... nothing.

ZUZU

The King did that?

MUTA

Not this King... he died a long time ago, he died... young... while gifting old soldiers and... purging the misbehaved. My mother wept, others celebrated... chaos ensued.

ZUZU

What did you feel... when he died?

MUTA

I don't recall... I was very young. All I remember was baking bread...

HARD CUT TO:

58

EXT. LYDIA, ANATOLIA - COTTAGE - MORNING (FLASHBACK)

White smoke exhausts from a chimney topping a cobblestone cottage off a plateau in the middle of the Paryadres.

On a windowsill, a black-and-red wallcreeper with dashes of white on the edge of their wings, lands to peck at an insect crawling across the mortar joints.

MUTA'S MOTHER

It is... imperative that the dough be slicked with olive oil or... or you risk the dough... drying out... and forming a crust.

MUTA

But the crust is the best part, ma.

MUTA'S MOTHER

It's too soon, the dough may burn. Read me the ingredient list again, honey.

MUTA

(reading)

"4 cups of bread flour; 2 teaspoons of kosher sea salt; 2 teaspoons of fresh yeast; 2 cups of lukewarm water, made by combining 1/2 cup boiling with 1/2 cup cold; 4 tablespoons of olive oil, separated; 1 tablespoon of butter for greasing."

MUTA'S MOTHER

In about half an hour, we'll top it with flakes of sea salt and... whole rosemary leaves. It'll will go perfect with the hummus we made.

BACK TO:

59

INT. ROYAL PALACE - BAKERY - SAME TIME

He stops to reminisce, then snarling with disgust.

MUTA

Can't believe I traded one kingdom for another... for this.

(sighing with a thousand)
yard stare)

I hated this palace. And now, I work here... I hate cooking... It has never re-laxed me. It is a chore like any other. The only time I can relax is when I... cook for myself.

ZUZU

So, you do cook? Not only bake.

MUTA

(realizing)

... I mis-spoke.

(glaring)

I don't care anymore. Besides, not like you'll tell anyone.

ZUZU

That's not my job... What are you making right now?

MUTA

(grinning)

I'm in the process of making a lemon cider syrup.

ZUZU

What is that?

MUTA

It's like a... 'vinegar candy'.

He holds a polished iron paring knife with a wooden handle carved to look like fish scales above a oil-stained olive tree cookie, positioning a lemon for slicing.

ZUZU

How do you make it?

She pulls out the chunk of unused clay and bamboo reed.

MUTA

(stunned)

Yooooou... want to learn how to make it? Well, it's pretty simple anyways, I suppose.

He begins to slice the lemon thinly into round sheets.

MUTA

Slice these as thin as possible.
Then into a saucepan along with...
1 cup of apple cider vinegar... a
handful and a half of sugar...
aaaaaaand about half a cup of
water. Stir like crazy.

He hands her a thin pair of wooden chopsticks.

MUTA

Boil it!

He blows slowly but strongly onto the glowing embers below the pan forming flames.

MUTA

(turning to Zuzu)

Add a walnut-size of butter... the good stuff, you know.

Zuzu nods keeping her eyes trained on the dissolving ingredients as Muta adds the butter that instantly caramelizes.

MUTA

Finally, you remove it from heat, stir some more and that's ready for shaping into... whatever you want.

ZUZU

Can you bake a steak?

MUTA

Did Xyola also send you to interrogate me? You... ask a lot of questions.

ZUZU

That's what Xyola said. And no, she needs the pastry. But I have one more question.

MUTA

What?

ZUZU

Can I use your stove?

Brined green peppercorns, drained and coarsely cracked in a royal blue granite pestle and mortar, evenly crusts the salted rib-eye.

She takes a cup of milk snow whipping cream, mixing it together with a tablespoon of spicy mustard and half a cup of the beef stock she got from Xyola.

Finished with a splash of olive oil and a knob of butter.

Sprinkled all over with plenty of salt and more black pepper.

Zuzu plates the steaming seared steak alongside oil-drizzled red pepper flake covered florets of roasted broccoli, bloody buttery juices drip over the glowing green.

She takes her worn-out fillet knife and trims off the rosy-white fat bordering the beef, tossing the pieces onto a cutting board staining the light green tinge olive wood with blood and char.

MUTA

What... is that?

ZUZU

A... a steak?

MUTA

No, that knife. Why don't you grab new ones?

ZUZU

I like these better.

Muta rolls his eyes.

Zuzu pokes a piece of the fat with the point of her knife she instinctively closes her eyes and slips it into her mouth.

MUTA

Did... did you eat a piece?

ZUZU

(swallowing)

...no.

He looks at her in disbelief only break out into a wheezing laughter.

ZUZU

(smiling)

Do... do you think he'll notice?

Muta can't stop laughing, and wipes drippings off the edge of her plate with a cloth.

MUTA

We'll see, otherwise we might be feeding the Behemoth early. Now, serve this before it dries out, sweetheart.

60

INT. ROYAL PALACE - KITCHEN - SUNDOWN

Back in the kitchen, it's been cleaned to the point that the tiles glaringly reflect the dissipating sunlight.

RUSE
What's this?

ZUZU
Your...your steak... sir?

RUSE
I didn't ask for this.

ZUZU
But? I-

RUSE
-was going back to your quarters!

The head chef begins to walk away from Zuzu, hands clasped behind his back.

ZUZU
What do I do with this?

RUSE
(not looking back)
Don't care. Get rid of it.

61

INT. ROYAL PALACE - LIVING QUARTERS - MOMENTS LATER

Zuzu passes by the dish pit from before and gives the plate to the porter.

62

INT. LIVING QUARTERS - ZUZU'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

By the time she reaches her quarters on her bed is the round white plate shining like brand new.

ZUZU
Rigby, no that's my spot. Rigby.

Rigby sits like a loaf of bread using Zuzu's legs as a bed frame.

ZUZU
Fine, you can sleep on my legs. I'm gonna wake up tomorrow with sand-legs - I don't care anymore.

Rigby crawls up her torso where his tail sways back and forth against her face. She hears a familiar ghastly voice.

At first, it is indecipherable, suddenly the voice from before resonates.

A FAMILIAR VOICE (V.O.)
Everything is going to be fine.

HARD CUT TO:

63

INT. ROYAL PALACE - KITCHEN - THE NEXT DAY

The whole kitchen staff is gathered on the service line below pots and pans, all cramped and complaining, some sharpening their knives while others chatter.

Zuzu notices Xyola in the sea of burly men standing taller than the rest.

The young chef gravitates towards her as Muta sidles up.

All the noise suddenly fades out as the Keeper enters the kitchen, then pitter-patters up to the crowd, book in hand.

XYOLA
I cannot believe you've
survived this long, little
calf. You're like the legend
Atys. We all had three
biscuits per chef gambled on
you becoming 'Behemoth
buffet'.

ZUZU
Who's he?

MUTA
Could you keep your fat
drippings off the
cheesecakes, please and thank
you.

ZUZU
... what's going on?

XYOLA
I only got some on the lard
pudding.

KEEPER
Today is the King's feast. A
celebration if you will.

MUTA
It's suet, not lard.

ZUZU
Will what? What are we
celebrating?

XYOLA
I know what it is, I gave you
it.

KEEPER
Why, the King, of course! And
all his accomplishments.

ZUZU
What has he accomplished?

Muta grins and turns to the Keeper while Xyola stuffs a heart-shaped fudge in her mouth to keep quiet.

KEEPER

(scoffs)

Well... Chef, for starters, the King was the one who created the contest that you won, bringing you here, providing you with the honor to serve the King.

ZUZU

So... it wasn't a contest, it was a... job interview?

KEEPER

Exactly, Chef! Nobody cares who wins the contests other than the kingdom's number one patron: our King!

MUTA

... we're getting paid?

KEEPER

With his scraps, yes. And whatever you sneak as soon as I turn my back.

The kitchen is tasked by the King to serve at the annual feast the winner's dish. Ruse foists the responsibility onto Chichibìo who chooses Zuzu to assist him on the produce run.

CUT TO:

64

EXT. ONION CITY - STREETS - DAY

Shuffling through her tablets, clacking like bottles in her bag, until she finds one labeled "ROYAL ~~LAMPREY~~ PIE".

They are supplied with a cheesecloth sack stuffed full of coins that is constantly flying out. Chichibìo, pulls a small, wrapped roll from inside his jacket and hands it to Zuzu.

ZUZU

What's this?

CHICHIBÌO

Salt crackers. I... didn't see you eat anything yet, so.

ZUZU

Thanks, chef.

CHICHIBÌO

Everyone goes through it - Chef
Ruse is impossible to please.
Everyone who's in his kitchen pays
the piper eventually. Don't take it
personal. He's all bark no bite.

They proceed through the crowded street littered with
merchants and markets.

CHICHIBÌO

And if it makes you feel better, I
didn't bet any biscuits on you
being gone. I ate them.

ZUZU

(sarcastic)

...thanks for believing in me.

CHICHIBÌO

(chuckling)

The King is having a feast, and
we're all set on everything except
some eels. This is going to be the
easiest produce run I've ever done
- we can get the rest of this list
at Southport!

Stunned silent by the name of her hometown; she bursts out
and pleads:

ZUZU

We can't go to Southport!

CHICHIBÌO

(sarcastic)

Whoa, why yes, your Majesty.

(serious)

Why not? That's the only place that
will have this... fish-thing.

ZUZU

It's an eel! And we can't go!

Chichibìo squints his eyes at her, grins and folds his arms.

CHICHIBÌO

Ahhh, I know why!

ZUZU
(red in the face)
What!? No, you don't, you're bluffing!

CHICHIBÌO
You know someone in Southport.

ZUZU
... what?

CHICHIBÌO
(teasing)
Who is it? A kid like yourself? Is it your crush? Oh man, it is! You have a crush in Southport, don't you?

ZUZU
Nooooooo, I don't want to see someone.

CHICHIBÌO
(laughing)
Like your lover?

(laughing)

Don't worry, I've been there before many times. I have to avoid my wife to get work done too.

Look, Chef, you need to learn how to not care about what others think, otherwise when you grow old like me where everything is an inconvenience. The key to happiness is-

ZUZU
-to always know what you want to eat, you already told me...

CHICHIBÌO
No, no, no, not that. The key to happiness isn't to be loved by others, little chef, it is to love yourself. The best advocate for your own peace of mind... is you.

She hesitates then shoots a look of confusion.

ZUZU
Cheesy, but I think I get it.

CHICHIBÌO

It's corny but it's true! I came to this stupid palace because I wanted to better myself - I wanted to become one of the best... I wanted to be better for her...

I felt as if she deserved nothing less than the best. Now, unlike back then, I barely recognize myself.

ZUZU

Now you've lost me.

CHICHIBÌO

How?

ZUZU

How can you tell me to not care about what others think when you yourself are only working for the King because of what your wife may think... and I thought your contract was sold to the King?

CHICHIBÌO

You ask too many questions. I find asking questions to be counter intuitive. I suppose we're not cut from the same cloth.

ZUZU

I'd say. If it makes you feel better, I don't recognize myself either... but I think it's because this jacket is way too big. Never wore one before...

CHICHIBÌO

What do you mean? You've never worn a chef's jacket?

ZUZU

Uhhh... oof. I mis-spoke. I-

CHICHIBÌO

You're a deviant, aren't you?

ZUZU

What!? No, no, no-

CHICHIBÌO

It's alright. Don't worry... I'm not going to tell anyone. So that's why you don't want to go... because you may be discovered?

She looks at him, unsure whether to tell the obvious truth, too afraid to respond. He glances back at Zuzu, fumbling her hat back over to keep her black curls from flopping out.

CHICHIBÌO

(grinning)

Maybe these townsfolk won't recognize you either in your uniform.

ZUZU

I do look different, I suppose I could give it a shot.

CHICHIBÌO

Well, you're gonna have to... because these fish-things don't exactly grow on trees.

ZUZU

How come you're not turning in me in? For... being an-

CHICHIBÌO

Lots of the other chefs were gossiping about you possibly being a 'you know what' but I didn't want to misjudge.

I don't care about that at all, in fact, it makes me even more impressed than I already was. Plus... rules were meant to be broken - but that's only me.

ZUZU

Impressed? By me?

CHICHIBÌO

Yeah! I've never been one to follow rules much either.

ZUZU

But it's unlawful?

CHICHIBÌO

Are you trying to persuade me? Unlawful doesn't mean harmful.

ZUZU

Thanks, but I don't find it
impressive... all I want to do is
cook.

CHICHIBÌO

And that's what we're going to do
tonight, whether you're ready or
not.

ZUZU

I'm ready... I've always been
ready.

CHICHIBÌO

That's the spirit! That's what you
need more of... confidence.

Just think - someday you'll be
training a new chef, maybe even
take Ruse's spot. Boss everyone
around.

They giggle as they stroll onto the boardwalk, entering
Southport.

65

EXT. SOUTHPORT - BOARDWALK - MOMENTS LATER

Not far down the boardwalk, an older desiccated gentlemen in
ragged cloths like mummiform, stretching out a brimless felt
cap in hand, asks the duo:

BEGGAR

Spare sand? Can anyone spare some
sand? Or peanuts, or shrimps?

CHICHIBÌO

We don't have any sand, but here's
a coin.

BEGGAR

I can't eat a coin.

ZUZU

You... eat sand?

BEGGAR

No, I use it to roast peanuts and
shrimp.

ZUZU

Isn't that illegal?

BEGGAR

If so, then I'll go to the dungeon
and get me a free meal there, win-
win... know what I mean?

CHICHIBÌO

We need lamprey eels. Know where we
could purchase some?

BEGGAR

Oh, everyone is sold out - I know
because I used to eat 'em. After
that dumb kid cooked one for the
King, they're considered fancy
food, and I can't afford 'em.

Last place that had 'em was the
tavern, I spend all my free time
there. Excuse me...

The beggar spots another person with nice clothes to ask.

ZUZU

Can you believe that?

CHICHIBÌO

Yeah, he called you dumb. I thought
feeding the King a blood-sucking
eel was hilarious - and ironic.
Anyways, let's see if we can beg
the tavern for some.

MATCH CUT TO:

66

EXT. SOUTHPORT - TAVERN - AFTERNOON

Everywhere they go welcomes them as chefs yet are completely
sold out of the lamprey eel; after the contest they've
become a valuable commodity.

The chef duo finds themselves down the boardwalk near a
crowded tavern; discouraged until suddenly -

UNKNOWN CHEF

I quit!

Some worker runs out into the street and runs right into
Zuzu and Chichibìo.

He is disheveled and sweaty but ignores the duo continuing
down the street as the Restaurant's Owner runs out.

OWNER

What!? You can't quit; we have-

The worker has already walked away enough for the owner to give up.

OWNER

Fine! Be a wuss! I'll cook for these sailors myself!

The owner notices the chef duo, who have awkwardly witnessed the whole thing - instinctively, Zuzu chimes in:

ZUZU

But... you're an owner you can't cook?

OWNER

I have no other choice.

ZUZU

Won't you get in trouble?

OWNER

I'm only telling you.

CHICHIBÌO

Why don't you let us cook for you, for the night, in exchange we need a little produce.

We're from the royal kitchen... and you know, save you the trouble of committing a crime against the kingdom.

OWNER

Look, chef! I would take that sweet slice of a deal if I had any fish.

OWNER

And I've got a whole crew of starving sailors for a potluck arriving before sundown.

CHICHIBÌO

We have a fish - or, well she does...

Chichibìo turns to Zuzu with puppy eyes. Zuzu immediately unwraps the crust of the fermented fish.

ZUZU

A giant fish.

OWNER

Whoa, that fish has got to be at least 40 pounds!

CHICHIBÌO

All we need on this list is a lamprey.

OWNER

You needed a list for one eel? You needed to write that down?

ZUZU

Everywhere else it's sold out, before the contest nobody cared at all - what happened?

OWNER

What happened? You happened! You're the winner, right?

Everyone loves your dish... everyone except the sailors who have to bring in the load of those things every day.

They're sick of it!

The owner peers past the chefs and spots movement and candlelight at the end of the pier, another ship docking for the day.

OWNER

Who I can see reaching the pier right this second! This is not happening! No more chatting, you want their eels or what?

Both the chefs look at each other, satisfied.

67

INT. TAVERN - KITCHEN - SUNDOWN

In the kitchen of the tavern, Zuzu cautiously looks around at the oil-splattered tile walls and a pile of emptied broken crab traps - compared to all the times she peeked from the boardwalk, it's a lot different on the inside.

CHICHIBÌO

You lead the way, chef.

She props up a new tablet after finishing marks.

ZUZU

Here's a recipe.

CHICHIBÌO

Sweet! This going to be easy-peasy.

(reading)

20-pound yield from 40 pounds of
fermented fish - so we will need:
10 lbs. of scallions - and 120
pounds of white rice! Oh, I spoke
too soon.

The owner watches the duo work in his kitchen from a
doorway, nervously biting his nails - except to occasionally
chime in:

OWNER

I have enough rice - not after
tonight - but I don't care! It only
needs to be cooked.

CHICHIBÌO

And if we want a leafy green, we'll
need at least 30 pounds of that
too. Do you have any water?

OWNER

For washing or drinking?

CHICHIBÌO

For cooking.

OWNER

Each of those urns have exactly 100
cups - already been boiled.

The sailors like to drink something
stronger anyways.

ZUZU

We'll need 2. What about oils? Soy
and oyster sauce?

OWNER

I have sesame, oyster, and olive
oils.

ZUZU

Well take both! Let me see the
recipe, chef.

He hands her a stone tablet:

INSERT - RECIPE TABLET

"12.5 gallons (200 cups) of water; 6.5 cups of soy sauce; 320 large eggs, beaten; 5 lbs.

of fresh ginger, minced; 20 cups of vegetable oil; 10 cups of sesame oil; 13 tbsp. of ground white pepper; 10 lbs. of chopped cilantro."

BACK TO SCENE

CHICHIBÌO

And for the marinade: we'll need 10 cups of more water, 2 fistfuls of cornstarch, a whole lot of ground white peppercorns.

ZUZU

Some more oyster sauce too!

Zuzu finally has a genuine smile on her face as she did in secret. She was able to cook and feed more people from her hometown than she knew.

UNKNOWN SAILOR (CAPTAIN)

Wow, this is delicious. We don't get much fresh cooked meals like 'dis one here. What do we owe 'ya?

OWNER

No coins accepted tonight, Captain. Only eels.

CAPTAIN

(laughing)

You's still want 'dose bloodsuckers, huh? You's can have 'em all! Tanks for da fish.

OWNER

(shouting at the kitchen)

You here that, chefs. You got 'em!
(to the captain)
Don't thank me, thank these chefs who volunteered to cook.

CAPTAIN

Volun... teered? How so?

OWNER

(realizing)

Uhhh... it was... out of respect!
For you, hardworking sailors.

CAPTAIN

Love to meet 'em! Tank 'em myself.

OWNER

Chefs! Come on out here... please!

68

INT. SOUTHPORT - TAVERN - SAME TIME

CHICHIBÌO confidently drags the nervous YOUNG CHEF by the looseness of her jacket, out into the jolly crowd of sailors who look like they've gone through war yet laughing up a storm while stuffing their faces of fish fried rice.

OWNER

This is the captain of the ship; he wishes to speak to you.

CHICHIBÌO

How's the food? Anything else we can make for you?

CAPTAIN

No, no, no. I only want ta tank you's for feedin' us... hey, aren't those royal stripes?

CHICHIBÌO

Yes... yes, they are! We are... doing a royal favor, in exchange for eels.

CAPTAIN

Lampreys? Surprised you's ain't sick of 'em... do 'yer peer speak?

CHICHIBÌO nudges Zuzu's arm, taking a step back behind her.

ZUZU

Yes, yes sir, I do.

CAPTAIN

Hey, wait-a-second! You's the contest-or. You fed a lamprey to the King!

Every sailor stops to listen in on the conversation, then begins to laugh.

Zuzu relives her time on stage - red-faced, mouth agape, petrified - she looks back over her shoulder at Chichibìo who mouths the words: 'Be bold'.

ZUZU

(looking back at the captain; chilled)

Yes, yes sir, I did.

CAPTAIN

That... was amazing! The greatest
'ting we ever saw! Right, boys?

The whole tavern responds swiftly with a loud: 'Yes, sir!'
Then, begin a round of applause, some even whistling at the
duo.

Zuzu is shocked frozen, Chichibìo pats her on her right
shoulder.

CAPTAIN

Don't take dis-re-spec' if we pre-
fer some 'ting else... sometime
'der's too much of a good 'ting...
I gotta tell 'ya doe... dey ain't
eels.

ZUZU

What?

CAPTAIN

I mean, 'em look like a-eel, but
dats dem a-ppear-ance, y'know? Dey
fish really... anyhow, come, join
us, we taking dis par-ty to da
boardwalk!

Flabbergasted, she doesn't respond and politely excuses
herself, letting the sailors finish their meals.

CHICHIBÌO

We'd love too! Why not, chef? They
gave us until tomorrow morning,
might as well take our time...

Zuzu, not fazed by the invitation - she WHISPERS to
Chichibìo:

ZUZU

Before we go back, I need to make
one more stop.

CHICHIBÌO

Where's that?

FADE TO:

I/E. SOUTHPORT - PAVILION - NIGHT

On her way back to the mushroom home, she sees the pavilion
next to the pier and hears some laughter coming from inside,
sparking her curiosity.

Peeking through a window, we see surrounded by plants of all kinds - the KING and the KEEPER are having the time of their lives in private.

Slightly inebriated, they continue drinking from dried bottle gourds wrapped in animal skins, giggling like little kids.

On a make-shift dining table out of a wheel, propped up by sugar canes, before them a half-eaten ham on the bone.

Emptied bottles, urns and vases of various drinks lay at their feet - other than the palace, the greenhouse were one of their most frequented places.

Zuzu, continues to eavesdrop:

KEEPER
Your Majesty-

KING
Kieta, don't call me that here...
let's not spoil the mood.

KEEPER
So, what do you think of the new
chef?

KING
What new chef?

KEEPER
The little girl you met with today.

KING
I met with a man who asked me to
stop calling him... whatever. Stop
asking me questions, I don't
know...

KEEPER
More to drink, sir? Or another
slice of ham?

KING
Both, Kieta, it's our party. You
and I.

KEEPER
Can I ask you one last question,
sir?

KING

Only if you stop saying sir, call me by my name.

KEEPER

Are we... friends?

KING

Kieta, in that palace there are always people who want to see me, meet me, talk to me. It can be... overwhelming sometimes - hence why we're in this dump.

Yet, out of all the ministers, those fancy-folk and my loyal soldiers, there is no one who I really care about than you... at least not anymore.

KEEPER

Your words are... you're going to make me cry. No one has ever even acted like they needed me. I was always useless.

KING

You were never useless, Kieta. You were misplaced...

70

EXT. SOUTHPORT - PIER - MOMENTS LATER

Zuzu begins to walk away, back towards her own home. Hoping maybe, she'll see the same reflection in her father hopefully.

71

INT. SOUTHPORT - MUSHROOM HOME - NIGHT

She goes back to her father's house, on the pier, and finds no one home. She goes back to her secret hiding spot and remembers the fermented trout had eggs.

She spreads it on a cracker and eats the salt-cured eggs, when her father comes home and catches her.

ZUZU

(innocently; mouth full)

Hey... daddy. How's it going?

DAD

What did I tell you, Zuzu. Now, the whole town knows after your stunt, do you not care that they think-

ZUZU

No! I don't, not anymore... it's okay, dad! I'm a chef now. You can even ask-

DAD

Stop! I already heard about what you did... it's a small-town, remember?

ZUZU

What do you think? I mean, aren't you proud of what I've done. I fed an entire ship of sailors...

DAD

You really want to know what I think? I'm ashamed... I miss my little fisher girl. I think you only want to be a chef in that... palace because you want an easier life.

ZUZU

Do you have any idea what it took to get in there?

DAD

(ignoring)

You only want people to like you and to feel a little less inconsequential. But you always mattered to me.

ZUZU

Don't I still matter to you? You've always mattered to me!

DAD

(snapping)

You left me! And for what?! Out of everyone, you left me for the King! He's the one who made the rules, I only follow them!

A soft crackle above silence.

ZUZU

I mean... don't you love me?

Her father doesn't answer and instead bows his head and opens the door as he did before. Zuzu leaves and doesn't see her father tearing up.

72

EXT. SOUTHPORT - PIER - MOMENTS LATER

Zuzu walks past everyone enjoying themselves and doesn't even look at Chichibìo who notices.

She walks to the end of the pier, which for the first time has nobody around. Her eyes dart around as she thinks about whether or not everyone was right about her.

Rigby runs up and slips himself into her arms. She slowly tightens her hug on him as the tears begin to leak out one at a time.

ZUZU

I don't understand, Rigby. I thought he would be proud of me.

Why did I ever expect anything good to happen?

Chichibìo is seen in the reflection of the rippling lake-water, Zuzu spins around attempting to change her mood.

CHICHIBÌO

Zuzu? You alright?

Zuzu tries to dry her tears and works out a fake smile.

ZUZU

Oh, hey... Chef. How's the party?

CHICHIBÌO

So, that's why you became a chef.

For a boy? Wow, I guess you and I aren't too different.

ZUZU

What? What!? Ew. No, no, no! It's my dad.

CHICHIBÌO

Your father? What... he's not proud of you? Why?

ZUZU

You're really going to make me say it again?

CHICHIBÌO

Oh. Ohhh. I see.

ZUZU

I'm so stupid.

CHICHIBÌO

I don't know much about having a father, never had one. But I know a lot about being married... having a wife.

(searching)

You know... I was a chef before I came to the palace.

CHICHIBÌO

I only went to work for the King because my contract was sold, but I thought it would make me better. The best. I had someone in my life that I felt deserved only the best.

ZUZU

I never wanted to work for the King either, I only want to cook.

MATCH CUT TO:

73

INT. ROYAL PALACE - KITCHEN - THE NEXT DAY

BACK in the palace, the head chef has devised a GIANT SPRING- TRAP to capture the Behemoth with resemblance between an onion and a jaw snapping closed.

RUSE

The only thing left is to lure the beast out from its hole, but how?

SOUS-CHEF

A bait and catch, not that I know anything about fishing. Once we figure that out, chef, we already have constructed our... method of cooking.

RUSE

Oh really, Stewie? Other than a water-powered rotisserie, what have you guys built this time?

SOUS-CHEF

We lit a bonfire under a cauldron of boiling sesame oil. I call it: the hot spring. We still have the spit-roast as back-up, chef.

RUSE

Perfect!

(MORE)

RUSE (CONT'D)
(laughing)
We will need all the buttermilk in
the entire kingdom to batter this
beast.

STEWIE
A sample taste - substituting with
pork... for now.

The head chef quickly puts a cloth to his mouth, spitting
out food he already chewed.

RUSE
Dry! Keep working on the batter, I
have a meeting to attend.

74 **INT. LIVING QUARTERS - ZUZU'S BEDROOM - DAWN**

Back in bed, Zuzu stretches out, messing up the sheets.s
She goes in to hug Rigby, but *the blanket is empty!*
Shooting up immediately, open-eyed.

ZUZU
Rigby?

She begins searching her small room, looking under the bed.
Once she runs out of places to look, completely powerless
and defeated, she storms out the bedroom.

75 **INT. ROYAL PALACE - HALL - SUNRISE**

The head chef notices Zuzu sitting in the Keeper's office on
his way to meet with the King.

RUSE
You're... meeting with the Keeper?
Why?

She doesn't look away from organizing her tablets, making
sure she has everything she needs.

Then goes to pet Rigby out of anxiety - *but reminded he's
missing.*

Her face sours even more.

ZUZU
I'm quitting.

RUSE
(surprised, laughing)
Oh, whoa, really? You're going to
quit? I supposed I expected nothing
more from you.

ZUZU
Why do you hate me?

The head chef is caught off guard by the young chef's
straight forwardness.

RUSE
(hesitant)
How- what makes you think I hate
you?

ZUZU
You've been against me from the
start, how am I any different from
when you first started? You were a
kid once, you know!

RUSE
Ohhh please, I don't hate you
because of your youth. I started
cooking way younger than you.

ZUZU
So, you do hate me? Why? Before I
leave for good, can you at least
tell me why?

They both shoot ugly stares at each other.

It becomes so silent in the hall you can hear both their
stomach digesting.

RUSE
(softly)
You're not a real chef.

ZUZU
(hesitant)
What?

RUSE
I've dedicated my life to this! You
waltz into the palace and think you
suddenly have what it takes to
cook?

(MORE)

RUSE (CONT'D)
I didn't have a choice; I didn't
suddenly decide one day to be a
chef - I was born in the kitchen!

Silence as the words settle in, echoing slightly throughout
the hall.

KEEPER
(interrupting)
Chef Zuzu, I was notified you
needed to speak with me?

Zuzu looks back at the head chef; her face of anger has
formed into pitiful contempt.

ZUZU
Yes. I want to speak with the King.
... and I'm missing my cat!

KEEPER
You had a cat?

And, head chef Ruse has a meeting
with King scheduled.

RUSE
You know what?

Both Zuzu and the Keeper turn to face him, one smiling and
one snarling.

RUSE
Let her go first - I don't mind
waiting a little longer.

MATCH CUT TO:

76

INT. ROYAL PALACE - KING'S THRONE ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A fast, heavy panting came from underneath the table. Below
the satin cloth's fringe: a BLACK DOG and it's long tongue
dripping with saliva into a puddle.

KING
Get that thing away from me. Throw
it back outside!

KEEPER
Your Majesty, Chef Zuzu would like
to speak with you.

Rigby's bat ears twitch as he's being scratched by the King.

The King immediately notices in between wealthy, partying cronies flashing fake smiles the young chef's cold steeled look.

KING
(smiling)
Are you the head chef? The one
who's cooking the beast? Can't wait
to taste-

As Zuzu saunters up, the King squints - making out who he's looking at. The smile that stretched ear to ear slowly disappears into confusion.

KING
You're... smaller than I remember.

Zuzu is finally recognized as the little contest-winner, much to the King's disappointment.

KING
Oh! It's you... you're still here?

ZUZU
(mumbling)
So are you, fraud.

KING
What did you call me?

ZUZU
(nervously)
Nothing.

KING
Speak your mind, woman!

ZUZU
(heated)
So are you! You're sitting in the
same spot!

KING
(laughing)
You can't talk to me that way.

(instantly serious)

I am your King.

(yelling)

I was ordained by a higher power!

(MORE)

KING (CONT'D)
(calm; smirking)

You will obey my orders.

ZUZU
(bursting out)
You're a fake. A fraud. A phony -
I'd rather die!

The whole room stops moving and looks to the King with worry, even the guards stop their chatter to shoot impressed looks. Zuzu and the King stare at each other, until the King begins to giggle like a child.

KING
(softly)
Kieta...

KEEPER
(unsure)
Yes, your Majesty?

KING
Clear the room.

KEEPER
Yes, sir-

(screaming at the crowd)

Get out! Move! Now! Leave - now -
go!

Everyone runs out the room in a rush, stumbling over each other, leaving the King, the Keeper, Zuzu, and two guards standing out of the light, backs against the wall - picking at the dead skin of their hands. Zuzu attempts to turn away to leave but is stunned by the King's voice.

KING
Stop! You!
(calculating)

You... you have guts.

I like that. Maybe I missed the
mark with you.

You must be one of those chefs who
only eat vegetables, hm... think
you can thwart me with insults?

(MORE)

KING (CONT'D)
You know what, little miss
exception? I'll make you a deal.

(grinning)

You go back to the kitchen, and
cook that beast, then I... I-

(thinking)

I will make you a sous-chef.

ZUZU
What?

KING
(hiding a smirk)
You're only a junior chef, correct?

You think you're the first one to
feel the pressure...

Zuzu looks down, in thought, almost reconsidering before the
King continues:

KING
You think you have any idea what's
it like to be all alone on top? Hm?

We'll see how far you get and how
much you regret along the way.

Feeling like you don't have a
choice in this life? Welcome to my
world...

Take the deal, chef. No shame in
it, won't ever be spoken of -
especially since I don't allow
fraternization here.

It is your decision now. Join me...
be a part of greatness.

A beat.

ZUZU
What makes you so great? You don't
cook - you only eat.

KING
(smirking)
I gave you a chance... I discovered
you... I made you... victorious.
The choice is yours.

Silence.

ZUZU
(a long pause)
No.

KING
(stumbling)
Wait - what? Isn't that what you
want, kid? Respect from the others?
I'm giving that to you, what don't
you understand.

You're saying no to the opportunity
to become one of the greatest chefs
of your generation?

ZUZU
I will always be a chef whether
it's in this palace or a dungeon.

I'm saying no to you. I don't want
to work for you!

KING
(shocked)
What!? Are you out of your mind?
You're turning down the best role
in this kingdom over what - because
you don't like me?

(mocking)

Because the other chefs were mean
to you? Is that what you're crying
about?

(serious)

You need to grow up, kid - and
recognize a valuable opportunity.

ZUZU
(temper flaring)
Valuable? You're not worth it.

KING
(gritting his teeth)
Really?

ZUZU
Really. And... you're a lot smaller
than I remember.

KING
(accepting)
Alright, then. No problem.

(light chuckle)

You've... made your decision. Pride
is always the downfall for you
people.

Kieta, order the guards to take
this chef to the royal dungeon.

The TWO GUARDS patiently lingering in the back don't wait
for the Keeper's orders and immediately position themselves
behind Zuzu - both with a spear in one hand and the other
free.

KEEPER
(confused)
But, your Majesty, you cannot throw
a little girl into the royal
dungeon?

KING
(pauses)
Eh, I've done worse - for a whole
lot less.

The guards seize Zuzu by the wrists and bring her closer to
the King.

KEEPER
Your Majesty! This... is not like
you!

Remember, what's written in water,
can't be erased with an ax. Let's
send her back to Southport... sir?

The name of her hometown sticks out to him.

KING
Southport? I've met every chef in
Southport... I don't ever remember
you.

Disrupting the silence, the King lets out a groan.

KING

It doesn't matter... going to the
same place anyways - take her out
of my sight - to the dungeon!

The King throws Rigby who lands on his feet on the floor in front of Zuzu.

He perks off his throne and peers down, jetting his grin at the small chef being dragged backwards.

KING

I will eat that beast even if it's
the last thing I do.

And there's nothing you can do to
stop me.

Th guards drag Zuzu as the worn-out bottom of her boots slide across the tile through the tall Mahogany door as one pulls the chain to close it.

The King continues to impatiently stare down the chef, his right leg shaking, desperate for her to disappear.

CUT TO:

77

INT. STAIRS TO THE DUNGEON - MORNING

They never leave the palace, the sun slowly setting through the skylight is the last source of light Zuzu can see before being led down a spiraling narrow staircase made of burnt stone as darkness consumes both of them except for a lit candlestick illuminating only the visage of the guard.

GUARD

Here's a candle, don't let it go
out - otherwise you'll go blind
after too long in the dark. We're
short in supply, so that's the only
one you'll get.

ZUZU

Is this the dungeon, I don't see
any bars or... hello?

The guard's footsteps sound further away, until they disappear.

78

INT. DUNGEON - MOMENTS LATER

Zuzu awaits her fate in the darkness with only a small candle to look at.

On the limestone, in between vines and cracks, she holds the candle up to read a chalk-drawn proverb in bulky strokes:

"So, we boiled my son and ate him. And I said to her the next day, 'Give your son so that we may eat him.' But she has hidden her son."

ZUZU

(to herself)

Should I laugh or cry? I always
knew I'd end up here, but I
should've taken it more seriously.

Could've kept fishing. I'm so
stupid to think I'd be able to
cook...

(sniffing)

Maybe... everyone is right about
me.

Interrupting the cavernous silence, her stomach grumbles out of hunger. A lone tear breaks the dam. She attempts to sniffle it back in, until she's BEWILDERED by a voice:

A FAMILIAR VOICE

Pssp... Hey. Hey, you. Chef.

Zuzu turns to slowly reach out the candlelight to reveal a cast of rugged folks sitting against the wall.

A FAMILIAR VOICE

Yeah. Yeah, you! Don't feel bad.
You got further than any of us. Be
proud.

UNKNOWN PRISONER

I couldn't believe out of all the
places, a deviant made it to the
palace!

You're living proof that anything
is possible!

ZUZU

Who... who are you?

A FAMILIAR VOICE

We are like you, chef. We were sent
here because we rejected the King.

All the people who rejected the contest, and opposed the King are there. Once they learn about Zuzu, who has no reason to hide anything now, they are incredibly impressed. Upon stretching out her arm, candle in hand through the darkness - we recognize the familiar voice as MELVIN, the wise man, and our mysterious narrator; he INTERRUPTS:

MELVIN

Where are my manners, chef...
uhh... what's your name, chef.

ZUZU

Zuzu.

MELVIN

Chef Zuzu, I am Melvin, this is
Michael - better known as the
butcher of Morgan Park.

ZUZU

The butcher!? Is Xyola your
daughter?

MICHAEL

You know my daughter?

ZUZU

Of course, she's now the best
Butcher in this kingdom. I thought
you retired?

MICHAEL

(smiling)

I did, but never stopped smoking
meats which technically is -

ZUZU

- is still cooking. So, you're a
deviant, too?

MELVIN

Yes, well... this is Lilith, she
was a servant for the King, and out
of the back cooked for hungry
children in secret before the King
found out.

ZUZU

You stole from the King?

LILITH

I gave those starving kids all the food the King didn't eat! It was going to the trash anyway... I have no regrets, those kids got fed that's what's important.

MELVIN

Before then she was his most loyal servant... or at least that's what the King thought.

ZUZU

You're all deviants... like me.
(turning to Melvin)
What about you, how'd you end up here?

MELVIN

I insulted the King. I originally was a sage, now I'm a prisoner.

ZUZU

You and me both... a sage you say, like a... smart guy who writes stuff down?

MELVIN

Not to toot my own horn, but yes - essentially.

ZUZU

Are you going to write about this?

MELVIN

I haven't decided, I document events and individuals that may help our posterity.

ZUZU

Who's that?

MELVIN

Future generations to come. You see, we aren't bad people - we're only ahead of the times.

I believe these rigid agricultural regional regulations will no longer be necessary, in the future, you'll be able to be anyone you want.

ZUZU

And the King? What time is he
living in?

MELVIN

The past... a primitive ancient
barbaric time. The King was never
meant to be King, he comes from
a... narrow-minded blinkered
family, but maybe his daughter
could've brought some good to the
name.

ZUZU

His daughter?

MELVIN

All those old, obedient dogs at the
palace... and none of them never
told you 'bout Atys?

ZUZU

I thought Atys is a man, a
soldier... I didn't think he were
real?

MELVIN

She was... she was also the
Princess.

ZUZU

The King's daughter?

MELVIN

Well, yeah - that's what a princess
is.

ZUZU

How do you know all this?

MELVIN

I used to be a friend of the King.

ZUZU

The King has... friends?

He chuckles at the young chef's naivety until he realizes -

MELVIN

Oh, that's right, you're... young.

THEN, he begins to tell a story.

BEFORE ZUZU WAS BORN, BEFORE THE BEHEMOTH WAS CAPTURED,
BEFORE THE PALACE WAS BUILT:

79

INT. ROYAL CASTLE - SETTLEMENT - THRONE ROOM - NIGHT
(FLASHBACK)

For the DAUGHTER OF THE KING, donning armor was a daily routine - yet, never had the opportunity to put it to good use. ATYS is a strong-willed 16-year-old girl born during one of the King's marriages.

Straight blonde hair, green eyes and wind-chaffed skin - she looks nothing like her father.

Unlike other princesses, Atys is confused often for a young boy due to her appearance and militant passion.

During her childhood, the King once had a horrific dream, in which he saw his daughter killed by a spear in battle.

As a result, the King, seeking to stave off the foreseen fate, had ceased sending her out to war despite her burning desire for the battlefield.

ATYS

What am I supposed to do then,
father-King? For the rest of my
life?

KING

You can stay in the city and get
married.

ATYS

I'm already married!

KING

Get married again, then. Try a man
this time - you are not going!

ATYS

You're not married?

KING

I was, many times. You don't
understand, Atys - you have
everything I ever wanted - can be
anything!

ATYS

Thank you! I want to be a soldier.

KING

Except that! No war for you. You'll
stay put and learn to lead, you
were not designed to follow!

(a deep sigh)

Why can't you be a homemaker?

ATYS

(under her breath)
... you're a homemaker.

KING

What'd you call me?

ATYS

Nothing.

KING

Speak your mind, woman!

ATYS

(snapping)
You're a homemaker, that's all you
do is sit around your stupid stuff.

Importing tapioca tilework while
eating coulis-

KING

Enough!

It becomes silent as the King's voice echoes throughout the
desolate castle.

A beat.

ATYS

(hesitant; calm)
Outside the city, within your
kingdom, a Behemoth of unknown
origin is terrorizing the miners
and may be coming for the commoners
next.

People who tend to fields without
any weapons to their name who farm
your food may become food
themselves if you do not let me go!

KING

I will send out a group of men.

ATYS

... and I must lead them.

KING

Atys! I'll send myself before you!
Even if you weren't my own, I
wouldn't - do you know why?

Because you never listen to my
orders!

ATYS

Your orders!? Your orders are
leaving bodies scattered across the
Great Lake, floating back to the
shore right into their relative's
fishing nets!

You've spent so long in one place
you've forgotten how much your
kingdom truly spans.

ATYS

The least you can do is take a
slice of humble pie and send your
own flesh and blood out to end this
humiliation!

KING

Atys... I... understand your-

(searches for the words)

-inclination, however-

He looks back at his wide-eyed little girl and her blonde tendrils popping out of her armor - strapped tightly in iron plates forming sharp edges around her shoulders ending in a fringe made of coins, around her collar a quilted linen is revealed to be underneath tucked into a thin tunic made of shivering scales of gold.

A never-used sword on her left hip and a long golden akinakes holstered in leather scabbards behind her back both colliding like two tangled tails - the chiseled gold chape on both resembles the same combat scene as on the coins.

KING

(sighs)

Was there any description of this
Behemoth?

Surprised, she tries to gulp only to find her mouth
completely dry.

ATYS

Some giant boar-like beast
destroyed most of the crops
already... and your mines.

Everywhere it goes it leaves
everything burnt in its trail...

(pauses)

... at least give me a better
reason, since when do beasts wield
iron weapons?

JUMP CUT TO:

80

EXT. ONION FIELDS - SUNRISE (FLASHBACK)

For the first time in her life, ATYS is allowed to leave the castle and pass city's borders, entering the last known area that the BEAST was observed. The daylight makes her eyes water, and illuminates her cold, pale skin.

It is the King's order she be protected by a team of the King's most efficient soldiers. Many of the soldiers accompanying Atys refer to the beast as the Behemoth.

The outside light is blinding to Atys; she squints and shields her eyes from the sun.

81

EXT. MASSIVE ABYSS - LATER (FLASHBACK)

A downward spiral of cliffs into the DEEPEST, DARKEST ABYSS - seemingly forever. Moans echo from an unidentifiable source, leaving the team unsure if it's human or beast.

With both feet on the edge, she spits into the palace-sized hole, never hearing it hit the bottom; SUDDENLY she loses her breath not able to catch it. STABBED IN THE BACK BY A SPEAR held by one of the royal SOLDIERS, the tip exiting her naval.

SOLDIER

(grunting)

I'm sorry... but we can't have a
queen.

Her body slides off the spear, her weight falling forward into the abyss. Down below far from anything alive, mysterious sounds echoing from blackness while the jealous killers study the BEAST as it catches her body by the ripped shirt on its jagged tooth.

Instead of immediately chomping down, the large creature softly carries her bloodied corpse to the ground - never to be seen again.

BACK TO:

82

INT. DUNGEON - SAME TIME

RIGBY is teased by the sight of a RAT, only to be halted by the chicken wire. A black-and-white wide-eyed cat half the size of Rigby slowly creeps out from behind MICHAEL - with an arched spine and a black mustache. Both cats stare at each the sight of other, the smaller one creeps back behind the prisoner.

LILITH

Relax, Charlie, everything is going to be fine.

MELVIN is fidgeting with his astrolabe in the dungeon, keeping track of time.

MELVIN

There has been evidence that this Behemoth lived here long before the King squatted and constructed his palace over the abyss.

ZUZU

Why on this side of the Turtle would he do that?

MELVIN

He?

(pauses; then)

That is the way it's always been. I don't believe the King ever had control over the Behemoth. Our Majesty desperately wanted to.

ZUZU

Why does everyone listen to him?

MELVIN

That's their King. But I suppose no one has really ever stood up to him.

Too scared possibly. He... destroyed that beast's home, probably dug up most of their food supply too...

83

INT. ROYAL PALACE - KITCHEN - SAME TIME

Cutting open the SCALDED EELS - curling them inside PASTRY SHELLS.

The kitchen staff mash BROWN BREAD left soaked in VINEGAR, strained into a thick, liquid; they add CINNAMON, BLACK PEPPER, SEA SALT and a little dollop of EEL BLOOD - the sauce is poured into the shell covering the eel for baking.

CORRIOR

Chichibìo! I've got a letter for a
Chichibìo!

The chef jumps up to the sound of his name pronounced correctly. With a smile stretch across his face - he knows exactly who's sent it.

CORRIOR

Hi! Are you Chichibìo? I've got a
letter from Elise for you.

Next to the burgundy wax seal laid an address in neat cursive: "Elise - Two Ponds past West Cornelia - On Our 10th Anniversary - For Chichibìo."

Fumbling his fingers over the wax-sealed scroll releasing the rolled-up salmon torn papyrus.

A disconnected piece falls swiftly to the ground and gets caught beneath the chef's filthy boots. He bends over and picks it off the floor.

INSERT - RECIPE CARD

"BREAKFAST FOR MY MAN - Sausage and Hash Casserole with Creamy Grits

For the Grits:

4 cups water; 1 1/2 cups stone-ground corn grits; 2 dried bay leaves; 1/2 tsp. kosher salt; 8 tbsp. (1 stick) unsalted butter; 2 oz Parmesan cheese, grated; 1 cup cream (sour or heavy).

For the Casserole:

6 large eggs; 1/3 cup milk; 1/2 tsp. dried parsley flakes; 1/4 tsp. salt; 6 oz pork sausage; 8 tbsp. (1 stick) unsalted butter, separated; 3 russet potatoes (2 lbs.), peeled and shredded; 1/2 tsp. salt; 1/4 tsp. black pepper; 1/4 cup chopped onion; 1 cup shredded cheddar cheese."

BACK TO SCENE

CHICHIBÌO

(blushing)

She made me... a recipe?

His smile has dropped, mouth agape. Then, immediately reopens the letter to read.

ELISE (V.O.)

Dear Chichibìo, my baby - I'm beginning to think maybe that working for the King is not what you really want.

I only pushed you because you weren't really happy with yourself, but I want you to know that I always have been. I don't need my husband to be a royal chef - I only need my man. I thought this is what you wanted.

I love you the way you are, I always have. Stay in touch, sweetheart. You'll have plenty of time to prepare because the moment you walk in, I want to hold and kiss you. I miss you so much and know you are doing what's right. Love, Elise.

Suddenly, he's interrupted and rattled by the sound of the HEAD CHEF'S voice:

RUSE

Hey! You... uhh... Chihiro! I need you back in the kitchen - there's no time to read!

Chichibìo's eye twitches as he attempts to form a grin.

RUSE

Besides... we've finally gotten rid of that stupid little girl. She's rotting away in the royal dungeon.

The head chef leans in with a grin. Chichibìo's fake smile melts away.

CHICHIBÌO

You... what!?

RUSE

She was a deviant. Some kid of a
fishermen... never was supposed to
be here in the first place. Right?

Chichibìo stares at him for a few seconds, pondering his
wife's words.

CHICHIBÌO

You're absolutely right, Chef...
that little girl... was way too
good for this place- and you know
what? So am I!

He attempts to rip off his apron, but it gets stuck around
his waist until he pulls apart the knot in back.

Then, he gently tosses is into the hands of his former head
chef who lets it fall to the floor.

RUSE

Are you out of your mind? You're
going to quit? You can't! This...
this is the best gig in the entire
kingdom.

Chichibìo has already walked off, rolling his letter back up
into a scroll, turns back to respond.

CHICHIBÌO

Then I'll leave the kingdom!

He picks up his pace out the door.

RUSE

... seriously!?

84

EXT. DUNGEON - GUARD'S FRONT DESK - MOMENTS LATER

CHICHIBÌO, still fuming, goes straight to the royal dungeon
and attempts to bail her out but the LADY GUARD won't budge.

GUARD

Can't release that one, King's
orders.

CHICHIBÌO

(smiling)

Did you do something with your
hair? It looks amazing, and not at
all frizzy. So... here's the thing,
I kind of need this one chef.

GUARD

That's not going to work. But you can keep trying if you want.

CHICHIBÌO

Oh, come on, I have a whole sack of coins. If you let her go for the day, I promise I'll return her back.

GUARD

She's not a dog, she's a criminal. And even if she wasn't, I'd still keep her in irons.

CHICHIBÌO

What! Why? She's... only a little girl.

GUARD

It's the King's orders.

The guard turns back to counting on her wooden abacus, away from the pleading chef.

Chichibìo begins to saunter out the dungeon and pauses to look back and give puppy eyes. As soon as the guard looks at him, he turns to continue out. After three more glances, the guard lets out a deep, heavy sigh.

GUARD

It's not working, sweetie.

CHICHIBÌO

Alright! Fine! At least give me a good reason why? Huh? Why do you care so much about the King's orders? You know she's not a bad person; she used to be a royal chef. She only wants to cook!

GUARD

You know what, cook? I don't know how you aren't insulted by her presence. She suddenly wins the King's contest despite everyone hating her dish.

GUARD

She enters the royal kitchen as a chef - she walks right in. This little girl last seen on the piers is suddenly a chef? I didn't get to take any shortcuts, why should she?

She leans back, content with her speech.

GUARD

(mumbling)

...besides, I could care less about the King's orders.

CHICHIBÒ

Wait... so you're keeping her locked up, not because of justice, but because you're bitter? That's not law, that's... cruel.

GUARD

I don't care, not even the slightest.

CHICHIBÒ

Sounds like you do care. Otherwise, you would let her go; you said it yourself: you don't care about the King's orders. You're... you're... jealous!

GUARD

Oh please, this little girl isn't even on my map. She's next in the long line of deviants. And, also, I don't cook. I really do my job, chef.

CHICHIBÒ

Prove it.

GUARD

Prove it? How?

CHICHIBÒ

If you're better than her, you wouldn't restrict her from cooking. If you really are not jealous of her skills, then let her go. Let her fail on her own.

The guard doesn't respond only stares at the chef in deep thought. The chef walks back up to her desk and leans towards her.

CHICHIBÒ

(softer tone)

That little girl, although a total amateur, made one of the best 'contest-winning' dishes our kitchen ever tasted.

(MORE)

CHICHIBÌO (CONT'D)

We were forced to stay quiet about it. If you really think she will fail, then let her fail. But you hiding her in your dungeon, makes you look like-

GUARD
Makes me look like what?

CHICHIBÌO
A sore loser. And a jealous one if I may add.

The guard shoots back a nasty glare, grits her teeth, looks away, only to stand up in the chef's satisfied face to whisper:

GUARD
I'll release her, but she must lose the cook costume.

CHICHIBÌO
(interrupting)
Done.

GUARD
And-

(pauses)

I never see her, or you, ever again. Stay away from the palace.

CHICHIBÌO
Done.

GUARD
(mumbling)
Doesn't matter anyways, I have plenty of prisoners left.

The guard slides one of the wooden beads away from the horizontal rod.

Zuzu is secretly released under the condition she never returns to the palace and stay far from the Onion city.

85

EXT. ONION CITY - STREETS - DAY

While the BEHEMOTH journeys outside for the first time the creature disturbs everyone before being recaptured by the head chef and his posse.

The sound of wind and the scattering of leaves as the Behemoth exhales the fresh air.

The Behemoth, who was forced to be reclusive within the palace as a trophy of the King gets to witness the outside for the first time.

The daylight blinds the Behemoth at first but as they adjust, their furrowed brow reveals a squinting pair of darting eyes.

The spring-driven shell resembles the skeleton of a giant onion if onions had bones, closing shut tight but faster than a Venus fly trap.

The head chef smiles so wide he shuts his eyes.

86

INT. TROY, GREECE - EMPTY CANTEEN - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

A short kid with unkempt black hair, staring into space with a steeled look puffs his chest out from his tucked in double-breasted buttoned-up black jacket behind a white, smooth apron tied tightly.

RUSE

Yes, chef!

A taller, older chef in an identical uniform circle the kid slowly hunched over staring down at him with his hands behind his back, fingers interlaced.

FATHER

You must be bold! What about the food makes you want to reproduce it?

Innovate it, feel inspired by it? What's so special about cooking to you?

The best creative minds are observant, so if you don't see anything - then you must look harder!

His father's stern yet humble words ring in his ears.

87

EXT. ONION CITY - STREETS - SAME TIME

Back in the streets, in the present, the head chef is standing a foot away for the first time from the captive Behemoth - gnawing at the bars of their enclosure.

RUSE
(to himself)
Yes, Papa. Finally.

They march the entrapped beast down the city streets to all the commoners' amazement.

88

I/E. ROYAL PALACE - VESTIBULE - SUNSET

Already sauntering out of the palace - looking up to the sky - tearful, red in the face, the KEEPER mumbling to themselves.

Then, noticing the head chef and his posse without reaction - their trap containing the wild Behemoth, trying to chew through the wrought-iron trap.

RUSE
Keeper? What is the matter?

KEEPER
(softly)
The... the King... is dead.

RUSE
What!? Who did this?

The crowd of fancy-folk loudly debated amongst themselves with no attempt to keep secret.

All the cooks and servers remain silent and go pale. No one seemed distraught other than the chefs and the Keeper.

KEEPER
Everybody - stop talking!

KEEPER
Yes. The King is dead. He died in his sleep, nobody hurt him.

RUSE
But how? How did this happen?

KEEPER
Ruse, he was 92 years old... it was... his time.

RUSE
But... there were no warning signs?

KEEPER
Nothing was shared... per the King's instructions. Why, what do you need?

Suddenly, a deep wailing from the confined Behemoth deafens everyone for a split-second.

RUSE

We... caught the beast.

KEEPER

Doesn't matter now.

RUSE

What are we supposed to do with it?

KEEPER

Don't care. Get rid of it.

RUSE

Wait! Can we... see him one last time?

KEEPER

Unfortunately, no, according to his plans he does not want a wake or visitors of any kind.

RUSE

What, but why?

KEEPER

Someday you can ask the King yourself. As for now I have a lot of work executing his plans in place.

RUSE

But, but, but...

KEEPER

But, what, Ruse?

RUSE

Who's next?

Abruptly, out of nowhere, the cream stone ribbed vaults tremored as if the PALACE itself were wailing - the matching pillars that held up the foundation are lifted, as if it were stretching out.

A sudden thunderous shock halts everyone's attention felt in their chest, dust ejects from growing stretching venous cracks throughout the vastness as if the palace itself were breathing - gasping for air!

89

EXT. ONION CITY - STREETS - SAME TIME

Meanwhile, outside - an average autumn day with the sun setting and a slight breeze carrying FLAKES OF STONE and SHIMMERING SPECS OF GOLD pulverized into a mist, falling slowly onto the heads of Onion-folk too busy to notice. The crew inside the vestibule run out, terrified and unaware of what's happening.

STEWIE

What was that!?

KEEPER

The palace... it's collapsing!

They watch as the PALACE stretches out - it looks like FOUR LEGS! The legs position the rest of the broken palace above a crater - it is the ABYSS where the Behemoth was formerly trapped. The circumstantial crew has run as far as possible, but the palace doesn't need to move far to reach them.

RUSE

What... is that!?

FISHMONGER

Whatever it is, it's way bigger
than the Behemoth!

90

EXT. SOUTHPORT - BOARDWALK - MEANWHILE

From a distance, the guard has high tailed it out of the city right towards the chef duo.

CHICHIBÌO

Oh no, we were so close.

The guard runs right past them to their astonishment; she looks back and yells:

GUARD

Looks like everyone is getting
released today!

They both retract their steps enough to get a glimpse of what's happening.

CHICHIBÌO

(nervous chuckling)

Well, thankfully we're already
gone.

Zuzu shoots a worried look at him that says, 'we have to do something'.

CHICHIBÌO

Oh, come on. You want to go help
them? They all treated you like
dirt.

ZUZU

Not all of them!

He groans as they begin to reluctantly make their way back
to the city, what they are up against appears more clearly.

91

EXT. ONION CITY - STREETS - SUNDOWN

WHATEVER IT IS, perches on the crumbles of debris of what
was once the palace, spreading their wings out slowly
shedding a layer of MUD-BRICKS and CEMENT raining down on
the running crowd like meteors.

Chef Ruse slowly cocks his head back to stare at his own
eyes tearing up in the reflection of the beast's pupils
who's elapsed a towering shadow over the small cook.

RUSE

(whimpered)

... oh no.

It eats him whole as the enormous LOVER of the Behemoth
rises up to swallow, only for its eyes to bulge and a vomit-
infused blood-curdling cough as the head chef is shot out
the gap of its jagged teeth like a sunflower seed into a
thicket of twigs from scorched bushes.

It overlooks everyone, scanning the crowd of Onion-folk as
they cower under the shadow of the beast - terrified of
their inevitable doom, and putting up no fight.

To everyone's surprise, the WAY BIGGER BEHEMOTH sputters out
their language:

BEHEMOTH

Unhand my baby!

FISHMONGER

Get the King! The King will stop
it!

KEEPER

Yeah, about that... the King is
dead!

FISHMONGER

We're all gonna die!

92

EXT. CHICKEN FIELDS - HUNTER'S SHACK - NIGHT

The lover peels back the traps jaw, freeing their baby easily, who watches their lover finish what they started 14 years ago.

The whole town has gathered to witness the terror, even the HUNTER from previously seen crying over his dead chickens.

Zuzu looks down at the broken concrete. A worm smashed to bits being eaten by a swarm of flies.

She glares back up at the fire-wielding beast with an idea in mind.

ZUZU

Let me use your chickens.

HUNTER

But they're all dead! And so will we if we don't run!

ZUZU

Trust me, I'm going to feed this beast!

FISHMONGER

What!? Are you out of your mind, little girl?

93

EXT. ONION CITY - STREETS - CONTINUOUS

Zuzu and Chichiblo regroup with the rest of the city in the streets, they are the only ones running towards the debris-riddled streets.

ZUZU

I need a stove!

STEWIE

We don't have a stove that size, we only have a frier.

HUNTER

How are you going to fry 25 chickens at once, little fisher?

ZUZU

I need 1 cup of cornstarch for every chicken. And 2 tablespoons of seasoning for each.

STEWIE

That's like 50 tablespoons!

ZUZU
(searching)
We need a binding agent, like egg-
wash or-or-or...

The head chef, unharmed yet rattled, pops up out of the bushes, wiping himself of slime to chime in:

RUSE
(yelling from a distance)
Buttermilk!

ZUZU
Maybe a little cayenne pepper for
heat?

Her make-shift brigade of self-deputized chefs look at her like a little kid.

ZUZU
Maybe a lot?

They smile with approval, as she picks up a small stick and dips it into the marinade, for Rigby to sniff and lick off. He brushes his dusty fur against her leg with a shove of love.

ZUZU
It's ready!

As the rest of the crew throw peas into the mouth of the beast, Zuzu begins plucking and battering the whole chickens in the barrel, dunks one and tosses it into the crackling FRYER.

Through waves of fire, and destruction every step it takes, the lover slowly makes its way down the streets. The smell of fried food halts them - piquing their interest.

The LOVER of the Behemoth lowered their head towards Zuzu, face to face, eye to eye, bowing and gently nudging with the bridge of their fuzzy snout against the young chef's temple.

Zuzu can feel scales, fur and feathers soaking up the beads of sweat on her forehead.

We can hear the lover speak in Zuzu's native tongue - a familiar ghastly voice, it is the whisper in the palace.

BEHEMOTH
I am grateful.

The beast's smoky breath felt like a furnace up close, as its jagged teeth came right up against Zuzu's collar.

They elevate the chef up by their jacket - carefully with kid- gloves and flips Zuzu over their back - landing on top a cushion of fur.

Zuzu is marched through the no longer crowded DEBRIS-RIDDEN STREETS OF THE CITY back towards the palace on a saddle of hair, taller than... Everyone coming out of their hiding burst into applause for their new de facto queen.

In the back of the crowd, a familiar face can be seen not smiling.

ZUZU'S FATHER catches eyes with his daughter in a burnt-up royal chef's uniform, soot-covered face, riding on top the Behemoth - wading through the cheering crowd.

Zuzu looks back into his gaze, instinctively smirking with all the confidence in the world, no longer ashamed.

Her father stares back, mouth agape, head tracing as the Behemoth trots past, completely bewildered by the sight of his daughter.

94

EXT. ONION CITY - PALACE WRECKAGE - MOMENTS LATER

After dropping Zuzu off at the ruins of the palace, the Behemoth gently picks their LOVER up by the nape.

Zuzu slides down the Behemoth's mane, towards the crowd as the massive, ancient, and finally free Behemoth duo slowly descent towards the west, never looking back at their ruined home:

BEHEMOTH

Let's go, Mushkhushshu.

Zuzu waves and pulls out a recipe for "FRIED CHICKEN", adding one more ingredient: "Buttermilk".

95

I/E. ROYAL PALACE - VESTIBULE - NIGHT

She runs up to the Keeper.

KEEPER

It seems the city-folk have chosen their next leader. The King's servants are now at your disposal.

ZUZU

I... only want to cook.

KEEPER

Cook? Chef... or- Ma'am. You are now the Queen!

(MORE)

KEEPER (CONT'D)

You can do whatever you want! As
for myself - I will be leaving.

ZUZU

You're not staying? After all this
time?

KEEPER

There is nothing left for me here,
chef.

All I was designed to do is serve.
But you don't want servants, do
you?

ZUZU

I don't, but I think I'll turn the
palace into a restaurant. One no
one has to pay for.

KEEPER

You... you - I suppose you can do
whatever you want, your Majesty.

ZUZU

We'll need a food keeper. Someone
to manage the kitchen. Only don't
call me that here.

KEEPER

Someone... like me?

ZUZU

Absolutely, we need you!

KEEPER

Need me?

(thinking)

It'll be my honor to serve you...
or I mean... serve the people,
my... friend?

Zuzu smiled at them, enticing one back.

The head chef appears once she turns around - dripping with
mucus, stands up straight and puffs out his chest in front
of Zuzu.

RUSE

I... misjudged-

ZUZU
(over)
I forgive you - thanks for the
suggestion.

RUSE
(surprised)
I - I have more. I could... teach
you more?

ZUZU
To become a chef?

RUSE
To become a better chef. It'd be my
honor...

He sorely kneels down in the muddy street despite his injuries before the young chef, bowing his head, then looking up at her - someone who'll appreciate every meal he cooks for the starry-eyed girl - learning every recipe under the sun.

RUSE
... to serve... my Queen.

96

INT. ROYAL PALACE - BALLROOM - SUNRISE

For her first action as Queen, Zuzu frees all the king's prisoners, then throws a feast - not a contest!

Everyone is invited and everyone can eat. Nobody gets extra and nobody goes hungry.

All the greatest chefs accumulated in the palace now have new grateful guests not the same, one patron.

CHICHIBÌO moves back home to spend time with his wife,

CHICHIBÌO
Don't worry, chef. I promise to
bring my wife on my next visit to
the city... once it is restored.

Anyways - I have a meal to cook at
home.

97

EXT. ONION CITY - STREETS - LATER

Peering over shoulders, the whole crowd is laughing, chatting, and eating their burnt-up crops.

Every single one attempting to sneak a peek at the new queen, while some stare at her completely flabbergasted.

Zuzu, although enjoying herself, is not used to all the attention - the first opportunity she gets to sneak away down the streets, she takes it.

98

EXT. SOUTHPORT - BOARDWALK - CONTINUOUS

Shuffling down the boardwalk, constantly looking over her shoulder to see if anyone noticed.

She grins from ear to ear, knowing she got away from the crowd. Upon remembrance, she decides to find her way through forestry to the PAVILION.

99

I/E. SOUTHPORT - PAVILION - MOMENTS LATER

A soft hum emits from the insects fluttering around her head.

In the previously cleared space, she finds herself somewhere to sit - closing her eyes, taking a deep breath in, suddenly opening them to see SOMEONE FAMILIAR sitting slumped a few feet in front of her, sipping from a gourd.

KING

So... you're the new queen?

ZUZU

(stunned)

We all thought you were dead?

KING

I am... I've been dead for a long time now...

I've had one foot in the grave and the other on a banana peel... be careful what you wish for, little girl. It may be the thing that kills 'ya.

ZUZU

(instinctively)

What do you wish for?

KING

(stumbling his words)

Beg your pardon?

She leans back, understanding the situation, yet more curious than anything - this may be her only opportunity to really talk to the King, as equals.

ZUZU

What do you wish for? What do you want? Everyone wants something...

KING

(a long pause)

... I want my daughter... I want my little girl back - I miss her so, so much.

ZUZU

(consoling)

I heard from a sage while I was in the dungeon, that she died... I'm sorry to hear that...

KING

Yeah, Melvin... what a yapper. Always in others business.

He grunts while readjusting himself in the wolf-skin covered wicker chair that appeared like a throne.

Zuzu peels back a nearby leaf that's in her face, only for it to flop back.

ZUZU

(trying to alleviate)

That's kind of his job... right?

KING

(chuckling through the pain)

Yeah, it is.

The King thinks back for a moment, staring into space.

In spite of bad memories, in the end, he liked Melvin enough to reminisce about him - even if only briefly.

100

INT. ROYAL PALACE - KITCHEN - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

MELVIN is in the middle of helping the KING with his speech. Towering behind him, leering at him up close while helping smooth out any folds and wrinkles in his animal fur coat, tucking in the excess of his sashet.

The King is uncomfortable and restless, then even more so after Melvin tries to relax him by massaging his shoulders.

MELVIN

We have to work on your elocution.

KING

My what?

MELVIN

The way you speak - enunciate
certain words - it intrigues
people.

KING

Bores me. Rather you speak plainly
and quickly.

MELVIN

You can give a plain and quick
speech that will be remembered
throughout all of history if it's
from the heart.

KING

(sarcastically)

I wouldn't share my heart even if I
had one.

They both chuckle.

101

INT. SOUTHPORT - PAVILION - MORNING

Back in the pavilion, the King slumps more back into his
wicker throne.

KING

(reality setting in)

I messed up... everything. All in
the name of progress... I...
instead blindly fulfilled my
vendettas... my... insecurities got
the best of me. It was all my
fault.

ZUZU

Your fault? Sir, you have nothing
to do with those things.

As much as I'd like to insult you
some more... you did give me a
chance... no one ever gave me a
chance... ever. But you did.

KING

You know... you can stop calling me
sir, now that we're... equals.

ZUZU

I know.

KING
Besides, I didn't give you a chance
because I liked you, chef.

ZUZU
... that's for sure-

KING
But, because you're a bloody good
cook. And... the way you...

KING
(a lone tear)
... talked back to me... reminded
me of my... little girl.

His head falls into his hands as he cries loudly in pain.
Zuzu stares at a completely different man than who she met,
someone like her.

She awkwardly stands up, and sidles up to the former King,
then places her right hand on his shoulder - unsure of what
to say except for:

ZUZU
Everything... is going to be fine.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END