



CURIOUS GUESTS

ALWAYS MAKE THE BEST FOOD

HAVING GUESTS FOR DINNER

A HORROR/COMEDY OPERA IN

ONE ACT

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Having Guests for Dinner

Libretto by Robert Ellsworth Feng
Music by Nick Bentz

Characters:

MARCUS, 25, *fun-loving and easy going, recently graduated and is currently in the food service industry*

LAURA, 23, *organized and analytic, a passionate sociology major who works outside of classes*

CHRISTOPH ABERFELD, 39, *a refined gentleman with a keen interest in fine art and anthropology; he is a coworker of Marcus and Laura's friend Scott; a cannibal*

2 POLICE OFFICERS

Scene 1: Milwaukee, WI. April, 2010. A dining room in a luxurious home by the countryside. It is 7:00pm and pouring outside.

Marcus and Laura are on their way to a stranger's house for dinner, only knowing the host is a coworker of their friend Scott who is strangely absent. Throughout the dinner, Laura becomes increasingly suspicious that Christoph is a cannibal. Christoph kicks them out when he discovers them rummaging through his personal belongings as he was off fetching the main course. Marcus finds a tooth in his takeout on the drive back.

Scene 2: Marcus and Laura's apartment, later that evening.

Back at their apartment, Marcus and Laura attempt to rationalize why there was a tooth in Marcus' food. After a long debate, they ultimately conclude that Christoph being a cannibal is the most likely scenario and plan to closely follow him the next day at the grocery store.

Scene 3: The Grocery Store, the next day.

Marcus and Laura follow Christoph to the grocery store. Laura has second thoughts on their spying, but Marcus reassures her. Marcus goes to use the public restroom, only to have Christoph walk in soon after. Marcus disguises his voice and tries to converse with Christoph in an attempt to get him to confess to his crimes. As Christoph leaves, Marcus accidentally drops the tooth in the toilet and flushes it in a panic, destroying their only piece of hard evidence. Christoph remarks he'll be visiting the art museum next, so Marcus and Laura follow him there.

Scene 4: The Art Museum, the same day.

Christoph admires a piece titled "Demons Practicing Cannibalism." After his soliloquy, he spots Marcus and Laura spying on him from a distance. Laura shakes it off as a chance encounter and apologizes for the previous night. She asks about the painting, which generates more suspicious remarks from Christoph. After some persuading, they are re-invited to dinner at Christoph's house later that evening.

Scene 5: Christoph's house, that evening.

Christoph welcomes Marcus and Laura back into his home, giving them a tour of his special "Bone Room." The room is full of various artifacts from different tribes as well as bone art, instruments, and taxidermies. He tells Marcus and Laura about his travels around the world. While Christoph goes off to fetch the wine, Laura and Marcus find a box of files with culinary reviews of the tribespeople Christoph had murdered and eaten. Christoph catches them by surprise with chloroform and they are rendered unconscious.

Scene 6: Christoph's house, dining room.

Marcus and Laura wake up at the dinner table tied to chairs. Christoph admits to how he's been eating all the tribespeople that have rejected him and shares his philosophy on making connections through cannibalism. At the height of his speech, Marcus' phone goes off, causing Christoph to have a meltdown. Police sirens are heard in the background, and Christoph haphazardly prepares his feast and ends up choking to death on an appetizer. Marcus and Laura untie themselves only for the police to arrive to the sight of Marcus standing atop Christoph's corpse while holding a knife. As Marcus and Laura are being arrested, Laura alerts them to the Bone Room, where they discover the evidence of Christoph's crimes. They are let free, and Laura gives one final snarky remark.

Scene 1

The countryside; outside a house with an imposing front door.

7:00pm; it is pouring.

LAURA

(getting out of the car)

Marcus, I told you it was going to rain before we got here!

MARCUS

(reaching in the glove compartment)

It's fine, all fine! There's a spare umbrella in here somewhere.

LAURA

(opening the umbrella)

I know I have it.

...

Whose house is this again? I want to make a good first impression.

MARCUS

Christoph Aber-something.

Some friend of Scott's from work, I think.

LAURA

(knocking on the door three times)

Good enough.

(to herself)

Christoph, Christoph...

MARCUS

(huddling with Laura in the small umbrella)

It's a nice place, what do you think, Laura?

LAURA

Did you lock the door?

MARCUS

Right. *(takes out his car keys to lock the door)*

LAURA

(pauses for a bit before knocking again)

Marcus, could you see if Scott's already here?

I don't see his car.

MARCUS

Sure
(takes out his cellphone)
Huh, no reception.

LAURA

What?

(Christoph suddenly opens the door. He has an aura of reserved sophistication)

CHRISTOPH

Ah welcome!
(shaking Marcus' hands delicately, as if examining; and taking a large whiff with his nose while doing so)
You must be Marcus and Laura.
Come in, please, do come in!
(Laura avoids shaking his hand and quickly follows Marcus in)

MARCUS

(as he walks in)
Thank you, and you're Christoph, right?

CHRISTOPH

(walking the couple to the dining table; the room is lit by lamps and candlelight, on the side is a small wine cabinet, a small sofa, and a dinnerware cabinet with several drawers)
Christoph Aberfeld.
Scott has told me all about you two.
I've been anxiously waiting to have you both over for dinner.

LAURA

(looking around)
Where's Scott?
I don't see him here.

CHRISTOPH

He sadly didn't make it. An illness it seems has ravaged his office.

LAURA

He's sick?
I thought he would've told us.

CHRISTOPH

Yes, high fever it seems. Chills, malaise.

MARCUS

I'll just have to send him pictures of all the food then.
(checks phone)
What's your Wi-Fi?

CHRISTOPH

No Wi-Fi here.
Social media tends to isolate us.

LAURA

Perhaps, but the Internet,
like any tool, can be used to learn.
We have libraries at our fingertips,
digital cities without borders or passports.
These ideas spread, evolve,
and on the information highway anyone can drive.
You claim it isolates,
but if I may debate,
perhaps your loneliness is a self-inflicted wound.
With this little thing, *(holds up cellphone)*
I can express ideas and touch the lives of countless others.
Unplugging yourself can be a virtue, yes,
but only by building connections outside.

CHRISTOPH

Ah! I see you've got plenty of gray matter to pass around.
Well now, don't be shy.
Please get yourselves comfortable while I bring out the appetizer.
(Christoph exits to the kitchen)

(Marcus and Laura seat themselves)

MARCUS

Appetizers hm?
I didn't realize Scott made friends with a chef!

LAURA

Yes, strange that he's never mentioned Christoph to you.
Where did he say he knew him from again?

MARCUS

I...I don't see why that matters.

CHRISTOPH

(Christoph enters with an ornate platter)

I present to you the Hors d'Oeuvres:

Beef tartare accompanied by shaved black truffles and a side of onion tarts.

(opens a bottle of wine and pours it for Marcus and Laura)

LAURA

Excuse my manners but is this beef safe to eat?

Isn't it raw?

CHRISTOPH

It's perfectly safe to eat.

It was butchered this afternoon, so the meat is fresh.

MARCUS

I'll admit, I've never tried raw beef before,
but it smells heavenly Christoph.

CHRISTOPH

(gives a warm, acknowledging smile)

You have my deepest gratitude.

Now, I believe it's time we say grace:

Bless this food,

Body of Christ,

Slaughtered to give us life!

Fill us with your sacrifice.

Amen.

LAURA

I can honestly say I've never heard that one before.

MARCUS

(under his breath)

Laura, don't be rude...

CHRISTOPH

The grace has been said, so please, dig in! Bon Appetit.

MARCUS

(Marcus takes a small pensive bite of the beef tartare, his face lighting up)

Delicious! Absolutely delicious!

It's tender and rich, but not overwhelming!

Laura, you've got to try this!

LAURA

In a bit.
(takes a long sip of wine)

CHRISTOPH

You're too kind Marcus.

MARCUS

So how do you know Scott? The office?

CHRISTOPH

We met while he was traveling abroad in Norway,
he was still in university I believe.
It's funny you ask, he saw me just as I -

LAURA

And what exactly is it that you do?

CHRISTOPH

(a long pause)
I study people.
I've dedicated myself to the study of the few indigenous peoples
still left on this earth who have never experienced contact
with the outside world.
You know, a tribe was recently discovered
not too far from the Bay of Bengal.
They were completely oblivious to the outside world,
and violently rejected all who came close.
I was quite fascinated by it all.
Imagine that, no smartphones, no cinema,
nothing of people consumed by skincare products,
or mutilated by plastic surgery.
I find it all rather tasteless.
And did you ever think of their point of view?
That we might be the savages?

LAURA

That's very...noble of you Christoph.
I myself am a sociology major.

MARCUS

(finishing the beef tartare)
Now Christoph, did you ever try to meet one of these tribes?

CHRISTOPH

Sadly no, though it's a dream of mine.
(looking to Laura)
Laura, you haven't touched your food yet.
Are you feeling unwell?

LAURA

I'm...on a diet!
Trying out a new thing, intermittent fasting,
everyone's doing it these days...

CHRISTOPH

I see...
I can bag something up for you later.

LAURA

Oh, you really don't have to.

CHRISTOPH

I insist!

MARCUS

(butting in)
So, Christoph, I just have to ask:
With your incredible skill, why didn't you ever become a chef?

CHRISOPH

Oh, cooking is just a hobby.
It's people that complete me.

LAURA

(to herself)
Uh...

MARCUS

It's a damn good hobby.
Do you think you could show me one of your dishes?

CHRISTOPH

Certainly. Curious guests always make the best food.

LAURA

(interjecting)
Did you ever teach Scott any?

CHRISOPH

Just one. A fine stew he made.
Which reminds me, I'll be back in a few minutes with the main course.
Please do excuse me.
(leaves)

LAURA

(quietly and sharply)
Are you thinking the same thing as me Marcus?

MARCUS

(digging into his food)
Yeah, the beef tartare...has an odd taste...it's (smacks lips)...paprika!

LAURA

Seriously?! Nothing about this seems...off to you?

MARCUS

What?

LAURA

Scott, last minute, "couldn't make it",
we're eating at a stranger's house,
and who the hell says grace like that?

MARCUS

(abruptly stops eating, Laura nods her head in agreement as he is about to speak)
Oh my god...He's a Mormon isn't he?

LAURA

What? No, be quiet!
Don't you think something's off...
Just a *little* bit?
The isolation, no cellphone reception,
it's all just a little too convenient don't you think?

MARCUS

What are you getting at?

LAURA

What if Scott just happened to arrive here before us?
What if he *was* here all along...in the kitchen! On our plates!
This is some *Silence of the Lambs* shit, Marcus.
We are in danger!

MARCUS

Laura please, we've never met the man before.

LAURA

Exactly!

Don't you think it's strange,
the little comments that he makes?

"Guests make the best food", who says that?!

MARCUS

Laura, honey, I think you've got the wrong idea.
Christoph is a little strange, yes, but I'm sure he means well...

LAURA

(slams her hands the table)

We have known this man for *ten* minutes Marcus!

CHRISTOPH

(offstage)

Everything okay there?

LAURA

All good!

(to Marcus)

I know how this looks, but trust me when I say

Christoph is not who he seems.

(gets up and starts digging through Christoph's drawers and furniture)

Here.

MARCUS

What the hell are you doing?

LAURA

I'm finding some goddamn evidence that's what.

A bloody knife, a severed head...

MARCUS

(shocked)

Are you out of your mind?!

LAURA

Marcus, I don't know how to tell you this, but I think Christoph is a cannibal!
As in he is killing people, chopping them up into little pieces,
and serving them to his next victims!

MARCUS

That's it! That's it, if you keep doing this I'll...I'll call the police!

LAURA

(starts throwing dishes and utensils out of the cabinets)

Oh? And how are you gonna do *that* with no reception?

Why is there no reception?

Oh right! So Christoph can eat people without anyone knowing!

MARCUS

Laura please.

LAURA

Be quiet! He could hear us.

MARCUS

Oh, because you're being such a wonderful houseguest right now.

Hell, Christoph could've walked right back in and...

CHRISTOPH

(entering suddenly with a large platter of a rack of lamb and Laura's portion in a takeout bag)

And what? What's all this?

MARCUS

Well, you see...we were...

LAURA

(closing the drawers immediately)

We were trying to catch a rat that we saw under the table!

MARCUS

(shaking his head in agreement)

Yes that's exactly what happened!

It went under the table, so here we all are!

CHRISTOPH

(setting the platter and takeout bag on the table)

Ah well thank you for telling me,

I've been dealing with quite the rat infestation.

MARCUS

Really?

CHRISTOPH

No. Do I look like an imbecile to you?
Scott never mentioned he had
such greedy cockroaches for friends!

MARCUS

So I guess we won't make it to dessert then?

CHRISTOPH

The dinner party is over!
Now get out and good riddance!

LAURA

Christoph please, there's been a misunderstanding!

CHRISTOPH

I said get out!

(Marcus and Laura run out as Christoph shouts at them; Marcus manages to grab the food baggie before they exit; the two quickly make it back to the car)

MARCUS

Damn, he really let you have it.

LAURA

Let's just get out of here...I don't want to talk about it.
God...I really made an ass of myself back there...

MARCUS

What were you thinking Laura, really?
Christoph's never going to talk to us again, what will we tell Scott?
(takes a bite out of the lamb and pauses)
Ow!

LAURA

What is it?

MARCUS

Nothing, I just bit into something hard.
(takes it out with his hand)
Just a...a tooth!

Scene 2

Marcus and Laura's apartment, the couple enters, Marcus sits at the table, still processing the night while Laura begins pacing back and forth, the time is 11:00pm.

MARCUS

(takes out his phone and calls Scott)

Damn it, Scott won't pick up!

LAURA

(to herself)

A tooth...a tooth! I rest my case!

MARCUS

I'm as surprised as you about this,
but let's not jump to conclusions just yet.

LAURA

A *tooth* Marcus. You found a tooth in your food!
How do you explain that?

MARCUS

Let's stop and think about this for a second.
We were driving home...when...when I happened to bite into...

LAURA

A tooth.

MARCUS

Will you stop saying that!

LAURA

Only when you can come up with an explanation
that doesn't make Scott work buddies with Jeffrey Dahmer.

MARCUS

Please Laura, he said he's from Europe.
That would make him more...sophisticated...an Armin Meiwes.

LAURA

Oh! The guy who cooked someone else's penis is *much* better!

MARCUS

I know, what a dick.

LAURA

Are you even listening?

MARCUS

Laura, please listen to what you're saying.

We were the one's kicked out of Christoph's dinner party.

If he is who you say he is, wouldn't it have been easier to eat us right there?

And as for the...um...curious molar...

perhaps he's a dentist! A dentist, yes!

LAURA

(casually) I thought he was an anthropologist...

MARCUS

And one of the teeth he pulled from work accidentally made its way onto my plate.

(Laura gives Marcus a look)

Yeah, okay, that one didn't make any sense.

In any case, it could've been his own!

LAURA

His own...tooth?

MARCUS

Precisely!

Chefs always taste their food,

so naturally Christoph took a good-sized bite of the lamb chop,

accidentally bit the bone, and poof! Out went his tooth!

LAURA

I think he'd know if he lost a tooth, Marcus.

MARCUS

Alright, well what if? What if? What if...

(Marcus comes to terms with the reality that Christoph might be a cannibal)

So back there...at Christoph's house...you're saying...we just ate...

LAURA

You just ate.

MARCUS

I'll be right back.

(Marcus rushes to the bathroom)

LAURA

(pauses and looks at the tooth, now in a tiny Ziplock bag)

Am I wrong for treating this as evidence?

You had a point, Marcus.

Christoph had every right to yell at us.

He didn't pull out a butcher's knife or make an escape.

Am I wrong for thinking something was wrong?

Ah! He was impeccably polite to a couple of strangers at his table.

And when he caught us looking through his things,
he just kicked us out, that's all!

I'd do the same thing!

If we'd just mind our manners, this would have never happened.

Christoph's just a bit strange, but I'm sure he means well.

MARCUS

(wiping his mouth)

Laura, you were right. I'm calling the police.

(holds up the Ziplock bag)

This is all the evidence we need!

LAURA

Hold on Marcus.

Let's...wait on it.

MARCUS

Yes! Let's...wait what?

LAURA

What you said before you, um, emptied yourself,
about *us* being kicked out.

You made a good point.

I think we should wait on calling the police

until we're absolutely certain that what we were served at dinner was...you know...

MARCUS

...the *other* other white meat.

LAURA

Exactly.

MARCUS

(thinking a bit)

Hey, you know when we were driving to Christoph's place?

LAURA

What about it?

MARCUS

I don't recall seeing any other houses, and not one intersection. It's just one long road connecting his house to the rest of town. He's got to shop for groceries at some point, right?

LAURA

(holding up the grocery store bag that had the leftovers)

We can catch him when he leaves!

And I think we know exactly which one he'll be at.

MARCUS

You know what this means!

(at the same time)

MARCUS

"Steak" out!

LAURA

We'll find out if he's really a cannibal!

(a long, awkward pause)

MARCUS

Do you...do you get it?

LAURA

Marcus please.

MARCUS

You know, like a stake out, but with steak –

LAURA

So we've decided he's a cannibal,
and you've decided to make jokes...

MARCUS

(playfully pretentious)

Excuse me,
puns are the highest form of language my dear.

LAURA

And the quickest way to sleeping on the couch tonight.

MARCUS

I'm sorry if that pun didn't *meat* your expectations.

LAURA

Marcus, I swear to God.

MARCUS

A good meat pun truly is a *rare medium well-done*.

LAURA

I love you, Marcus,
but make no mis-*steak*,
if you *carrot* all about your well-being,
you'll avoid any *beef* with me.

MARCUS

Touché...but you weren't serious about the couch, right?

LAURA

Go to bed, Marcus.
(*Laura throws a pillow at the couch and turns off the lights*)

Scene 3

The next day, afternoon. Marcus and Laura have followed Christoph to the grocery store, and they are waiting for Christoph to walk inside.

LAURA

(walking around the parking lot and searching for Christoph's car, but soon begins pacing back and forth)

Where do you hide them, Christoph?

Where were the bodies when we ate at your table?

In the fridge, the freezer perhaps?

Or do you keep them chained inside the basement
until you get hungry

(imitating Christoph)

so the meat is fresh?

(stops and realizes she's been pacing around)

Focus, Laura. Focus.

(looking for the white Lexus when she pauses)

Let's be rational here.

What cultural causation could there be
to have a man like Christoph act the way he does?...

Ah! Now I'm starting to talk like him!

Fine! I'll play along.

You study people? Well, here's a *taste* of your own medicine.

Philosopher Herbert Spencer, what would he say?

"Where does Christoph fit into society?

Is his work with Scott merely voluntary in an industrial one?"

He seems wealthy enough to be doing this for fun...

or to blend in...

Or...maybe your words are meaningless *Herb*,
after all, you're just easy reading for eugenicists!

(snaps out of it)

What am I even doing?

(Laura feels her phone vibrate and picks it up)

MARCUS

(over the phone, slowly inching towards Christoph's location)

I found him, Laura!

He's by the butcher, as a killer cannibal would be!

LAURA

Marcus, if he's eating people, why would he order meat at the butcher?

MARCUS

(pauses, then smugly)

Or that's exactly what he'd *want* us to think!

LAURA

(sarcastically)

Yeah, that's obviously what he's doing,

MARCUS

You're still having doubts about him?

LAURA

I thought my mind was set,
but I just don't know anymore.

Marcus, listen to us talk.

What the hell are we doing?

MARCUS

Listen to me babe,
we're doing the right thing, I think.
Last night, I only gave you a hard time,
because I did not want to believe it myself.
But you convinced me,
I'm with you all the way.
There is a killer out there,
walking the streets we walk,
breathing the air we breathe,
and we are the only ones who know.
It doesn't matter if no one believes us,
Laura, I'm with you all the way.

LAURA

(touched)

Thank you honeypie.

MARCUS

It's all coming together.

(Marcus and Laura both laugh; Marcus sees Christoph move closer to his location)

He's close now, I think he's saying –

Oh no.

LAURA

(concerned)

Marcus? Are you ok?

MARCUS

I'll be right back, bathroom break!

LAURA

Now?!

MARCUS

You know I have a weak bladder!

(hurries to the restroom, where he nervously waits for the person at the single urinal to finish up, but can't wait so he goes into the stall instead)

(the man at the urinal leaves, Christoph enters, bumping into the man)

CHRISTOPH

Pardon me, sir.

MARCUS

(still with phone in hand, hushed)

Just my luck, he's here too...

LAURA

You're with Christoph?

MARCUS

Shh! I'll call you back, I got a plan.

(hangs up the phone; in a disguised voice)

So, you come here often?

CHRISTOPH

(taking a moment to muster a response as he stands at the urinal)

Excuse me?

MARCUS

The bathroom I mean.

CHRISTOPH

Three to four times a day, I'd say.

Do I know you?

MARCUS

No! Why would you ask me that?

CHRISTOPH

It's just...your voice...it sounds...

MARCUS

(thinking of a way to change the conversation)

I just...wanted to get to know you is all!

CHRISTOPH

Oh, are we...is this what we're doing?

MARCUS

(attempting to sound definitive, but still coming off as unsure)

We...are?

CHRISTOPH

Are we?

MARCUS

Yes, absolutely.

CHRISTOPH

Well, in that case, why don't we continue our conversation at my dinner table?

MARCUS

(hesitant)

Hold on, you're inviting me to dinner?

CHRISTOPH

Sorry, was that too forward?

MARCUS

No, not at all! I love lamb!

CHRISTOPH

(pauses to think)

How peculiar, I had just prepared a splendid rack of lamb last night.

MARCUS

What a coincidence! I just...love lamb, can't stop thinking about it!

CHRISTOPH

Yes, well the main event was rudely halted by inconsiderate guests, more swine than human I'd say.

MARCUS

Oh, fuck off!

CHRISTOPH

Come again?

MARCUS

I mean...you must have told them to fuck off after being so rude!

CHRISTOPH

To put it politely, yes.
(zips up his fly)

MARCUS

My...my name is...Jack.

CHRISTOPH

Nice to meet you...Jack,
I'm Christoph Aberfeld.
Nice chatting with you.
(flushes)

MARCUS

Wait!
(awkward pause)
I'm not done yet.

CHRISTOPH

Excuse me?

MARCUS

Talking! I'm not done talking!

CHRISTOPH

Look, if you're serious about dinner,
you can find me at Grohmann Art Museum later this afternoon.
They're having a lovely exhibit on the Livre de la Vigne nostre Seigneur.

MARCUS

I'll be there!

CHRISTOPH

I look forward to it.
You will make a fine addition to the dinner table.

MARCUS

(attempting to sound distinguished)
Yes, indubitably!
And what will be at said table?

CHRISTOPH

Long pig naturally.
(goes to wash his hands and exits the restroom)

MARCUS

(gets up and calls Laura; under his breath)
Laura, it's me!
He just invited me to his house for dinner!
(taking out the tooth from the Ziplock bag)
Christoph's one-way ticket to jail!

CHRISTOPH

Sorry Jack, did you say something?

MARCUS

(startled by Christoph, he drops the tooth in the toilet and accidentally flushes it trying to reach into it)
Oh God! Shit! No, no, no, no, no...oh shit...

CHRISTOPH

I...see this is a bad time,
I hope to see you at the museum...Jack...
(exits)

LAURA

Marcus?
Is everything alright?

MARCUS

(sitting on the bathroom floor, his arm half covered in toilet water, his phone on speaker in the other hand, defeated)
So...I'm gonna need two museum tickets
and a fresh change of clothes.

Scene 4

The Grohmann Museum, outside the Livre de la Vigne nostre Seigneur exhibit. A sculpture garden can be seen outside, with just as much greenery as there are sculptures of the human figure. Inside, Christoph has his back turned, contemplating and observing an enlarged print of Demons Practicing Cannibalism, from the book that the exhibit is featuring.

CHRISTOPH

You know my heart, my inner storm,
oh, art divine.
You embrace me, understand me, consecrate me.
“Demons Practicing Cannibalism”;
demon and man, one in the same.
Yet I am still alone.
*“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner
who went out early in the morning
to hire workers for his vineyard”,
but where is my heaven?
To be transfixed
on my eternal Eucharist.
“Demons practicing cannibalism,”
in my paradise with no one to share it with.
Just one is all I ask.
Just one who can grant me connection.
Just two words that can last me to the end of days.
“I understand.”
(glaring at Laura and Marcus from his peripheral vision)*
I thought I heard the scurrying of roaches.

MARCUS

Nice to see you too bud.
We’re just here appreciating art like you are.

CHRISTOPH

(snarky)
Hmph. I have a hard time believing you of all people are here to appreciate,
hm, what was the name of this exhibit again?
I seem to have forgotten.

MARCUS

The...um...exhibit of...well...
that’s not exactly the reason we’re here.

LAURA

Marcus!

MARCUS

Truth is...

(red in the face) we'd like to ask that you re-invite us to dinner!

CHRISTOPH

(somewhat shocked) I...honestly wasn't expecting that.

LAURA

(interrupting) That aside!

We were simply not ourselves that night,

and we would hate to cause a rift between Scott and his friends!

What do you say, Christoph?

May we be re-invited to dinner tonight?

CHRISTOPH

My, today seems to be full of surprises.

If you're so insistent, so be it.

You know I'd never waste a potential meal.

I trust what occurred last night was caused by...hysteria,

and shall not be repeated, correct?

LAURA

What century are you fro—

MARCUS

(nudging Laura)

Absolutely, no doubt about it!

LAURA

(catching herself)

That's right! I'll make sure Marcus is on his best behavior!

MARCUS

Yes – Hey wait!

CHRISTOPH

(interrupting)

I'm delighted to have you all for seconds.

LAURA

Yes, us as well...

(after an awkward silence, Laura stares at the print of Demons Practicing Cannibalism)

“Demons practicing cannibalism”...how barbaric.

A horrific act...for both parties involved.

MARCUS

It's messed up...sure am glad no one here is into that!
(Laura steps on Marcus' foot while Christoph is still looking at the print)

CHRISTOPH

(calm and corrective)
Most animals participate in that communion,
that...transubstantiation,
but they know not the purpose of the ritual,
they derive neither perverse pleasure nor pain from the act;
it is as natural for them to consume their own as it is for them to breathe air.

MARCUS

Change the subject, Laura. I'm begging you.

CHRISTOPH

Coincidentally, the people of Papua New Guinea
are known to practice cannibalism
to exorcize the demons of pestilence.

MARCUS

I am *begging* you.

LAURA

(with a pained smile)
What an...interesting fun fact!
Though I think the tribes that practice it today are in the minority.

CHRISTOPH

(a sudden and sharp break in façade; condescending)
Beg your pardon? I have encountered them in the flesh!
(Marcus and Laura look at each other and mouth words to each other)

MARCUS

(trying to lighten the mood)
So, what do you do at work?

CHRISTOPH

Human resources. Same as Scott.
That's when I knew we had a *real* connection.

MARCUS

(in one breath)
Wow that's so great Laura please change the subject.

LAURA

What's on the menu for tonight, Christoph?

CHRISTOPH

My, my! How forward!
But I am glad you asked,
since you all are coming,
for tonight's presentation will be a feast for the ages!

LAURA & MARCUS

(forcing a smile)

Wow, how lovely, I can't wait...
About the food...don't hesitate.

CHRISTOPH

The entree I cannot say,
but I guarantee there's plenty to taste!
We shall feast at the table like American Indians,
the purest communion where nothing will go to waste!
I'll see you both at six p.m. sharp.

LAURA

I'm sure our palates can handle it.

MARCUS

He's really getting into it...

LAURA

(nudging Marcus)

Well Christoph, we really should go.
I promise we won't be late!

MARCUS

Yes! We really should get going!
We need to get dressed and ready!

CHRISTOPH

(ignoring Marcus and Laura)

You may find it foreign on your plates,
but I promise it's an acquired taste.
The purest connection, not a word gone to waste!
We shall have a proper dinner.

MARCUS

Laura, I don't think he's listening.
Do you think he'd notice if we just leave?

LAURA

It's been so great to see you again!
We'll see you *later tonight*,
so we'll be leaving now.

MARCUS

Let's get out of here!

CHRISTOPH

I do love having guests for dinner,
and serving my fellow man!

Scene 5

Laura and Marcus arrive at Christoph's house once again; their car is parked, and they are walking to the front door where Christoph is eagerly awaiting them. The lights are all on in Christoph's house. The sun has almost set, with clouds blocking it out.

MARCUS

(slowly walking to the front door)
So do you think Christoph will try to eat us,
or will he just sniff my hand again?

LAURA

You had the *whole* ride to make that comment, and you choose now?

CHRISTOPH

(opens the door enthusiastically)
My new friends, welcome once again!
Tonight's *prix fixe* includes a special tour of the *bone room*,
where I keep my most prized possessions.

MARCUS

(to Laura)
Did he just say the –

LAURA

(lightly elbows Marcus)
What a wonderful surprise!
We can't wait to see...the...

MARCUS

...the "bone room"?

CHRISTOPH

(still enthusiastic)
The bone room gets its moniker
from the many treasures I've acquired all my life,
treasures that I still feel inside me,
like the bones of my body.

MARCUS

Please stop saying "bone".

LAURA

Well, what are we waiting for?
Let's go ahead and see your...special room!

CHRISTOPH

With pleasure. *(begins leading them to the bone room)*

MARCUS

I swear if this turns out to be some kinky sex dungeon...
(Christoph flicks the light on as they enter the bone room; Marcus takes a second to view the dozens of different tribal memorabilia on display like a British museum)
...and it's even worse.

(The bone room is a large, curated room with museum-like displays along the walls, some on shelves, and with old photographs and items hanging from the walls. The items are from various tribes from across the world with a certain fixation on isolationist tribes. Accompanying each item is a photograph of Christoph posing with one or several members of said tribe. There are ornate wall lamps that illuminate the entire room.)

LAURA

(dumbfounded)
Oh, wow. This is...a lot to take in.

CHRISTOPH

Impressed?
This could be where your future lies as well.

LAURA

(looking at one of the photographs behind a glass case)
Come again?

CHRISTOPH

Your future as an anthropology enthusiast like myself!

LAURA

I think my future lies in lending aid,
not curating a personal museum.

CHRISTOPH

You flatter me.
I have visited dozens of tribes the world over.
They offered the very kindness and aid you speak of.
All that you see here is a testament to the lessons and stories
these primitive guides imprinted onto me.

LAURA

(pointedly) What is your deal?

MARCUS

Laura!

LAURA

(defiantly at Marcus)
No.
(sharply to Christoph)
Your weird exhibit isn't impressing anyone!

CHRISTOPH

(surprised)
I'm...so sorry, I had no intention of offending –

LAURA

Don't talk down to me,
your formalities and manners don't fool me.
I can see right through you.

CHRISTOPH

I think I know what is going on.

LAURA

Oh do you now?

CHRISTOPH

(holding back anger)

We are all still tense from the previous night.

And when one is famished, they become,
is the word you use “hangry”?

But rest assured, tonight’s dinner shall mark our new friendship!

Allow me to fetch the wine and give you two some time.

When I return, I promise to serve you well.

(exits)

(as soon as Christoph leaves, Marcus and Laura both look at each other, nod, and begin searching the room for evidence)

MARCUS

Yep, he hides them in here.

LAURA

Agreed.

MARCUS

I can’t believe you snapped at him like that,
are you trying to make him suspicious?

LAURA

He had it coming.

(they both begin rummaging and searching the room, alternating between standing up and on their knees)

MARCUS

He *would* hide the bodies in a room like this.

LAURA

Christoph’s far too vain to not keep trophies.

MARCUS

But if he’s eating people,
what would be leftover?

LAURA

(searching on the floor)

I don’t know, locks of hair? Carved out skulls?

(slowly standing up so that she is face to face with one of the photographs of the tribespeople)

A photograph.

MARCUS

(looks at Laura)

You don't think?

(as Marcus gets up, he uses a handle on one of the exhibits, which pulls down to unlock a hidden drawer; Marcus reaches inside and takes out several files, which are meticulously organized)

Babe, come look at this.

(Laura helps hold up the file for them both to see)

I think we found our trophy...

LAURA

"Venezuela, '91,
Two Piaroa women,
Chewy and gamey, best served rare.
Your stories were beautiful."

MARCUS

"Central African Republic, '97,
One Bayaka man,
Liver this time, indescribably rich.
I'd have more, but they would get suspicious.
I wish they'd understand."

LAURA

"Venezuela, '01,
Four Yanomami women,
I told myself not to, but I simply couldn't resist.
Your lives have changed mine so much."

MARCUS

"Venezuela," –
Huh, Christoph really likes Venezuela...

LAURA

No laws to protect the natives there.
(pauses gravely)

MARCUS

What's wrong?

LAURA

“Milwaukee, 2018,
Scott Richard Parker.
A brief, but beautiful friendship.
The most tender, delectable beef tartare.”
(shaken)
This is it Marcus.
We need to get this to the poli-

CHRISTOPH

(appears behind Laura and Marcus and surprises them both by pressing a chloroform filled cloth to their faces)
That would be quite rude to your host, no?

MARCUS

(struggling with Christoph while Laura is overtaken by chloroform)
It's ok Laura!
Chloroform doesn't work like it does in the movies...
(Marcus instantly passes out from the chloroform as Christoph drags them out)

Scene 6

Laura and Marcus wake up tied to their chairs at the dinner table. The table has an elegant, red covering with candles, silverware, and fine china all set for a meal. A large butcher's knife is placed directly in front of them, resembling a sacrificial arrangement.

MARCUS

(drowsily waking up, struggles to move and notices the ropes, then upon seeing the dining table and the knife, is horrified, but slowly appears victorious)

Oh my God...I was right! Christoph was a cannibal all along!...

LAURA

(struggling to move in the ropes)

Are we really doing this right now?

Also, I was the one who proposed that, remember!

MARCUS

Yeah, if Christoph eats us, we're screwed!

LAURA

(ignoring him, tries to move the chair, reaching for the knife)

Just help me reach this knife!

CHRISTOPH

(rises from behind, he gently lifts the knife and moves it just out of reach)

My, that was close.

What a terrible host I would be if the food went missing.

LAURA

So what, are you gonna kill us first and then eat us,
or do you get off on eating people raw?

MARCUS

We're warning you,
we probably taste awful!
A-and...we haven't showered in days.

CHRISTOPH

Unnecessary for livestock.

LAURA

Is that what we are to you?

CHRISTOPH

Oh come now, Miss Sociology Major.
Surely you see our relative positions?
Your roles are to become a part of me,
it became your life's purpose the moment you accepted my invitation.

MARCUS

You are one sick bastard!

CHRISTOPH

Me? Sick?
Burn down your forests,
irradiate your oceans,
invent new ways to make humans suffer!
But *I'm* the sick one?

LAURA

And what about all those tribes you claim to love?
Do you think they enjoyed getting butchered and eaten?!

CHRISTOPH

With every bite, I remember them fondly.
Each one that I sought out,
each to whom I extended my hand,
yearning to be taken in,
away from distractions,
and away from this cruel place!
Your smartphones, your small talk,
your manicured, dishonest nods and smiles!
All for a taste of human connection.
(in ecstasy)
With every bite, I reminisce...
Their hopes,
their grief,
their memories.
I treasure them all inside me,
taken right in their prime
so nothing is wasted.
You must be elated
that I have chosen to respect our friendship
in such a way.
I shall first marinate your livers in milk –
trust me, it really brings out the flavor.
As they soak, your tongues

will make an irresistible amuse-bouche.
Your fat will become pristine soap,
your bones, the foundation of a chaise lounge,
and the rest shall become an exquisite broth.
Your hides shall be cured and stretched on a lamp.
Not a single hair shall be wasted.
Soon you shall be consecrated,
perfectly preserved with the rest of my dear friends.
Connected forever, eternally linked in this moment of –

(Marcus' phone alarm goes off suddenly)

MARCUS

(innocently) Sorry! My bad.

CHRISTOPH

(breaking his façade)

Great perversion!
Are you not grateful? Are you that thankless!
Degenerate mongrel swine!
After all that I've done, this is the thanks I get?
I thought we had something special!
I was to give you the privilege of the purest connection,
but I think I will cut straight to the chase,
starting with your tongues!

LAURA

Christoph, reconsider!
Three people missing in a row? Someone will get suspicious!

MARCUS

I want to stress again we haven't showered in days!

CHRISTOPH

Silence vermin!
So what if I'm discovered?
I will have my Last Supper before I am thrown to the lions!

MARCUS

I don't think that's what happens in the Bible.

CHRISTOPH

Enough!

(haphazardly sets his spot at the table)

I was going to take it slow,

(sloppily and quickly pours wine, and sets a palate cleanser)

draw out your sacrifice...

(hurriedly, in one breath)

Bless this food, body of Christ, slaughtered to give us life, blah blah blah sacrifice. Amen.

(grabs his knife and picks up the appetizer)

...but this will have to do!

How does Marcus and Laura sashimi sound?

(stuffs the appetizer in his mouth as he says)

Prepare to d-

(Christoph holds his free hand to his throat as he chokes; as he leans on the chair, he falls to the ground, onto his knife that he was holding in his other hand)

(Marcus and Laura sit in shock, mouths agape)

LAURA

(shifts his chair so he can grab a knife from the table; begins freeing himself)

(a knock is heard at the front door)

Ah! Help has arrived!

(Laura frees herself from her chair)

MARCUS

Quick Laura, untie me!

(Laura cuts Marcus free, she rushes to the front door)

OFFICER 1

Evening— *(is cut off by Laura opening and immediately closing the door)*

MARCUS

What are you doing?

LAURA

It's the police!

MARCUS

Well in hindsight,

we're *really* lucky that he was actually a cannibal.

LAURA

(going back and forth on what to do until she gingerly opens the door)

Evening officers *(quickly throws knife to the side)* what brings you here tonight?

OFFICER 1

Yeah...we received some concerned calls earlier this evening about some “shady activity” going on around here, and that people might be... *(looks at Marcus standing atop of Christoph’s corpse)* ...in trouble?
Would you care to explain?

MARCUS

(walking in front of Christoph’s body)
Y-yes! That was us! This guy, he, um, abducted us a-and...

LAURA

...and he tied us up and said he was going to eat us!

MARCUS

And make us into soap and lamps and shit!

OFFICER 2

I...see...but you’re ok now?

MARCUS

Physically? Yes.
Emotionally? Scarred beyond comprehension.

OFFICER 2

Mmhmm...I’m sure this has been quite the ordeal for you two. I take it this man was the stalker we’ve been hearing about, must’ve followed you two home?

MARCUS

Actually, this is his house, we were having dinner and—

LAURA

And that’s when he abducted us!

OFFICER 2

He...abducted you to have dinner with him?

LAURA

No that was *during* dinner.

OFFICER 2

Wait, so you *voluntarily* came to his house then?

LAURA

(cornered) ...Yes.

OFFICER 2

To have dinner.

MARCUS

Yeah...

OFFICER 1

Okay...I think it's pretty cut and clear what's going on.

MARCUS

Thank you!

OFFICER 1

You two are coming with us for questioning.

LAURA

What!?

MARCUS

No, wait I can see how this could be taken the wrong way.

OFFICER 2

Come on. Turn around, hands where I can see 'em!

LAURA

(being cuffed by Officer 2)

Christoph is a cannibal!

A cannibal!

You don't know what you're doing!

OFFICER 1

(taking out pepper spray and sprays Marcus)

You have the right to remain silent,
everything you say can be used against you in a court of law.

MARCUS

Pepper spray!

Haven't we been seasoned enough!?

LAURA

You're making a huge mistake!

MARCUS

(struggling as one of the policemen begin to cuff him)

Are you insane! He has a place called the fucking Bone Room!

LAURA

Wait, the Bone Room— That's right!

(to the officers)

Please, listen to me.

We have all the evidence we need to change your minds, I just need one minute!

OFFICER 2

And where can we find this so-called "evidence?"

LAURA

The next room down and to the right.

OFFICER 1

(to Officer 2, aside)

Is she serious?

(Officer 2 mumbles something causing him to nod)

Fine, one minute. And I'm coming with you.

(Officer 1 and Laura leave and then come back with Christoph's files from the Bone Room)

OFFICER 1

(skeptically reading the files of Christoph's victims, becomes visibly shocked)

Christ on a cracker...she's telling the truth!

OFFICER 2

Let me see that!

(grabs the files, then turns to Officer 1)

Send a team immediately to search the house.

(uncuffs Marcus and Laura)

Kids, come with me for questioning. Not the bad kind though, consider me convinced.

LAURA

(victoriously standing next to Christoph's corpse)

I guess in the end, our friend Christoph got his just *desserts!*

(a very awkward silence, everyone stops what they are doing, Officer 1 looks at her in confusion and horror)

MARCUS

(lets out a short laugh)

Sorry, too soon.

(Fin)