

HUNGER

A play by
Chantal Bilodeau
in collaboration with
Bated Breath Theatre Company

CHARACTERS

CHARLES deMARQUET, Master Chocolatier

CHRISTABELLE deMARQUET, Dessert cookbook writer

CAROL/MAXINE, Food rep

VOICES

STORE PA

STAGE MANAGER

CO-WORKER

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A special evening at a small, high-end chocolate store. Soft atmosphere, music playing in the background. The smell of melting chocolate permeates the room.

Charles & Christa are hard at work making profiteroles. While people trickle in, get a glass of wine and mingle, they invite a few "assistants" to help with the preparation. One person is assigned to whip the cream, another to cut the choux pastry, a third to stir the melting chocolate.

Movement sequence: Charles & Christa move with precision, both anticipating and complementing each other. Watching them work is like watching a perfectly choreographed dance.

CHARLES

Good evening! I am Charles deMarquet, Master Chocolatier, and this is my beautiful wife, Christabelle deMarquet.

CHRISTA

And we're very pleased to have you here tonight for our monthly Hunger event.

CHARLES

(surveys the crowd) I can tell all of you have impeccable taste... and just the right amount of restraint. I like that in a crowd. Nuance, refinement, sophistication... those are the foundations of society and the most important aspects of my trade... Right, Christa darling?

CHRISTA

Absolutely.

CHARLES

Now before we indulge in our signature profiteroles, let me offer some guidance so you can fully appreciate this unique gustatory journey.

CHRISTA

But first, who has had profiteroles before?

They wait for a show of hands.

CHRISTA (CONT'D)

Great. I'm sure they were fine... but what you're going to taste tonight is on an entirely different plane. *(to Charles)* And why is that?

CHARLES

Because the secret is in the chocolate... And chocolate is like capitalism... or sex: you can put the right elements together but if you don't have that touch of magic, all you get is a huge big mess.

CHRISTA

Chocolate starts in the cocoa tree. When the pods are ripe, they're harvested often by young, trafficked, African children living in grinding poverty.

CHARLES

The seeds are then extracted, fermented in big bins and dried in the sun. *(picks up beans from a bowl)* These are dry cocoa beans, see?

CHRISTA

But when you have raw material seeped in abuse, you can't help but get a tainted product. As we all know, slavery has a foul and unmistakable taste.

CHARLES

So we, at deMarquet Chocolate, do things differently. We stand for justice and love. Justice in that we only use 100% organic, Fair Trade, sustainably-farmed cocoa beans; cocoa beans that can be tracked to farms that don't use child labor; cocoa beans that earn their growers a living wage. And love, well... *(he puts his arm around Christa)* Need I say more?...

They kiss. This sparks something. They throw themselves at each other and start making out. After a beat, Christa draws Charles back into the presentation.

CHRISTA

Charles...

CHRISTA (CONT'D)

So forget cheap and fast. Forget instant but morally-reprehensible.

Charles keeps kissing and fondling Christa. She slaps his hand.

CHRISTA (CONT'D)

Stop it.

CHRISTA (CONT'D)

Life is in the peace of mind that comes from fairly distributed wealth. Life is in the deMarquet profiterole.

At this point, the profiteroles should be assembled and set on serving platters.

CHARLES

Could I please have a volunteer--

Maxine immediately steps forward.

MAXINE

Me! Right here! I can help, whatever you want, I'm good at this kind of stuff, I'm good with people. *(to the crowd)* Hello! *(to Charles, indicating wrapped chocolate squares)* Are these free samples?

Maxine stuffs her suitcase with chocolate samples.

CHARLES

(to Maxine)

Wow. You're quite the chocolate lover.

MAXINE

Oh, you have no idea...

She takes the platter from
Charles's hands.

MAXINE (CONT'D)

I'll pass these out.

Charles, Christa and Maxine pass the profiteroles and flirt with the audience. This should be taken as far as comfortable and include physical contacts. The following three monologues are delivered simultaneously and are addressed to people close-by (not to the entire room). The competitiveness should escalate as the three vie for people's attention.

CHARLES

(in French) Chocolat... *(Spanish)* Chocolate... *(English)* Chocolate. Food of the Gods. Aphrodisiac. Love me. A perfect balance of bitter and sweet with a touch of the exotic. Hello... May I? *(dips someone's finger in chocolate and makes them lick it)*... Mmmmm, you're delightful. So are you. And you too. Love me. *(Nahuatl)* Chicolatl. *(Norwegian)* Sjokolade. *(Romanian)* Ciocolata. Rich, complex and layered. Somewhat addictive. So valuable it's traded on the stock market... Love me. Love me. Love--... Oh. *(stops dead in his tracks, smitten/takes a profiterole and feeds it to the person)* Eat me... *(reacts as the person eats)* Oh, my God. You are making me WILD!... Isn't he/she something?... Oh hello. What a lovely, lovely sight... You're definitely a--... *(leans in to smell the person)* Classic Columbia: Moderately fruity and lightly bitter with deep cocoa flavor. And this blooming flower here--... *(smells someone else)* a Mexico--no a Jamaica: Bright and fruity. Appealing aromas. Reminiscent of pineapples. *(roars as if wanting to devour him/her)* *(Italian)* Cioccolato. *(Polish)* Czekolada. *(Greenlandic)* Sukkulaat. Did you know that chocolate was brought to earth by the Aztec god Quetzalcoatl? He came on the beam of a morning star with a cocoa tree stolen from paradise. *(watches someone eat)* Yeah... That's exactly it. Let the textures caress your tongue and your palate. Uh-huh...

(MORE)

CHARLES (CONT'D)

I'm the soft, gooey sweetness in your mouth. I'm the shiny, sticky mess on your fingers. Love me. Not anyone else, just me. Me, me, me. Love me!

CHRISTA

Whipped cream... Whipped cream... WHIPPED cream... That caught your attention, didn't it? You naughty, naughty boy/girl... Love me. *(watches someone eat a profiterole)* Oh, that's messy. Come here... *(takes a napkin, wipes the person's mouth)* You can't go around with your weaknesses written all over your face... *(to someone else)* Let me help you too... *(wipes the person's mouth)* There you go. Always better to be on top of things, isn't it?... Love me. *(whispers in someone's ear)* How would you like to WHIP my cream? Or BEAT my eggs?... Love me. Love me. Feed me. *(waits for someone to feed her a profiterole)* No, come on. You have to tantalize me a little bit... That's better... *(eats)* Mmmm... Creamy, creamy cream... So fresh and organic and local. So guilt-inducing... So quintessentially middle-class... *(hands someone a profiterole)* Your turn now. Worship me. *(waits until the person eats)* Slowly, slowly... You have to take the time to taste every flavor... *(to someone else)* Isn't he/she the *crème de la crème*... Although you're not so bad either, my little cream puff... Love me. *(stops in front of someone, examines him/her)* My, my, you are scrumptious... *(dips his/her finger in cream and makes the person lick it)* Mmm... I bet YOU could whisk me into soft peaks... *(scratches someone's ear)* Just think how hard the cows had to work to give us this smooth and white perfection. *(feeds him/her a profiterole very slowly)* We need to take just as much time to appreciate it... *(to someone else)* Don't you think?... At least, that's what I think...

MAXINE

Chhhhou... Chou, chou, chou, chou, CHOU! Hi, beautiful. Please, stuff yourself. And don't be afraid to come back for more... Love me. Hello handsome. Chou for you, chou for you, chou for me... *(she goes to eat it)* Oops! *(smears chocolate on her skin instead)* Would you mind licking that off?... Thank you, dear. Oh, you want some too? *(repeats the action with someone else)* There you go. I'm highly lickable, aren't I... That's my secret value-added feature... Chou anyone? Going once, going twice... *(finds someone who wants it)* Oh, right here... *(feeds him/her a profiterole)*. Wow, that really seems to get your mojo going... *(notices someone)* Oh, what have we got here? My, my... Look at those hands...

(MORE)

MAXINE (CONT'D)

(takes the person's hand and caresses herself with it) As soft as a baby's butt... Wait--... *(cups the person's hand, places a dollop of cream in it and makes them lick it)* Mmm! That's good... *(stops in front of someone)* Hi. *(feeds him/her a profiterole then whispers)* You're turning me on... *Chou-fleur, chou-rave, chou-navet, chou de Bruxelles, choucroute, chouchou...* *(picks out a couple)* double-chou... *(hands them a profiterole)* Eat this together, you know, at the same time. So it ends in a kiss... There you go, now that's a win-win relationship... I'm a *chou*, you're a *chou*, kiss me. *(makes a kissing sound)* Look at them... so crispy, and doughy, and golden... and hollow. Fuck me. Oops, Freudian slip... Love me. Hello... May I? *(dips the person's finger in chocolate and feeds it to their partner)* Now that's sexy, isn't it?... I like sexy. I really, really like it.

At this point, the profiteroles should be gone. Maxine slips out. Charles & Christa gather to say their goodbyes.

CHARLES

Folks, we hope you enjoyed our profiteroles and we look forward to seeing you again next month.

CHRISTA

And don't forget about our new book!

CHARLES

Yes, *Organic Decadence*, our first book, is coming out very soon! And it is full of exclusive deMarquet chocolate recipes rendered in beautiful prose...

CHRISTA

So make sure you sign up for our mailing list on your way out--

CHARLES

--or pre-order a copy on our website and we'll send it to you as soon as it becomes available.

CHRISTA

Thank you again for coming--

CHARLES

--we hope to see you next month--

CHRISTA

--and in the meantime...

CHARLES

May you find what you hunger for.

2

Maxine's apartment. A large wall half-covered with shiny chocolate wrappers dominates the room. A rolling library ladder leans against it.

Maxine moves deliberately at first, adjusting this and that, then sits, very straight, hands on her lap.

A beat.

She starts retrieving chocolate samples from her suitcase. As she does, her demeanor dramatically changes. She unwraps the chocolates with great anticipation, basks in the smell... then throws the chocolates on the ground, positions the ladder, climbs up, and adds the wrapper to the tapestry.

She repeats the action a few times, getting more and more frantic, then rubs against the wrappers on the wall as if intoxicated by their power.

MAXINE

I'm so hungry... So hungry... I don't know for what, for like fucking the world, controlling the world, owning the world like everywhere from here to there, like that kind of power, that kind of--... I don't know, people, bodies, things, money, products, like an extravaganza of mass consumption, day and night, a smorgasbord of excess that explodes like fireworks, pow, pow, pow, colors spilling into the sky, leaping out of televisions, magazines, billboards, permeating the very air we breathe, the food we eat, down to the last molecule, filling our lungs, colonizing our bloodstream--

She stares at the wall... then goes to her suitcase and opens another compartment. It's filled with chocolate wrappers.

She takes handfuls which she hands to the audience.

MAXINE (CONT'D)

Everywhere, it has to be everywhere. Here. And there. And there. A wall of tiny mirrors looking at me... A wall of me looking at me...

While audience members put up the shiny wrappers, she tries to catch her reflection.

MAXINE (CONT'D)

Am I pretty?... No, I'm not pretty. Not pretty enough...
(turns to an audience member and hands him/her some wrappers)
Make me pretty.

She weaves some gold wrappers into her dress.

MAXINE (CONT'D)

Like this... See? All golden and shiny... Here. You too. Make me pretty. Everybody, make me pretty.

She hands out more wrappers.

MAXINE (CONT'D)

Yes... That's it...

She looks for her reflection in the wrappers. This time, she likes what she sees. She puts herself back in the same calm and collected state she was at the top of the scene.

MAXINE (CONT'D)

All right. Time to go eat.

And she's off.