

## Van Halen'd Potatoes

### Cast of Characters

- Sheila - a middle-aged woman (wife of Jay)
- Jay -a middle-aged man (husband of Sheila)
- The Server (Mitch AKA Bruce). Young person. This role could equally be played by a woman; if so, Fiona AKA Lucie (pronouns would need to be changed accordingly)
- The Chef (André)- young middle-aged/middle-aged man.

Non-speaking parts: can have one (or more) couples sitting at tables (preferred but not essential).

### Set/Prop Requirements

Two (or more) small tables (both with place settings and menus), five chairs, four large binders, two mugs and a breadbasket.

### Music (optional)

Excerpts of songs by ELO ("Evil Woman") and Van Halen ("Runnin' with the Devil," "Jamie's Cryin'") could play before the action begins, and "Don't Fear the Reaper" by Blue Oyster Cult at the end.

### Scene

A couple (JAY and SHEILA) are seated at a restaurant table; another two people are seated at a separate table nearby. There could be additional small tables about the stage, either empty or with people seated at them.

SETTING                   A restaurant.

AT RISE                   A couple seated at a table (CENTER STAGE) are holding menus. UPSTAGE LEFT sits another couple looking at two thick three-ring binders. They should not be well lit. There is an unoccupied chair at their table. If no additional couple, a small table with two empty chairs.

SHEILA: Wow, here we are, The Lavatory! Chef André must be back there right now, hard at work.

So exciting!

*Thank-you, Jay!*

(SHEILA reaches across the table and affectionately grabs JAY'S hand, she squeezes it, withdraws her hand, and looks at her menu).

JAY: It's our anniversary, and you . . . no, scratch that, we deserve it.

(JAY looks down at his menu).

OK, Let's see . . . appetizers: (*slowly, clearly, thoughtfully*) crenellated moose ear . . . subjugated radicchio . . . lathered, infantile turnips mattresssed in reduced ghee.

I have no clue what any of this means.

SHEILA: I hope they don't kill a moose just for its ear, like they do with shark's fin. That's terrible.

JAY: It must be a thing, you know, like a "bear claw" pastry; it can't be the actual animal. But what would it mean to *crenellate* a moose ear? Aren't crenellations those spaces around the top of a castle?

SHEILA: I think so, but . . . let's leave it for now.

(looking at menu) Subjugated radicchio?

JAY: Well, to subjugate is to overpower or control, right? So, a subjugated radicchio must have something . . . I don't know . . . *done* to it?

SHEILA: Maybe it's beaten in some way, or blanched, or pulverized.

JAY: At least we know radicchio is involved, but lathered *infantile* turnips, *mattressed* in reduced ghee?

SHEILA: Ghee is the clarified butter used in Indian cooking. But to *mattress* something?

(WAITER ENTERS, SHEILA pokes JAY and whispers)

Ask the waiter - he's coming over.

JAY: (Whispering) Why do I always have to as--

WAITER: So, how you folks doing today?

JAY: Good, good, and yourself?

WAITER: Great!

(WAITER circles table and walks away).

JAY: OK . . . so, I have a couple of quest-

(WAITER is leaving/has left).  
Where'd he go? I hope he's coming back.

(JAY scans room and looks offstage, as if searching for the waiter, then returns to his menu).

Hmmm . . . look at this: *Van Halen'd* potatoes.

You think it's about the band? Maybe the spuds are *shredded*, just like Eddie shreds on guitar.

SHEILA: Possible, but it could be there's a Dutch chef; I don't know, Rem Van Halen or something, and he came up with this new way of doing potatoes. So, it's named after him, like the Cobb salad is named after . . . Cobb?

(WAITER returns)

WAITER: Have we decided?

SHEILA: We have questions.

WAITER: That's what I'm here for.

JAY: OK, so . . . (reads waiter's name off his name tag)  
Mitch, uh . . .

(WAITER looks around)

WAITER: Who?

JAY: Your name tag says Mitch.

WAITER: Nah, that's the name of a guy who used to work here. I can't find mine, so I use his.

I'm Bruce, but you don't need to use my name to ask me a question.

JAY: Alright, not calling you Bruce, the Van Halen'd potatoes, what, uh . . . what *is* that?

WAITER: (*Quickly, breezily*) It's an innocent tuber, fried in an E-L-O base with a Frobisher glaze. It's amazing.

Some people combine it with another appetizer and make it their meal.

JAY: Wow. OK, interesting . . . now about the E-L-O-.

(WAITER leaves as JAY is talking).

Did you get that?

SHEILA: He said it's in an E-L-O base.

JAY: Meaning?

SHEILA: ( *Spells out the letters slowly*) E-L-O. . . . Hmm.

JAY: It's the Electric Light Orchestra! There's a classic rock motif running through this whole thing (pokes menu).

SHEILA: Kind of like the Hard Rock Café?

JAY: Sort of, but the Hard Rock is a chain, pretty mainstream. This is supposed to be hip, and a little ironic, which means expensive.

SHEILA: Can we not talk about prices? This is a special night.

JAY: Sorry, I know, we're here for The Lavatory experience.

SHEILA: E-L-O. How about this: endive, lettuce and olive.

JAY: Nah, it's E-L-O, you know, (talking/singing using the tune of the actual song "Evil Woman" by ELO) The evil woman, duhna nuht nah; the evil woman . . ."

SHEILA: So misogynistic.

JAY: No it's not.

SHEILA: Why does he keep repeating the phrase "the evil woman" over and over again? It's a classic trope.

JAY: If he said, (talks/sings like the song) "Women are evil, duhna nuht nah, ... women are evil," that would be misogynistic, because it would be about women as a group, suggesting that women are evil by definition. But he says the evil woman, referring to a particular woman. It's not an indictment of all women.

There are specific women who are evil.

SHEILA: Sounds like a rationalization to me.

JAY: You telling me that Jeff Lynne, the mastermind behind ELO, the guy with the big hair, the man who wrote "I turn to stone, when you are gone," is a misogynist?

SHEILA: I don't know him personally, I'm just saying *Evil Woman* sure sounds women-hatey, that's all.

JAY: Alright, both of us are probably wrong on the ELO thing anyway, so let's drop it.

SHEILA: You brought it up.

JAY: And now I'm putting it down.

SHEILA: Let me look at the desserts (turns over menu).

JAY: No, no, don't start on that. We haven't even figured out the entrees. We don't need any distractions.

SHEILA: Stop policing my menu viewing, I just want to see.

JAY: Am I wearing a badge? Why does everything have to be so dramatic?

*Fine. Look at the desserts. I just think first we should—*

SHEILA: Look, they have Jell-O!

JAY: You're kidding me.

SHEILA: Lime, grape, cherry, and orange.

JAY: I see . . . it's artisanal.

*Not sure what that means in a Jell-O context. Ten bucks though, that's quite a mark-up.*

SHEILA: I thought we weren't going to talk about cost, this is our anniversary and—

(WAITER approaches table).

WAITER: So, we ready?

JAY: Not exactly, and don't go anywhere. Maybe you should hold my hand, just so you don't wander off.

WAITER: How can I help?

JAY: You know what you said before about the Van Halen'd potatoes with the ELO base? Is that a classic rock thing?

WAITER: What do you mean?

JAY: ELO and Van Halen, they're rock bands from back in the day.

WAITER: What day?

JAY: The 70s, the early 80s, that era. You know (*sings part of the Van Halen song "Jamie's Cryin"*) Oh, oh, oh, Jamie's cryin', dooh, do.

(Bobs his head and simulates playing drums) How about "Dooht, dooht, runnin' with the devil ...?

WAITER: Sorry, I'm not familiar with those songs.

JAY: Huh, to each his own, right? Just don't spring a Foreigner frittata on me later, right?

*Pause.*

(WAITER stares blankly at JAY)

I see that doesn't register either. Ok, skip the music stuff. Just tell me straight-up what the crenellated moose ear is. Use words that can be found in a standard English-language dictionary.

WAITER: Sure, so the crenellated moose ear is a moose ear that has been crenellated.

JAY: You gave me absolutely no new information with that. It's not an actual moose ear is it?

WAITER: What do you mean by actual?

JAY: The animal called the moose, the big guys who live in Maine and stand in swamps and eat moss and reeds, it's not their physical ear, right?

WAITER: It's crenellated.

JAY: Fine, but what's the *it* that's crenellated.

WAITER: I'd have to ask the chef.

(WAITER leaves)

JAY: Great, he's gone again.

SHEILA: (Grabs JAY's hand)  
Do you think he's asking Chef André?

JAY: I should hope so, maybe we'll get to the bottom of this.

(CHEF enters purposefully)

SHEILA: Oh . . . my . . . God! He's coming over!

(CHEF takes an empty chair from the table nearby. He brings it to JAY and SHEILA'S table and turns it backwards so that when he

sits on it his hands rest on the top of the back of the chair).

CHEF: André, your chef.  
(CHEF extends hand).

SHEILA: (Shakes CHEF's hand).  
(Nervously). Hi André Chef, I mean Chef André. Hi. Great to be you, I mean meet you.

JAY: You got out here quickly.

CHEF (Points at ceiling). Cameras. I've been watching this whole thing. I get a feed in the kitchen. No pun intended.

JAY: None taken.

CHEF: I like to see how our patrons interact with the menu, the food, the space, the whole Lavatory concept.

JAY: Impressive. But don't you have chef work to do? Sautéing, *sous viding* [sue-veeding], that type of thing?

CHEF: I've got people doing that. I'm more involved in the creative end, menu design and such.

JAY: Evidently.

CHEF: Neither of you prepared before coming here tonight, did you?

JAY: Prepare?

CHEF: Study the menu, do your research. Your due diligence.

JAY: Due diligence? I'm not buying a house, although this meal could set you back, know what I'm saying?

CHEF: No, I don't.

JAY: Just that, well, you need to take out a loan to . . .

CHEF: (Pause). Are you done with the jokes?

JAY: Um, yeah, I guess.

CHEF: Stop talking about money, it's tiresome. If you don't want to pay for a transformative experience, then stay home with a frozen pizza, nothing wrong with that. But don't carp about the bill.

JAY: Fine.

CHEF: You know, you *could* have gone on our website, it's not that hard. There's even a Lavatory Wikipedia page, but you can't be bothered.

The lady was on the right track with the endives by the way.

JAY: Yeah, but the menu says Van Halen'd potatoes, and then Mitch, or Bruce, or whoever he is, started talking about ELO so I figured . . .

CHEF: If you'd done your homework, you'd know I only listen to EDM. That's what's cranking in the kitchen right now.

We're not going to have the freshest locally-sourced ingredients and a bleeding-edge menu, and then name the dishes after a bunch of stale old-timey rock bands.

JAY: Could be ironic or something.

CHEF: No, I don't believe in that. You know the Scatterfield Festival? I DJ'd there. EDM.

JAY: You're a busy guy.

(Pointing upward) Don't you think using technology to eavesdrop is an invasion of privacy?

CHEF: It's a public place. Ever overhear somebody at the next table?

JAY: Sure, but you know it's a possibility; that's different than being monitored without your consent!

CHEF: You're probably the type who shows off to his friends by saying "I went to The Lavatory," and then says, "It wasn't that great."

You come here because it's written up on all the foodie sites, and you need to impress the wife for the anniversary—maybe the marriage isn't going so great—but you don't want to do the work.

The Lavatory is Shakespeare, not beach reading.

JAY: Look, I'll stipulate that I'm a lazy, unredeemable slob who probably doesn't deserve to be here, just tell me what the crenellated moose ear is.

CHEF: (Calling to actor off-stage) Bruce, bring the volumes.

(WAITER enters and drops two thick binders on the table in front of JAY and SHEILA).

CHEF: Study these, (points at binders) and when you're done you'll take a test. It's multiple choice—I scrapped the essay last year—and you need a 70 to pass. Feel free to work together. You can do it at home on-line, but I don't like to see phones out in a restaurant, it's gross.

JAY: I agree with you on that one.

CHEF: Don't suck up.

Educate yourself and you'll understand the menu just fine. It's really more of a quiz than an exam. Bruce will bring you a cup of Blue Oyster Coffee in the meantime.

JAY: Oh ... Good one! Blue Oyster Coffee . . . B-O-C!

CHEF: What?

JAY: Blue Oyster Cult! You know: Don't Fear the Reaper (hums tune of "Don't Fear the Reaper" and then stops abruptly).

More cowbell?

(CHEF crosses his arms)

Could we get a little something to nibble on while we work?

CHEF: No. When you understand the menu, Bruce will be glad to take your order.

We'll leave you to it.

(WAITER and CHEF exit)

SHEILA: Did you hear what he said about ELO? It does mean endive, lettuce, and olive! Maybe that will be on the test!

JAY: He said you were on the right track, not that you got it.

SHEILA: Better than that classic rock tangent you were on, what a dead-end that was!

JAY: Well *sorry*, *Van Halen'd* potatoes, come on!

You're just getting annoyed and---

SHEILA: If you say the word "hangry," I will throttle you, I swear.

JAY: OK, OK.

Do you really want to stay and do this? We *can* leave.

SHEILA: I do want to stay—it must have taken forever to get this reservation—but I'm *so* hungry, I didn't eat lunch.

JAY: Let's go then.

SHEILA: No, we can't quit now; like Chef Andre said, you've got to want it. We're here now, so let's *do* this.

JAY: Alright, game on!

(JAY gestures for SHEILA to lean closer to him)

(*Whispering*) OK, listen, I've got something that will help us (*looks around furtively*).

(*Still whispering*) I have Goldfish crackers in my pocket.

(SHEILA briefly extends hand and quickly withdraws it as JAY, alarmed, makes a motion to indicate *under the table*)

SHEILA: (*Whispering*) Oh, oh, right, tell me when you're ready, and I'll put out my hand.

JAY: (*Whispering*) Wait a little bit and I'll give you a sign. Just act natural.

(JAY opens the binder in front of him)

(*Normal voice*) Well then, let's split up the material: I'll do number one, you do number two.

SHEILA: Can we call them sections? I'll take section one.

JAY: Sure, OK, section two is mine.

(*Stagey, overly deliberate, self-conscious*) You know, I just remembered, I promised my brother that we'd go fishing next weekend.

(JAY reaches under table, and shortly thereafter SHEILA does so as well)

SHEILA: (*Whispering*). Got 'em. Is that all you have? (*Whispering and now speaking quickly*). Never mind, he's coming!

(WAITER enters with a tray with two mugs on it and a small basket of breadsticks covered with a napkin; SHEILA and JAY quickly bring their hands out from under the table)

(*Stagey, overly deliberate, self-conscious for all to hear*). Fishing! How fun. Hope you guys catch something!

WAITER: Okaaay, so, here are your BOC coffees.

(WAITER puts mugs on table but not the breadsticks).

And Chef Andre wants to apologize. He realizes that you might have felt silenced, coerced, or bullied because he spoke so forthrightly. That's not the message he wishes to convey.

*Leaning in and speaking more softly)* He's had to do some work in this area. . . . He took a training.

*(Louder voice)* Chef Andre is very passionate about The Lavatory and wants every patron to share his enthusiasm. This is a space where all tastes are respected and we explore together as equals.

JAY: Really?

WAITER: Well . . . (Shrugs, holds hands palms upward in a "what can I say" gesture).

Anyway, he sent out these complimentary house-made Black Sabbath bread sticks to tide you over.

(WAITER puts basket on table and removes napkin)  
Enjoy.

I'll bring the tests when you're ready.

JAY: *(Picking up a bread stick and holding it aloft)* Not biting this time, no way. I'm paranoid.

WAITER: Excuse me?

(JAY makes a never mind gesture)

Let me know when you're ready, and I'll bring the tests.

(WAITER exits)

SHEILA: I guess we should get down to business *(opens her binder and holds up a loose piece of paper that was in it)*.

Oh My God!

JAY: What?

SHEILA: These are the answers to the test!

JAY:           Perfect!

SHEILA:    We can't use this, that would be cheating!

JAY:           No it's not. They gave it to us, that's on them.

SHEILA:    They didn't mean to. Even if they don't find out, we'd know. I want to feel like I deserve a Lavatory meal.

JAY:           Oh come on! I'd say we've put in quite the effort as it is.

SHEILA:    I'm going to go tell them.

JAY:           Let me handle it.

SHEILA:    You're really going to?

JAY:           Yes. I'm going to the kitchen right now.

(JAY gets up and walks to the side of the stage. He pauses for a moment, then with his arm extended and palm flat and outwards, pushes as if on a swinging door.)

(Speaking to unseen people offstage) Hey . . . uh, Chef, and uhm, Bruce, sorry, not supposed to call you ... anything, but uh, by mistake I think you gave us .... Wait, what are you eating? .... Is that a grilled cheese!

(JAY backs up, and BRUCE and CHEF ENTER and all move toward the table where Sheila is still sitting).

CHEF:           (Touching around his mouth with a napkin). The kitchen is a sacred, creative, space, you can't invade-

JAY:           Sorry, I didn't mean to barge in, but it appears you accidentally put the answer key in my wife's binder, so I was letting you know.

CHEF:           Oh, thanks, very good of you.

JAY:           Actually it was . . . (gestures toward Sheila).

CHEF: Almost makes up for the Goldfish thing, you guys are not exactly subtle.

JAY: OK, you busted us on the Goldfish, but what about the *grilled cheese*?

BRUCE: What about it?

SHEILA (Standing up): Well, your menu is so ... *esoteric* that we have to *study* it (SHEILA picks up a binder and lets it drop a few inches to the table) and meanwhile you're out there eating ...

BRUCE: Well, one of the first things you learn (points at the binder) is that there's a secret "Chef's Menu," but you have to request it.

JAY: (with *incredulity, disgust*) I can only *imagine* what's on that.

BRUCE: I think you can, grilled cheese is one item—your choice of Swiss, Cheddar or Monterey Jack—and there's also a club sandwich, Reuben, Caesar salad, fish and chips, ... let's see, what else, uh . . . today's special is Swedish meatballs.

JAY: Swedish meatballs?

BRUCE: Yeah, they're delicious, way better than Ikea.

CHEF: Now that you know, you can order off the chef's menu, if you'd like.

SHEILA: Wow, really?

CHEF: And since it's been a long day, and I appreciate your honesty, we'll skip the test.

SHEILA: Really? No test and a special menu? Wow, Chef Andre, this is such a privilege!

CHEF: (Waves her off) Don't worry about it. So what'll it be?

SHEILA: I'm really hungry ... (*timidly*) so could I get the, uh, club sandwich?

(CHEF nods)

BRUCE: White, wheat, sourdough or rye? And it comes with fries or potato salad.

SHEILA: Wheat please, and the potato salad.

BRUCE: It's delicious, you'll love it, we use dill, vinegar and just a little mayo.  
Sir?

JAY: (Looking at the original menus that they were given) I do like the sound of the chef's menu but this is The Lavatory, so I think I'm going to have the uh .... hmmmm, ooh, I didn't see this one before, the Nullified Supertramp.

BRUCE: Wow, the Nullified, a bold choice.

CHEF: You do know what's in that, and how much it cos--?

JAY: (holds up his hand) No clue and I'm not going to worry about it. I'm in The Lavatory.

CHEF: Exactly so.

BRUCE We'll get right on that: club sandwich with potato salad for the lady, and a nullified for you. Can I take a drink order?

SHEILA Sure, but why don't you finish your grilled cheese first; we have our coffees.

BRUCE: Well, thank you.

(CHEF gives a little bow. BRUCE and CHEF exit).

SHEILA: Wow honey, the Nullified Supertramp, you're amazing! What do you think it is?

JAY: Not even going to speculate, even when it gets here. Maybe I'll figure it out when I see it, or take a bite, and maybe not, so be it. And if it's really terrible-

SHEILA: You can have some of my club sandwich!

JAY: That's what I was counting on, but I don't think that'll be necessary. I believe in Chef Andre, and that a night in The Lavatory is one well spent!

SHEILA: Thank you, Jay, (takes his hand). This really *is* an experience to remember.

JAY Happy Anniversary, sweetheart.

####

**Blackout End**