

The Pie and the Tart

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Characters

Pierre and **Jean** – vagabonds

Gaultier, a pastry cook and **Marion**, his wife.

The scene is laid outside GAULTIER'S cake shop in Paris. The time is the middle of the fifteenth century. The Act could be played on a curtained stage with one door, back centre. The only furniture is a bench, right. JEAN and PIERRE are discovered, the former seated on the bench, in an attitude of extreme dejection; the latter pacing up and down, blowing on his fingers. Both must indicate that they are cold and hungry.

JEAN (regarding PIERRE'S restless pacing): Must you keep doing that?

PIERRE: It's this blasted cold. If I stop walking I shall freeze. I'm dying of hunger and cold.

JEAN : So am I. But I prefer to die sitting down.

PIERRE : We make a pretty pair, you and I. Paris should be proud of us. (Displaying his rags.) There are twenty-three holes in this tunic. I know because I counted them this morning. That's only reckoning the ones that let the wind through. No doubt there are others. But let that pass.

JEAN : The holes in your tunic don't interest me. What I am concerned about is the hollow in my stomach. We must live; and without a meal.....

PIERRE : That's what I said to Judge Gaston when I was pinched last month for begging.

JEAN : Said what?

PIERRE : He asked me why I did it, and I said, "Well, your honour, I must live." And he looked me up and down and said, "I really don't see the necessity."

JEAN : A wag, that Judge.

PIERRE : He didn't know what it was to be hungry. See here, my pretty, this can't go on. I'm going to knock on every door in this street. And since charity begins at home I shall begin right here. (Indicating the cake shop.) You'd better not be seen. Go into the next street and try your luck there. (JEAN begins to go, but PIERRE calls him back.) Wait a minute, brother; let's hear what you can do. (JEAN knocks on the bench and assumes a mendicant voice and attitude.)

JEAN : "For the love of St. Agatha and all the blessed saints, have pity on a poor Miserable who has had no food for three days." How's that?

PIERRE : Not bad. But make it seven days and squint slightly. It's a sure sign of starvation.

(Exit JEAN)

PIERRE : (Knocking on the cake shop door): Alms, good sir; for the love of God and all His blessed angels, take pity on a poor traveller who has had no food for a week.

(M. GAULTIER comes to the door. He is a man of about fifty, well preserved and obviously content with his lot.)

GAULTIER : Go away. I've got nothing for you. My wife is away and I am busy. You'd better go to the next street.

(M.GAULTIER slams the door. Exit PIERRE, R. Enter JEAN, L. He looks at the door, hesitates and then knocks.)

JEAN : For the love of St. Agatha, St. Nicholas, St. Crispin and all the blessed company of Heaven, have pity upon a poor Miserable who has had no food for seven days.

(The door is opened by MARION. She is younger than her husband, stoutish, but comely.)

MARION: Go away, beggar. My husband is out and I have nothing for you. You'd better call again when he comes back.

(MARION shuts the door. JEAN sits disconsolately on the bench. Presently GAULTIER comes out of the shop. He makes as if to go out, R., but remembers something and goes back towards the shop. MARION appears at the door)

M. GAULTIER : Ah, Marion. I am just off to dine with the Mayor. He keeps none too good a table. I am thinking that I'd better take that eel pie with me - the big one that I made last Monday. Just get it for me. Hurry; I mustn't be late.

MARION: Very good, husband. (She goes back into the shop, but GAULTIER calls her back.)

GAULTIER : Wait. I can't very well be seen carrying an eel pie through the streets of Paris, can I? Not quite the thing for a man of my position. Do you think you could bring it along after me?

MARION: Quite impossible. I've too much to do to run errands. Why not send someone back for it?

GAULTIER : A good idea. But who?

MARION: Well, you'll be bound to meet someone on the way.

GAULTIER : Yes, but how will you know if he's the right one? Anyone might just come and say they had been sent.

MARION: I hadn't thought of that.

GAULTIER : I have it. I'll tell the messenger, when I have found him, to kiss your hand. That will be the sign and you'll know that everything is all right.

MARION (laughing): Well, choose a good-looking one. (Coyly): Madame Gaultier's hand is not for everyone to kiss.

(MARION returns to the shop. GAULTIER exit, R. JEAN who has overheard all the foregoing, sits pondering. Presently enter PIERRE L.)

PIERRE : Any luck? JEAN : Yes — and no. PIERRE : What does that mean?

JEAN (after a pause) : Look here. Are you ready to do exactly as I tell you? And no questions asked?

PIERRE : I'll do anything to keep my stomach quiet.

JEAN : Very well. Now listen. I am going into the next street. Directly I am gone, go up to the door, knock on it and say.....

PIERRE : Thanks. I've been there once today already. I got what I expected. (Mimicking M GAULTIER'S pompous manner.) "Go away, beggar! Go away; I'm busy. Go into the next street." Bah! (He spits.)

JEAN : Never mind about that. Listen. I say directly I am gone, go up to the door and knock on it. The lady will come to the door.....

PIERRE : But how do you....

JEAN : Don't interrupt. The lady will come to the door. When she does so you will take her hand and kiss it.

PIERRE : Kiss the lady's hand? I think you're making a slight mistake, brother. I'm not lovesick; I'm starving.

JEAN : Wait. That's not all. When you have kissed her hand you will say, "Madam, I am sent by M. Gaultier to fetch the pie." She will then give you a large eel pie and

PIERRE : And the heavens will open; roast fowl and nectarines will be seen to rain upon us from the clouds, and champagne will be heard gurgling in the gutters. Where did you learn this conjuring trick?

JEAN : Very well. Believe it or not as you like. The point is: are you hungry, or are you not?

PIERRE : (rubbing his waist-line) Hungry? I've a hollow in here that all the birds of the air could nest in.

JEAN : Then do as I tell you. If it doesn't come off, never trust me again. But it will.

PIERRE : Criminy, Jean, I believe you're serious!

JEAN : Of course I'm serious.

PIERRE : All right. I'll do it.

JEAN : Good.

PIERRE : Tell me again. What do I have to do?

JEAN : It's all quite simple. Go up and knock at the door and say, "Please, Madam, M. Gaultier has sent me for the eel pie." She won't give it to you till you have kissed her hand. That's important.

PIERRE : But suppose the husband comes to the door?

JEAN : He won't. He's out. I happen to know it. Never mind how, but I do. Now, I'm going round the corner. I shall be back in five minutes, and don't you start dinner till I come! (Exit JEAN, R. PIERRE knocks on the door. MARION answers it.)

PIERRE : Good morning, lady. I have come from M. Pie, who sends me to fetch the Gaultier - I should say I have come from M. Gaultier, who sends me to fetch the pie - the eel pie.

MARION: And how am I to know you are his messenger?

PIERRE : Ah! (Coyly.) Allow me, lady, to kiss your hand. (He attempts to seize her hand, but MARION snatches it away.)

MARION: All right. That will do. Wait there and I will get it. (Exit and reappears with pie.) Here it is. Take care how you carry it. It's a very good pie.

PIERRE : Rest assured, lady, I shall take the greatest care of it. As a carrier of eel pies I claim to be second to none in all Paris. It shall travel thus, close to my bosom. As a mother with her bantlings, as a shepherd with his ewes, as St. Ursula with her maidens, so will I play the guardian angel with this pie. It shall.....

MARION: Be off, then. And don't waste time in getting there.

(She closes the door. After she had gone PIERRE stands holding the pie as if stupefied. He then places it carefully on the bench and sits beside it. He gazes at it lovingly, prodding it now and then with his fingers.)

PIERRE : This must be a dream; and presently I shall wake. One of those dreams that are too good to last. I know, because I've had them once or twice before. (Picking up the pie tenderly and sniffing it.) Good dream, last a little longer. Just now I haven't the very least desire to wake up.

(Enter JEAN.)

JEAN : Well, what did I tell you?

PIERRE : (Putting his fingers to his lips): Sh ! Don't speak too loud. You might wake me up.

JEAN : (laughing and clapping him on the back): Wake up, then. It's dinner time. (Picking up the pie.) We won't wait for the nectarines and the champagne. This will do to start with.

(He goes out, carrying the pie in front of him. JEAN follows as if in a trance, nose in the air, sniffing. After a pause, enter GAULTIER. He is obviously angry and rather out of breath. He knocks on the door. MARION opens it.)

MARION: What, back already?

GAULTIER : The mayor was out. Nice way to treat a guest, eh? Asks him to dinner and then goes out and forgets all about it. I'll get even with him for it one day, mark my words. Gaspard Gaultier is not the man to be treated like that. Oh, no! MARION: But what will you do for dinner?

GAULTIER :Dine at home, of course. Where else? MARION: But there's nothing in the house to eat.

GAULTIER :Nothing to eat? What are you talking about? There's the eel pie, isn't there?

MARION: But.... you sent for it. I gave it to your messenger not a quarter of an hour ago.

GAULTIER (Picking up his ears): Eh! What's that? MARION: I gave the pie to the man who came for it. Just as you told me to. He kissed my hand, as you said he would, and I told him to hurry. Didn't you meet him on the road?

GAULTIER : I sent no messenger.

MARION: But.....

GAULTIER : I say I sent no messenger. (Suddenly threateningly.) What have you done with the pie? I believe you've eaten it! MARION: Now don't be absurd, Gaspard. Of course I haven't eaten it. I tell you the messenger came, as you arranged, and I gave him the pie. You must be crazy. If you didn't send him, who else did?

GAULTIER : If this is a joke, woman, let me tell you that it's in very bad taste. I'll soon see for myself if the pie is there or not. And if it isn't, you'll have to find a good explanation.

(He strides into the shop, followed by MARION. After a considerable pause re-enter JEAN and PIERRE. They sit, arms round each other's shoulders, at one end of the bench.)

PIERRE : Jean, my stomach being, as it were, now composed, my brain is beginning to function. I have an idea.

JEAN : Slowly, my friend, slowly. My doctor warned me that after a meal the brain must not be overworked. It is in the interest of digestion.

PIERRE : Agreed. We will approach the problem cautiously. In the matter of the pie which we have just eaten, you will agree that it was a masterpiece.

JEAN : It was the work of an artist.

PIERRE : The composition was faultless - the flavour, just so. And then the crust. Was ever such a crust? (Picking his teeth with his fingers.) The memory of it still abides with me.

JEAN : And what eels! The tenderness, the plasticity! I wonder where he catches them.

PIERRE : He does not catch them. They give themselves up. No eel could resist the blandishments of such an artist as M. Gaultier. To my mind the pie had but one fault.

JEAN : And that?

PIERRE : Its singularity. There should have been two. Listen, my Jean. When I was waiting at M. Gaultier's door, I saw a tart. It was on a shelf just outside the kitchen. I think it was a cranberry tart. I was allowed one glimpse of it and the vision faded. But it was a tart to dream about: succulent, spiced, sugared, white as a maid's bosom: the very tart to sit affably on a foundation of eel pie. I see no reason why the tart should not be ours. Would not you like to go and fetch it?

JEAN : But how?

PIERRE : You know the formula, "M. Gaultier sends me", etc., and the hand of Madame Gaultier is both small and white. Believe me, you will enjoy the experience.

JEAN : (getting up from the bench): I'll do it. But she mustn't see you.

PIERRE : All right. I'll be round the corner. To it, then, and goodluck.

(Exit PIERRE,L.) JEAN (KNOCKING AT THE DOOR) : Hullo, there!

(MARION comes to the door)

MARION: And what do you want ?

JEAN : M. GAULTIER has sent me, lady. He finds that the eel pie is not large enough to go round. He wants the cranberry tart which he says is on the kitchen shelf. And, oh, yes, I am to kiss your hand. Then you'll know it's me.

MARION: (giving away nothing by voice or expression): He wants the cranberry tart, does he? Very well, if you'll wait there I will get it. (Goes back into the shop.)

JEAN : If life was always as easy as this! And to think that only an hour ago I was in danger of starving to death. Well, for what we are about to receive.... (Before he can finish the sentence M. GAULTIER runs out from the shop and begins to cudgel him)

GAULTIER: Thief, dog, cut-purse, reptile, rascalion, slubberdegullion! What have you done with my pie?

JEAN : Stop beating me! Stop beating me, and I'll tell you.

GAULTIER : (Still beating him): No lies, now! Where is it? What have you done with it?

JEAN : I can't tell you till you stop beating me.

GAULTIER : (Dropping the cudgel) Well?

JEAN : It was no fault of mine, sir. It was my friend. About ten minutes ago, when you were talking to your wife, he overheard you say that you were sending someone back for the pie. And so he came and he took the pie. He did it with the best intention in the world. If he'd known there was going to be all this fuss about it he would never have done it.

GAULTIER : And where is he now?

JEAN : Not far away. I'll go and get him.

GAULTIER : You'd better. And see here. If you're not back with the pie, I'll have you both hanged for thieving. I'll give you five minutes. Not a minute more.

(GAULTIER goes back into the shop. JEAN stands downstage, rubbing his bruises. Presently enter PIERRE, L.)

PIERRE : Any luck?

JEAN : Not at all. She says she can't give the tart to just anyone. It must be the same messenger who came for the pie, or none at all. I kissed her hand till it was all sticky, but she wouldn't budge an inch.

PIERRE : Well, that's easy. I must go myself. You get out of sight. I'll soon show you how these things are managed.

(Exit JEAN, R., PIERRE knocks at the door. GAULTIER opens it.)

GAULTIER : (seizing him by the collar): Are you the dog who took away my pie? (Shaking him.) Answer. What have you done with it? No lies, or I'll have the law on you!

PIERRE : Leave go of me and I'll explain. (GAULTIER releases him.) You see, sir, it was this way. I overheard you telling your wife that you wanted a messenger. So I presented myself to madame. She gave me the pie and I carried it straight to the Mayor's house.

GAULTIER : I see. And I suppose he was delighted to see you?

PIERRE : He couldn't find words enough to thank me.

GAULTIER : You are a liar! The Mayor is out.

PIERRE : Ah, sir. That's where you're wrong. He was out; but he's home again. He returned just after you left. He was most grateful for the pie, and he's expecting your honour for dinner. He said he hoped you wouldn't keep him waiting.

GAULTIER : Well, well! So that was it. And I thought he'd forgotten all about it. See here now. Run back to his Worship and say I shall be with him in five minutes. I'll give something for your trouble. Hurry, or he'll think I'm not coming.

PIERRE : Very good, sir... and the tart?

GAULTIER : Eh? Oh, yes. The tart. I'll get it. (He goes in and returns with the tart.) There you are. Carry it carefully. Tell the Mayor I shan't be many minutes. You can wait for me at his gate.

(GAULTIER goes back into the shop calling "MARION!" Presently enter Jean, L. He sees Pierre holding aloft the tart.)

JEAN : Criminy! But you've got it!

PIERRE : (presenting his disengaged hand to be kissed) : Sir, M. Gaultier presents you with this cranberry tart and bids you kiss my hand. (Jean advances slowly and makes a show of taking Pierre's hand as if to kiss it. But instead, he snatches away the tart and runs out, closely pursued by PIERRE.)