

TO GO

By Walter Thompson

EXT. DAY - GOLDEN GATE FIELDS RACETRACK

In the stands, VANESSA VICKS, a solidly-built woman in her mid-30s, watches the race placidly. On her T-shirt, a cartoon version of herself smiles and drives a DayGlo food truck.

The real Vanessa frowns and clenches the railing with strong hands, revealing unexpected definition in her forearms and biceps. Sound fades away until all that remains are twenty horses and their riders. Number 5 pulls into the lead as its jockey starts using his whip.

Vanessa leans forward a millimeter; Number Five's eyes bulge and widen. In split screen, Vanessa's nostrils and Number Five's flare in unison. The jockey's whip fills the frame, rising and falling, rising and falling --

INT. DAY - EAT AT VAN'S KITCHEN

CLOSE-UP on a large bowl as a powerful male hand lashes egg whites into stiff peaks with a whisk. In a sunny commercial kitchen, JOHN CARVER, 47, a giant slab of a man, works in a sleeveless T-shirt and baggy drawstring pants. A tattoo stretches from his sinewy left shoulder down a veiny forearm; a recipe for chocolate-chip cookies.

On the wall behind him: photos of food vans around San Francisco, certificates from Le Cordon Bleu, Vanessa peeling veggies with the First Lady, and a two-page magazine spread: "STREET FOOD QUEEN HOLDS COURT." Vanessa challenges the camera while three gaudily painted vans form a semicircle behind her, the Golden Gate Bridge in the far distance.

SHANE BUCKLEY, 38, wears elbow-length gloves and scrubs gunk off giant trays in an industrial sink. Fogged black glasses and scuffed shoes mark him as a hipster; a small paunch declares his love of food. A cell phone trills in his pocket; he stops washing and struggles with the gloves.

CARVER

You know the policy; no phones in
the kitchen.

Big Man nods at a sign on the wall of a cartoon Vanessa dangling a terrified cell phone over a boiling pot of water.

INSERT- CELL PHONE DISPLAY

CHKG PURCHASE: 128.21 AHAB'S MARKET - BALANCE: -4988.52

Vanessa enters with an armload of large salmon in brown butcher paper. Shane shoves the phone in a pocket.

VANESSA

I got a good deal.

Shane follows her to a prep counter; Carver fills a pastry bag with batter.

SHANE

I know Ahab was glad to see you.

VANESSA

Hope he's not the only one. Sorry I'm late; busy afternoon!

She leans in for a kiss, but Shane pulls back and wrinkles his nose, then reaches for a clipboard hanging on a peg.

SHANE

Come on. Don't you think that's a little -- don't make me say it.

VANESSA

(unsure)

What? (She sniffs the fish) They're fine if I grill them today. Like, right now. We can do tacos on Van 1, sesame noodles on Van 2.

CARVER

They call that A/B testing. Amazon does it all the time.

SHANE

Van 2 is at Earl's. The brake pads are uh, al dente.

VANESSA

We'll combine menus with Van 3.

SHANE

Three needs a new DMV sticker.

Vanessa glares at him as she reaches for an apron and a massive cleaver.

VANESSA

Why are you washing? Where's Betty?

SHANE
I had to lay her off.

Vanessa brings down the cleaver and decapitates two salmon at once. Shane hides his cell behind the clipboard.

VANESSA
Betty's our kitchen fairy!

SHANE
I tried paying her with chocolate
sprinkles, but her rent is due.

Carver daubs dough from a pastry bag onto a baking sheet.

CARVER
I could be the kitchen fairy.
Kitchen wizard.

Vanessa uses a filet knife to eviscerate a fish.

SHANE
Tear the guts out completely. Don't
leave anything for the scavengers.

Vanessa pauses, but keeps working. Shane reviews text messages on his phone, scanning recent bank transactions.

SHANE (CONT'D)
Been taking some inventory. You
know, to make sure we're prepped
for the mayor's wedding next week.

VANESSA
Mmm hmm.

SHANE
We're short. In fact, the
cupboard's bare. Not a crouton.

Vanessa glances at a case bursting with meat and produce while Shane ticks imaginary items off of a list.

SHANE (CONT'D)
No cheddar. No lettuce. Fresh out
of clams. The dough that was in the
freezer, behind the vodka? Gone.

Vanessa dumps a heap of fish entrails into the trash and faces Shane; her cheeks are glistening with tears.

VANESSA

One week, baby. I can make the
bread from scratch. We can,
together. We always have.

Shane is unmoved. Vanessa wipes her eyes with a sleeve, turns on the grill and seasons the filets. In the background, Carver slides trays in a convection oven.

VANESSA (CONT'D)

I owe Karpov. I couldn't tell you.

SHANE

The butcher? My God.

EXT. NIGHT - COSSACK MEATS

A truck backs up to a loading dock where KARPOV, a tall, impatient Slav, gnaws on a fried turkey leg as a MINION stands by with moist towelettes. The truck door rolls up to reveal a circus clown and a referee in a striped jersey. Both men are dead, frozen and hanging from meat hooks.

INT. DAY - EAT AT VAN'S KITCHEN

Shane is stricken with fear while Vanessa grills the fish in a wire basket. The fire flares several times; perspiration mixes with her tears.

SHANE

How could you -- borrow sugar from
a neighbor? Who else do you --

Vanessa slaps a button that turns off the grill. As the fish sizzle, she pulls a sweat-soaked shirt away from her body.

VANESSA

Out of the goddamn frying pan.

She throws grilling gloves into the sink and walks away. Shane follows her into the walk-in cooler.

INT. DAY - WALK-IN COOLER

As the door slams, Vanessa falls against Shane and breaks down. Slowly, and with his whole heart, he encircles her in his arms and soothes her, almost lifting her off her feet.

SHANE

Shh. It's okay, honey. We're gonna
figure this out.

She pushes him away with both hands.

VANESSA

Are you nuts? We're dead! We are so dead!

Vanessa sits on a stack of plastic milk crates, puts her face in her hands, and starts to bawl. Shane watches for a beat and sighs.

SHANE

Hey, lady. Your headlights are on.

Vanessa crosses her arms over her breasts.

SHANE (CONT'D)

I knew I could get you to stop.

VANESSA

You're still a pig.

She shivers as Shane wraps her up in a kiss. The door to the cold room opens, startling them. It's Carver, holding a tray heaped with steaming macaroons.

CARVER

Displays of affection in the workplace make me uncomfortable.

VANESSA

Carver, we need to talk.

CARVER

OK, but two things: I'm Kitchen Wizard, now that there's an opening. Also, don't fire me even though you're broke and owe all over town. We can get everything we need for next week's City Hall gig right here, for free.

Carver holds up a newspaper article about the West Coast Gourmet Expo, starting tomorrow at the convention center.

CARVER (CONT'D)

Of course, we'll have to **steal** all of it.

Shane takes a macaroon; Vanessa grabs the paper.

SHANE

Wizard, that's the dumbest --

VANESSA

We're gonna need a driver. We can't
use one of our vans.

Vanessa and Carver study the newspaper as Shane stuffs a
entire macaroon in his mouth and whimpers.