

INT. DESERTED SET OF THE TV COOKERY SHOW, 'TRANSCENDENTAL GASTRONOMY'. EVENING. CONTINUOUS.

An illuminated island in the centre of a vast, dark soundstage – a beautifully appointed kitchen. An encyclopaedic provision of industry and wealth mingling exquisitely with the rustic, DARLING motifs of Home. Stainless steel, BLUSH copper and MACULATED marble; knotted planes of oak, congealed hob-top spillages, branded hessian sacks. A comprehensive display of olde abundance: VIRGIN ALPS of flour beside torn paper bags of same. A GLITTERING BERG of salt. A BEACH of unrefined sugar. Something artisanal lurking in an aspic FOG. A FOREST of herbs. Cured, preserved, dried meat, onions, garlic, flowers dangle CONDEMNED from a gnarled beam. Black pepper and poppy-seeds PUNCTUATING these shots. Everything deftly lit as if a fresh spring morning in PROVENCE. Hence: BIRDSONG; the GIN SCENT of juniper.

ESCOFFIER (V.O. IN FRENCH WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES)

(MUFFLED THROUGH A MOUTHFUL OF SOMETHING)

When you remove the beater –  
(SWALLOWS AUDIBLY)  
you should have stiff peaks.  
Then watch –  
(PAUSE TO WATCH)  
as they curtsy oh-so demurely!  
(GIGGLES)

A series of VIVID closeups: an ARC of flour leading to a huge, PREGNANT mass of dough; a Delftware bowl of CARDINAL RED wild cherries BEADED with water; a fine MESH of spun sugar DRIZZLED over the back of a greased ladle; a disc of shortcrust pastry LOLLING over an oiled beech rolling pin, DREDGED with flour. Each shot intercut with the distinctive \*POP\* of a wine cork.

ESCOFFIER (V.O.)

(BETWEEN GREAT GLUGS OF WINE)

It helps to have cold fingers for this.

(\*SLURP\*)

It helps to have fucking Peripheral Vascular Disease for this!

(A TOUGH PAUSE; A HARD SWALLOW)

Two fat hands held up palm down to the camera. The fingers BLANCHED WAX down to the major knuckles; the hand a BRUISED purple rising to turquoise, TUBEROUS veins. Hairy. A blue catering plaster wrapped tight around the thumb. BIRDSONG; an undertone HISS of STEAM.

ESCOFFIER (O.S.)

(SLURRED)

Ideal for pastry making; useless for comforting an infant!

(A SUPPRESSED BELCH)

In many ways, my profession was  
inscribed on my body from birth.  
Destiny. Prophesied, even! Writ  
large in my frigid hands by Saint  
Honorius of Amiens himself!

One hand moves to the other, and begins absentmindedly  
picking something SOFT and WHITISH from under the  
fingernails.

ESCOFFIER (O.S.)  
Pastry, of course. The finest!

Closeup of a drying SAUSAGE of the finest pastry ROLLED  
between thumb and forefinger. Flicked with the BRUSH of a  
cymbal. A glass of wine, encrusted with pastry, APPEARS  
in the right hand and is raised out of shot – to the  
mouth, a SWIG – then returned to rest on the palm of the  
left.

ESCOFFIER (O.S.)  
(\*GULP\*)  
I succumbed (though there was  
never much resistance) to the  
lures of gourmandising early on.

A euphonium PARPS comically – Auguste's representative  
instrument.

ESCOFFIER (O.S.)  
Hours spent gorging on  
blackberries in the woods. Stolen  
minutes alone in the pantry with a  
cake. Whole days spent wielding a  
nutcracker; 'Scoffing. Cultivating  
my morbid corpulence. I am –  
(\*SNIFF\*)  
– a gross object.  
(PAUSE)

More unsympathetic EUPHONIUM. A WADDLING rhythm.

ESCOFFIER (O.S.)  
These days, the little vanity I  
can muster I channel into my  
'toque blanche', which I keep  
pristine and straight as a flue.  
Each sharp pleat a different way  
to cook an egg...

A SLOW tracking shot of the main workbench: chaos. Too  
much of everything. Nature's bounty SPOILING in puddles.  
Discarded spoons and spatulas GLUED to the marble with  
CONGEALED whatever. Evidence of Escoffier's hand  
everywhere; everything used – 'handled' – in some way.  
Intercut with a reverse shot of the COWERING, SILENT  
crew: a mixture of uniformed chefs and headset-wearing  
technicians.

CONTINUITY (O.S.)  
(MUTTERED)  
This show is a fucking nightmare.

ESCOFFIER (O.S.)

On set I may cut a rather laughable figure (the brutish floor manager refers to me as 'Dodu Dodo'), but in the kitchen – the real kitchen, not this bastard set! – I am a manifest god.

A navy blue apron hangs on a magnetic hook on the vast SMEG fridge door. Half hidden behind: OBSCENE magnetic poetry.

ESCOFFIER (O.S.)

(DISTRACTEDLY)

Make sure the juices are running clear: introduce a skewer between the ribs.

One side of the kitchen a GRISLY parlour of dead animals, heaped practically – in size order.

ESCOFFIER (O.S.)

The musicians of Bremen repurposed as a 'ballotine' – a 'royal roast'. Each deboned and stuffed inside the other. Served 'au jus' on a bed of oak shoots and red cabbage... A starter of Bremer eel soup...

(TRAILS OFF)

An awkward silence. The camera turns away, and finds a basket of assorted bread. A palette cleanser.

ESCOFFIER (O.S.)

The three T's: taste, taste, TASTE!

(\*CRUNCH\* THEN,  
THROUGH FOOD –)

Did you know, it only takes five, maybe six minutes to fry an egg on one of those spotlights?

(SWALLOWS)

The rig of lights (an impossible number) TWINKLE banally. Like the stars above, or something. The mounting display of excess in the kitchen (EXPLICIT fruit has joined the fray, along with the SICKLY-SWEET contents of some liqueur bottles, a SLICK of molten chocolate) is WONDERFUL and not dissimilar to a landscape (post-apocalyptic, landfill, waning metropolis). Everything BLOOMING with pastel-shaded mould. A CLOUD of spores. Accordingly, there is a celebratory ROAR from the euphonium. BIRDSONG continues, clearly looped.

CONTINUITY (O.S.)

I'm resigned to the maintenance of continuity in raw materials alone.

A stack of Polaroids SHUFFLED through: fields of wheat, sugarcane, lush forests, groves, orchards, pendulous fruit, sprats, seeds, pits, stones, amoebic swarms,

bacterium, atomic diagrams; interspersed with maudlin, SOFT-FOCUS shots of handsomely presented dishes: pêche Melba, Melba toast, bombe Néro, fraises à la Sarah Bernhardt, baisers de Vierge, suprême de volailles Jeannette, filets de poulet à la paprika, agneau de lait, caille en sarcophage etc. etc. A close SIMMERING throughout.

CONTINUITY (O.S.)  
(SIGHS CONTENTEDLY)

ESCOFFIER (V.O.)  
A mistake. A failure.

A box of a dozen eggs lies STRANDED atop a MOUNTAIN of flour RIVERED with black treacle. Each egg cracked HAPHAZARDLY and abandoned. GLUEY albumen darkens patches of the grey, PULPY cardboard.

ESCOFFIER (V.O.)  
Don't be afraid to make mistakes!  
The raw egg trickled ruinously  
inside the light, scuppering the  
workings. Nevertheless, for one  
glorious moment there – before the  
lamp shorted out – my aura glowed  
yolk-yellow!

The set is flooded with an EERIE twilight: yellow rimmed with white. Everything looks monochrome, as if under streetlight. Egglight. Then... \*BANG!\* the bulbs EXPLODE in unison.

FADE TO BLACK.

Out of the darkness a FLASH of white. The vicious SWIPE of knife on steel accompanies. Cicadas have replaced birdsong. Somewhere over the hills, the sounds of a party. 'La Mer'. More FLASHES. Inside each one, the THREAT of a precise hand and a keen knife: julienned vegetables, latticed pastry lids, separated ribs, paper-thin garlic, batonettes of courgette, tiny travel-dice of carrots, swedes, turnips etc. Very impressive. The scene ends with the knife held up to the camera, the blade reflecting Auguste's CONCERNED face in the foreground; the Provençal night sky behind.

SNAP TO BLACK.