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# FIVE ALARM

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By Kristen Da Silva

Characters:

Ava Rose	In her thirties. Killaloe born and raised.
Ellen Pellham	In her twenties or thirties. A rambler in every sense of the word.
Connie Gardiner	In her thirties. Ava's childhood friend, now rival.
Tucker Dell	In his twenties or thirties. Fresh out of culinary school.
Caleb Seaton	In his thirties. The prodigal Killaloe, returning to be the town reporter.

(The characters may be aged up, keeping in mind that Ava, Connie and Caleb were classmates and should be similar in age.)

Five Alarm was first produced by Port Stanley Festival Theatre in 2017, with the following creative team:

Ava:	Danielle Nicole
Ellen:	Franny McCabe-Bennett
Connie:	Jane Spence
Tucker:	Jeffrey Wetsch
Caleb:	Tyler Rive
Director:	Simon Joynes
Stage Manager:	Lani Martel
Set Design:	Joshua Quinlan

ACT ONE – SCENE ONE

Time: The present. Early afternoon.

Place: The fairgrounds of a small town.

*(Lights up. We see two stations set up for cooking. The tables are dressed in cheerful plastic tablecloths. Each holds a large camp stove, a large cutting board, pots, pans, knives, spoons, etc. One station is labelled “21” and the other “22”. There is a large garbage can - the outdoor variety - somewhere on the stage. Ava Rose and Ellen Pellham enter. They’re both trying to catch their breath, having just climbed a big hill. Ellen is struggling considerably more than Ava. They have cooking supplies and coolers with them. Ava wears a “17<sup>th</sup> Annual Wayne Rose Chili Cook Off” t-shirt.)*

Ava: Here we go. This is us.

Ellen: That was quite a climb.

Ava: Just a little hill. *(Beat. She looks at Ellen.)* Are you okay?

Ellen: Just a touch of asthma. *(She takes a puffer from her pocket and takes a puff.)* There we go. Oh! Ava! We’re table twenty-one! That’s good luck.

Ava: It is?

Ellen: Twenty-one is my lucky number.

Ava: Well, great! I hope it comes through for us. Oh. Here’s your shirt.

*(Ava gives Ellen a “17<sup>th</sup> Annual Wayne Rose Chili Cook Off” t-shirt.)*

Ellen: I get a shirt?! See? I told you twenty-one is lucky.

Ava: Well, everyone who enters the competition gets a shirt. Okay, now let’s see. We should set up. Get organized.

*(She takes the box around to the front of the table and starts taking things out of it. Bottles of spice, cooking implements, etc.)*

We’ll put that there. We’ll need that later. And these. And these. And those.

*(She stops to fan herself.)*

Holy moly. It’s hotter than the surface of the sun today, isn’t it? It is hot!

Are you hot? I'm hot. I'm sweltering hot.

Ellen: I'm comfortable.

Ava: I'm hot.

Ellen: Yeah. You said. Can I get you something?

Ava: Maybe I need some water. Or a Zoloft.

Ellen: Oh. You're nervous.

Ava: I'm nervous.

Ellen: Hey, you don't need to worry. You've got this in the bag. You're a great cook! Probably. I don't know because I met you this morning, but I'm willing to bet you are. And, I told you, twenty-one is my lucky number. I grew up at twenty-one Blue Jay Road. Beautiful little house. Really happy childhood.

Ava: Aw, that's nice.

Ellen: I loved that house. (*Beat.*) It burned down.

Ava: Oh.

Ellen: I also have twenty-one moles on my back. And only one of them is suspicious. Also, when I was twenty-one, I got a dog. And that was the best thing to ever happen to me. He was this big dog with really scruffy fur.

Ava: He sounds adorable.

Ellen: Well, as it turns out, he had rabies so we ended up euthanizing him.

Ava: Twenty-one doesn't actually sound like a very lucky number for you.

Ellen: It is, because I choose to believe it is. And what you believe, you can conceive. Just like you believe you can win this chili competition. Right?

Ava: I've lost sixteen years in a row.

Ellen: Hey. Seventeenth time is the charm. That's what everyone says.

Ava: Thank you, Ellen. Thanks for all of this. I know it was last minute. Gretchen dropping out really threw me for a loop.

- Ellen: Are you kidding me? This is a dream come true. Chili is my all time favourite food
- Ava: Well, good, because you're going to see a lot of it today. You might like it less tomorrow.
- Ellen: Doubt that.
- Ava: So, when you answered my ad, you said you had cooking experience?
- Ellen: Yes... Well, food prep.
- Ava: Same thing.
- Ellen: Okay. *(Beat.)* We're going to win this thing, Ava.
- Ava: Do you think so?
- Ellen: I know so.
- Ava: We're going to win. We're going to win. *(Beat.)* Oh God. I can't breathe.
- Ellen: Oh no! No. Don't panic! It's okay. Just, look into my eyes.
- (Ellen goes to Ava and holds her shoulders. Ellen is still holding a bag.)*
- Everything is okay. Ellen is here. In through the nose, out through the mouth. In through the nose, out through the mouth.
- (Ava takes a deep breath. Then another.)*
- Ava: What is that smell?
- Ellen: I have four pounds of raw meat in this bag.
- Ava: We should put that in the cooler.
- Ellen: Right.
- (Ellen moves to the cooler to put her meat away. Ava takes out a pair of binoculars. She surveys the fairgrounds.)*
- What are you doing?
- Ava: I'm just scoping out our competition. A lot of regulars are back. A lot of people who want that trophy. There's Burt Inglewood.
- Ellen: Who's he?

- Ava: My accountant.
- Ellen: He can cook?
- Ava: Like an angel. He won six years ago. And he's determined to win again. I heard he grew all his own ingredients this year, even the beef.
- Ellen: Wow. Does he have a farm?
- Ava: Nope. Raised it in his carpark. And there's Brenda Oliver.
- Ellen: From Brenda's Big Burgers? Oh no. They have great food.
- Ava: Don't worry. I have it on good authority that she doesn't even make those burgers. They're frozen. She buys them by the skid from Costco, passes them off as fresh.
- Ellen: You're kidding me. That's an outrage!
- Ava: I know.
- Ellen: You can get some good deals at Costco, though. I got eight cartons of Q-Tips for \$9.99. That's 1.5 million tips. Which is too many, really. Because I only have two ears. So, even if I clean my ears twice a day every day for the rest of my life, I'm going to have a lot of Q-Tips left over. But, they got me with that low, low price.
- (Ava looks through the binoculars.)*
- Ava: Oh. The Grouper twins. They grew up on the farm next to ours. One had a terrible accident with a manure spreader and lost his sense of smell. The other got his tongue stuck to a frozen mailbox and lost his sense of taste.
- Ellen: Poor twins.
- Ava: That's nothing. They used to be triplets.
- Ellen: Do you know everybody in town?
- Ava: Most of them. I've lived here my whole life. Killaloe born and raised. No one has any secrets from me and I have none from them. You know how it is in small towns...Except, I realize now that I'm saying that, that I don't know much about you. You're new around here, right?
- Ellen: I moved here a couple years ago.
- Ava: Well, tell me about yourself.

- Ellen: Oh, there's nothing to know about me, except I'm a Pisces and (*about the t shirt*) this is not my size.
- Ava: Sorry. (*Beat.*) I'm sure there's more to you than that. Where are you from?
- Ellen: Where aren't I from? I was born in Wawa. Moved to Nipigon when I was fourteen. Moved to Timmins two years after that. Then Penetanguishene, Kapuskasing, Elliot Lake, Huntsville, Belleville, Stouffville, Elmvale, Smooth Rock Falls, Exeter, Port Perry, Port Hope, Port Albert, Petawawa and Napanee. And then I moved here.
- Ava: Wow. You don't stick around a place long, do you?
- Ellen: I've found it's better if you don't. A rolling stone gathers no moss, and all that.
- Ava: So why Killaloe?
- Ellen: Well, I was driving along. I'd been on the road a couple of weeks, and I was getting tired. Then I saw this sign. It said "Killaloe welcomes you". And I thought 'what a polite town'. I stayed awhile in a boarding house over by the fire station, then I got a job and now I'm renting a place of my own. I guess that officially makes me a Killaloe-en. Killaloer? Killalite? I'm from here now.
- Ava: Well, we're glad to have you. (*About the table next to them.*) Who do you think is over there? At table twenty-two?
- Ellen: It doesn't matter, you know why? Your only enemy, is up here. (*She taps her head.*) And I don't mean your hair, because that looks really nice.
- Ava: Thank you.
- Ellen: This competition means a lot to you, huh?
- Ava: Ellen, there's something I haven't told you.
- Ellen: Oh no. You owe money to the mob.
- Ava: What? No.
- Ellen: Oh, thank God. I can't go through that again.
- Ava: Remind me to ask you about that later... But, no, what I need to tell you is that I'm Ava Rose.

- Ellen: Okay.
- Ava: My dad was Wayne Rose.
- Ellen: The guy from the poster?
- Ava: Yeah. This competition is in his honour because he had the best chili recipe anyone ever tried.
- Ellen: Well, no wonder you care so much about that trophy. It's practically your birth right.
- Ava: Yes, exactly! It's not even for me. It's my grandmother. She's been holding a spot on the mantle next to my dad's ashes for all these years. I want to finally bring it home.
- Ellen: Ava, that is the most tragic chili-related thing I have ever heard. It would be my honour to help you put that trophy where it belongs. Are we using your dad's recipe?
- Ava: I wish I had it. But all I've got are these scribbled notes on the back of a take-out menu from Hong's Chinese Restaurant. (*She takes a torn menu page from a folder.*) I lost the other half years ago. If I could find it, I'd be able to piece together his recipe.
- Ellen: You're like the Indiana Jones of chili. (*Ellen picks up a news clipping from Ava's folder.*) Is that him?
- Ava: Yes.
- Ellen: You have his smile. (*Reading.*) Wow. Someone named Connie Gardiner has won five years in a row?
- Ava: Don't say that name to me.
- Ellen: Not a fan?
- Ava: Connie Gardiner is my mortal enemy. She has won this competition only through deceit, deception and lies.
- Ellen: I think those are all the same thing.
- Ava: She slept with a judge.
- Ellen: She slept with Mary-Sue Gormley?
- Ava: No. The other judge. Lance Laramy.

Ellen: The mayor's son?!

Ava: Bingo.

Ellen: They slept together at Bingo?!

Ava: Probably.

Ellen: Whoa. O-69.

Ava: But Lance isn't a judge this year. He's in prison for tax evasion.

Ellen: God, there is so much corruption in politics.

Ava: So, we won't be seeing Connie Gardiner today. Not a chance she's going to try to win by merit. Nope. I heard she's staying home.

Ellen: Well, seems like that improves our chances. So who's judging this year?

Ava: Well, Mary-Sue Gormley is back. And some new reporter for Channel 5. Here. Chop these peppers.

Ellen: Like, with a knife?

Ava: Unless you know another way.

*(Connie Gardiner enters. She's wearing a "17<sup>th</sup> Annual Wayne Rose Chili Cook Off" t-shirt. She's tough. The kind of person you'd want on your side in a fight. She puts her things down on the other cooking station.)*

Make sure you cut them all the same size. We want them to cook evenly.

Connie: That's good advice.

*(Ava freezes. She turns to look at Connie.)*

Ava: Connie?

Connie: Ava.

Ava: What are you doing here?

Connie: I've come to defend my title. And what are you doing here? Don't you have cows to milk?

Ava: I milked them before I came.

Connie: I'm surprised you can show your face at this competition. Wasn't sixteen

years of losing enough for you?

Ava: I thought you weren't competing this year.

Connie: Well, you thought wrong. I am competing, and I'm going to win. Again. If you want to pull out now, I'm sure everyone will understand.

*(Ava crosses to Ellen.)*

Ava: This is terrible! Connie's here. She wasn't supposed to be here!

*(Ellen looks.)*

Ellen: That's Connie? Wow, she scares me.

Ava: What am I going to do?

Ellen: Appear strong when you are weak and weak when you are strong.

Ava: What?

Ellen: Sun Tsu. The Art of War. *(Beat.)* Someone left it at the boarding house.

Connie: Something wrong, Ava? You look a little pale.

Ava: *(To Connie.)* I'm fine. *(To Ellen.)* She's trash talking me!

Ellen: So trash talk her back!

Ava: I don't know how!

Ellen: Let your plans be dark and impenetrable as night, and when you move, fall like a thunderbolt.

Ava: That's not helping me that much!

Ellen: Go. I've got your back. When in doubt, call her a bad name.

*(Ava and Ellen return to the table. Ava tries her best at trash talking. It's not good.)*

Ava: Well, Connie, you're here. But you're not going to win. It just so happens that I'm going to win.

Connie: Impossible, because I'm going to win. And there's only one winner.

Ellen: And a runner-up.

Connie: Which is a nice way of saying loser. Check your history books, Rose. I've

won the last five years.

Ava: Well, Gardiner, history is history. The future is a mystery.

Ellen: *(Helping her out.)* And the present is a gift.

Ava: That's right. And in the present, I'm here with my game face on. And in the near future, I'm going to cook my heart out. And in the slightly more distant future, the judges are going to award me the trophy. So, you better get ready to weep, Connie.

Connie: I never weep. Weeping is for babies and war widows.

Ava: Well, you're going to weep today.

Connie: Physically impossible. I wasn't using my tear ducts so I had them surgically removed.

Ellen: Really?

Connie: *(Calling.)* Tucker? Where the H-E-L-L are you?

*(Connie takes a chef's jacket from her bag.)*

Ava: What's that?

Connie: It's a chef's jacket.

Ava: You're not a chef.

Connie: No. But Tucker is.

Ava: *(To Ellen.)* Who's Tucker?

*(Tucker enters. He's wearing Crocs on his feet and a bandana over his head. He's pulling a rolling cooler. There are little bits of grass stuck to his clothes. He slams into the gate and falls.)*

Connie: Tucker, get up. Where have you been?

Tucker: Sorry! Sorry! I tripped on a prominent clump of grass back there. Went ass over tea kettle. Right back down the hill. Then I did it again. Third time, though, made it all the way up- *(He puts on his chef's jacket and then spots Ava and Ellen.)* Oh, hello! Bonjour! Our neighbours! I'm Tucker-

Connie: Stop being so friendly.

Tucker: Can't stop that. That's hardwired. *(To Ava and Ellen.)* Tucker Dell. It's a pleasure to meet you.

Ava: Ava Rose.

Tucker: You are not.

Ava: I am.

Tucker: No!

Ava: Yes.

Tucker: Ava Rose? Daughter of Wayne Rose? Holy shitake!

Connie: Tucker, calm down.

Tucker: No, no, no. Wayne Rose is my personal idol. This is such an honour, Miss Rose. Your dad changed my life. He's the reason I wanted to become a chef.

Connie: Oh, here we go.

Tucker: He's the King. And you. You're like the Imperial Princess-

Ava: That's really sweet.

Ellen: I'm Ellen. Hi.

Tucker: Ellen, do you know how lucky you are to be sharing a cutting board with this woman?

Ellen: Oh, yes. I do.

Tucker: Would you sign your autograph?

Connie: Oh, for God's sake.

Ava: I'm not famous.

Tucker: Maybe not to the average Joe. But, to me? You're like Elton John.

Ellen: Ooh! Do Tiny Dancer!

Ava: You really want my autograph?

Tucker: Absolutely.

Ava: Okay.

Tucker: Just anywhere here. *(He lifts up his shirt.)* That way I'll have it forever.

Connie: Tucker! Pull your shirt down and get over here.

Tucker: But, I-

Connie: Don't make me count to five.

Tucker: Why? Do you not know how?

Connie: Tucker!

Tucker: *(To Ava.)* Rain check?

Ava: Sure.

*(Tucker crosses to Connie's station.)*

So, you're professionally trained?

Tucker: Thirty-fourth in my class.

Ellen: Of how many people?

Tucker: Thirty-

Connie: Tucker studied at the Cordon Bleu!

Ava: Holy crap.

Tucker: B-L-U-E. Not the one in France. This one's in Buffalo.

Connie: That's enough chit-chat. We're here to compete, not to braid each other's hair. Tucker, there's more stuff in the car.

Tucker: Catch you later, Princess. And you, Ellen. *(About Ellen's shoes.)* Great Crocs, by the way.

Ellen: *(Beaming.)* Oh, these old things?

*(Tucker exits. Ellen goes back to the cooler to find the peppers. Connie and Ava are momentarily alone.)*

Connie: That trophy is coming home with me.

Ava: Not this year.

Connie: We'll see about that.

*(Connie exits. Ellen brings a pepper to Ava.)*

Ellen: Look! This one has a sticker on it!

Ava: *(Grabbing Ellen.)* Oh my God!

Ellen: It's going to be fine.

Ava: I can't let her win that trophy.

Ellen: She's not going to.

Ava: She brought in a professional!

Ellen: He seems very nice.

Ava: No! He's our enemy.

Ellen: Well...He's our enemy's sous-chef.

Ava: You're the one quoting The Art of War. And the first lesson in The Art of War is that the sous-chef of your enemy is your enemy!

Ellen: You haven't read the The Art of War, have you? I'm sorry, but I like him. He has very kind eyes.

Ava: No. You don't like him. He's with Connie, and there is no way we can let her win this competition. I would rather die!

Ellen: That's a little theatrical.

Ava: We need to get our mise-en-place in place.

Ellen: I don't know what that is, but yes, let's do that.

Ava: I'll cut the onion. You cut the pepper. Consistent cuts. Got it?

Ellen: Got it.

Ava: All the same size.

Ellen: Yes! That's what consistent means. I knew that.

*(Ava begins peeling onions. Ellen approaches the pepper on the cutting board. She's holding the knife upside down. She tries to cut the pepper with the blunt side. It pops away from her and falls to the ground.)*

Whoops.

*(She goes to retrieve it and it slips away from her. After a little chasing, she gets it.)*

Slippery little sucker. Got it. Three minute rule.

Ava: It think it's three seconds and we don't use that here. You should get a new pepper.

Ellen: New pepper. This pepper is bad. *(Talking to the pepper.)* You're bad, pepper. You're a bad, bad pepper.

Ava: Ellen. Please.

Ellen: Right.

*(She tosses the pepper out. She gets a new pepper and tries again with the knife.)*

This knife is terribly dull.

*(Ava looks.)*

Ava: You're using the wrong side.

Ellen: Ohh. *(She turns the knife and touches it with her finger.)* Oh my. That's sharp.

Ava: That's how it cuts.

Ellen: It seems really dangerous.

Ava: Okay. How about I do the cutting? You can get started on the tomato sauce. A good tomato sauce is the foundation to a delicious chili.

Ellen: Alrighty! Tomato sauce. I can do that.

Ava: Okay. Great.

*(Ellen pokes through the cooler. She looks at the pots and pans. She stands and puts her hands on her hips.)*

You okay?

Ellen: Yep. Just planning out how I'm going to tackle this. *(After a beat.)* How would you start?

Ava: You could start by putting the tomatoes in the pot.

Ellen: Yeah. That's what I was thinking. That's a good place to start.

*(Ellen gets the can of tomatoes. She looks at it and looks at Ava, who has gone back to peeling onions. She approaches the pot and, with uncertainty, puts the can inside it. She stands back.)*

Ava: What are you doing?

Ellen: I put the tomatoes in the pot?

Ava: You have to take them out of the can first.

Ellen: Oh, you want to do it that way? That's the French method. Gotcha. Good. I'll do that.

*(Ellen takes the can out of the pot. She examines it for a long beat. Ava observes.)*

Ava: Ellen, where exactly is it you work?

Ellen: Hm?

Ava: Your job. Which restaurant do you work for?

Ellen: I don't work for a restaurant.

Ava: You don't?

Ellen: No.

Ava: I thought you said you were a cook.

Ellen: No. I said I'm in food preparation.

Ava: Right. Where?

Ellen: At the zoo.

Ava: The zoo?!

Ellen: Yes.

Ava: The zoo!

Ellen: Yes.

Ava: The zoo where they keep animals? That zoo?

Ellen: I'm confused by your question because I don't know about any other kind

of zoo.

Ava: You work at a zoo.

Ellen: Yep.

Ava: Oh my God.

Ellen: Is that bad?

Ava: Yes, it's bad! I thought you were a cook!

Ellen: No! I'm not a cook!

Ava: Well, I know that now! You're a zookeeper? This is...God. What am I going to do?

Ellen: I'm sorry. I didn't know it would matter. I thought you just wanted help with your chili competition-

Ava: I...I do...I'm sorry, Ellen. Of course it doesn't matter. So, you're not a cook. My mistake. I'll just have to show you. Right? And you're a zoologist, which is a type of scientist, so, obviously you're a smart woman and probably a fast learner-

Ellen: I'm not a zoologist.

Ava: I thought you had to be a zoologist to work at the zoo.

Ellen: It's a petting zoo. Mostly chickens...but I don't recommend you pet them. They bite. One rabbit. A bunch of barn cats, some of which, again, bite.

Ava: This sounds like the world's worst petting zoo.

Ellen: It's pretty bad.

Ava: So, you don't know anything about cooking?

Ellen: I really don't.

Ava: Do you know how to open a can?

Ellen: I know how to open a door.

Ava: You've never opened a can?

Ellen: I've opened a can of whoop ass. On Fred. He's the lead chicken. *(Beat.)* I can open a frozen dinner.

- Ava: You never learned to cook?
- Ellen: No. But my mom used to have me shuck corn sometimes.
- Ava: You can shuck corn?
- Ellen: Yes.
- Ava: Good! Good. You shuck the corn. That's great. That'll be a big...tiny help.
- Ellen: Ay-ay, Captain.
- Ava: And don't touch any knives, or burners.
- Ellen: Got it. *(She takes out two ears of corn.)* So this corn is going in the chili?
- Ava: No, it's going on top. As a garnish.
- Ellen: That's a great idea.
- (Ellen crosses to the garbage can to shuck her corn. Connie and Tucker enter with more bags.)*
- Ava: That's one thing I remember about my dad's chili. All the sweet, perfectly roasted little kernels on top...
- (Ava has become distracted by Connie taking out two ears of corn.)*
- What are you doing with that corn, Connie?
- Connie: None of your business.
- Ava: Is it going in your chili?
- Connie: I'm sure you'd love us to tell you.
- Tucker: She's using it as a garnish.
- Connie: Tucker!
- Tucker: What? You said she'd love us to tell her.
- Ava: A garnish? Where did you get that idea?
- Connie: Never mind. Keep your eyes on your own paper. *(To Tucker.)* And you, zip it.
- Tucker: Uh-oh. Someone woke up on the wrong side of the bed of lettuce.

Connie: Shush your face and shuck this corn.

*(Connie busies herself setting up her station. Tucker moves to the garbage can to shuck the corn. Now he and Ellen are there together.)*

Tucker: *(To Ellen.)* Hello.

Ellen: Hi.

Tucker: Nice ears.

*(Ellen giggles.)*

Ava: Ellen.

*(Ellen looks at Ava. Ava shakes her head. Ellen frowns and focuses on her corn. A beat. Tucker starts dancing his two ears of corn around the rim of the garbage can.)*

Tucker: Look. I'm doing the corn-corn.

Ellen: I'm not allowed to think that's funny. *(Sotto.)* But I do. *(She grins at him and then checks to make sure Ava isn't watching.)*

Connie: So, Ava, how's farm life?

Ava: I don't know Connie, how's Lance Laramy?

Connie: How would I know?

Ava: Doesn't he get conjugal visits? Or did you throw him over once he stopped being of use to you? My question is, how are you going to win this year? Now that you don't have a plant on the judging panel.

Connie: That isn't why I won.

Ava: Oh, come on. Everyone knows you were lying on the cooking couch.

Connie: That's not even a thing.

Ava: Please.

Connie: Please yourself. I won because I have an unbeatable recipe. What do you have? Some chicken scratch on a take-out menu that your father left you.

Ava: What did you say?

Connie: You heard me.

Ava: How do you know about that? And don't talk about my father.

Connie: What are you going to do about it?

Ava: I'll cut your tongue out.

Connie: I'll grow a new one. I'm like an earthworm. You can't kill me.

Ava: Earthworms can be killed.

Connie: No, they can't. Cut them in half, they keep moving.

Ava: They eventually die.

Connie: No, they don't.

Ava: Of course they do.

Connie: Why is that an "of course"?

Ava: Because if they never died, we'd be standing on a world covered in earthworms! There would just be earthworms everywhere! Come on! Use your brain.

Connie: Stop distracting me. I'm cooking.

Ava: Fine.

*(Ellen brings her corn over to Ava for inspection.)*

Ellen: Private Pellham, reporting for inspection, sir!

Ava: You don't have to call me sir.

Ellen: How's my corn?

Ava: It's beautiful, Ellen. Clean as a whistle.

*(Ellen holds out her hand.)*

What?

Ellen: My mom used to give me 5 cents per ear.

Ava: Oh. Well, can I owe you?

Ellen: Nah. I'll give you a freebie. Now what do you want me to do?

Ava: Uh...How about you stir the sauce?

Ellen: Stir it?

Ava: Yes. Very important job. Probably the most important job in making chili. Stir the sauce. Keep it moving.

Ellen: What does that do?

Ava: It prevents...you from touching anything else.

Ellen: Right.

Ava: Thanks, Ellen.

*(Ellen moves to the stove and stirs the sauce. Tucker returns to Connie's station. He picks up two bell peppers and gets Ellen's attention. When she looks, he starts juggling them. They do this without raising the attention of Ava or Connie. Ellen silently claps, delighted. He picks up a tomato and adds it to the mix. He juggles all three. Ellen does a silent cheer, hands in the air. He is encouraged. He picks up a knife. Ellen shakes her head. He puts everything down. Connie looks at him.)*

Connie: What's going on over there?

Tucker: Where?

Connie: There.

Tucker: Here?

Connie: Yes. There.

Tucker: *(He points to somewhere on the ground where there is nothing but grass.)*  
Or did you mean there?

Connie: No. I meant there.

Tucker: Because I thought I saw something going on there earlier. It was like an ant carrying another ant. It was really weird.

Connie: That's not what I meant.

Tucker: I kept wondering if the ant being carried got sick, or if he was just tired.

Connie: Just do your job.

Tucker: I am. I'm doing it.

*(Ava tastes the sauce.)*

Ellen: Oh, are we eating now?

Ava: No. I'm tasting. You should taste everything in the kitchen. That's the key to good cooking. Keep stirring. You're doing great.

*(Ava goes to the cooler to get some more ingredients.)*

Ellen: *(To herself.)* Taste everything.

*(Ellen begins tasting things. She tastes the spice mix Ava was making. She makes "mm" noises. She bites into a tomato. She "mm"s again. She bites into a hot pepper and screams. She throws it. It hits Connie.)*

Connie: Hey!

Tucker: Holy shitake! What is happening?!

*(Ellen claws at her face.)*

Ellen: Haaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!

Ava: Ellen?!

Connie: You threw a pepper at me.

Ellen: BURRRNING!

Ava: Ellen! Are you okay?

Ellen: NOOOO!

Tucker: Her face is all red.

Ava: What happened?!

Ellen: Owey zowey!

Tucker: She's speaking in tongues!

Connie: You threw a pepper at me!

Ava: *(To Connie.)* Shh. Something's wrong with her. Ellen, talk to us!

Ellen: Pa-pa-pa-pa-pa-pa-pa!

Ava: Talk to us using words!

*(Ellen sobs.)*

Tucker: Should I get someone?

Ava: I don't know what's wrong with her. *(To Ellen.)* What happened, Ellen?

*(Ellen opens her mouth in a silent scream.)*

Tucker: She can't speak!

Ava: Here! Draw a picture.

*(Ava hands Ellen a piece of paper and pen. Ellen scribbles a crude drawing of a pepper. She hands it back to Ava.)*

Tucker: That's it?

Ava: What is that?

Tucker: I don't know.

*(Ava rotates the drawing. They look at it again.)*

Ava: Is it a torpedo?

*(Ellen sobs.)*

Tucker: Oh my God! It's the creature from Alien. *(To Ellen.)* Ellen, this is very important. Are you being eaten from the inside?

*(Ellen sobs.)*

Ava: Of course it's not the creature from Alien! Is it a comma?

Connie: Yes, she was injured by punctuation. It's a pepper, you idiots.

*(Ellen taps her nose.)*

Ava: A pepper. Oh my God. Did you just bite into a habanero?

*(Ellen shrugs with desperation.)*

Oh God. She must have. Here. Here. Have some water.

*(Ava holds out a bottle of water from the cooler.)*

Tucker: Whoa! No! Are you crazy?! Water after a hot pepper?! That's like jumping into a bath of alcohol after sliding naked down a rusty slide. And I know from experience. Both things. What she needs is milk!

Ava: I don't have milk.

*(Ellen sobs.)*

Connie: Get her some milk!

Tucker: I've got this! You just sit tight little lady!

*(Tucker exits in a rush. Ellen moans.)*

Ava: Shh. It's okay. You're going to be okay.

*(Ellen grabs a knife and hands it to Ava.)*

Ellen: Cut...it...off!

Ava: No, I'm not going to do that-

Ellen: I can't take it, Ava! Cut it off!

Ava: I'm not qualified to cut your tongue off!

Connie: Oh for the love of God! Here.

*(Connie opens her cooler and gives Ellen an ice pack.)*

Ava: Ice! Good idea.

*(Ellen puts the ice pack to her tongue and whimpers.)*

How's that? Is it cooling down?

*(Ellen nods.)*

Oh, good.

Ellen: *(To Connie.)* Than thoo.

Connie: Sure. Fine.

Ava: Wow.

Connie: Don't get excited. I'm not nice. I just can't stand caterwauling.

Ellen: I wathn't catherwauling!

Ava: It's okay. Just ice your tongue. Those peppers are hot.

Connie: Please. My mother used to mix them with my Pabulum.

*(Tucker enters with a baby bottle of milk.)*

Tucker: I got the milk!

Ava: Is that a baby bottle? Did you steal that from a baby?

Tucker: It was an emergency! The line at the concession stand was super long because they're selling deep fried Mars bars. And this one guy ordered like two dozen and I was like "Sir, do you know that each one of those has forty-five percent of your recommended daily fat intake?" and he was like "it's okay, I work out" and I was like "I don't want to steal your joy, but you'd have to do eight hundred minutes on the Stairmaster to burn those off"-

Ava: Tell us this incredibly long story later! Give her the milk!

Tucker: Oh my God. Didn't I give it to her? Here, Ellen.

*(Tucker gives Ellen the milk. She sucks.)*

Ellen: It's so slow!

Ava: Take off the nipple!

*(Ellen screws the top off the bottle and drinks.)*

Ellen: Ahh. That's like a little fire extinguisher.

Tucker: I told you. Milk. The capsaicin in hot peppers has a long hydrocarbon tail. It binds to the lipoprotein receptors on the tongue. That's common knowledge. What's not common knowledge is that capsaicin doesn't dissolve in water. But, the casein in milk has a detergent effect on capsaicin. Therefore, drinking milk after eating spicy food, is like putting Palmolive in your mouth.

Ellen: Wow.

Connie: Hey, Bill Nye, you done over there?

Ava: Thank you, Tucker.

Tucker: Ah, it was nothing. Are you done with the milk though? I should take it back. That baby was pretty pissed.

*(Ellen give the bottle to Tucker. Connie glares.)*

I'll be right back.

Connie: Well, hurry up. I didn't bring you here to play nanny and give biology lessons.

Tucker: That was chemistry, actually.

Connie: Tucker!

*(Tucker exits.)*

Ava: Why don't you lay off him, Connie?

Connie: Mind your own business, Ava. And come pick up your pepper.

Ava: You pick up the pepper.

Connie: It's your pepper to pick up.

Ava: Well, you have possession of the pepper so it's up to you to pick up the pepper.

Ellen: If only Peter Piper were here. Right?

*(No one laughs.)*

I'll pick up the pepper.

*(Ellen picks up the pepper and throws it in the garbage can.)*

Pepper problem in the past.

*(Connie and Ava stare each other down a moment longer before going back to their work. Ellen stirs the sauce again. Ava begins to hum. Connie tries to ignore it. Finally, she can't. )*

Connie: Do you mind?

Ava: What?

Connie: The humming.

Ava: Was I humming?

Connie: You know you were humming.

Ava: I didn't realize. I guess I'm just happy.

Connie: Well, stop it. You know I have sensitive ears. I'm a super-hearer. I was tested.

Ava: No, you weren't.

Connie: I was too. By scientists. So, if you don't mind.

Ava: Well, maybe I do mind. Maybe I want to hum. And it's a free country.

Connie: You're just trying to get under my skin.

Ava: Nowhere else on earth I'd less rather be.

Connie: That's really bad grammar.

Ava: You're really bad grammar.

Ellen: *(Sotto, to Ava.)* You really do stink at trash talk.

Ava: Pass me the paprika.

*(Ellen can't figure out which one is the paprika so she passes several bottles of spice to Ava at once. Tucker enters, slams into the fence.)*

Connie: Tucker! *(Beat.)* What took you so long?

Tucker: That dang clump of grass!

Connie: Go around it!

Ellen: Uh, Ava?

Ava: What?

Ellen: I don't want to alarm you, but we've got a situation. A ly-fay in the auce-say situation.

Ava: What?

Ellen: Pig latin. A ly-fay? In the auce-say? *(Beat. Sotto.)* There's a fly in the sauce.

Ava: You're kidding me?

Ellen: At first I thought it was a really big piece of black pepper, but then I noticed it was swimming. What do I do?

Ava: Dump it.

Ellen: Really? But I've been stirring it for so long.

Ava: We can't serve it like that!

Ellen: It's just one fly.

Ava: Which is too many flies for chili!

Ellen: It might be a clean fly.

Ava: I don't care if it's the Martha Stewart of flies. We can't serve it!

Ellen: Alright.

*(Ellen lifts the pot off the stove and exits with it. Connie takes out a can of tomato sauce.)*

Connie: Little sauce problem?

Ava: Nope.

Connie: No? So she's just taking that pot for a walk?

Ava: Maybe.

Connie: I have an extra can. I'll sell it to you. For five thousand dollars.

Ava: Canned tomato sauce? Surely you're kidding

Connie: I always use canned tomato sauce. What's wrong with canned tomato sauce?

Ava: Nothing. *(Under her breath.)* If you're lazy.

Connie: What?

Ava: What?

Connie: What did you say?

Ava: When?

Connie: Just now.

Ava: I said "nothing".

Connie: After that.

Ava: I didn't say anything after that.

Connie: You muttered something.

Ava: Oh, you mean you didn't hear me? I thought you were a super hearer.

Tucker: She said “if you’re lazy”.

Ava: Oh. I guess he’s a super hearer.

Tucker: I can read lips.

Connie: Lazy? You’re calling me lazy?

Ava: Canned tomato sauce? It’s a little lazy.

Connie: You’re using canned beans.

Ava: I can’t make a bean. You can make a sauce.

Connie: You can make a bean. It’s called farming. Beans don’t just happen.

Ava: Did you farm your own beans?

Connie: None of your beans-ness.

*(Ellen enters with the pot and a balloon animal. She is panting and taking a puff from her puffer.)*

Ellen: All rinsed out. I think that hill got steeper.

Ava: Thank you. *(About the balloon animal.)* What is that?

Ellen: A wiener dog! Did you know they have a clown?

*(Ellen points off.)*

Ava: That’s not a clown. That’s the minister’s wife.

Ellen: Oh.

Ava: Let’s hurry and get more tomatoes on.

*(Connie empties the can of sauce into her pot. Ellen watches.)*

Connie: There. Sauce done.

Ellen: *(To Ava.)* Did you know they have sauce in a can?

Ava: We’re not using sauce from a can.

Ellen: Seems like it would save us a lot of steps.

Ava: They have chili in can too, Ellen. If we use that, we’ll save all the steps.

Ellen: Now you're thinking!

Ava: No, Ellen. I wasn't serious. We make things from scratch. The way my dad did.

Connie: How do you know he did it that way?

Ava: I have his recipe.

Connie: No. You have half his recipe.

Ava: Well, I know my dad. And he wouldn't have used canned tomato sauce.

Connie: Maybe you don't know him as well as you think you do.  
*(Ava turns to face Connie. She is ready to fight.)*

Ellen: *(Sotto.)* Do not swallow bait offered by the enemy. The Art of War.

Ava: *(To Ellen.)* But I want to.

Ellen: Don't do it. That's what she wants. Here. Make sauce and take deep breaths.  
*(Beat. Ava turns and moves to the stove.)*

Connie: You know who I thought about the other day?

Ava: You talking to me?

Connie: Yeah.

Ava: I have no idea who you thought about the other day.

Connie: Ca-Ca-Ca-Caleb Seaton. Yep. I was watching TV on Sunday morning and Porky Pig came on and all of the sudden, I thought of Ca-Ca-Ca-Caleb.

Ellen: Who's Ca-Ca-Ca-Caleb Seaton?

Ava: No one.

Connie: No one? Now, come on Ava. Is that any way to talk about the love of your life?

Ava: He wasn't the love of my life. We were friends.

Connie: I think you were more than friends. *(To Ellen.)* Caleb was a skinny, gap-toothed weirdo with a stutter. Ava and him were practically married.

Ava: We were thirteen years old, and it was barely a stutter.

Connie: It took him twenty minutes to get through the Lord's Prayer.  
*(Ava throws down her spoon.)*

Ava: You know what, Connie? You're a jerk.

Connie: Oh yeah? Well, you're a loser.

Ava: Maybe I'm a loser, but at least I've never traded my body for a chili trophy.

Connie: I've heard you don't do much at all with your body.

Ava: Excuse me?

Connie: That's what all the men say. Frigid as a popsicle.

Ava: Oh, is that so? Well, you know what? I'm not frigid. Just because I don't give it out all over town like it's candy and every night is Halloween!

Connie: Oh, so I give it out like candy?

Ava: If the shoe fits, Willy Wonka.

Connie: You're just a sad, lonely spinster.

Ava: There's no such thing as a spinster anymore. It's not 1930. It's called feminism. Look it up.

Connie: You're pathetic.

Ava: You're crooked.

Connie: You can't cook.

Ava: You're a cheater.

Connie: Lemon.

Ava: Con artist.

Connie: Loser.

Ava: Crook.

Connie: Underachiever.

Ava: Unethical weasel.

Connie: Unfashionable farm girl. Enjoy your participation ribbon!

Ava: Enjoy your sexually transmitted disease!

Connie: You're a sad little orphan.

*(Ava lunges.)*

Ava: Shove it, Connie!

*(Ellen grabs Ava and pulls her back. Tucker does the same to Connie.)*

Tucker/Ellen: Whoa!

Tucker: The oven mitts are coming off!

Ellen: Do I have to get the hose out? That's how we cool off the chickens when they're fighting.

Ava/Connie: Who's fighting?/Wouldn't be much of a fight.

Ava: I'm stronger than I look!

Connie: I will snap you like a toothpick!

Tucker: Alright, slugger. Come on. Let's just cool off.

*(Tucker takes Connie aside and squirts water into her mouth from a water bottle.)*

Ellen: *(To Ava.)* Are you okay?

Ava: She really knows how to push my buttons.

Ellen: You can't let her.

Ava: I know.

Ellen: Ava, listen to me. Keep your eye on the prize. Don't lose your grip on the dreams of the past. You must fight just to keep them alive.

Ava: The Art of War?

Ellen: No. The Eye of the Tiger. *(Beat.)* You good?

Ava: Yes. Thank you.

*(Ava and Ellen return to prepping/cooking.)*

Tucker: *(To Connie.)* Let's keep it friendly.

Connie: Is that sauce simmering yet?

Tucker: About that. The stove appears to be out of propane.

Connie: What?

Tucker: Yeah. Not working.

*(He jiggles the knobs.)*

Nothing.

Connie: You've got to be kidding me! Argh. Come on.

*(Connie and Tucker exit to get propane. Ellen watches them go.)*

Ellen: I'd say the karma fairy has been here.

Ava: Yeah.

Ellen: So, who is Caleb Seaton?

Ava: Oh. No one. He was just this boy that helped my dad with odd jobs around the farm.

Ellen: A boy you liked?

Ava: I don't know. He was fun. We used to goof around together, you know, swim, climb trees...But his favourite thing to do was hide in the barn and wait for me to come along so he could jump out and scare me. *(Beat.)* We spent a lot of time together. For a while they called us the Three Musketeers.

Ellen: Don't you need three people to be the Three Musketeers?

Ava: We had three. There was another kid who liked all that same stuff. Connie.

Ellen: Combat boots Connie?

Ava: Hard to believe, huh? But, once upon a time...See, Connie boarded her pony, Magic Sparkle, on our farm.

Ellen: Magic Sparkle?

- Ava: I know but, believe it or not, Connie wasn't always...well, like that. She used to wear pigtails and had a bike with a glittery banana seat. And Magic Sparkle was her pride and joy. My dad taught her to ride. She was a better rider than I was. I tried to get my horse to go left, he'd go right. I tried to get him to slow down, he'd break into a gallop. Not Connie. She was like the horse whisperer.
- Ellen: What happened to her?
- Ava: Well, her dad took off when she was pretty young. And then her mom had a string of boyfriends. Trying to find a new father for Connie, I guess. She even dated my dad for a while.
- Ellen: Really? Connie's mother?
- Ava: Yeah. I never thought it was anything serious. I mean, he'd had girlfriends here or there. It wasn't a big deal or anything...Not that you'd know it by the way Connie cried at his funeral. Anyway, after my dad died, her mom started up with a new guy and I heard he was all kinds of no good.
- Ellen: Jeez. It's almost enough to make you feel sorry for her.
- (Beat. Ava tastes the sauce.)*
- Ava: This needs more cumin.
- Ellen: Cumin right up!
- (Ellen passes the bottle of cumin to Ava.)*
- So, you lost your dad when you were young, huh?
- Ava: Yeah. Summer before grade eight. When I was eleven, things were simple. Somehow by the time I turned thirteen, everything seemed complicated. I lost my dad. We stopped planting after he died, so Caleb wasn't coming around much, and Connie had to take on babysitting jobs to help her mom out, so she stopped riding Magic Sparkle.
- Ellen: So that was the end of the Three Musketeers. Did you ever see Caleb?
- Ava: Once in awhile. There was this place we found by the water tower. We called it Sandy Mountain but it was really just a hill. Up there, after dark, you could see all the lights of town. We'd go up there and talk. It's true what Connie said: Caleb had a terrible stutter. But up there, when it was just the two of us, it went away. One night he told me he dreamed about

becoming a news reporter and travelling the world. But he figured, with his stutter, they'd never take him. I told him not to count himself out. I believed he could be whatever he wanted to be. He was so smart. *(She loses herself in the memory.)* I'll never forget the way he looked at me. He had the bluest eyes I've ever seen. And for a moment, everything stood still...until, finally, he said, "Hey, Ava...do you want some Pop Rocks?" And I said "yes" and then...

*(Ava trails off and stares off into the distance. After a moment, Ellen grabs her.)*

Ellen: What? Don't stop there! That's not how you end a story! What happened next?

Ava: What happened next was Connie threw a log at my head.

Ellen: What?!

Ava: And that's the last part I remember. Because of the concussion.

Ellen: What the hell was Connie doing there?

Ava: Hiding, apparently. Watching us. And the next week, she came up with the name Ca-Ca-Ca-Caleb and it spread like wildfire. Soon every kid in town was calling him Ca-Ca-Ca-Caleb Seaton. He was humiliated. He stopped coming to school.

Ellen: That's terrible.

Ava: The next thing I knew, he was moving with his dad to Vancouver. I never saw him again. I guess he probably has a wife and two kids by now.

Ellen: Do you ever think about him?

Ava: No. Not much...Only every day for the last seventeen years.

Ellen: Oh, Ava.

Ava: You know what? I'm sure if Connie hadn't nailed me with that log, Caleb and I would have had an awkward teenage kiss that tasted like Pop Rocks and Grape Crush. I'd have run home and written about it in my diary and I would never have given him another thought. But, instead, I'm stuck here thinking about the kiss I never had.

Ellen: That's so sad.

Ava: Nah. It's fine. Everybody on earth has a Caleb Seaton.

Ellen: I wonder who Caleb Seaton's Caleb Seaton is.

Ava: Me, I hope.

Ellen: Yes. Right.

Ava: How about you? You have a one-that-got-away?

Ellen: One that got away? Are you kidding? No. I have a whole bunch I should have thrown back.

*(Connie and Tucker enter. Tucker has a small canister of propane.)*

Connie: This is ridiculous. We've lost precious minutes.

Tucker: We'll be back in business in no time.

*(Tucker sets to changing the propane on the stove.)*

Connie: It's thrown me off my game. Broken my concentration. I need to stay in the zone, Tucker. In the zone. Do you understand me? Get that propane hooked up, stat!

Tucker: Got it. I'm on it.

Connie: *(To Ava.)* What are you looking at?

Ava: Nothing.

*(Tucker makes a discovery.)*

Tucker: Oh. Whoopsy daisy. Turns out we had propane after all. I was just turning the valve the wrong way.

Connie: What?!

Tucker: Righty tighty, lefty loosey.

Ellen: Honest mistake.

Connie: Tucker-

Tucker: I'm sorry.

Connie: Tucker!

Ava: Connie. Calm down.

Connie: *(To Ava.)* You stay out of it. *(To Tucker.)* And you!

Tucker: I don't like that vein in your forehead.

Connie: Hand me that knife.

Tucker: Are you going to stab me with it?

Connie: Hand it to me.

*(Tucker tentatively holds the knife out for Connie. As she grabs it, he flinches and it cuts her.)*

Tucker/Connie: Ahh!

Connie: You cut me!

Ellen/Ava: Oh my God!

Connie: I'm cut!

*(Connie grabs a towel.)*

Tucker: Holy shitake!

Connie: I'm bleeding. I'll be disqualified!

Tucker: Also, you could die! Which would be even worse!

Ava: Take her to the first aid station!

Connie: There's no time!

Ava: You can't cook like that!

Connie: *(To Tucker.)* Just close it up here.

Tucker: I'm a cook, not a surgeon!

Connie: Find a stapler or a glue gun-

Ava: The first aid station is just over there.

Ellen: I have a Band-Aid!

*(Ellen produces a tiny Band-Aid from her purse.)*

Connie: Band-Aids are for children and head wound victims. *(To Tucker.)* Wrap it up in your bandana.

Tucker: I can't! I faint when I see blood. I can't even cook steak rare!

Ava: *(About the first aid station.)* It's a hundred yards away.

Connie: You just want to get rid of me so you can sabotage my chili.

Ava: Oh come on, Connie. I'm not going to sabotage your chili. First of all, you don't have anything but cold sauce from a can and a couple of ears of shucked corn. You might need stitches.

Connie: I don't need stitches. My body regenerates at a faster-than-normal rate because I have strong will.

Ava: Then why are you so pale? Tucker, take her! She's going to faint.

Tucker: So am I!

*(Tucker sits on the ground and puts his head between his legs.)*

Ava: Tucker! Come on, get up.

Tucker: I'm very squeamish! Someone always has to remove the seeds from squash for me!

Ava: She's hurt.

Tucker: *(Plugging his ears.)* La la la la la la.

*(Ava crosses to Connie.)*

Ava: *(To Ellen.)* Keep an eye on things. Don't let that sauce burn.

Ellen: Where are you going?

Ava: I'm going to take Connie to the first aid station before she bleeds out.

Ellen: Oh, that's so touching. A tragedy has brought you together and mended old fences.

Ava: That is not what's happening. I just don't want her death on my hands.

Connie: *(Woozy.)* I'm not going to die. It's a little blood.

Ava: I'm just surprised it's red and not black. Come on. Elevate the wound.

*(Ava helps Connie exit. Ellen moves to Tucker, who is still on the ground. She taps his shoulder.)*

Ellen: You can look now. She's gone.

Tucker: Did she die?

Ellen: Oh, no. She's gone to get first aid. She'll be fine. Come on. You'll get grass stains on your whites.

*(She helps him up.)*

Tucker: What a wuss, right?

Ellen: Not at all. When we shoot the chickens at the zoo, I always have to close my eyes. Which wastes a lot of bullets.

Tucker: You work at a zoo?

Ellen: The Killaloe Petting Zoo.

Tucker: Do you have any white tigers there?

Ellen: At the petting zoo? No. No tigers. We had a white dog for a while, but it was apparently just someone's pet and they came back for it.

Tucker: I saw a white tiger at the San Diego zoo. They're my favourite animal.

Ellen: Wow, you've been to San Diego? I've never left Ontario.

Tucker: Oh, it's beautiful there. When I graduated from Le Cordon Blue, a bunch of us got this van and took a road trip down the coast. It was pretty wild. It was like our freedom ride. You know, because we were finally done school.

Ellen: I don't think that's what a freedom ride is.

Tucker: No. Especially not for me, because I got really car sick. There's no freedom when you're bent over an IGA bag.

Ellen: Do you want some water?

Tucker: Thank you.

*(Ellen brings him a bottle of water from the cooler, then they each go back to their stations. Tucker starts measuring out spices. Ellen stirs the tomato sauce in the pot.)*

I guess we're holding down the fort, huh? You're so lucky to be working with Ava Rose. Chili is in her blood.

- Ellen: I'm afraid I'm not much help to her. I don't know anything about cooking.
- Tucker: Why'd you enter a cooking competition?
- Ellen: Because I realized I'd been in town for two years and my only friends are chickens. And that's a real love-hate relationship. I thought getting involved in an event like this might be a good way to meet people. And, I was right. How about you?
- Tucker: If I'm being honest, I'm mostly here for the cash prize. Connie promised me half if we win.
- Ellen: What are you going to do with it?
- Tucker: I wish I could tell you, but it's a secret. Let's just say that that money will buy my freedom. Yes ma'am. I get that cash and the world is my oyster mushroom. That's a culinary joke.
- Ellen: You're pretty funny, Tucker Dell.
- Tucker: And you're pretty pretty, Ellen-
- Ellen: Pellham. And, stop. I am not.
- Tucker: You're hotter than this jalepeno. I bet your boyfriend thinks so.
- Ellen: Well, I don't have a boyfriend.
- Tucker: Oh, no? Well, I'm surprised to hear that.
- Ellen: Would your girlfriend be surprised to hear that?
- Tucker: I don't have a girlfriend. So there we are. Two single people. *(They smile at one another.)* You want to know a little trick? Put a teaspoon of sugar in your sauce. Trust me. It mellows everything out.
- Ellen: A teaspoon?
- (She looks around the table.)*
- Which one is that? This one?
- (She picks up the ladle.)*
- Tucker: Noo.
- (Tucker crosses to help her find the teaspoon.)*

This is a teaspoon.

Ellen: Oh! Like what they give you when you order tea... *(Beat.)* I just got that.

Tucker: There are dozens of varieties of spoon. See?

*(He holds up spoons and labels them for her.)*

Slotted spoon. Table spoon. Ladle. Stirring spoon. Pasta spoon. Wooden spoon, or “spanking spoon”, as it was known in my house. Measuring spoon-

Ellen: You know a lot about spoons.

Tucker: Well, I know a lot about forks too. And when I come back from using the little boy’s room, I’m going teach you.

*(Tucker exits. Ellen picks up the spoons one by one.)*

Ellen: Tea spoon. Slotted spoon. Table spoon. Big spoon. Not-as-big spoon. Weird spoon with the claws. Spanking spoon. Tiny spoon-

*(Caleb enters carrying a microphone. He speaks to a camera man, who we don’t see.)*

Caleb: How’s this, Doug? Maybe over here? Light’s good. *(He notices Ellen watching them.)* Hello there.

Ellen: Hello.

Caleb: Are you a contestant?

Ellen: Me? No. I’m just an assistant contestant. I was just doing spoon inventory. Making sure we’ve got all our spoons. *(She counts them.)* Yep. Got ‘em all. What are you doing?

Caleb: I’m a reporter for-

Ellen: Oh! You’re the new reporter for Cable 5!

Caleb: That’s right. I’m here to do a little coverage of the competition.

Ellen: Wow. That’s a big camera.

Caleb: Yep.

Ellen: Don’t you get nervous?

Caleb: Why? Do I look nervous?

Ellen: I don't know. I don't know what you normally look like.

Caleb: Well, I'm not nervous. I did four years of journalism school.

Ellen: Oh, don't feel bad. I did two years of grade six.

Caleb: *(To Doug.)* Yeah, coming. *(To Ellen.)* Excuse me.

Ellen: Sure. Good luck. I'll just be over here...with my spoons.

*(Caleb moves to his mark. He jots down some notes on a small notepad.)*

Caleb: *(Quickly, to himself, practicing/scripting.)* "Good afternoon Killaloe. Coming to you live from the 17<sup>th</sup> annual Wayne Rose Memorial Chili Cook Off." *(To the sky.)* Lord, when I die, please don't let them remember me with a chili making competition. Alright, I think I've got it, Doug. Let's do this.

*(He straightens his clothes. His nerves begin to show. He clears his throat or does vocal warm ups. He stretches his neck side to side to loosen up. Finally he lifts the microphone to speak and he is stricken with camera fright. He forgets all his notes. Ellen watches.)*

Caleb: Good afternoon, Killaloe. I'm Channel 5. No. This is Channel 5. And I'm coming to you live from the K-Killaloe fairground. Today is the 18<sup>th</sup> annual-...wait, no. Is it the 17<sup>th</sup> annual? I'm sorry. Excuse me. *(He flips through the note pad but he's lost his place.)* I wrote it down here somewhere. Well, never mind. There have been a lot of them. It's the Wayne Rose Memorial Chili C-Cook Off today. Where competitors meet every year to go head to head in a brutal battle...No. "Brutal" is probably the wrong word. I hope it won't be brutal. It is just chili. Let's hope everyone keeps it chill. E. Right? *(Beat. He tries to get back on track.)* So. We have two dozen competitors here today, all vying for the trophy. Each one of them has brought their best recipe in the hope of walking away with the title of Chili champion. Let's go get to know some of the competitors. Maybe I'll see you down at the fairground later today for the judging. Thanks for your patience, Killaloe, I'm-

*(The camera man is waving him down.)*

Just a moment. Oh, yes. I have been asked to read the official rules of the competition before we get underway.

*(He takes out a sheet of paper. He has not read these beforehand. Ellen pays rapt attention to make sure that they have followed the rules. She mentally checks off those they have followed, with pride, until Caleb gets to “non-contact”.)*

“All recipes must be original and made from at least 10% fresh ingredients.” That’s aiming high. “All participants must wash their hands.” Well, that’s a good reminder. And, as one of the judges, I’d appreciate if you did. “This is a non-contact competition.” Is this a mistake? *(He looks up at the camera man.)* Oh, I’m getting the wrap-it-up signal. So. Come on down and be part of this momentous day in Killaloe history. And, if you are joining us, please remember to keep it beautiful. Throw out your pets and pick up after your trash. I’m Caleb Seaton, and I’ll catch you later. *(He does a little ball-throwing motion. This is a signature move he’s hoping will catch on.)*

*(The filming is done. Caleb crumples and gives an apologetic look to the camera man.)*

Oh God. I’m sorry, Doug. I don’t know what happened. Maybe I had too much coffee this morning. I-I I’m not usually like this.

*(Caleb’s eyes track the camera man – who we don’t see– until he’s alone. Then he slumps to sit on the ground.)*

Come on, Caleb! Pull it together. What’s wrong with you? There are three people are watching, at most, and one of them is your mother. Don’t blow this.

*(He looks up and sees Ellen standing over him, a look of stunned awe on her face.)*

Hello again.

Ellen: What did you say your name was?

Caleb: It’s Caleb.

Ellen: Caleb what?

Caleb: Caleb Seaton.

Ellen: Holy shitake!

*(Blackout. End of Act One.)*