

DANTE ' S INFERNO

(episode 3)

Dinner Of One

by

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(ORIGINAL 1/2 HOUR TELEPLAY)

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TEASER

FADE IN:

EXT. NIGHT. "DANTE'S INFERNO" BAR. ESTABLISHING SHOT.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. NIGHT. "DANTE'S INFERNO" BAR.

An average looking man, JAKE, slumps over a glass of whiskey. Scattered on the bar around his glass are crumpled pieces of paper with writing on them. Muttering to himself, he swooshes down the whiskey and picks up each piece of paper before throwing them back down on the bar in disgust. A figure comes to stand in front of him. He looks up to see DANTE the bartender.

DANTE

(smiling)

What seems to be the problem,
friend?

JAKE

(slightly drunk)

Problem? I've got the world's
greatest recipes here and I cant
get a stinkin job in a decent
restaurant anywhere in this
godforsaken city. I'm a chef... a
great chef!

With that affirmation, Jake takes another sip from his glass.

DANTE

A chef, huh?

Dante looks Jake up and down, especially observing his hands.

JAKE

Yeah. I've mastered it all:
Italian, French, Asian, Caribbean,
even Middle Eastern. I can do it
all.

DANTE

Sounds like you shouldn't have a
problem finding work.

Jake collects his crumpled recipes and crams them into his
jacket as he responds.

JAKE

That's the thing. Been on a bunch
of interviews, and I never have
enough experience to work in a
decent place, and I won't settle for
some job as a short order cook at a
grill or diner, you know. I'm too
talented for that.

DANTE

How good are you, really?

Jake looks around to see if anyone is listening in. He leans
forward to whisper his response to Dante.

JAKE

I'm the best there ever was. I just
need a chance to prove it.

DANTE

(serious)

O.K. I believe you. You're in
luck, my friend.

JAKE

(perks up, surprised)

Really?

DANTE

Really. A close friend of mine owns an exclusive restaurant in the lower east end here in Gomorrah. Her head chef disappeared a few days ago, and she's lookin to find a new set of hands for the kitchen. You interested?

JAKE

(excited)

Yeah, I'm interested!

Dante takes out a pen and scribbles the name and address of the place on a bar napkin, handing it to Jake who is salivating.

DANTE

Her name is "Anancy". Hell of a woman. You'll like her. Tell her I sent you, and she'll set you up real good.

JAKE

(genuinely thankful)

O.K. I don't know what to say, man. What was your name again?

DANTE

(grinning)

"Dante". I'm the owner of this particular Inferno.

JAKE

Well, thanks, Dante, I mean it. My name's Jake. I'd love to repay you somehow one day.

DANTE

(devilish grin)

We'll figure something out. Maybe
you can make a special dinner for
me one night, deal?

Dante hold's out his hand and Jake earnestly accepts it.

JAKE

(excited)

Deal! I'll make you the best
dinner you ever had, and that's a
promise!

Dante smiles and points at Jake.

DANTE

(grinning)

I'll hold you to it, Jake. And
that's a promise.

SMASH CUT TO:

MAIN TITLES:

END OF TEASER

EXT. NIGHT. ANANCY'S RESTAURANT. UPSCALE CITY STREET.

There's a line out the door of well dressed people waiting to get in. Jake, not quite fitting in with the rest of people, makes his way to the front of the line where a statuesque stunning HOSTESS is taking care of reservations.

JAKE

Excuse me, I'm here to see...

HOSTESS

(smiling)

Anancy. Yes, she's expecting you.

Right this way.

CUT TO:

INT. NIGHT. ANANCY'S RESTAURANT.

Jake follows the hostess through the small but crowded restaurant and into the kitchen where we find ANANCY, a middle-aged Jamaican woman with jet-black skin, short natural hair, a glowing smile, and penetrating eyes. Her back to Jake and the hostess, she's speaking to an older prep cook nearby, BOISEY. They both speak in heavy Jamaican accents.

ANANCY

Boisey, make sure we don't run low on fresh garlic tonight, and cut up some more ox-tail for the goat-head soup.

BOISEY

Yesm, miss Anancy.

Miss Anancy is wearing an apron over a stunning strapless evening gown.

Masterfully working the stove, intermittently handling five pans at once, she is a contrast of elegant beauty and feverish chef. Without turning, she addresses Jake as the hostess leaves.

ANANCY

(heavy Jamaican accent)

Thank you so much for coming so soon, Jake. Dante speaks very highly of you. That means a lot to me. He has a good eye for such things.

Anancy dips a wooden spoon into a sauce pot simmering on the back-burner. Finally turning, she hands the spoon of sauce to Jake.

ANANCY (CONT'D)

Taste this.

Jake, speechless, takes the spoon from her and tastes it, closing his eyes as a wine connoisseur would do in attempting to guess a vintage and *terroir*.

JAKE

(impressed)

Amazing. I've never tasted anything like it before... what is it?

ANANCY

(smiling)

My secret recipe that has kept that line out the door coming for many years.

JAKE

I've had some experience with Caribbean dishes, but I must admit, I can't even guess what's in that sauce.

ANANCY

Good. That's the general idea. I expect my chef to take care of everything but the sauce. Can you do that?

JAKE

(confident)

I sure can, Miss Anancy.

ANANCY

Just "Anancy" is fine. Here, take this.

Anancy undoes her apron and hands it to a surprised Jake.

JAKE

You want me to start right now? I thought this was an interview.

ANANCY

It was. You got the job. Welcome.

Anancy begins to exit the kitchen as she speaks over her shoulder.

ANANCY (CONT'D)

Boisey here will help you with anything you need, and don't overcook the sea-bass!

Anancy disappears into the restaurant, leaving a bewildered Jake. He is snapped to attention by Boisey.

BOISEY

That sea-bass is just about ready,
Jake. Best pull it out the flames.

Jake turns to the stove and deftly pulls the frying pan with the sea bass off the flames and slides it onto a plate.

CUT TO:

INT. NIGHT. ANANCY'S RESTAURANT.

The restaurant CROSS DISSOLVES from full to empty. We see Jake and Anancy sitting at a table, relaxing over a bottle of wine. Anancy is puffing on a cigar. She exhales the smoke in a slow devilish way.

ANANCY

You did great for your first night,
Jake. I'm very happy with your
work.

JAKE

(excited)

Thanks. I can't tell you how much
it means to me, you giving me this
opportunity and all.

ANANCY

No, thank you, Jake. Had you not
popped into my world, I would have
spent another night racing between
the stove and the hostess table,
which isn't easy wearing high heels
and a dress.

They both laugh at her little joke.

JAKE

I must tell you that your recipes are so simple. There's no complex non-traditional way of prepping anything, and yet it all tastes so different than anything else I've ever eaten. I can't believe that sauce of yours does that.

ANANCY

It does. In the right quantity, it adds the perfect balance to everything I make. Once a person has a taste for it, they never stop coming back. Cooking is not about disguising food, it's about harmonizing ingredients. I just do it a little different than most folk.

JAKE

So where'd you get the sauce recipe? Jamaica?

ANANCY

Not exactly. It was brought to Jamaica by the slaves taken from West Africa. It's an ancient recipe, Jake. It's almost lost to the world. A handful of women know it in Jamaica, and there's rumor of it being still used deep in the bush of Africa.

JAKE

(intrigued)

I can't figure out if it's a fish oil, or liver of some type of fowl... definitely not an herb, fruit or vegetable, so it must be from meat, fish, or poultry, right?

Anancy rises from the table, exhaling a cloud of smoke in Jake's direction.

ANANCY

The ingredient *is* the recipe, Jake. I've told you too much already. Don't worry about the sauce, Jake. That's my department. A chef never asks another chef too many questions about their recipes. See you tomorrow. Good night.

Anancy leaves the table and heads for the door. Boisey enters the restaurant from the kitchen.

BOISEY

Just finishing up now, Mr. Jake. Will be locking up soon.

JAKE

O.K. Boisey. See you tomorrow. Thanks for helping out tonight.

BOISEY

No problem, man.

Jake finishes his glass of wine and heads for the door. Boisey watches him leave, smiling an evil grin.

BOISEY (CONT'D)

No problem at all, man.

CUT TO:

INT. ANANCY'S RESTAURANT. KITCHEN.

Jake has a severed goat's head on the center kitchen counter, prepping it with oils and spices. Running out of a spice, he looks around the kitchen for some more, but doesn't find any.

JAKE

Boisey? Hey Boisey, are you back yet?

He rinses his hands off, and while drying them with a towel, looks down the hallway to a closed door that has a "PRIVATE" sign on it.

JAKE (CONT'D)

(to himself)

Maybe they keep all the spices in there.

Jake heads towards the "private" door, and reaches for the handle. He jumps back, startled, by Boisey's voice.

BOISEY

(angry)

Mr. Jake! You were told to never go in that room, weren't you?

JAKE

(apologetic)

Yes, but I was out of fennel and couldn't find any in the kitchen...

BOISEY

Then you wait for me to get back.
The extra spices are kept in the
kitchen pantry behind the oils,
remember?

Jake is surprised at the usually calm Boisey's intense reaction.

JAKE

Sorry. I forgot.

Boisey stares at Jake.

BOISEY

It's best you don't forget a second
time.

Boisey extends his arm out, showing Jake the way out of the hallway and back into the kitchen. Jake leaves, a bit uncomfortable, leaving Boisey standing there alone, staring at Jake.

CUT TO:

INT. ANANCY'S RESTAURANT. KITCHEN.

Jake is cooking on the stove, taking orders as they come. He keeps looking over his shoulder towards the "private" door. Picking up the wooden spoon next to the sauce pot, he tastes it again, and again. His eyes squinting, he whispers to himself.

JAKE

What *is* that taste?

A waiter interrupts him, entering to pick up two plates he's just finished.

WAITER

Table seven?

JAKE

Table seven. Three is almost ready.

The waiter hurry's away with the plates in hand.

WAITER

OK Be right back for table three.

Jake, alone again, turns to look at the "private" door, then back again to the simmering sauce which occasionally bubbles. We see an Extreme Close Up of the sauce bubbling.

JAKE

(to himself)

I could make millions with that sauce... If I only knew what was in it.

CUT TO:

EXT. DAY. OPEN AIR PRODUCE/MEAT MARKET IN CITY.

E.C.U. on the eye of a dead fish. Pull out to reveal Anancy carrying a wicker basket, wandering through the crowded market place, pausing at stalls to look at fruits and vegetables. As she moves along, someone is watching her. Arriving at a fish stall, she stops to greet the owner, MR. MIZUNO, an elder Japanese man. They are obviously old acquaintances.

MR. MIZUNO

(smiling / bowing)

Good morning Anancyson.

ANANCY

Good morning, Mr Mizuno. Is it ready?

MR. MIZUNO

I have a fresh shipment for you. Just come in late last night. I get it now.

Whoever is watching Anancy cannot tell what they are saying. Mr. Mizuno disappears for a moment behind his stall. Anancy looks over her shoulders, feeling someone watching her. Mr. Mizuno returns a moment later with a package wrapped in Japanese newspapers, and hands it to her, bowing.

ANANCY

Thank you so much, Mr. Mizuno. I was running dangerously low.

Anancy places the package into her basket and covers it with a towel. She pulls out an envelope of money and hands it to Mr. Mizuno. Grinning broadly, he accepts the money with a bow.

MR. MIZUNO

Arrigato Anancyson.

She too bows with a smile.

ANANCY

Arrigato domaison. Until next time.

Anancy walks off with her purchase. The person no longer follows her, but remains watching Mr. Mizuno. We finally see who it is that has been stalking her all this time. It is Jake, and he has a wicked determined look in his eyes.

CUT TO:

EXT. NIGHT. JAPANESE QUARTER OF GOMORRAH.

The narrow city street is bustling with Asian pedestrians and shopkeepers selling their wares. Mr. Mizuno is slowly walking along the crowded street before turning into a quiet alley leading to a doorway. As he unlocks the door and steps into his apartment doorway, a man rushes in behind him, slams the door closed, and shoves a pistol in his face. It's Jake, and he means business.

MR. MIZUNO

(terrified)

Here, take my money and leave me
be!

JAKE

(grimacing)

I don't want your gook money, pops.
I want to know exactly what you
sold Anancy this morning at the
market.

MR. MIZUNO

(surprised/confused)

What?! I sold her fish! The same
fish she buys every week!

Jake smacks the old man in the face with his gun, drawing blood.

JAKE

Liar! What's the secret ingredient
she buys from you every week? I
know it's you! I've tried
everything else. It must be you!

(MORE)

JAKE (CONT'D)

What is it that you sell her? Tell me or you die!

Jake cocks the pistol and shoves the barrel under Mr. Mizuno's jaw.

MR. MIZUNO

(trembling)

She buys an exotic type of poisonous blowfish that is illegal here. She uses it in her soups. I swear!

JAKE

(gleeful)

That's it! What's it called? Where do I find it?

MR. MIZUNO

It's called "*Faust-fish*" in English. Any Japanese fish salesman can get it for you. You can buy it down the street from here.

Jake, satisfied, pulls the gun away and shoves it back into his coat pocket.

JAKE

You tell anyone I was here and I'll come back and kill you, understand?

MR. MIZUNO

Yes, yes. I understand.

Jake lowers the gun and slips out the door, leaving Mr. Mizuno leaning against the wall, trembling.

CUT TO:

INT. NIGHT. JAKE'S APARTMENT.

Jake's apartment is a disaster area. There's pots and pans everywhere, and every available piece of counter space is covered by blowfish. All four burners on the stove are going, one boiling a fish, one frying a fish in oil, one frying a fish in milk, and the last a sauce pot that is simmering a sauce which looks very similar to the one at Anancy's restaurant. On a large cutting board nearby, he has a pile of eyes, a pile of gills, a pile of fins. Dropping a few eyes into a pulverizing bowl, he squishes them to a paste and adds them to the sauce, stirring it in carefully. His face is stern and concentrated. He's obviously exhausted, having been at it for countless hours. Dipping a wooden spoon into the sauce, he takes a taste, his eyes closed in concentration. Opening his eyes in disgust, he throws the spoon across the room and knocks the sauce pot to the floor.

JAKE

God damn it! Ahhhg! I'll make
that bitch tell me what's in that
sauce if it's the last thing I do.

CUT TO:

INT. NIGHT. ANANCY'S RESTAURANT. KITCHEN.

It's past closing time, and Jake is just finishing cleaning up his counter space. Anancy walks into the kitchen with a warm smile.

ANANCY

Great night, Jake. Listen, Boisey had to leave early, and I have to go to the Governor's home now for an after-hours party, so be a doll and lock up the place when you're done, will you?

JAKE

(smiling)

Sure, no problem.

Anancy hands Jake the keys to the restaurant and walks off.

ANANCY

See you tomorrow. I'll lock the front door on my way out.

JAKE

Thanks, have fun tonight. See you tomorrow.

Jake stands motionless with the keys in his hands, listening as the front door closes, leaving him alone. He looks over at the "private" door, then at the keys in his hands. Determined, he wastes no time, walking straight for the "private" door. Trying every key, he finally finds one that works, and enters the room.

CUT TO:

INT. RESTAURANT. ANANCY'S PRIVATE ROOM. NIGHT.

Jake looks around at the seemingly insignificant small room. Bookshelves line the walls, littered with books, vases, and wooden trinkets from the islands. In the center of the room is a large wooden table covered with intricate carvings.

Jake steps towards the table to take a closer look, seeing scenes of African village life. He tilts his head up to peruse the shelves, looking for some clue or some recipe or some spice. Nothing of interest except a few life-size wooden demonic masks with large protruding teeth, and an intricately carved handle of a long serrated knife. Turning back to the table, he looks closer at the carving with more than a passing curiosity. In the center, he pieces together the picture story, noticing a human body stretched out on a wooden table, followed by a figure standing over the table holding up a large knife, followed by a large bubbling cauldron, followed by a group of people eating at a table. At this last scene, he figures out what the table represents. Shocked, he takes a step back and looks at the table, noticing a small gutter carved into the entire perimeter, serving as a drainage system. This is no ordinary table. As he finally figures out what this table and room are for, his eyes open wide as he fully understands what exactly Anancy's secret ingredient is. Panicking he takes another step back towards the door, bumping into Anancy. He springs away from her, terrified.

ANANCY

(grinning)

I forgot my purse.

Anancy closes the door behind her, sliding a dead-bolt lock closed, trapping Jake in the room with her.

JAKE

I was looking for...

ANANCY

My secret recipe? It was under your own nose the entire time!

Anancy's eyes sparkle as she smiles again, this time brandishing a mouth full of horrible fangs.

JAKE

No!

ANANCY

Yes!

Jake throws his arms up in a futile defense as Anancy springs towards him in full attack, growling viciously.

CUT TO:

INT. NIGHT. ANANCY'S RESTAURANT.

A man is seated alone at a corner table near the window, eating his dinner. His back is to us and we can't identify him.

CUT TO:

Extreme Close Up of a bloody piece of meat being cut into by a steak knife and fork. We follow the fork-full of meat as it is brought up to a grinning mouth.

CUT TO:

Dante sitting alone, eyes half closed, as he savors the exquisite taste of his dinner. Anancy walks over to his table.

ANANCY

I didn't want to interrupt you,
Dante.

DANTE

Not at all.

ANANCY

(smiling)

Good, isn't it? I had some last night, but saved this cut especially for you.

DANTE

(grinning)

Some of the best I've had all year.

Dante lifts his napkin and wipes some blood from the corner of his mouth.

DANTE (CONT'D)

Thank you.

ANANCY

No, thank you! You sure know how to pick them out.

Anancy leans in towards Dante to whisper.

ANANCY (CONT'D)

He wasn't much of a chef, but oh, does he make a tasty dish! *Buon appetite*

They both laugh, and Dante toasts his glass of dark red wine to her as she walks off. Dante takes a sip and then begins cutting into another bloody piece of meat, bringing a forkful to his grinning mouth.

DANTE

(to himself)

Damn good eatin'...

FADE TO BLACK

