

The Count Of Monte Crisco

A new comedy by Steph DeFerie

Based on the novel by Alexandre Dumas

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CAST

Dottie - An older waitress
Ruthie - A younger waitress
Raylene - A cashier
Lyle - A cook
Buddy - A busboy
Delbert - A mechanic
Ed - Delbert's boss
Jimbo - A trucker
Trixie - A regular customer
Paulette - A regular customer

The Place: Mae's Diner And Bus Stop, the outskirts of Nickleberry, Texas
(just off Route 77)

The Time: A Monday in August

ACT I

Mae's Diner, the outskirts of Nickleberry, Texas, (just off Route 77). Up center is the lunch counter running horizontally across the stage, with open ends. There are the usual items on it - salt and pepper shakers, napkin dispensers, silverware, menus, etc.

Up right is the exit to the storeroom. Up left is the exit to the rest rooms. Next to the counter in the back wall right is the swinging door to the kitchen. Behind the counter in the back wall center is the kitchen pick-up window. Running along the back wall under the window is the service counter. In front of the lunch counter are three or four padded stools. Up right is a pile of boxes, supplies that have been delivered but not yet put away.

Downstage are one or two tables and chairs. The tables are covered in plastic table cloths and set with salt & pepper shakers, silverware.

The front door entrance is through the vom. Near the entrance is a small glass display counter filled with t-shirts, knick-knacks and candy, especially brightly wrapped, colorful ones - jawbreakers, mints, kisses, etc. On top is an old cash register, a basket of mints, a jug of toothpicks, a bowl of matches. There is a stool behind it.

The whole effect is bright and cheerful. The decor is Texas cow country.

The following excerpt begins on page 11.

DELBERT

Naw, today I need a big hot cuppa that French coffee and some French toast and some French fries and any other French food you got. Bastille Day's a French holiday and I'm celebratin'.

RAYLENE

You ain't French.

DOTTIE

And you never drank a cup of coffee in your life.

DELBERT

Yeah, I know but Ed says I gotta have one now. I fell asleep three times under Doralee's Gremlin this morning already, working on her exhaust system. It's all shot to hell. She drives too fast on them dirt roads out around her place trying to run over prairie dogs.

LYLE

What're you so tired for? Hot date last night?

DELBERT

You could say that. I was with a beautiful woman named Hay-dee until ten minutes past four in the morning.

RAYLENE

Who's she? Some trashy French woman jus' passing through?

DELBERT

No siree bob. She's a princess, the daughter of the Pasha of Yanina. She's real beautiful. She lives in a har-eem and wears veils so's no one can see her beauty 'cept'n for the man she loves.

LYLE

Hoo-ee!

RAYLENE

So I guess you didn't see nothin'.

BUDDY

Can we meet her?

DELBERT

Any time you want. She ain't going nowheres.

RUTHIE

(Nervous) She sticking around?

RAYLENE

And jus' where is this princess right now?

DELBERT

(Pulling a battered paperback book out of his coveralls) Right here.

BUDDY

She must be awful small to fit in there. Is she a pixie?

DELBERT

She's a character in this here book, Buddy. "The Count Of Monte Cristo" by Alexandree Dumas. (HE puts the accent on the first syllable of the last name so it rhymes with "pumice.")

LYLE

Monte Crisco? You mean like the grease?

DELBERT

Naw, Monte Cristo, like the sandwich.

BUDDY

That's the one with battered ham and cheese and pickles on the grill. They'se real tasty with lots of jelly and Rice Krispies sprinkled on 'em.

DELBERT

Well, it sounds like the sandwich but in this here book, it's this little bitty island out in the Mediterranean Ocean.

RUTHIE

You mean you was up all night reading a book, Delbert? You sick or somethin'?

RUTHIE, who was somewhat relieved to find out her rival isn't real, is concerned again.

DELBERT

Naw. It was jus' a good story's all.

DOTTIE

Where'd you get it, Del?

DELBERT

You 'member last week when ever'body went out searchin' for that there English teacher from New York City went missing during his nature walk out in the desert?

BUDDY

And they found him dead and all chewed up by the coyotes and the buzzards and his nose was missing and his eyes was pecked out of his head and he'd turned all black an' bloated an'...

RAYLENE

(Pushing away the remains of her donut) That's a right pretty picture you're painting for us there, Buddy, thank you very much for reminding us.

BUDDY

You're welcome, Raylene.

DELBERT

Well, anyways. Somebody had to drive his car back into town and Ed volunteered us so's he drove me out and dropped me off and I was supposed to bring it back in. But the battery was dead and we had to jump her jus' to get her started and so naturally Ed tells me not to stop anywheres on the way back and then he goes on up the road a piece to pick up some parts at Collie's.

DOTTIE

Get to the point, Delbert.

DELBERT

Well, I kind of forgot all about that durn battery and stopped to take a le..relieve myself and then I couldn't get it started again.

BUDDY

It's easy to forget stuff. One time I forgot to take my pants off before I took a bath.

DELBERT

So I had to wait for a while 'til somebody came by to give me a jump. I got kind of bored so I rotated the tires and checked the fluids and then I didn't have anything else to do. And then I saw this here book kinda peekin' out from under the back seat and I figured I could read some of it jus' to pass the time. I never thought it'd turn out to be so interesting-like.

RAYLENE

You telling us that's what you've been up to ever' night since then? (Hinting for Ruthie) That's why you couldn't take nobody to the movies or out dancin' or for a DQ or nothin'? 'Cause you was reading a book?

LYLE

Not readin' a book - spending time in a ha-reem.

BUDDY

What's a ha-reem, Mr. Lyle?

LYLE

It's a place where all the women of the head Araby king stay. And the only men they have to wait on 'em don't have any...well, you know, man-parts.

BUDDY

How come?

LYLE

So's they don't get tempted to do something they shouldn't.

BUDDY

What'd happen if they did do somethin' they shouldn't?

LYLE

I guess they'd probably...cut off their man-parts.

RAYLENE

Well, shoot, they'd only be right back where they started from only they'd've had some fun gettin' there.

DOTTIE

That must've been some book to get you so all fired up, Del.

DELBERT

Oh, I'll tell you what, it sure was. It's probably the best book I ever read in my whole life.

RAYLENE

That ain't sayin' much, Delbert, you can't even get through the TV Guide.

DELBERT

This story was different. It was right smart with a prison escape and buried treasure and some mean lady poisoning everybody and a baby buried alive and ever'thing. And there was hope and revenge and romance and jus' ever'thing you could wish for in a story. And the way the fella wrote it, he made you feel like you really cared about what was happenin' to the folks it was all happenin' to. He made you feel like maybe it was happenin' to you.

DOTTIE

Well, you're a regular old Roger Ebert at the movies, ain't ya?

RUTHIE

(Jealous) I suppose there were lots of pictures of those har-eems and beautiful naked ladies.

DELBERT

(Fanning the book under her nose) Not at all, Miss Nosey-Pants. It's all words and I read every one.

BUDDY

We used to read about Dick and Jane in school. They had a dog named Spot. Does your story have any dogs in it, Delbert?

DELBERT

Sorry, Buddy, but there weren't no dogs. (BUDDY looks disappointed) But there were pirates.

BUDDY cheers up.

DOTTIE

Mama'd like that. She's got some weird fascination with and pirates and gladiators and such. It's downright disgustin' at her age. When Channel 3 does one of them all day Tarzan marathons on the weekend, I got to make sure we got an extra tank of oxygen.

DELBERT

All this talkin's making me thirsty. Where's my coffee, Ruthie?

RUTHIE

(With a black look to BUDDY) We're temporarily out of coffee.

DELBERT

Well, you'd better make it a Mountain Dew, then. Better give me a double. I don't want to fall asleep again.

LYLE

Why don't we have any coffee? And how come this place ain't cleaned up yet? The lunch rush is gonna start any minute.

RAYLENE

Lyle, the lunch rush ain't gonna start until you start givin' out complimentary Roloids.

LYLE

Very funny, Raylene. I guess you've all had your little break so let's all get back to work now, gals.

BUDDY

Hey!

LYLE

Gals and Buddies.

BUDDY moves his suitcases out of the way, maybe behind the counter or off to the side and begins bussing the dirty dishes from the tables into a bus bucket. RAYLENE counts the money in the cash register, checking it against the receipts. RUTHIE starts cleaning the lunch counter and DOTTIE bustles around in the service area, straightening it up. DELBERT helps himself to a soda and sits at a table, drinking and thumbing through his book.

LYLE

Someone want to tell me why we don't have any coffee?

DOTTIE

Buddy took the machine apart. He was lookin' for pixies again.

LYLE

Honest to Jesus, Buddy, I'm gonna kick the pixies outa yor butt you keep doin' that.

LYLE goes to work on the coffee machine.

RAYLENE

So tell us about that story, Delbert. Who is that Count fella anyways?

DELBERT

Well, it all takes place over there in France back in the olden days. The King got his head chopped off in the revolution and then Napoleon took over. (HE puts his hand in his coverall in the classic "Napoleon" pose) He started having wars with ever'body and he managed to take over almost all o' Europe before he got beat. Then they stuck him on this little island called Elba off the coast of Italy thinkin' it'd keep him from makin' any more mischief but it didn't.

DOTTIE

Lord, if I wanted to learn the history o' France, I would've stayed on in school 'til the eighth grade.

DELBERT

Okay, so picture it.

At this point, and at every point that DELBERT "tells" the story, there should be a light change to indicate we've entered the world of the book.

DELBERT climbs up on the lunch counter.

DELBERT

(In an impressive voice) February, 1815. Marseilles, a port on the Mediterranean. (An aside) That's down on the bottom of France.

DOTTIE and RUTHIE cross over to the suitcases and pick out some costume bits - hats, shawls, scarves, etc. THEY put one or two on and then pass the others out to BUDDY, LYLE, and RAYLENE and then DOTTIE, RUTHIE and RAYLENE form a crowd around the display case, looking out expectantly into the audience. THEY are now a French crowd and act and speak accordingly. LYLE stands apart. BUDDY crosses up to be with DELBERT.

DELBERT

Royalists, backers of the new King Louis the 18th, look with suspicion on the Emperor Napoleon's supporters as he secretly plots his return from Elba. The country is restless and down at the docks, this restlessness is compounded by concern for the good ship Pharaon, for it is overdue.

During the following, DELBERT gets down, goes behind the counter and constructs, out of white cloths, a large sail or flag which HE will wave across the back of the stage to represent the Pharaon coming into port. BUDDY can help.

JOSETTE (DOTTIE)

Alas, poor Monsieur Morrel! Another day and still no word of the Pharaon. It may well be lost, gone to the bottom with all her poor brave sailors down.

FIFI (RAYLENE)

It is so risky, is it not, to be the owner of a ship? One bad storm and you are ruined.

MARIE (RUTHIE)

And yet your investment is multiplied ten-fold if it comes safely home.

JOSETTE (DOTTIE)

It is all a gamble - life, love. Fate tosses the dice with our future. Today, you are nothing. Then the wheel of fortune turns, lifting you up into happiness and prosperity. Who knows when you will lose it all in an instant and be cast down again?

FIFI (RAYLENE)

We must enjoy our happiness and endure our misery with the knowledge that both are fleeting.

A pause.

JOSETTE (DOTTIE)

Oooooohhhhhh - that sounds ominous.

LYLE crosses to the ladies.

MORREL (LYLE)

(Waving a slip of paper) I am saved! Here is word just arrived that the Pharaon is safe and will be coming into port any moment!

MARIE (RUTHIE)

Congratulations, Monsieur Morrel.

JOSETTE (DOTTIE)

Thanks be to God.

FIFI (RAYLENE)

And your cargo, Monsieur, is it intact?

MORREL (LYLE)

The cargo is secondary, Madame. I pray for the safe arrival of her crew foremost.

DELBERT and BUDDY now wave the white sail behind the counter. DOTTIE, RAYLENE, RUTHIE and LYLE turn to wave and cheer at it. The following is said simultaneously.

FIFI (RAYLENE)

Here is it, Monsieur! Hooray! (etc.)

JOSETTE (DOTTIE)

Three cheers for Morrel and the Pharaon! (etc.)

MARIE (RUTHIE)

A glorious site! See how proudly she rides the waves (etc.)

MORREL (LYLE)

Look! All her sailors have lined her deck to salute us! My prayers are answered! (etc.)

LYLE, RUTHIE, DOTTIE and RAYLENE continue to cheer as DELBERT puts down the sail, comes forward and picks out a costume for himself from the pile. BUDDY comes down to LYLE, who turns to face the audience again.

DANGLARS (BUDDY)

Ahoy, Monsieur Morrel!

MORREL (LYLE)

Bonjour, Monsieur Danglars! How was your voyage from Italy, Monsieur le Purser?

DANGLARS (BUDDY)

Not without troubles, Monsieur. There was sickness and an unscheduled stop.

MORREL (LYLE)

Where is Captain LeClère?

DANGLARS (BUDDY)

Dead of the brain fever.

MORREL (LYLE)

Then, who is in charge?

DANGLARS (BUDDY)

That young upstart, Edmond Dantès, took command and changed our course so that we lingered almost two days at the Isle of Elba. He even went ashore with a package. Surely it is traitorous to have any contact with the banished Emperor.

DELBERT crosses to BUDDY and LYLE.

DANTES (DELBERT)

Who is traitorous?

MORREL (LYLE)

Edmond! What is this I hear of your going to Elba?

DANTES (DELBERT)

Only on Captain LeClère's orders, Monsieur. His dying command was that I deliver a package to Marshal Bertrand. I do not know what it contained and I did not even see the Emperor. (To BUDDY) How did you know about the package?

DANGLARS (BUDDY)

(Caught) I...uh...happened to be passing the Captain's cabin when he gave it to you and the door was open.

MORREL (LYLE)

(Sourly) You have sharp eyes, Danglars. (Pleased) I'm pleased with your attention to duty, young Dantès. You have done well. May I invite you to dine with me? I would like to treat the Pharaon's new captain to his first meal back on shore.

DANTES (DELBERT)

Captain?! Monsieur, do you jest?

DANGLARS (BUDDY)

Monsieur Morrel, am I not equal in seniority to Dantes?

MORREL (LYLE)

There are other factors to consider. Edmond has proven himself in his honesty and hard work. The men respect and follow him. He has my full confidence.

DANTES (DELBERT)

Merci, Monsieur, a thousand times merci!

DANGLARS (BUDDY)

(To DELBERT) Have you given him the letter?

MORREL (LYLE)

Letter?

DANGLARS (BUDDY)

The one Dantes carried away from Elba. I assumed it was for you, regarding ship's business. (To DELBERT) Or are you in league with the emperor, hoping to return him to power?

DANTES (DELBERT)

You slander me, Monsieur. I am not political. It is true I have been charged to deliver a letter but it is not for Monsieur Morrel and I am ignorant of its contents.

MORREL (LYLE)

I believe you, Edmond.

DANGLARS (BUDDY)

But Monsieur...

MORREL (LYLE)

The matter is settled. Let us hear no more about it.

BUDDY withdraws in a huff.

MORREL (LYLE)

Now, Edmond, will you dine with me?

DANTES (DELBERT)

There is only one thing I should like better, Monsieur, and I beg leave to attend to it.

MORREL (LYLE)

Would this something happen to have a beautiful figure, flashing eyes and a mouth that's been waiting three months to be kissed?

DANTES (DELBERT)

(Blushing) Yes, Monsieur. I would like to call on my Mercedes and my father to tell them the good news.

MORREL (LYLE)

So I am not as tempting as your girlfriend, Edmond? Never mind. I release you with a happy heart and best wishes.

Enter from the front door, ED, DELBERT's boss.

ED

Hell's bells, Delbert, what're you doin' over here?

Lights change back to "diner-mode."