Ellen and her husband, Cal, have converted the ground floor of a nineteenth-century townhouse on the New Jersey shore into a fabulously successful restaurant, The Golden Carrousel. Business has been so good that Ellen, as sole “chef extraordinaire,” and Cal, handling just about everything else, are in way over their heads.

**ELLEN** is more frantic than ever. She has several bass out and is dressing them.

**CAL** [*bursting in*]: One oxtail…one Billi, one bass, one duck, one Floating Island, and one pears!

**ELLEN** [*eyes closed, reciting*]:

One oxtail, one Billi, one duck, one Floating Island, and one pears! ...

**CAL**: One oxtail, one Billi, one bass, one duck, one Floating Island, and one pears! ...

**ELLEN**: You do the shrimp and I’ll do the eggs! [*She starts whipping egg whites with an automatic mixer as CAL removes the shrimp from the refrigerator and dumps them into the Cuisinart. He turns it on. They both make a fearful clatter.*]

**ELLEN** [*over the din*]: Heavy cream!

**CAL**: How much?

**ELLEN**: Half a cup.

**CAL** [*starts pouring it into the Cuisinart*]: Watch…

**ELLEN**: That’s enough. [*They finish their chores simultaneously.*] You slice the mushrooms and I’ll finish the mousse! [*She pours the mousse out of the Cuisinart and carefully folds in the egg whites she’s just whipped as CAL slices the mushrooms with lightning speed and precision.*]

**ELLEN**: You cut the grapes and I’ll do the soups… [*She returns to her soups on the stove.*]

**CAL**: I’ll cut the grapes…

**ELLEN**: While I do the soups…

**CAL**: Where are the grapes?

**ELLEN** [*muttering as she works on the soup*]: One oxtail…one Billi, one bass, and one duck…

**CAL**: Where are the grapes?

**ELLEN**: Second shelf of the refrigerator.

**CAL**: Of course. [*Starts rooting around in the refrigerator.*]

**ELLEN**: One oxtail…one Billi, one bass, and one duck…

**CAL**: Second shelf.

**ELLEN**: That’s right… [*Tastes the soup.*]

**CAL**: It’s not there.

**ELLEN**: Then look in the bin…

**CAL** [*thumping around*]: Nope.

**ELLEN**: Try in the door.

**CAL** [*making more and more noise*]: Nothing.

**ELLEN**: Check the top shelf.

**CAL**: I already did.

**ELLEN**: They’re not with the pears?
CAL: Not with the pears.
ELLEN: Not in the bin?
CAL: Not in the bin.
ELLEN: Start taking things out.
CAL [does]: I am!
ELLEN: They’re not in the back?
CAL: Not... in... the back!
ELLEN: Under the bass?
CAL: Nowhere in sight!
ELLEN: Try by the cream.
CAL: I already have. [He’s now spread a great arc of food around the refrigerator.]
ELLEN: They’ve got to be there.
CAL: Ellen, I’m looking!
ELLEN: Next to the stock.
CAL: Nowhere in sight!
ELLEN: Oh, honey, I need them!
CAL: Yes, I know...
ELLEN: Should I come and help?
CAL: Son of a...!
ELLEN: I can’t do the duck... [Reaches for the salt and notices the bowl of empty grape stems.] OH, NO!
CAL [picking over the mess strewn on the floor]: They’ve got to be here!
ELLEN: I don’t believe this! [She lifts up the bowl to show CAL.]
CAL [his back to her]: I remember seeing them...
ELLEN: CAL, YOU ATE THEM!
CAL [his back to her, finds something tempting, starts eating it]: Mmmmmmmmmm...
ELLEN [holding up an empty branch]: There’s nothing left but the stems!
CAL: What is this?
ELLEN: LOOK!
CAL [facing her]: What?
ELLEN: You ate all the grapes.
CAL: No, I didn’t. I didn’t eat those.
ELLEN [waving the branch]: CAL!
CAL: I didn’t eat any grapes.
ELLEN: I saw you!
CAL: Why would I eat those grapes?
ELLEN: I don’t know, but I saw you!
CAL: I don’t even like grapes.
ELLEN: I asked you to stop, don’t you remember?
CAL: I’d never eat grapes.
ELLEN: CAL, YOU ATE THOSE GRAPES, I SAW YOU!
CAL [in a whisper]: Not so loud, they’ll hear you out front.
ELLEN [whispering]: How are we going to serve Duckling in Wine with Green Grapes?
CAL: I didn’t do it.
ELLEN: You’ve ruined the dish.
CAL: You’ve made a mistake.
ELLEN: I can’t go on like this...
CAL: Serve it with something else.
ELLEN: What’s scary is, you don’t even know you’re doing it.
CAL:  Peaches or cherries.
ELLEN:  It’s like a disease…
CAL:  Roast duck with Bing Cherries is a classic!
ELLEN:  YOU ATE THE BING CHERRIES THIS MORNING! [She starts to cry.]
CAL:  Well, we have peaches, don’t we? Substitute peaches!
ELLEN:  Cal, I can cook. I can really cook!
CAL:  It’s even better with peaches!
ELLEN:  I could win us three stars, maybe even four!
CAL [starts opening cupboard doors]:  Now where are those peaches?
ELLEN:  I’ve trained with the best…
CAL [thumping in one of the cupboards]:  I know they’re in here somewhere…
ELLEN:  …cooked with the best!
CAL [finds a can of peaches]:  You see!
ELLEN:  But I can’t do this alone. I need you to help.
CAL [starts opening the can]:  You golden babies…
ELLEN:  You always had such good taste… [The lid off, CAL inhales the fragrance, then reaches down for one, lifts it up, and pops it in his mouth.]
ELLEN:  …a razor sharp instinct. I need it, Cal!
CAL:  There’s nothing wrong with canned peaches, they’re just as good as fresh. [He then takes a swig of the juice.] I don’t know when I’ve tasted such a delicious peach…
ELLEN:  Do you still have it? [She rushes to a cupboard and sweeps down an armful of spice tins.] SHOW ME IT’S THERE, SHOW ME YOUR TALENT! [Concealing its identity, she pours out a heaping teaspoon of mustard and offers it to him.]
ELLEN:  Taste this!
CAL [offering her a large syrupy peach, still garbled]:  I really wish you’d try this, it’s…
ELLEN [fierce, forces the teaspoon of mustard into his mouth]:  Taste!
CAL [spitting]:  What are you doing?
ELLEN [shoveling in another batch]:  I SAID, TASTE IT!
CAL [sputtering]:  Jeez, what is this?
ELLEN:  You tell me, Cal.
CAL [gagging]:  It’s poison.
ELLEN:  Try again! [CAL is certainly strong enough to overpower her, but it is food and he can’t resist anything that’s put in his mouth. Coughs.]
ELLEN:  What is it?
CAL:  How am I supposed to tell, my mouth is on fire?!
ELLEN:  Well, you’d better be able to tell if you want to stay in business, my dear! [Forces in another spoonful.]
CAL [weakly]:  It’s …curry powder!
ELLEN:  Wrong!
CAL:  Paprika…
ELLEN:  Wrong!
CAL:  Clove…
ELLEN:  Wrong!
CAL [in pain]:  …Horseradish.
ELLEN:  Think, Cal. Think!
CAL:  Soy sauce?
ELLEN:  Wrong!
CAL:  Saffron?
ELLEN:  Wrong!
CAL: Ginger?
ELLEN: Wrong!
CAL [with a sob]: I don’t know!
ELLEN: IT’S MUSTARD, CAL. SIMPLE MUSTARD! [She pours out another teaspoon of spice and puts it in his mouth.] …And this?
CAL [spits it out]: Uuugh! You’ve gone crazy.
ELLEN: You don’t know, do you!
CAL: Dill…
ELLEN: You’re so glutted, you can’t even tell…
CAL: Cinnamon.
ELLEN: You can’t even tell bitter from sweet.
CAL: Coffee?
ELLEN: It could be dirt for all you know! [Shoves in another taste.]
CAL: Nutmeg?
ELLEN: Unbelievable!
CAL: Anise?…Brown sugar?…Oregano?…Coriander?…Tarragon?…
ELLEN: It’s salt, Cal. [The doorbell rings.]
CAL: No!
ELLEN: What are we going to do?
CAL: It didn’t taste anything like…
ELLEN: Salt!
CAL [pouring some in his hand]: Salt…
ELLEN: You drank all the Floating Island…
CAL: It didn’t taste anything like salt!
ELLEN: You ate all the grapes…
CAL [tastes the bit in his palm]: Son of a…!
ELLEN: And now, canned peaches…canned!
CAL: You know, that is amazing. I never would have guessed it was…salt…
ELLEN: It makes no difference to you anymore. You’d eat anything and like it. [The doorbell rings again.
ELLEN goes back to stirring her oxtail soup, tastes it, pours the remaining beaten egg yolk into the Billi Bi, tastes that, adding spices. She starts to cry.] There’s someone at the door, you’d better get it…
CAL: I’m sorry, El…I’ll watch it from now on…I didn’t realize…

ELLEN [crying softly as she stirs the soup]:
I can’t do it all by myself, I just can’t…
It’s too hard…so much to do…I get lost sometimes, afraid I’ve done something wrong…I need you to help me…Reassure me, Cal…Tell me it’s good…Tell me it’s fine…Give me that strength…Tell me it’s fine…

CAL [wraps his arms around her, rocks her]:
Ssssshhhh, come on El…It will be all right…We can still do it…We’ll work it out…I’ll watch the eating…They love you out there…They’re breaking the doors down…Listen to them…baby…baby…please…

[The doorbell rings again and again…]

Typed by Stuart Vavra