

CLEANSE

Written by
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INT. ARTISAN VENDOR MALL ICE CREAM BAR - DAY

EVAN (19) enters the vendor mall and briefly stops at the ice cream counter. He's dressed one notch too formal for an ice cream bar. It's tiny and overly curated. Everything is matte pastel.

A chalkboard reads:

"MELTED THEORY"
SMALL-BATCH ETHICAL FROZEN EXPERIENCES

Below that:

TODAY'S FLAVORS
Beet Ripple
Charred Banana Ash
Bi Avocado Drift
Trans Birch Cream
Cucumber Pepper Silk
Lemon Basil Veil
Yani Miso Bloom
Lavender Salt WAP
Inclusive Toasted Hay
Gay Roasted Fig Static
Smoked Vanilla WHORE
Cardamilmf Snow (Cardamom)

To his right, at a small cafe table sit RHEA (34) and JULES (31). Rhea is a super dyke, severe and intense, wearing a shirt that says "I Hate ♂" and Jules is smiling in a way that somehow makes all of it worse. In front of them are two clipboards, tasting spoons, water, and a stack of sample cups.

When they introduce themselves, Rhea overeagerly shares that they're gay, but Jules corrects her and says she's bi. Rhea gets red in the face.

Evan stands awkwardly, trying to seem casual and failing.

EVAN
Thanks for meeting with me. It's
been pretty dry on the job hunt
front, so I really appreciate it.

He sits too early, then stands halfway back up because he thinks maybe he wasn't supposed to yet.

RHEA
Oh? Leaving already?

EVAN
No, I just wasn't sure if I should
wait to be invited to sit down.

A beat.

Rhea waves an open hand in a small circle, implying a type,
most likely male. She checks something on her clipboard.

RHEA
Off to a good start. Most of the
people we get like you don't wait
for or take directions very well.

EVAN
Great, yeah, my mom was really
abusive growing up. I remember this
one time she threw a big-ass
textbook at my head and knocked me
out.

Jules looks a bit confused.

JULES
Yyeeaahh, we don't throw things
like that around here.

EVAN
Perfect. Amazing.

RHEA
So, why do you want to work at
Melted Theory?

EVAN
Honestly, I mean, I like talking to
people, I'm responsible, I'm on
time, and this felt like something
that could be fun.

Silence.

Rhea writes something down.

JULES
Could.

EVAN
I mean would.

RHEA
Fun.

She writes FUN in large letters.

EVAN
I mean serious too. Obviously.

JULES
Ice cream can be serious, yes.

EVAN
Right. That's what I'm saying.

RHEA
You said "fun."

EVAN
I meant both.

RHEA
After.

A long beat.

Jules clears her throat.

JULES
We like to begin with a sensory
literacy assessment.

EVAN
Oh.

JULES
Twelve flavors. Just give us your
honest notes.

EVAN
Okay, yeah. Totally.

RHEA
Not "totally." Specifically.

EVAN
Specifically, yeah.

Rhea slides the first sample over.

FLAVOR ONE.

Evan tastes.

JULES
Initial thoughts?

EVAN
Um... sweet. Cold.

Rhea stares.

RHEA
Anything else.

EVAN
Creamy?

JULES
Anything beyond the legally
required traits of ice cream.

EVAN
Right. Sorry. It tastes kind of...
purple?

RHEA
Purple is not a flavor.

EVAN
No, I know that. I just mean it
tastes how purple looks.

JULES
That is actually closer than
"sweet" and "cold."

Evan gets a little too confident.

EVAN
Oh. Well that's pretty good then.

RHEA
It's not good. It's still bad.

She writes something down.

FLAVOR TWO.

He tastes.

EVAN
Okay. This one's... kind of smoky?

JULES
From what source?

EVAN
Fire.

RHEA
Not all smoke comes from fire in
culinary applications.

EVAN
Sorry. Wood?

JULES
What kind of wood?

EVAN
I don't know, regular wood?
Rhea closes her eyes and sighs deeply.

RHEA
"Regular wood."
She writes it down.

FLAVOR THREE.

He tastes. His face changes immediately.

EVAN
Ew. This one's fucking gross.
Silence.

Jules slowly sets her pen down.

JULES
Oh?

EVAN
Sorry. Sorry, I shouldn't have said
it like that.

RHEA
You said it exactly like that.

EVAN
I just got surprised.

JULES
By the flavor?

EVAN
Yeah.

RHEA
That's what flavor does.

EVAN
No, I know, I just meant--

JULES
Can you try again using language
appropriate for a guest-facing
environment?

EVAN
Okay. Um...

He takes another tiny taste and almost gags.

EVAN (CONT'D)
It's... challenging.

RHEA
That's not a flavor profile word.

Evan is openly annoyed.

EVAN
Okay, well then I guess that one
tastes like if drywall got wet or
something.

A beat.

Jules looks at Rhea.

JULES
That is, unfortunately, the closest
so far.

EVAN
Really?

RHEA
It's avocado fiber with oat
reduction.

EVAN
Okay. Yeah. See, I would never have
known that.

RHEA
Why not?

EVAN
Because no one knows what avocado
fiber is.

JULES
We do.

EVAN
Right, because you sourced it.

RHEA

Cleanse.

She hands him water. He grabs the wrong glass.

JULES

That's my water.

EVAN

Oh my god, sorry.

RHEA

You obviously knew that was my water. I literally handed yours to you.

EVAN

It was a MISTAKE, I'm SORRY.

Beat.

He drinks from his own.

FLAVOR FOUR.

He tastes.

EVAN

This one's better.

RHEA

Better than what.

EVAN

The wet wall one.

JULES

Please don't call our product that.

EVAN

Sorry.

JULES

What specifically is better.

EVAN

It tastes more normal.

Rhea exhales through her nose.

RHEA

"Normal" compared to what framework.

EVAN
Like... if a regular person had ice cream.

RHEA
So you believe our clientele is irregular?

EVAN
No. No, I'm saying the ice cream is irregular.

Silence.

EVAN (CONT'D)
That also came out wrong.

RHEA
Very.

FLAVOR FIVE.

He tastes.

EVAN
Okay, this one tastes like that one vape flavor that everyone liked in like 2016 but, I never liked it.

JULES
What does that mean?

EVAN
It tastes like peppered cucumber in milk.

RHEA
That's spot on, but it's not really selling the flavor.

EVAN
It's like spa water but with milk instead of water.

Jules glances at Rhea.

JULES
That's the best you've done so far!

Evan performs a discreet celebratory fist pump.

EVAN

I don't know, maybe it's just me,
but I really feel like I'm getting
the hang of this.

RHEA

Don't get ahead of yourself now.

Evan rubs his hands together.

EVAN

Onto the next!

Rhea writes something down.

FLAVOR SIX.

JULES

Let's really try to be more
expansive in the description this
time, okay?

EVAN

Okay.

He tastes.

EVAN (CONT'D)

I like this one because, it's ice
cream.

Silence.

RHEA

That's not a description at all.

EVAN

No. You're right. That wasn't a
description. That was me starting a
sentence before I had one. I
thought maybe if I kept talking, it
would become a thought. It didn't.
And I still don't fully believe
this is ice cream in the way a
normal person means ice cream.

JULES

A description would be something
like, "The basil lifts the citrus,
while the dairy base softens the
sharper herbal edge."

EVAN
Yeah, but you know what's in it and
I do not.

JULES
You can still perceive structure.

EVAN
I'm nineteen.

RHEA
And?

EVAN
I just feel like you're asking me
to review a cloud and it's unfair.

MONTAGE - FLAVORS SEVEN THROUGH ELEVEN

-- Evan takes a spoonful.

EVAN
That one tastes like vagina.

-- Another.

EVAN
That one also tastes like vagina.

-- Another.

EVAN
This one tastes expensive in a bad
way.

-- Another.

EVAN
I genuinely cannot tell if I'm
supposed to swallow that.

-- Another.

EVAN
Can we just pretend like I tried it
and we'll see if I can still guess
the flavor? I think that would make

EVAN (CONT'D)
for a better interview honestly.

Rhea's notes get more furious. Jules now looks fascinated,
like she's studying a lab rat.

END MONTAGE.

FLAVOR TWELVE.

Rhea places the final sample down like it still matters.

RHEA

Last one.

JULES

Really take your time.

Evan stares at the cup like it's a threat. He tastes. Long pause.

EVAN

It's smoky, then floral, then creamy, then kind of purple, then sort of regular wood, but in a pleasant way, not in a wet wall way, and I just want to make it clear I'm not saying gross this time.

Silence.

Rhea and Jules look at him.

RHEA

What the hell was that.

EVAN

That was all the words you liked, from before.

RHEA

No, it wasn't.

EVAN

It literally was.

RHEA

It's cardamom smoked vanilla.

EVAN

See, again, you're telling me after the fact.

RHEA

A strong candidate would have identified at least two components.

EVAN
A strong candidate for what, the
CIA?

JULES
For Melted Theory.

EVAN
It's a counter in a vendor mall.

Dead silence. Rhea sets her pen down very carefully.

RHEA
I'm sorry?

EVAN
No, I know how that sounded.

JULES
Do you.

EVAN
Yes, and I'm not trying to
disrespect the place, I'm just
saying I thought this was gonna be
more like, "Can you scoop?" Not 21
flavors but they're not normal.

RHEA
We don't use the word "scoop."

EVAN
Okay?

JULES
We portion.

EVAN
Of course you do.

RHEA
What does that mean.

EVAN
Nothing. It means nothing.

A long pause.

JULES
Is there anything else you want us
to know about your relationship to
frozen dessert?

Evan sits there, exhausted, defeated, a little sweaty.

EVAN
Yeah. I mean, if we're being fully
honest here, I'm actually lactose
intolerant.

Beat.

He throws up violently all over the table and both of them.

A stunned silence. Evan looks at the damage. Then back at
them.

EVAN (CONT'D)
So... did I get the job?

Jules sits frozen, covered in vomit. Rhea, dripping, points
silently to the exit.

RHEA
Get. Out.

EVAN
Okay. Fair enough.

He stands too fast, nearly slips, catches himself, and
rushes off. Jules wipes her cheek.

CUT TO BLACK.