

How to Cook a Duck



Prologue

England, spring 1944. Bainbridge, Alastair, and Lyle, three retired veterans in their 80s, are terrified of dying in their dreary retirement home.

As they struggle to accept that life's last adventure is behind them, Bainbridge receives news that his only living relative, his nephew Reginald, is feared trapped behind enemy lines. The old Brits take up the charge and escape from the retirement home on a rescue mission.

In a comedy of errors they survive crossing the English Channel en route to Lyle's family's château in France but fall into German hands in the small town in Bordeaux. Not sure what else to do with the old men, the Germans situate them in Lyle's château.

Meanwhile, Reginald, a duty-bound naval officer in his 40s, escapes from France back to England where he learns of his uncle's departure. He sneaks back into France to rescue the old men but his boat is dashed upon a shoal. Without means to ferry them home, he joins them at the château.

Act I

Feeling that their life has purpose again rejuvenates the old Brits. They occupy themselves with gardening and eating lavish meals prepared by their French cook Aimeric, all the while convinced that Aimeric has been sent by the Germans to spy on them. They hold fast to this delusion, their *raison d'être* that saves them from the abyss of old age. Reginald, on the other hand, recognizes the truth; the German's are too occupied with losing the war to give them any thought whatsoever.

Reginald discovers an old boat in the woods that he determines will be their means of returning to England. Unbeknownst to him, he is being watched by Marianne, a spirited local French beauty who has developed a crush on him. Furthermore, the boat he's discovered belonged to her father and she is excited to salvage it herself.

Back at the château the flow of gourmet meals from the kitchen tapers off as Aimeric runs out of ingredients due to war rationing. The old Brits, deeply invested in their fantasy, are certain that Aimeric is starving them out at the German's request. They focus their efforts on procuring black-market goods, all the while steadfastly refusing to entertain Reginald's escape plan. Instead, they choose to believe that Marianne is a *femme fatale* sent to seduce Reginald and ferret out information about their mission. To that end, they force Reginald to deliver her the boat to throw the German's off their scent. The irony is not lost on Reginald who realizes the men will do anything not to escape. Out of his deep sense of duty and respect for his uncle, he has no choice but to acquiesce.

Act II

Aimeric, his home life having become insufferable due to his mother-in-law's nagging, moves into the château, causing the old men to believe the Germans are turning up the heat by positioning their spy ever closer.

Meanwhile, Reginald delivers the boat to Marianne who seizes the opportunity to prepare a lavish dinner for him.

Back at the château, Aimeric's cooking has all but ceased. The old men, tipsy, hungry, and more than ever convinced of a German plot against them, crash Reginald's dinner at

Marianne's. They devour his food with gusto but their perceived victory of defeating the German ploy is shattered when Lyle suffers a mild heart attack.

The brush with death breaks Lyle from their collective denial and forces him to face reality. He confides in Reginald that there is a rumor around town he believes is true; that the war is coming to an end. Reginald confronts his uncle, upset that he would keep such critical information from him. But Bainbridge defiantly holds onto his denial as the end of the war would mean the end of his purposeful life.

Just as Bainbridge and Alastair refuse to acknowledge the imminent end to the war, they also rebuff the severity of Lyle's condition and determine he simply needs a good meal and some rest. To that end, they confront Aimeric and demand a proper repast. A brawl ensues, and Aimeric, having been gotten the better of, takes the two old men to a black marketeer and buys them provisions with his personal savings. As Bainbridge and Alastair sample the goods, the black marketeer pleads with Aimeric to attend a French Resistance meeting as they need his guidance more than ever now that the liberation of France is nigh.

That night Reginald, certain that the war is indeed ending, succumbs to his growing feelings for Marianne and resolves to help her fix the boat as he will no longer need it.

Back at the château, Aimeric prepares the old men a lavish feast with their black-market plunder but Lyle is too sick to eat. In determined denial of their friend's worsening condition, Bainbridge and Alastair make themselves busy by tailing Aimeric and crashing the resistance meeting. Once the dust settles, the sobering truth crashes down on them; Aimeric is not a German spy but the former leader of the Resistance, and the war is, in fact, ending.

With reality pressing in, the old Brits determine the only way out is to steal the boat back from Marianne and use it to escape. At Marianne's, Reginald busts them in the act, but their ensuing fight is broken up with the news of Lyle's passing.

The final blow to the old Brits' self-imposed veil of denial is dealt at Lyle's funeral which is interrupted with news that France has been liberated. Reginald accepts the reality and moves in with Marianne while Bainbridge and Alastair retreat into the château and their growing anxiety about what will become of them.

Act III

Reginald fixes Marianne's boat while Bainbridge and Alastair live under siege in the château that has begun to crumble around them. The standoff is impassable; Reginald demands his uncle accept reality and move into a home, a term Bainbridge cannot entertain as it strikes at the heart of his fear.

Marianne convinces Reginald to take them a home cooked meal as a peace offering, but it goes awry when his uncle shoots at a city official who wants to talk about the ownership of the property.

It is the last straw for Reginald and he determines to force his uncle into a home. But Marianne understands the old men are simply afraid and have trapped themselves in a corner. She convinces Reginald to take them to the boat so they can use it to escape and live out their lives on their own terms.

Reginald and Marianne deliver the boat but the police arrive to haul the old Brits in for shooting at the city official. Facing jail dissolves Bainbridge's bravado and he finally allows Reginald to see the extent of his vulnerability and fear. In a plan orchestrated with help from Aimeric, the new Chief of Police, Reginald helps Bainbridge and Alastair escape by sending them on their way up the coast to rendezvous with Aimeric's father, with whom, presumably, they will continue to adventure on.