

THE BAD REVIEW

by

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INT. LOUIS'S HOME - EVENING

LOUIS CAMERON sits at his kitchen table, typing away on his laptop. Louis is a six foot, brunette, handsome restaurant critic in his early thirties. Louis finishes typing and is reading over what he has written with a skeptical look. Louis nods his head a few times and places the computer mouse over the send button in his Email application.

Before he has the chance to click send, there is a loud knock at the door. Louis stands up. The knocks continue in a LOUD, AGGRESSIVE manner. Louis looks through the peephole and slightly opens the door.

LOUIS

Um, hello? Can I help you?

LENA BAYLOR is knocking outside the door. She is a beautiful, strong, red headed restaurant chef in her late twenties. She stands in a haughty stance with an angry look on her face.

LENA

Yes! Hi! Are you Louis?

LOUIS

Yes. And you are...

LENA

Lena. Lena Baylor. Name ring a bell?

LOUIS

Pardon me, but I can't say it does.

LENA

Is this not the residence of, er, critic Lizette Burley?

LOUIS

(clears his throat
nervously)

Wrong address.

Louis hastily shuts the door but Lena catches it just before it completely closes and shoves her way inside.

LENA

Give me ten minutes to explain myself!

LOUIS

This is completely inappropriate.

LENA

You have to understand-

LOUIS

Why would you ever think it's okay to show up at my home? How did you even get my address?

LENA

It's just that-

LOUIS

Are you out of your mind!?

LENA

Look, I-

LOUIS

It's these damn yellow pages. You can find anything you want in just a-

LENA

CAN YOU PLEASE LET ME EXPLAIN MYSELF!

LOUIS

Er, okay.

LENA

Look, the newspaper sent my boss a copy of the review you wrote for Alejandro's.

LOUIS

I forgot they started doing that. As a courtesy.

LENA

(sarcastically)

Yeah, a COURTESY.

(earnestly)

The review you wrote was really nasty. Everyone's entitled to his or her own opinion but you've gotta understand that this will ruin me. I'll lose my job, I won't have a source of income, you'll kill my self drive.

LOUIS

Ma'am-

LENA

Lena.

LOUIS

Lena, you can't just come marching into some stranger's home demanding a review you did not earn. I tasted your food, and I wrote what I tasted. And frankly, what I tasted was subpar.

LENA

I know. I get it. Give me a chance to change your mind.

LOUIS

I'm truly sorry, but it's too late.

LENA

Can't be. Please, let me prove you wrong before you send the final copy to the publisher.

LOUIS

Lena, I just can't-

LENA

One meal. Let me cook you ONE meal to change your mind!

LOUIS

I'm sorry, no.

LENA

Come on! Free food! Yum!

LOUIS

I always get free food. That's my occupation.

LENA

One chance. I need one chance to prove myself and you won't be sorry.

LOUIS

I just want to go to sleep. Please leave.

LENA

Come on! I'll cook you dinner. If you hate it, I'll never bother you again.

(MORE)

LENA (CONT'D)

Just give me the chance to at least prove to you that I'm a really good cook.

LOUIS

Ummmm...

LENA

PLEASE! Please, please, please!
Please just let me-

LOUIS

Fine.

LENA

Splendid! So... what types of food do you fancy?

LOUIS

Anything delicious.

LENA

(trying to crack a joke)
So not my cooking? Am I right!

Lena giggles at her own joke. Louis awkwardly twiddles his thumbs and avoids eye contact.

LENA

(uncomfortable)
Well, anyway... how does some Italian cooking sound to you?

LOUIS

Works for me.

LENA

Perfect!

LOUIS

If you'll just excuse me for one moment, I need to use the rest room.

LENA

Sure! Just make yourself at home.

Louis shoots Lena a confused look. Lena flashes a dazzling smile. Louis heads to the living room, opens his laptop and clicks the computer mouse. The computer screen is NOT SHOWN.

INT. LOUIS'S KITCHEN - LATER THAT EVENING

Louis makes his way back to the kitchen and takes a DRAMATIC, EXTENDED WHIFF of the air.

LOUIS
(in a surprised tone)
That smells... delicious.

LENA
Just wait 'til you taste it! My
wedding soup is to die for.

LOUIS
Is being humble one of your strong
suits?

LENA
(mock offended)
Hey! Confidence is key!

LOUIS
Let's just see if the taste lives
up to all this hype.

LENA
Bon appetit! I'm going to get
crackin' on the entre but enjoy!
Compliments are always accepted in
my kitchen!

Louis stares at the bowl of soup for a great length of time before picking up his spoon. He holds a spoonful of soup up to his nose, breaths in the broth, and then finally eats it.

LOUIS
Wow.

LENA
Is that a good wow? Or a bad wow? A
wow - this needs more salt? Or a
wow, maybe I could go for some-

LOUIS
Lena, it's delicious.

LENA
(unable to contain her
smile)
Eh, you know. Just something I
whipped up. No big.

Louis chuckles.

LOUIS

Let's see what else you have in store.

LENA

Okay, time for the main course. What are we thinking? Something on the fancier side? I may be able to impress you with a little veal marsala.

LOUIS

Um, could we err on the side of simplicity?

LENA

I mean, lasagna is my specialty. Thoughts?

Louis's stomach growls.

LOUIS

(awkwardly laughing)
Lasagna sounds delectable.

LENA

Let's get to cooking!

INT. LOUIS'S KITCHEN - LATER

LENA

The lasagna is going to take a while, do you wanna open one of these bottles of wine now? We can sip and chat on the couch?

LOUIS

Sure! We can save the other for dinner.

LENA

Great! Superb! Sounds awesome!

Lena and Louis walk into her living room and sit down on the couch.

INT. LOUIS'S LIVING ROOM - EVENING

LOUIS

You're a very animated person, Lena. I can tell you really enjoy what you do.

LENA
It's my passion.

LOUIS
Yeah?

LENA
Isn't your occupation your passion?

LOUIS
Sure. I'm good at what I do. I like succeeding. I like bringing home a paycheck.

LENA
That's not the way you should be talking about a job.

LOUIS
(sarcastically)
You don't say?

LENA
I don't know where I'd be in life if I wasn't a chef. I worked hard in school but never would've had the grades to make it to college. My parents couldn't afford to send me anywhere after high school so I got an after school job senior year at our local diner. The chef let me cook every now and then when the rush slowed down. I was serving a customer this very dish when he approached me about filling an empty position at his culinary school. Someone was looking out for me that day.

LOUIS
Some story.

LENA
It's just more of a love than a job. I absolutely adore it. I love the smells, the feel of the ingredients, the spices, the-

LOUIS
Taste?

LENA
(chuckling)
Yes! Definitely that too.

LOUIS
 (in admiration)
 It's special when you find
 something you love to do.

LENA
 And get paid for it as well!

LOUIS
 (smiling)
 Absolutely.

Lena blushes. She catches herself gazing at Louis and shakes her entire body as if shaking off the notion. The oven timer sounds.

LENA
 Sounds like the foods ready!

LOUIS
 Looking forward to this infamous
 lasagna!

Lena gets up to go to the kitchen and Louis follows her.

INT. LOUIS'S KITCHEN - EVENING

Lena opens the oven. She burns her arm on the side of the oven.

LENA
 Shit!

LOUIS
 Did you just burn yourself?

LENA
 Ow, yeah. I'm the worst when it
 comes to heated surfaces.

LOUIS
 (tenderly grabbing her
 arm)
 Ah, yes. Let's get it under some
 cool water.

Louis turns on the faucet and places Lena's arm under it. Once under the water, he lets go of her arm.

LENA
 (delicately)
 Thanks. That feels a lot better.
 (MORE)

LENA (CONT'D)
(snapping back into her
loud demeanor)
Sit down! Dinner is being served!
And if you don't like this then
there's something seriously wrong
with your taste buds.

LOUIS
Bring it on!

Lena dries her hands and puts on oven mits. She places the dish in front of Louis and serves him a slice. She runs back to her kitchen and pulls out the other bottle of red wine, pours two glasses and sits down at the table next to Louis.

Louis takes his first bite and chews for a long time. Lena watches Louis eat.

LOUIS
(swallowing)
You know. The manner in which
you're observing me eat your food
right now is pretty similar to the
expression you might have while
watching a film in the thriller
genre.

LENA
(exasperated)
OH COME ON!

LOUIS
Well.

LENA
Yeah?

LOUIS
Best lasagna I've ever eaten.

Lena's cheeks instantly flush.

LENA
(smiling from ear to ear)
Thanks.

LOUIS
(excited)
Absolutely divine! It's so
succulent! It's ambrosial!

LENA
I'm so happy you love it!

INT. LOUIS'S KITCHEN - LATER

Louis ferociously finishes his serving and helps himself to a second. Lena gets up from the table, grabs LARGE strawberries covered in chocolate from the refrigerator and returns to the table. She has a nervous expression on her face.

LENA

(hesitant and stuttering)
So, you r-really enjoyed the food,
huh-uh?

LOUIS

(distracted with stuffing
his face)
Yep! Delicious!

Lena pushes the plate of strawberries toward Louis. Louis uses one hand to continue eating and the other to place two strawberries on his plate.

LENA

Really outdid the meal you had at
my restaurant, didn't it?

LOUIS

(still distracted by the
food)
Oh yeah. A review on this meal
would have turned out WAY
different.

LENA

Think that could become a reality?

LOUIS

(snapping back into the
present)
Excuse me?

LENA

Er, sorry. That was a bold way to
lead into this.

LOUIS

Lead into what, exactly?

LENA

Look, I'm so happy you enjoyed this
meal. I really wanted to prove to
you that I'm not the chef you wrote
about.

LOUIS
And you did.

LENA
You truly feel that way?

LOUIS
Do I feel that this meal was
superb? Absolutely.

LENA
Louis, please. Is there any way,
any possibility, you might be able
to swap a review on this meal out
for the other. It would mean the-

LOUIS
No.

LENA
-world, wait what?

LOUIS
I can't do that.

LENA
What the! You just let me cook that
whole meal for you and you're NOT
even going to consid-

LOUIS
Did you cook the meal to prove a
point or save your ass?

LENA
Well I... It's just that...

LOUIS
Lena.

LENA
You don't understand what this is
going to do to me! Everything I've
worked for is going to get taken
from me. I'm going to get fired. My
reputation will be destroyed. Can't
you just go out on a limb here for
me!

LOUIS
And just flush my integrity down
the drain? Lena, you're a talented
chef, there's no questions asked
about that.

(MORE)

LOUIS (CONT'D)

But you need to have some confidence in what you're good at. Because what you're good at making, you're REALLY GOOD at making. You have the potential to shine, you just choose to cook what everyone else in town is making. Stick to what you know, and you'll succeed.

LENA

How can you say that? I don't understand?

LOUIS

Lena, you cooked with knowledge and experience tonight. You used ingredients you're used to, recipes you've memorized and the taste really proved that. I know that what I SO enjoyed tonight was something that many before me have enjoyed in the same way. What you prepared in the restaurant was some wannabe creation that you piggybacked off the cafe down the street. It was you trying to be something you're simply not. That's not you. This, this is you.

LENA

But I-

LOUIS

Please. Just let that sink in. Just take this as a learning opportunity. I want to see you go places, to fill the stomachs of thousands of customers with delicacies. Delicacies with a little Lena spin on them.

LENA

(still disappointed)

Okay. I understand. I'm going to head out.

LOUIS

It was really a pleasure spending this evening with you. Thanks for the delicious meal.

LENA
Don't mention it. Thanks for the
help. Maybe we'll cross paths
again. Good night, Louis.

LOUIS
(smiling)
Good night, Lena.

Lena exits his home.

INT. LENA'S KITCHEN - MORNING

Lena is sipping her coffee at the kitchen table when she
hears the paper boy leaving her driveway. She gets up from
the table and grabs the paper from her porch. She brings it
back to the table and opens it.

LENA
(opening paper to her
review)
Ugh.

Lena reads the poor review she had previously seen. The
article continues onto a jump page and when she opens the
paper to the jump, a look of shock comes over her face.

An attachment to the article reads the headline, "BAD MEAL
PREPARED BY AN EXQUISITE CHEF". She scans over a summary of
how the critic was lucky enough to have his mind swayed by
some excellent Italian cooking in a second dine-in
experience.

Lena picks up the phone and dials a number.

LENA
(into the phone)
Yes, hi. I was calling to speak to
Louis, Louis Cameron. Yes, I'll
hold.

FADE TO BLACK