

FOODIES

"The Reservation"

by

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INT. KOREAN SEAFOOD RESTAURANT - NIGHT

A restaurant filled with aquariums, cigarette smoke and Korean clientele. We land on a booth with THREE GUYS - their table overflows with exotic dishes - eating, drinking, laughing like old friends.

LEO (early 30's) holds court. He dresses the part of a writer. Unshaven, bed-head, little old for his rock T-shirts. He wants to be the next great food critic.

WOODRUFF (don't call him by his first name) is a handsome and stylish branding executive. His criteria for restaurants stops at the cocktail program and waitress date-ability.

NATE is an anxious and sensitive soul in business short sleeves with a nearby bike helmet. A chef groupie, he's always glancing in the direction of the kitchen.

LEO

Guess what I drove by yesterday?
Woulda stopped for a burger but it
closed down. For good.
(off their looks)
The Bucket.

NATE

*The Bucket?! That's terrible. We
should launch a Kickstarter or
something.*

WOODRUFF

... Eh.

Before Leo can respond, a WAITER drops off a plate of thrashing tentacles. Woodruff and Nate inch back.

LEO

Ah. The main course - Lidako
octopus.

NATE

Whoa, isn't that illegal--

LEO

Why do you think I picked this
place?

With chopsticks, Nate and Woodruff attack the table's squirmy dishes. But Leo's staring at Woodruff.

LEO (CONT'D)

"Eh"? That's your response? Me waiting tables, you behind the bar, Nate in the kitchen. We were like the Beatles and that was our Cavern Club.

WOODRUFF

You romanticize everything. It was a dump that had air hockey.

NATE

(backsliding)

The food was bad. Plus those rats.

LEO

It's where we met. It was an LA institution.

(then, sad)

You don't miss something till it's--

Nate bangs on the table for help -- he has part of an octopus wriggling from his mouth.

LEO (CONT'D)

Watch the suction cups. They stick to your teeth.

(glancing around)

Making us look like amateurs here, Nate. Bite down, buddy.

Cringing, Nate chokes it down. Embarrassed, he plays it off.

NATE

Tasty stuff. Very fresh.

WOODRUFF

No shit, it's fresh. It's moving.

LEO

One time I ate at this creole place where they flambe the live shrimp in absinthe. I saw insane colors. Greta looked like a Van Gogh.

Woodruff nudges Nate. They both take a big drink.

LEO (CONT'D)

What was that?

WOODRUFF

New drinking game. We drink every time you mention Greta.

LEO

Look, the story wasn't about her.
Greta just happened to be--

Nate and Woodruff drink again.

LEO (CONT'D)

Fuck you both. This has been the
week from hell-- Hey you get those
reservations for next week yet?

WOODRUFF

I had to follow the chef on Twitter
and e-mail a statement letter like
I was applying to Yale and still
radio silence.

NATE

Is this Travis Tang's new
restaurant? Very tough rez.

LEO

Don't say 'rez.' But exactly.
That's why it's so important I get
in there.

Leo hesitates, sees the guys are waiting for more.

LEO (CONT'D)

The only people allowed in are
Travis's backers, friends and
family and connected assholes like
you. They don't want anyone writing
about the restaurant yet.

NATE

What's the point if you can't--

LEO

The point is I will write about it!

WOODRUFF

I love when you talk tough about
food blogging. I'm getting wet.

LEO

My reviews need to get noticed. The
better the meal, the better my
prose. And if this dinner is half
as transcendent as the one I had at
his pop-up in Brooklyn last year
with Greta this will be the best
review--

Leo grabs Woodruff and Nate's wrists before they can reach their drinks. They stop scrambling as the Waiter arrives looking for room for more plates on the table's near-avalanche of food.

WAITER

Special occasion? You celebrate birthday? More soju? Birthday soju?

LEO

No, no. Just a couple friends getting--

NATE

(too enthusiastic)

We're a food club. You know, going out and pushing the culinary envelope. We've been doing this way before it was a thing.

WOODRUFF

He doesn't give a shit, Nate.

Woodruff motions to the Waiter clearly not giving a shit.

WAITER

Right. So you *foodies*?

Leo glowers. Nate and Woodruff settle in for the show.

LEO

No! Jesus, who came up with that awful word. Like we're fanboys.

Looking sorry he asked, the Waiter drops the check in the middle of the table. Leo looks hopefully at Woodruff.

LEO (CONT'D)

You got this, right?

(off his look)

You know, your expense account?

WOODRUFF

What client would I be wining and dining in this place? C'mon, split three ways it's only like 16 bucks.

LEO

(sheepish)

Exactly.

Scoffing, Woodruff hands the waiter his credit card. A squeal of feedback makes them turn.

A DJ dressed like Elvis fires up a karaoke machine in the corner - he begins crooning a *Guns n' Roses* song in Korean. Tables are scraped away making room for a dance floor. The guys watch a bachelorette party in short skirts strut by.

WOODRUFF

Maybe we will have a round of
birthday soju.

The guys nod to the Waiter, eager to stick around.

EXT. PARKING LOT, KOREAN STRIP MALL -- LATER

The threesome stumble drunkenly out as the restaurant's lights flicker off. Nate unlocks his bike. Woodruff clicks the key chain of his vintage Porsche. Fumbling with his keys, Leo falls into his old Subaru.

NATE

Sure you're cool to dri--

LEO

As a cucumber. Later, gentlemen.

Leo's car squeals past them going way too fast and rattles down the street.

Woodruff and Nate exchange what-can-you-do shrugs and split off in separate directions.

INT. LEO'S SUBARU - LATER

Leo's driving. Classic LA punk shakes his windows. Neon signs for pho shops and taco stands scroll down his windshield...

EXT. STREET CORNER NEAR DODGER STADIUM - MOMENTS LATER

Sketchy street corner with stadium lights in the b.g. A Latino woman (LUCIA) in a Dodgers cap mans a churro cart. A regular, Leo devours a churro smothered in gooey goodness.

LEO

Got an email today - a reminder
about my reservation at Shinzo's in
Seattle. He personally massages
every cut of kobe beef for a half
hour so it's extra tender.

LUCIA

Sounds... interesting?

LEO

This was the week Greta and I were supposed to be on our food trip up the coast.

LUCIA

If that's your idea of an invitation, I've got plans.

Leo smiles and finishes his mouthful.

LEO

I'll take one more. For a night cap.

As Lucia preps another hot churro, Leo drops a handful of crumpled bills in her tip jar.

INT. BUNGALOW COURT, LOS FELIZ - LATER

Leo pulls up to a cool bungalow, eating his churro from a greasy bag.

Through the window, a stylish beautiful young woman (GRETA) clicks on some music, flips through her mail and dances into her kitchen like she's just getting home from work. A pitbull follows her, tail wagging.

LEO

Hey Meatball. You taking care of mommy.

As Greta eats takeout, Leo eats his churro -- almost like they're dining together. Leo drops some churro on his shirt. He tidies himself, glances back up-- Greta has the dog leashed and is heading outside where she'll no doubt see him.

LEO (CONT'D)

Fuck, fuck.

Leo reverses, dings the car behind him sparking its ALARM and peels off with his engine rattling into the distance.

INT. ENID'S APARTMENT, DTLA - LATER

A one-bedroom apartment. Most lights are off. From behind the closed door, a woman's moans can be heard; or maybe it's womens' moans.

With headphones blasting music, Leo types on his beat-up laptop. An island of his belongings (guitar, books, vinyl, T-shirts) is piled in the corner.

LEO (V.O.)

... And while tonight's octopus was dead, its spasms made it feel very much alive. And isn't that what eaters like Woodruff, Nate and I were seeking there tonight - to sidestep our daily digital drag to experience something new that can't be downloaded or streamed, to feel alive. If so, carpe diem from Koreatown's Ocean Emporium.

Leo finishes, posts to his site, Foodistheneweverything.com and slaps shut the laptop. Standing, he struggles to pull out the creaky living room futon -

LEO

Ow!

- and wrenches his back. In pain, he collapses on the creaky contraption. He folds a pillow over his ears to drown out the sex sounds and waits in his rumpled clothes to pass out.

Unable to sleep, he finds the remaining churro in his pocket and gnaws on it like a baby with his bottle.

TITLE CARD: FOODIES

Roll Credits: A rapid succession of food photos interspersed with Leo, Nate and Woodruff over the last 10 years. They're toasting at Oktoberfest, posing with sushi chefs and BBQ pitmasters, sitting in with mariachi bands, jostling in line at food trucks and (back in their 20's, in work t-shirts) eating and drinking, blissful and content, at the bar of The Bucket.

INT. ENID'S APARTMENT -- MORNING

BEEP BEEP BEEP! Leo's phone alarm blares - 7:00 am. Hungover, Leo silences the alarm. He hears the shower running down the hall.

Leo stretches out and flips through Instagram -- Greta's feed. It's all food porn but every once in a while she's in view behind the plate. Leo can't help but tug on himself under the covers.

ENID

ARGGGGH!

ENID (pretty but too thin, no nonsense, 25) screams from her bedroom doorway. She slams the door! Leo's horrified.

LEO
 Oh god -- I'm sorry! Enid?! I'm
 sorry! I was just... *itching?*

An attractive girl in a towel, last night's guest, exits the bathroom on the other side of the room. She's chuckling. Leo shrugs apologetically at her, turns back to the closed door.

LEO (CONT'D)
 Enid?!

A beat.

ENID (O.S.)
 ... Put on some coffee.

INT. KITCHEN, ENID'S APARTMENT - MOMENTS LATER

At the counter in a business pantsuit, Enid jabs at a grapefruit. Leo pours a French press into mugs with Wellbutrin and Prozac ads. He pops a few aspirin with his coffee.

ENID
 Another big Thursday night?

LEO
 Wanna come sometime?

ENID
 I'd rather die. Can't you guys geek out over a normal hobby? Fantasy football? Poker? Golf?

LEO
 Food is not just my hobby.

ENID
 Well it's not your job.

LEO
 Yet.

ENID
 You've been stinking up my apartment with leftovers and stealing my pharmaceutical samples for six months. You still owe me two grand and yesterday I found a \$400 sushi bill in your laundry -- and why the fuck am I doing your laundry! Oh my god - *you're turning me into mom.*

LEO

This is my passion! Who knows more about food in this city than me?!

ENID

Just the type of modesty employers love.

LEO

There's a rumor *LA Weekly's* hiring soon. I just gotta boost my profile. Unearth the hidden gems, cover the new spots before anyone else.

ENID

Sometimes following your passion isn't the best career path. You think I like flirting with doctors to sell boner pills all day? Plus, you're getting flabby.

Leo touches his stomach. Standing, Enid packs up her pharmaceutical case.

ENID (CONT'D)

Look, I get it. Greta was smart and hilarious and had an amazing body and you probably think you'll never get anyone of that caliber again-
(sincere but fumbling)
But... hey you don't know that for sure, right. Anything could happen.

Enid pats Leo on the shoulder and starts heading out leaving him more depressed than before.

LEO

You're right, Enid.
(off her looking back)
You are turning into mom.

INT. WOODRUFF'S CONDO, HOLLYWOOD - NEXT MORNING

Angle on a neon sign for "The Thirsty Gull." Reveal Woodruff in his boxer shorts making blender drinks at his impressive home bar. Behind him is his condo's killer view. Otherwise the place is cold and barren.

A pretty executive-type stumbles out his bathroom fixing her hair. It was clearly a rough night.

WOODRUFF

Morning!

(silencing blender)

I'm making smoothies. No booze. I mean, unless you want booze?

Looking at the bar, she shakes her head.

BUSINESS WOMAN

That's the last time I accept an invite for a Sazerac at '*LA's most exclusive bar.*' Uck. Who even uses pick-up lines like that anymore?

WOODRUFF

Exactly! Everyone just uses their apps. I'm old-school, out there doing artisanal pick-ups.

(tosses a bottle flair bartending-style)

Tell me that wasn't the best Sazerac of your life?

BUSINESS WOMAN

Five ago I would've found you charming. Barely.

(sighs)

I need a cab back to that wine bar. Where the hell are my heels?

As she stumbles around, Woodruff's phone rings. He answers.

LEO (O.S.)

It's been two days - I miss us. Free for lunch?

Woodruff leisurely samples the green smoothie from the blender.

WOODRUFF

Hmm. I dunno, Leo. I'm pretty busy.

INT. HIP RAMEN SHOP - LATER

Lunch rush at a hip ramen shop. Leo and Woodruff sit at the teak counter. A Waitress with a punk rock-look arrives.

CUTE WAITRESS

One number 2. And... one number 11.

The Waitress puts a huge bowl filled with a lava-like substance in front of Leo. Leo takes a dramatic breath.

LEO

Fingers crossed. Your wall of fame
may be about to get its first
Caucasian.

Leo motions to the wall displaying a few Polaroids of
Japanese men posing with empty bowls like soldiers with war
trophies. The Waitress smiles.

CUTE WAITRESS

Famous last words.

The Waitress walks off. Leo starts eating. Woodruff watches
her.

WOODRUFF

Look at that tone little karate
body go.

LEO

Can we just have one meal without
you trying to fuck the waitress?

WOODRUFF

Can we have one meal when you just
order something normal?

LEO

Where are we with those
reservations for Thursday?

WOODRUFF

I've got two assistants and one
entitled intern working on it.

LEO

I've gotta be there. This is gonna
be like Pauline Kael championing
Bonnie & Clyde or Jon Landau
discovering Springsteen for *Rolling
Stone*. The review that puts me on
the map--

CUTE WAITRESS

How is everything?

LEO

The springy noodles, the broth's
texture. Deliciously complex.

WOODRUFF

Is it just me or when he talks
noodles do you get goosebumps too?

Embarrassed, Leo shoots Woodruff a look. The Waitress turns away -- then puts a plastic jug of chocolate milk on the counter and leans in.

CUTE WAITRESS

This will at least coat your stomach. Good luck.

Leo can't help be flattered as she smiles and walks off.

WOODRUFF

Freshman year all over again. I did everything for you but light the incense and put on Norah Jones. Don't blow this.

Gulping milk between spoonfuls of ramen, Leo waves him off.

LEO

Just shut up. I'm not in that dating headspace right now.

WOODRUFF

Finish that bowl and you'll be back at her place in no time. Granted you'll have raging diarrhea.

LEO

Oh god, I just hit a wall of jalapenos.

Passing by, the Waitress doubles-takes at Leo's progress.

CUTE WAITRESS

Nearly halfway? Not bad.

The waiters take notice. Patrons start to encourage him.

WOODRUFF

You're the crowd favorite.

Buoyed by the support, Leo eats faster. Nearing the final stretch, he lifts the bowl up in a theatrical gesture.

LEO

Mazel tov.

He starts gulp-gulp-gulping his way to the bottom. Everyone's filming with their phones now.

CUTE WAITRESS

Impressive, I didn't think-- *Oh my god.*

Leo's lowered the bowl for a breath -- not only is his face red, but he's got a gushing bloody nose.

WOODRUFF

Time-out. Injury on the field.

Woodruff shoves the napkin dispenser at him. Leo wipes himself but he's sweating so much the napkins deteriorate to pieces.

LEO

I'm fine. No big deal-- Goddammit
it's hot in here, though?

Leo clutches his chest. His bowl crashes to the floor. Veins bulging, he curdles over at the counter.

CUTE WAITRESS

What the hell is wrong with him!?

INT. BACK ALLEY, RAMEN PLACE - LATER

His shirt stained with blood, chocolate milk and ramen, Leo sits on a crate collecting himself. Woodruff stands in front of him.

LEO

I think it's some acid reflux
thing. It's happened before.

WOODRUFF

I thought you were dying. All your
roach coach and C-level dining's
probably given you crazy
cholesterol, parasites and Christ
knows what else.

LEO

Occupational hazard.

WOODRUFF

Not to mention you totally cock
blocked yourself.

Woodruff helps Leo up. They walk down the alley.

WOODRUFF (CONT'D)

You need to see a doctor.

LEO

Don't try to show concern. It just
feels unnatural - like that gorilla
who nursed the kitten.

INT. CYBER PROMOTIONS OFFICES, GLENDALE - LATER

A data services (aka spam) firm. Rows of hunchbacked workers sit on their computers and headsets. Looking left and right, Leo (hoodie over his stained shirt) hurries past and grabs his seat. Having slipped in unseen, he tries to get online.

LEO
What the fuck.

Leo catches his coworkers looking -- they spin away from him.

LEO (CONT'D)
Is the net down? Hector, how are you on Pinterest? Anyone? Hello?

INT. IVAN'S OFFICE -- CONTINUOUS

Management office with a view of the parking lot. IVAN (musclehead in a cheap suit) chows a protein bowl while reading *48 Laws of Power*. There's kettlebells in the corner. Leo knocks and walks in.

IVAN
You make an appointment?

LEO
With whom? Were you at my station?
Is my Internet blocked?

IVAN
I'm gonna start calling you Triple
L. Long Lunch Leo.

LEO
Dental appointment.

IVAN
And Monday? You were gone for over
two hours. Same on Friday.

LEO
(opens mouth)
They're doing bridge work.

IVAN
Really? According to your blog you
were eating BBQ in Compton. Then
Ethiopian on Fairfax. Gross.

LEO
You read my site?

IVAN

Skimmed. I don't get the big deal with food. Know what I had for lunch? Try 300 body-weight burpees in Crossfit.

LEO

Ivan, don't you ever just, like, miss pizza?

IVAN

I get it. You wanna be the next, like, John Grisham.

(off Leo's cringe)

But not on our dime. You're blocked from non-work websites. You get one hour for lunch. And you don't leave the complex.

LEO

What!?

IVAN

This building has a dynamite cafeteria. I highly recommend the protein turkey bowl.

INT. FARMER'S MARKET - MORNING (THAT SUNDAY)

Leo and Nate shop a popular Farmer's Market. In his bike shorts, Nate holds a tote bag full of fresh finds, exchanges greetings with the vendors and makes a show of sniffing/squeezing the produce. Leo eats a burrito from a nearby food truck.

NATE

Suki's family's driving up for dinner this week. So, I offered to make whatever they wanted. And you know how hard it is for me to cook under pressure, for a crowd.

LEO

Your culinary impotence has killed many a Thanksgiving.

NATE

They said "no." You believe that? They want to go to, wait for it, *Olive Garden*.

LEO

I don't understand these Olive
Garden fanatics. It's like
Scientology with breadsticks.

Leo suddenly tosses away his burrito and ducks behind a
vendor's tent.

NATE

Where you going? I need to find
garlic scapes--

He pulls Nate in with him.

LEO

Shhh!

Leo motions - there's Greta at a vendor with her pitbull. She
looks beautiful in a sundress. A hipster farmer dumps box
after box of fruit in a bag for her.

LEO (CONT'D)

Who needs that many kumquats - *is*
she on some kind of fruit flush?
Look at that guy flirting with her.

NATE

Is that? Wow, Greta looks gr--
(catches self, off Leo)
Jesus, are you ok?

LEO

Do I look ok?! I can't handle
seeing her right now. Not while I'm
wearing sweatpants and with even
less job prospects than when she
left me.

The dog spots Leo spying and barks happily. Greta turns to
look -- Leo ducks back behind the tent and hurries away with
Nate tailing.

NATE

Don't be so nostalgic about being
in a relationship. I didn't tell
you the kicker yet. Suki planned
this family dinner from hell for
Thursday. She knows that's my
night.

LEO

That sucks. Sorry...
(thinking aloud)
(MORE)

LEO (CONT'D)

Although maybe it'll be easier to get reservations to 'Dorado' if it's only two of us.

NATE

What!? No, no, no. Not again. I missed omakasa at Sushi Gen cause Suki needed me to run lines.

LEO

You said you had diarrhea? Hey, next time you fake a sickness, just say the flu for godsakes.

NATE

You know what? I'm putting my foot down. *Fuck the fucking Olive Garden.*

A yoga mom with kids looks over. Nate wilts but Leo can't help but be amused.

LEO

(to the mom)

Don't even get him started on Outback Steakhouse.

INT. LUNCH CAFE, CYBER PROMOTIONS OFFICES - NEXT DAY

A dreary basement cafe with misspelled chalkboard specials and a microwave in full-view behind the counter. A Spanish-language soap plays on the TV.

Sitting with his co-workers, Leo stares down at his unappetizing protein turkey bowl. Ivan approaches.

IVAN

Isn't this nice? Synergizing with your coworkers. How's the turkey bowl?

LEO

Like something died in my mouth.

Rebuffed, Ivan takes a piece of paper out of his folder.

IVAN

Oh. Almost forgot. Left your resume in the fax machine. Again.

Ivan crumples up the paper and shoots it into the trash.

IVAN (CONT'D)

Man, how many of these babies have
you sent out? Least a dozen, right?
That's tough.

Ivan walks off. Embarrassed in front his coworkers, Leo punishes himself by trying a big spoonful of his lunch. His phone rings and he answers.

WOODRUFF (O.S.)

Better do some laundry before
Thursday. The reservation king just
scored us three seats for Thursday.

Leo spits out his food as his coworkers cringe. He jumps to his feet, shaking the table.

LEO

Yes! Yes! Fuck yes!

Ivan and the whole cafeteria glance over. Giddy, Leo sighs with relief and sits back down.

INT. 'DORADO' RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Leo, Nate and Woodruff (all spiffed-up) enter a restaurant space that feels both hip and exclusive but warm.

There's a small cool crowd and a DJ spinning. CHEF TRAVIS (handsome, sleeves of tats, late 20's) works with intense concentration in the open kitchen like a genius conductor.

The threesome look around excitedly. Suddenly Woodruff and Nate share a look of concern.

WOODRUFF

You know what? Suddenly I'm
not really feeling this
place.

NATE

Yeah. There's a new shabu
shabu spot around here I'm
dying to try.

Woodruff and Nate try to hustle a baffled Leo towards the door.

LEO

What? After all that? This is the
soft open of the most--

Leo spots what Nate and Woodruff saw -- Greta! She's speaking with the Hostess. Leo spins on his heels to flee when:

GRETA

Leo?

Caught, Leo turns back. Greta smiles - professional, but warm and beautiful. Greta sees the other guys, waves.

GRETA (CONT'D)

Wow, flashback. The band's all here. Hey Nate. Woodruff. How are you guys?

NATE

Hi Greta. Cool spot.

WOODRUFF

Sup girl. Wish I knew you worked here before I paid a scalper thru the nose on Craigslist.

GRETA (CONT'D)

Well. Welcome. What a surprise. Same old boys' club. Looks like Thursday nights haven't changed.

LEO

No, they've changed. Lots of changes going on here.

GRETA

Well... this is an unofficial opening so please tell me you left your notebook at home.

LEO

Um, yeah. Of course. Pleasure, not business.

Leo smiles uneasily and the guys nods along. Greta hands menus to the Hostess.

GRETA

Naomi will escort you to your seats.

(then)

Nice to see you, Leo.

LEO

(rambling, nervous)

You too. Maybe I'll see you later? I mean, of course I will, we'll be in the same room, so. Okay, bye.

Turning to follow the Hostess, Leo curses himself.

NATE

You okay? Should we bail?

WOODRUFF

Don't make a scene.

The Hostess motions to their table.

LEO
Nobody's bailing or making a scene.

Sitting, Leo unflaps his napkin and glances furtively over his shoulders.

LEO (CONT'D)
I'm a professional here to review a meal. Let's eat.

Nate and Woodruff exchange worried looks. The DJ drops the needle on a record...

SPEED-MOTION sequence:

Think Clockwork Orange orgy or Keystone cops -- our threesome devour plate after small plate in rapid succession. Woodruff's ordering wine and they're drinking and eating like conquering Vikings in fast forward. They're having a great time. Except Leo - as he eats/drinks his eyes stay on Greta.

END SEQUENCE.

WOODRUFF
Holy shit.

Woodruff's spotted someone across the room -- a 20-something exec, ZACH, sits down with a table of beautiful people.

WOODRUFF (CONT'D)
That's my old assistant, Zach.
Damn, he's got a good table.

NATE
Looks like he's doing pretty well for himself.

WOODRUFF
Oh yeah. I was just reading he founded his own company. And guess who taught that little punk everything he knows.

Woodruff flags the passing Waitress.

WOODRUFF (CONT'D)
Can you deliver a bottle of Cuvve Louis to the young gentleman at that table. Tell him it's from me.

WAITRESS
Yes si--

WOODRUFF

Oh tell him I need him to grab me a latte and pick-up my dry-cleaning ASA-fucking-P.

(off Waitress's look)

Say it just like that. He'll love it.

WAITRESS

Right away.

The Waitress walks off. Seeing Greta approach, Leo straightens up. Greeting them with a smile, Greta passes out their desserts.

GRETA

Thought I'd bring dessert over. It's our little spin on the churro. How's everything so far?

NATE

Amazing.

WOODRUFF

Great.

LEO

Gotta admit I was surprised to see you. I never thought you'd leave your old restaurant. You were the backbone there at Mozza.

GRETA

I liked the idea of being on the ground floor of something, you know. I thought it was time for a change.

Leo winces a little like he's heard this before.

GRETA (CONT'D)

And so, you're good? Things are good?

LEO

Good?

Leo chews on his dessert for an uncomfortably long silence.

LEO (CONT'D)

Things are... great. Everything's great. Just great.

Leo smiles. Everyone smiles like a bullet's been dodged.

GRETA

Well, great. I better get back.
Enjoy--

LEO

This dessert, with its cream and
plantains, tastes so *familiar*.

Greta turns back.

LEO (CONT'D)

A lot of tonight felt familiar. Too
familiar. The bloody clam cerviche,
pork neck tacos.

GRETA

Ok?

LEO

It's like you stripped our entire
relationship for parts and are
serving it for dinner.

Greta's smile fades.

GRETA

Are you kidding me? Wow. You know,
for the first few dishes, I
actually thought this might not be
a total disaster.

LEO

Tell me I'm wrong.

GRETA

Come on Leo, we both know the chef
has a right to put his own spin on
any recipe. This is his
interpretation of his new city, Los
Angeles. He's an artist.

Leo looks over at handsome Chef Travis in the open kitchen.
The Chef and Leo lock eyes for a pregnant beat. In a horrible
a-ha moment, Leo looks from the Chef to Greta.

LEO

No. You... *and him?*

Woodruff and Nate followed Leo's gaze. Getting the idea, they
go into damage control.

NATE

Whoa. No scenes, remember Leo.

WOODRUFF
 (grabs Leo's wine)
 I better drink this.

GRETA
 What? Don't get weird.

LEO
 That's not an answer.

GRETA
 Look Leo, let's not rehash
 everything. We tried. You know as
 well I do we just weren't, you
 know, going anywhere.

LEO
 What about our big trip? We're
 supposed to be eating Shinzo's kobe
 beef in Seattle right now. He--

GRETA
 "Massages every cut for a half
 hour." Yeah, I know.

LEO
 What's that supposed to mean?

GRETA
 Leo. Your whole life is obsessing
 and writing about what other people
 are doing, ok. I needed someone who
 was excited about what they were
 doing.

Greta starts to walk off, leaving Leo reeling.

LEO
 This meal is gastronomic
 gentrification. You know that as
 well as I do.

A few people including Chef Travis look over.

GRETA
 Take care of yourself, Leo. I mean
 that.
 (walks off, then turns
 back)
 I know you'll write about this
 place no matter what I say so knock
 yourself out. No one reads you,
 including me anymore.

Greta continues walking off. A few lookie-loos go back to their meal. Woodruff and Nate turn to Leo like WTF.

LEO

I just ate dinner made by the same hands that make love to my girlfriend.

WOODRUFF

Why is every meal with you an international incident?

NATE

Don't beat yourself up. Look at that guy - he's like Ryan Gosling with utensil tattoos.

LEO (CONT'D)

Oh my god. You guys always did take her side.

Nate and Woodruff exchange oh boy-looks.

LEO (CONT'D)

You don't need this. You have mature relationships, big boy careers, dental plans, real lives.

WOODRUFF

You know how hard it was to get in here. Let's just finish eating.

LEO

See that's the problem. Food club is more than just a hashtag for me. I'm here fulfilling a primal urge but you guys are just, like, *having dinner*.

Leo screeches his chair back. Diners look over.

LEO (CONT'D)

Sorry to break-up the band but I think it's time to put a fork in our Thursday nights. It doesn't mean anything anymore.

Leo grabs the wine bottle off the table and weaves his way across the space. He lingers in front of the open kitchen. He and Chef Travis lock eyes.

CHEF TRAVIS

If you make me step out of my kitchen, it's not going to be pretty.

LEO

You may have gotten the girl, but
this is MY city.

Walking off, Leo pushes out the front door. Nate and Woodruff sit embarrassed with the whole restaurant watching them.

WOODRUFF

Can't that asshole ever make a big
dramatic exit after we pay.

INT. LEO'S SUBARU - NIGHT

Leo's back cruising the streets.

LEO (V.O.)

'Dorado' has quite the pedigree.
Artful design, rock star Brooklyn
chef and gifted manager formerly of
Mozza and, full disclosure, my bed.
No doubt, my ex had a hand in
shaping the menu. Hints of our
favorite taco stands and noodle
shops echoed through the meal like
ghosts. Biting into the
deconstructed nacatamals or
reimagined soup dumplings
transported me...

INT. 'DORADO' - LATER

Leo's voice-over continues...

LEO (O.S.)

Certain meals have the power to
connect us to our past selves. Like
Proust and those cookies he went on
about. Aren't our best memories
forever bonded with food...

Back at the restaurant, Woodruff watches as the Waitress offers his old assistant, Zach, the champagne.

Zach looks from Woodruff to the bottle. Zach waves the bottle off and turns back to his table - he says something that cracks everyone up.

NATE

What a dick. I guess you did teach
him everything you know.

Nate chuckles. Woodruff doesn't. The Waitress drops off the check (and the bottle).

BY THE OPEN KITCHEN, Greta passes Chef Travis. He stops working for a moment to reach out - they squeeze hands tenderly. But Greta looks distracted.

INT. DONUT SHOP - LATER

A 24/7 donut shop. At the counter, Leo bangs away on his laptop.

LEO (V.O.)

Soft serve at the beach. Your grandpa's favorite steak house. The burger combo at your first job. That LA classic, the churro, after a Dodger win with a first date. I remember that churro well because I'd fallen for her before I'd even finished it. I'm often accused of making everything about me and this is all far too personal for a review. Maybe that's why I never made it as a food writer and live on my sister's futon and write spam for minimum wage - to me there's nothing more personal than food. Angeles' brims with tastes that reverberate on dishes that could hang in LACMA. Go, enjoy...

EXT. STREET CORNER NEAR DODGER STADIUM - MOMENTS LATER

Leo stands alone on the street corner with Lucia's cart in the b.g. Eating his churro, he looks out over his sprawling city.

LEO (V.O.)

... Me? I need a little more soul in my food. I'll probably still be hanging around Lucia's churro cart by Alvarado and 5th. I never have been good at letting go.

INT. ENID'S APARTMENT - MORNING

His jeans half-off, Leo snores on the pull-out couch which is only partially pulled out. The sound of a DOOR BUZZER buzzing - over and over. Leo finally cracks a bloodshot eye.

Groaning, he tugs up his pants and stumbles over to unbolt and open the door. It's Nate and Woodruff. Leo squints.

LEO
What's going on? Who died?

WOODRUFF
Smells like you.

Leo stumbles back to the living room. They follow him and make note of his sad set-up on the futon.

NATE
We read your review.

LEO
That's a first.
(rubbing head)
Oh god. I barely remember writing it.

NATE
It was really good.

WOODRUFF
It was also depressing, angry, TMI and the opposite of what you should've written if you ever want someone to hire you.

NATE
In other words, vintage Leo.

LEO
Who was I kidding? Nothing's gonna help my career. Luckily no one reads me. Especially Greta.

Nate's phone dings. He reads his text.

NATE
Huh. Suki read it.
(off their looks)
Damn! You blew my alibi. I told her I was working late to get out of family dinner.

WOODRUFF
Way to put your foot down.

ENID
Um. What the fuck is going on?

Enid appears in the doorway in her facemask and night shirt.

NATE

Enid! Long time. Love your place.

WOODRUFF

Rise and shine, beautiful.

Enid shoots them a hard look.

ENID

Don't you guys ever get sick of each other? I want everyone gone by the time I get out of the shower.

WOODRUFF

(like a child)

Yes Mrs. Whistler.

Enid glares at him.

ENID

And Leo, if you're gonna wake me up this early close your fly and put on coffee.

Enid retreats into her room. Mortified, Leo zips up his fly and shuffles into the kitchen. Woodruff and Nate exchange pitying looks as their friend makes coffee.

WOODRUFF

Look man, we came over cause - well it didn't really hit home until reading your review that your life had gotten so, um---

LEO

Bleak? Empty? Hopeless? Relax, I'm not going to kill myself or anything. I just wish someone had told me I peaked at 28.

WOODRUFF

I'm just saying, I get it.

LEO

Oh fuck off. You have a customized mixology bar in your condo. No one yells at you if you come into work late. You had sex with the Carl Jr's girl. *On a boat.*

WOODRUFF

If it makes you feel better, I don't have any other friends.

(MORE)

WOODRUFF (CONT'D)

And my pubes are going prematurely gray.

More dings from Nate's phone.

NATE

Shit. Suki's really pissed. She thinks she got food poisoning at Olive Garden and somehow I'm to blame.

WOODRUFF

Now that we're all thoroughly depressed, I hope you feel better.

LEO

A little. Thanks.

(shakes it off)

No, actually I feel worse. What are we doing? I'm venting to my churro lady about Greta every week but that's what food club should be for. It's supposed to be our man cave. Our place to vent and break bread around the proverbial campfire.

Nate and Woodruff nod thoughtfully. Nate checks his watch.

NATE

I'm already late for work.

(shrugs)

I'll cook up some breakfast.

Nate starts going through the fridge and cabinets.

NATE (CONT'D)

Slim pickings but improvisation is a chef's greatest tool, right.

WOODRUFF

I'll make bloody's. Anyone else?

Stepping aside, Leo watches pleased as they begin to tear apart the kitchen.

SMASHCUT TO:

INT. ENID'S APARTMENT - LATER

The three guys sit on the futon gnawing on big messy omelette plates. They're silent but for the sound of their eating. Just munching, chewing, little 'mmm's' of approval.

It's a nice moment reminiscent of Leo's comments about the proverbial campfire.

In her business suit, Enid emerges and stops short at the sight of them. Leo looks up, sheepish.

LEO

Coffee's on. Nate made his famous hangover omelettes.

ENID

Assholes.

Enid crosses into the kitchen. The guys smirk at each other thru mouthfuls of food. Suddenly, Leo cringes for a moment, rubbing his chest in pain like he did in the ramen scene.

WOODRUFF

Oh Jesus. You ok?

LEO

Fine, fine.

Leo swallows hard. Ding - Leo checks a text on his phone.

LEO (CONT'D)

Wow. My review is actually getting around. It's reposted on *Reddit*, *Eater*, *LA Weekly*--

As Leo scrolls, his phone continues dinging with a flurry of texts. Leo stops scrolling, sits up straight. The guys exchange looks.

LEO (CONT'D)

Oh my god.
(reading, under breath)
"For the record, the Dodgers lost that night."

Leo slowly pockets his phone. He looks at them and breaks into his first real smile.

LEO (CONT'D)

Greta still reads me.

They all continue eating in near silence.

THE END