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Why I Never Have Italian Food

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Chapter 1

I stood in front of my mirror, adjusting the hem of my bodycon dress that hugged me in the right places, and smoothing down any imaginary wrinkles. Tonight was the night I had been eagerly waiting for – Phil, the new guy I'd been dating, had invited me to his house for a home-cooked Italian meal. I've always wanted to try Italian food. I had envisioned cozy candlelight, a table laden with delicious pasta, and of course, some cannoli for dessert. With a touch of lip gloss and a hopeful smile, I locked my front door and headed towards the evening of what I hoped would be both culinary delight and romantic discovery.

The evening air held a hint of autumn as I pulled up in front of Phil's beautiful house. As I stood in front of his door, I gave myself a final once-over, making sure my dress was perfect and my hair cascaded down my shoulders just right. Then, with a quick inhale to calm my nerves, I rang the doorbell.

A moment later, the door swung open, revealing Phil's charming grin and a hint of nervousness in his eyes. "Hey," he greeted, his voice warm.

"Hi," I replied, feeling a flush rise to my cheeks.

"You look stunning," he said, and I could tell he meant it.

"Thank you," I said, feeling a mix of bashfulness and exhilara-

tion.

As I stepped inside, I took in the inviting aroma that enveloped the room – the rich scent of simmering sauces, the promise of a delicious meal. Phil’s house was tastefully decorated, a blend of modern and cozy, with warm lighting and comfortable furniture. It felt like the perfect setting for a romantic evening.

“Make yourself at home,” he said, guiding me further into the living room.

I settled onto the couch, feeling both excited and slightly nervous. Phil disappeared into the kitchen, and soon, he returned with two glasses of wine. He handed one to me, and I accepted it with a grateful smile.

The soft glow of ambient lighting in his living room cast a gentle halo around us, creating an intimate atmosphere that encouraged candid conversations.

“Cheers,” he said, clinking his glass against mine.

“So, I remember we ended our talk yesterday with you sending me a text about being quite the adventurer,” Phil said, his voice a mixture of curiosity and genuine interest.

I chuckled, taking a sip of my wine. “Well, I do have a soft spot for trying new things. Life’s too short to stick to the same routine.”

He nodded, a playful smile tugging at the corners of his lips. “I’ve always wanted to go skydiving, but heights... not really my thing.”

I leaned in, teasingly touching his biceps. “So, the big, strong Phil is afraid of heights?”

He let out a laugh, his eyes crinkling with amusement. “Well, I wouldn’t say afraid, exactly. Just... cautious.”

Our laughter lingered in the air, easing any tension that might

have still existed. As we talked, I noticed the way his eyes sparkled when he spoke about his favorite books and movies, his enthusiasm contagious. It was easy to get lost in the rhythm of our conversation, sharing anecdotes from our lives as if we'd known each other for much longer than we actually had.

With each exchange, I felt a growing connection, a sense that we were discovering not just each other's interests, but also the little quirks that made us who we were. And when a lull in the conversation arrived, it didn't feel awkward – it felt comfortable, like we could sit in silence and still understand each other.

As the wine flowed and the stories continued, our closeness deepened. Our knees brushed against each other, and the air was charged with an unspoken electricity. It was as if the wine had loosened the barriers that often separated two people getting to know each other, and I found myself growing bolder, my laughter coming easier.

And then, as if it was the most natural progression, he reached for my hand, his fingers brushing against mine. My heart skipped a beat, a thrill racing through me. His touch was warm and reassuring, a silent invitation to move beyond mere conversation.

"Emily," he said, his voice soft, "there's just something about you that draws me in."

My gaze met his, and in that moment, the connection between us felt tangible, undeniable. "There's just something about you too that draws me Phil," I replied, my voice carrying a newfound vulnerability.

Without a word, he leaned in, his lips meeting mine in a gentle, lingering kiss. It was a promise of what could be, a taste of the chemistry that had been simmering between us from the

moment we'd met. As our lips parted, our eyes met, a silent understanding passing between us.

The air was charged with anticipation as he leaned in again, his lips brushing against mine with a renewed sense of urgency. The kiss deepened, becoming a blend of desire and curiosity, as if we were exploring uncharted territory together. It was a dance of sensations, a conversation conducted through touch and taste.

"Phil," I pulled back and said softly, my voice a mere whisper, "this feels like a dream."

He smiled, his fingers still gently tracing patterns on my skin. "Believe me, I've been dreaming about this too."

Our kisses grew more fervent, fueled by a growing hunger that went beyond physical attraction. It was a meeting of souls, a connection that transcended the physical realm. And as his hand traced a path along my back, sending shivers down my spine, I felt a powerful surge of emotions – excitement, tenderness, and a lingering sense of wonder at the unexpected turn our evening had taken.

I was about to reach for the buttons on his shirt when suddenly, a voice broke the silence, making me jump.

"Who's this?"

I turned to see a middle-aged woman standing in the doorway of the kitchen, holding a tray of caponata. She had a stern expression, and her eyes bore into mine as if trying to decipher my very soul. Phil reappeared at her side, looking slightly flustered.

"Mom, take it easy. This is Emily, the girl I was telling you about last night when we were in bed?" he said, introducing me with a nervous chuckle. "Emily, meet my mother, Maria."

I mustered a smile, trying to hide my surprise. Did I hear

him say in bed? Maybe it was on a phone call I guess. I hadn't expected to meet his mother on our fourth date, especially not under these circumstances. My initial excitement was replaced by a sense of unease, but I reminded myself that meeting the family could be a good sign – a sign that he was serious about being committed.

“Nice to meet you, Maria,” I said, extending my hand.

Her handshake was firm, her grip strong and unyielding. “You too,” she replied, her tone neutral.

Phil cleared his throat, breaking the awkward silence. “Mom, why don't you put the caponata on the table? Dinner should be ready soon.”

As Maria disappeared back into the kitchen, Phil let out a sigh. “I'm sorry about that,” he said, looking genuinely apologetic. “My mother can be... well, let's just say she has a strong personality.”

I laughed, trying to lighten the mood. “No worries. Meeting the family is always an adventure.”

We sat down at the dining table, and I tried to shake off the initial awkwardness as we chatted about our day and shared stories from work. The food, when it arrived, was delicious – plates of pasta, aromatic sauces, and those heavenly cannoli I had been looking forward to. Phil's cooking skills were impressive, and I couldn't help but be drawn into the experience despite the unexpected encounter with his mother.

Maria's presence loomed over the table like a shadow, and I couldn't shake the feeling that there was more to her scowl than just initial disapproval.

As the dinner continued, my discomfort grew. Every time I looked up, I found Maria watching me with a combination of scrutiny and something else – something I couldn't quite put

my finger on.

She remained mostly silent, occasionally chiming in with a comment or two. Her presence loomed over the table, a constant reminder that I was stepping into a world that was not just about the two of us.

As we finished our meal, Phil excused himself to clear the table, leaving me alone with Maria. The air was charged with tension, and I felt like I was on the verge of being put through some unspoken test.

“You seem like a nice girl,” Maria finally spoke, her gaze fixed on me.

“Thank you,” I replied, my nerves resurfacing.

“But you should know that my son cares about me very much,” she continued, her tone shifting a bit. “He’s been through a lot, and I worry about him. No one gets him like I do. I raised him all by myself, I’m not going to let some uptight girl just come in and swoop him away from me. He’s all I have, he’s *my* baby boy.”

I nodded, understanding that she was just a concerned mother, even if her delivery was a bit intimidating. “Well I’m beginning to care about him a lot too, I like Phil.” I said, my voice steady. “I’m here because I want to get to know him better, and he seems like he very much wants the same thing too.”

Maria studied me for a moment, her eyes searching. “He needs someone who will stand by him, through thick and thin. Not someone who’s just here to eat off his money and occupy some big place in his life without giving him anything at all.”

“Well I’m willing to give it a shot,” I replied, my sincerity shining through.

Phil returned to the dining table, and Maria’s demeanor shifted

slightly, becoming more reserved. The tension in the room had dissipated, replaced by a cautious acceptance.

“Um... do you mind if I use your bathroom? I need to freshen up a bit,” I asked Phil, standing up to get a minute break from surviving this dinner with his mother.

“Sure, it’s that way. The first door on your left.”

“Thank you, I’ll be out in a sec.” As I left the table and walked towards the hallway Phil pointed to, I could hear his mother muttering something that made him laugh so hard. So she actually has a sense of humor, how nice.

As I returned to the living room, I found Phil standing near the couch. I smiled at him, my nerves momentarily forgotten.

“Hey, I was thinking maybe we could sit and talk,” he suggested, his tone a mix of hesitation and eagerness.

“Sure,” I replied, taking a seat beside him.

He took a deep breath, as if gathering his thoughts. “Emily, there’s something you should know.”

My heart skipped a beat, my imagination running wild with possibilities. “What is it?”

He looked into my eyes, his gaze intense. “I’m sorry I couldn’t tell you much sooner. I just didn’t want to chase you away so quickly because I really, really like you Emily.”

I smiled a little at his last words, but it was short lived. What could he possibly want to tell me that might chase me away?

“I-I really like you too Phil, but you have to tell me what you mean now.” I noticed his mother was on a sofa next to him, giving me a piercing look. Can’t this crazy woman give us any kind of privacy at all?

“Okay, Emily, the truth is I-I live here with my mother. But it’s

not just a typical mother-son relationship. I know you might be thinking I'm some mummy's boy. But that's not me or us at all. The thing is, we're, well...we're together, romantically."

My mind froze, unable to process his words. "Wait, what?" It's like I must have misheard or misunderstood his words. Does he think being a mummy's boy is worse than what, incest?!

He let out a sigh, his shoulders sagging. "I know it's not something you'd expect. But it's just how things are. I love her, she's been here for me ever since my father left her. I-I feel in love with her a long time ago, and it just never stopped and I doubt it ever will." He turned to look at his mother, and they both smiled.

A million thoughts raced through my mind, a mixture of shock, confusion, and disbelief. My mouth opened and closed back again. I could not find any words to say to the ridiculous speech I had just heard. How could I have been so wrong about this entire situation?

As if the revelation itself wasn't enough, Phil's next words made my jaw drop even further. "But the thing is lately we've been having some issues in bed, if you know what I mean, and we've been discussing it. And we think that having someone else join us could you know, spice up our sexual life a bit."

I felt like I had been plunged into a nightmare, a nightmarish soap opera that was spiraling out of control. This couldn't be real. It just couldn't.

"What? Phil? Can-can you hear yourself right now? Are you-are you being serious?" I finally managed to stammer.

Phil reached for my hand, his eyes pleading. "Emily, I care about you a lot. And we think you could be the missing piece in our relationship. That's why I had you over for dinner tonight, I think you're exactly what we've been missing."

I jerked my hand away, my mind a chaotic mess of emotions. “Missing piece? Are you fucking insane?”

He looked hurt, wounded by my reaction. “I-I thought you’d be open-minded, and understanding about it Em. It’s one of the reasons I admire you, your gentleness attracts me.”

Gentleness? Understanding? My mind was a whirlwind of disbelief, anger, and a deep sense of betrayal. This couldn’t be the same person I had been excitedly dating just hours ago.

And then, as if the situation couldn’t get any more surreal, he reached into his pocket and pulled out a small velvet box. My breath caught in my throat as he opened it to reveal a sparkling diamond ring.

“Emily, I know you’re an understanding person” he said, his voice shaking, “I love you, I know you feel the spark between both of us too. I want us to be a family, you, my mother and myself. Will you-will you marry me Emily and make it official?”

I stared at him, my mind reeling, my heart pounding in my chest. The absurdity of the situation had reached an all-time high. He wanted me to be a part of this bizarre arrangement, to marry into this twisted dynamic? The proposal itself was like a punchline to a sick joke.

My mind couldn’t process it all. The shock, the absurdity of the whole matter, the confusion– it was all too much at once. In a fit of desperation and frustration, I jumped up from the couch, my mind a whirlwind of emotions. I stumbled backwards, my heart racing, and before I knew it, I was banging my head against the floor.

“Emily! Are you okay?” I heard Phil say.

My head throbbed with a sharp pain, and my vision swirled in a disorienting dance of colors. I squeezed my eyes shut tightly, not attempting to even get up. I silently kept praying that when

I opened them, I'd be free from this nightmare.

"Get off my floor, you fool!" A voice, harsh and commanding, cut through the haze of confusion.

"Mother, calm down. She's in shock."

I couldn't even respond or find room in my head to process another incoming thought right now.

"I told you to get up! What's wrong with you?" Her voice, now even more enraged, filled my ears.

Confusion turned into panic as her hand descended on my cheek, delivering a stinging slap to my face.

Immediately my eyes snapped open wide, my heart still pounding, and I found myself gasping for breath. As my eyes adjusted to the soft light filtering through my bedroom curtains, I realized that it had all been a dream.

"Well I'm certainly never having Italian food ever again." I muttered, thanking the gods that it had only been a nightmare.