

A Table for Two

When I started freshman year of college, I got a job as a waitress at a moderately fancy restaurant in my hometown called Alexander's. I worked from 4 to 11 PM on weeknights, and those have been my hours ever since. I've been waiting tables for a couple of years now, though it's not something I plan to keep doing. Still, it works in well with my schedule and occasionally I come across interesting people.

It was Valentine's Day. I was in my junior year. This particular day was one of the busier times of the year, as it was almost always packed with quite a few couples out for an evening to themselves. I was managing five tables already. They were all relatively quiet couples, didn't make much noise, and we got along nicely. I always seemed to get lucky and got the easy customers. My best friend and co-worker, Lily, was usually not so fortunate.

I heard a 'ding' come from the door that signaled the entrance of a customer. I walked over and grabbed a couple of menus, before getting a good luck at the table I was about to tend to.

A tall guy stood before me, standing by himself. He seemed about the same age as me, and he was all dressed up in a nice suit. In his right hand was a bundle of roses. I greeted him, and asked him "Table for two?" with a knowing grin on my face.

"Yeah," he said, a goofy half-smile spreading across his face as well. I was never really one for Valentine's Day, but this guy looked more hopeful than any other person who came in that day.

"Right this way." I led him to a booth and he sat down at one end, setting the roses on the table. "Who's your date?" I asked him, still smiling.

"Her name's Sarah."

"She's very lucky to have you." I liked to exchange friendly banter with customers on Valentine's Day. I liked hearing their stories.

The guy's eyes kind of wandered off. "Yeah," he said, absentmindedly.

"I'm Kate," I said, holding out one hand.

He looked at my hand, then up at me as he accepted the handshake. "Lucas."

“Do you want anything to drink?”

“Just water.” I nodded, and brought him a glass within a few minutes. I left to tend to the other tables. After they were satisfied, I returned and asked him if he was ready to order. Lucas looked different than he had before. Anxious. The goofy grin he had on his face earlier had vanished, and he looked slightly worried. He was holding the roses, examining them carefully, deep in thought.

“Can I get you something to eat?”

“No, that’s okay,” he said, scratching his neck. “I’m going to wait for Sarah to show up, and we can order together.” I nodded, and continued on with business.

A couple hours passed, and my other tables were already finished with their meals. Soon, the restaurant was almost completely empty, and all that remained was Lucas and one other table that I was waiting on. As I gave my last table their check, I took a glance over at Lucas, who was still sitting alone. He had his head in his hands. It didn’t look like he was crying, but he didn’t really look happy either. I watched as he stood up and slowly walked out of the restaurant.

“Have a nice evening,” I said to the couple. They thanked me, and I walked over to Lucas’ table. His glass was completely drained, and he had left the roses behind. I picked them up and looked at them. They were really nice roses.

I wouldn’t let Lucas leave disappointed like this. I felt a surge of meaning flow through me. Roses in hand, I ran to the door and opened it. It was dark, about 10 PM, and I couldn’t see too well, but I needed to find him. “Lucas!” I called out. I could see the shadowy figure of Lucas move its head over its shoulder. I ran up to him and handed him the roses. “Come back inside,” I said, smiling. “I’m not going to let you leave without a nice evening first.”

We walked back to the door. He didn’t look too sure of himself, or what was happening, but went along with it all the same. I pointed to the ground and said “Stay right here.” I quickly opened the door. My co-worker and old friend Lily had a confused look on her face.

“I need you to cover for me,” I said urgently. “It’s important.”

Lily didn’t look too sure but she nodded. “Whatever you say.”

I walked back out and led Lucas inside. We sat at the booth where he was earlier, the roses set to the side between us. Lily walked over, holding her trusty notepad and pencil.

“Listen Kate,” she said, “I don’t know what you’re up to with this guy, but if our boss finds out you’re eating with this guy instead of working, you’re totally screwed.” I dismissed her comment with a wave of my hand.

“We would like a bottle of your finest champagne, and I would like a Caesar salad.” Lily scribbled my order down and glanced at Lucas.

Lucas rubbed his eyes. When he took a moment to glance at us, he noticed that we were both staring at him. He scratched the back of his neck. “What’s going on?”

I laughed. “I’m taking you out to eat. It’s your turn to order.”

“Oh.” He ran a hand through his hair and let out a deep sigh.

Lily tapped her foot impatiently and put her hand on her hip. She tapped her pen against the notepad impatiently.

“I want lobster.”

Lily looked at Lucas and raised an eyebrow. “Steamed lobster?”

“Yeah, whatever. As long as it’s a lobster.”

“Why the sudden interest in lobster?” I asked him.

“I like lobster,” he said flatly, shrugging his shoulders. “Tonight is a lobster kind of night.”

I laughed.

The meal went well after that. We talked about Valentine’s Day and how much it sucked, observed his lobster and my salad, praised the food, shared a few laughs, and just talked about life. It was the best conversation I’d had with anyone, let alone a practical stranger, in a long time.

“If I ever meet this Sarah person again, I’ll have a talk with her that she won’t soon forget.”

“I still can’t believe she stood me up,” he said again, with a deep sigh.

“Lucas,” I said, setting my fork down, “I don’t know much about Sarah. I’ve never seen her, I’ve never met her, I don’t know what she’s like, and I don’t know what you

thought about her, but I do know this: Anyone who would turn down a date with you is a fool. There was either a death in her family or she simply doesn't appreciate you.

"But you must know this. If she doesn't appreciate you enough to accept a date on Valentine's Day, she isn't worth the bother or the grief. It will be hard, and believe me I've been there. But you need to let her go."

Lucas smiled. "Thanks," he said, and promptly finished the last of

"I had a wonderful evening, Lucas."

"You know," he said, "my evening wasn't too bad either. Pleasure to make your acquaintance, Kate."

We stood up and looked at each other.

"Will I ever see you again?" he asked, somewhat hopeful.

"Perhaps," I said, sliding my hands into my pockets. "It's entirely possible that we won't. But if you ever need me again, you know where to find me."

And with that, we parted ways.

After closing up the restaurant, I headed home for the night. Though I was exhausted, I couldn't help but wonder about Lucas. I wondered how things went between him and Sarah. Although I couldn't admit it to myself, I secretly hoped he would show up the next day.

Morning came around, and my busy day of college was gone in the blink of an eye. When it was time, I showed up at Alexander's and waited tables as usual. I hid my secret hopes for Lucas to arrive from my customers and from Lily, save for an occasional glance out the window.

The time slowly and painfully drifted away. At 11, when all hope was lost, I closed up the restaurant and went home. Each day after that, the little secret hope for the return of Lucas remained, becoming more and more hopeless with time. I waited for Lucas to show up each day, but he never did. Days faded into weeks, weeks faded into months, and eventually an entire year had passed.

It was Valentine's Day again. Business was booming at first, and I forgot about Lucas. Too many tables. Unrelentlessly, customer after customer poured in. I was

juggling tables, trying to keep everything under control without letting it get out of hand. The door made a 'ding' and I rushed over, grabbing a couple menus.

"Table for two?" I asked, menus in hand. There was no immediate response. I glanced up, slightly impatient, and saw a tall, familiar, and frankly stunning figure, standing in front of me. I nearly dropped the menus in my hand and my speech stammered as I struggled for words.

"Sure," he said. He had the same goofy grin on his face and the same suit from a year ago. In his right hand was a bundle of roses. I smiled.

"Right this way, Lucas."