

Mr. Pickington's Review

Elena was nervous. Her teacher, Mrs. Colander, was exceedingly nervous. It was the end of May, and the year-long cooking class was coming to an end. Mrs. Colander said that the principal would usually come and eat a dinner prepared by the students; he would declare it marvelous, whether it was or not, and the students could continue to believe themselves culinary masters. This year, however, Mrs. Colander had garnered the attention of a connoisseur of fine dining, Mr. Alfred Pickington, and he had ungraciously imposed himself on the class to be the judge for their final meal.

Mrs. Colander was, at the least, flustered. As Elena and her fellow classmates prepared and cooked the meal that Mr. Pickington would judge, Mrs. Colander continued to hover behind each student, hurling advice in a strident voice and ensuring the students knew how to prepare everything perfectly. It was undeniably annoying.



Elena was responsible for the potatoes. She was conscientious and did not make a mistake in any part of the preparation. She peeled the potatoes so perfectly that not a single hint of a peel was left, she boiled them until they fell apart at the slightest pressure of her spoon, and she added cream and butter slowly as she blended until the potatoes were smooth.

"I will not make a mistake," she muttered to herself just as Mrs. Colander appeared behind her, nearly vibrating with tension.

"No mistakes! We cannot afford any mistakes! Mr. Pickington could ruin this class!" she gasped, whirling around and running off to the next station. Elena shook her head, exasperated, as Mrs. Colander yelled, "If he writes a bad review about the food, my reputation will be destroyed!"

Elena took the plate from Justin, who was the chef for the salmon. He had arranged it in an intricate fashion on the plate, with a tiny sprig of parsley on top. The salmon had been roasted and was coated in a thin layer of herbs: basil, oregano, and thyme. To continue the artistic presentation, Elena arranged her creamed potatoes as if they were a river flowing from the base of the mountain. Porsha garnished the plate with an impressive array of garlic-scented broccoli. All three students silently hoped that the connoisseur would not need an antacid at the end of his meal.

During the final stages of the students' preparation, the door to the classroom flung dramatically open. The students looked up, startled. One long, emaciated leg appeared in the opening, followed by a nose, which came way ahead of the rest of him. Elena thought he looked a bit like an exotic crane: impossibly long legs covered in yellow plaid pants, long

narrow feet encased in shiny black-patent leather, a jacket in a bright shade of purple, and a proboscis that was disturbingly beak-like. Mr. Pickington was definitely eccentric, Elena thought. She had never seen anyone quite so...colorful.

He stopped in the doorway and glanced around the room, his impressive nose in the air in an aloof manner.

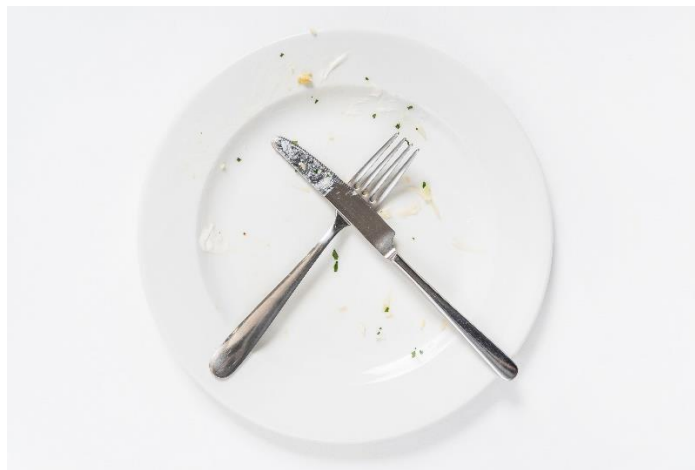


"Please let me know where I should sit," he said, his face expressing disgust at the small room. When Mrs. Colander, who looked a bit like a fish out of water with her mouth opening and closing rapidly, pointed to an empty chair at a small table in the corner of the room, Mr. Pickington removed a pristine white handkerchief from his coat pocket and placed it on the chair before perching on the edge. There was more evidence of his fastidious nature as he placed another handkerchief on the table in front of him. He then looked expectantly at Mrs. Colander and spoke again.

"Let's begin," he said, in a voice that was quite deep and warm for someone so bird-like.

Mrs. Colander jumped at the sound and snatched the plate from Elena's hands, whirling about in a mad dash. She practically dropped the plate in front of Mr. Pickington in her haste to get away from him, and he glanced at her, smiling a little.

There was absolute silence in the room as he took his first bite and his second and his third. He made no sound at all until he finished his meal ten minutes later and rose gracefully to his feet.



"I must say that the food was not intolerable," he stated.

Mrs. Colander promptly burst into tears. Mr. Pickington sighed heavily, "Please desist from this vulgar show of emotion. I said that the food was *not* intolerable. Your students are quite adept at preparing an adequate meal, and I might be persuaded to participate in another judgment in the future."

With one last exasperated look at the still sobbing Mrs. Colander, Mr. Pickington bowed slightly towards the students and left the room, walking in his avian manner down the hallway.

Elena smiled at Justin and Porsha, "Did I hear him wrong, or did he just say he liked it?"

Justin nodded, "It seems that way. He didn't stop eating until he had managed to get all of your potatoes off the plate without actually licking it."

Porsha laughed, "I saw him pick up a piece of broccoli from the table and eat it after it fell off the plate, so I think we scored on this one." The three students gave themselves pats on the back, laughing.

Mrs. Colander raised her head from the stove, which had thankfully been turned off long before she fell on it, and said, "He actually liked it? He wasn't unhappy?" She started wiping tears off her face, "Did I hear him say he would come back sometime?"

Elena rolled her eyes, "Yes ma'am. He said he would come back."

"You all get A's! You all get A-pluses!" Mrs. Colander ran out of the room and took off down the hall to the principal's office, squealing the whole way.

"I guess this means we're good," said Porsha to Elena and Justin, and then, the three of them went to work cleaning dishes.

