

SEASON WITH LOVE

Written by

Ninan Pollack

## TEASER

INT. COOKING COMPETITION SET - NIGHT

Productions assistants scurry around the set carrying in baskets of produce and wiping down kitchen counters, as lighting technicians assemble the lights. "The Secret Ingredient" is emblazoned on the central wall in giant letters. TOM (40s), wearing a headset and holding a clipboard, directs people around the set.

TOM

Come on people we don't have all night! And make it look good - this isn't Cutthroat Kitchen!

Tom stops a nearby PA.

TOM (CONT'D)

You! Where's Lili?

The PA looks at Tom with fear and shrugs an "I don't know" before running off.

TOM (CONT'D)

(angrily to himself)

You can never find them when you fucking need them.

Tom looks up from his clipboard and notices a PA, ANDY (20), standing a few feet away with a nervous look on his face.

TOM (CONT'D)

Hi, can I help you? Or are you under the impression that standing around doing nothing will help us prepare for tomorrow?

ANDY

Sorry sir, but um... Jamie's assistant called and we have a bit of a problem...

Tom returns to his clipboard and turns away from Andy.

TOM

Please go talk to Lili and get out of my face.

Andy starts to cower but doesn't move. Tom notices that Andy is still there.

TOM (CONT'D)  
Andy, is it? Is there a reason  
you've decided to ignore my  
directions?

ANDY  
Sir, you sent Lili home a few hours  
ago? And I think you're going to  
want to hear this yourself.

Tom gets close to Andy's face.

TOM  
(yelling)  
What the fuck could be so  
important?

ANDY  
(gulps)  
We lost Jamie. He'll be backpacking  
around India for the next three  
months.

Tom says nothing and calmly walks into a nearby office,  
closing the door. Andy stands there bewildered for a few  
moments before he faintly hears objects being thrown in the  
office.

TOM  
(muffled screaming)  
Fuck you, Jamie Oliver!

**END OF TEASER**

ACT I

INT. TINY APARTMENT - AFTER MIDNIGHT

The apartment is cramped, messy, dimly lit. Music plays loudly. LILI (26), Chinese-American, sits at a desk, hunched over a cookbook.

LILI

(mutters)

So you first cut the dough in half... then twist and pinch?

The front door to the apartment opens.

JENNA (O.S.)

Hey girl, I'm home!

LILI

(without turning around)

Hey! How was your shift?

JENNA (23) enters the living room, turns on the overhead light, and throws her bag on the couch.

JENNA

Not too bad. There was a bachelorette party tonight so I was stuck making mostly cosmos and g&t's. But at least they left a huge tip.

LILI

Ok, so not too bad of a night! Oooh, also, I have some leftover fried rice in the fridge for you!

Jenna beelines to the kitchen and rummages for the rice.

JENNA (O.S.)

How was your day? Excited for shooting to start tomorrow?

Lili takes a break from reading and leans back in her chair.

LILI

Actually yes? Tom asked me to focus my attentions on just one contestant this season - he's the son of Maggie Stevens. I guess the network thinks he'll be a shoo-in to win.

We hear the sound of a microwave.

JENNA (O.S.)

Wait, what?

LILI

It's crazy, right? I figure it'll be nice to work with someone who can probably cook. These things are genetic right?

Jenna walks back into the living room, shoveling food into her mouth.

JENNA

Oh my fucking god, this pasta is incredible. Maggie Stevens could never. What would I do without you?

LILI

You'd have literally starved by now.

Jenna peers over Lili's shoulders to the open cookbook.

JENNA

Is this a new one? Who's it by?

LILI

Do you remember that food blogger I've been following? The one with the chubby baby? I grabbed her book from the store after I got off set today.

Jenna throws herself onto the couch, pushing aside stacks of loose recipe sheets.

JENNA

I don't get why you waste your time with these books. When are we going to open our own restaurant? Come on, I'm dying to be your official sommelier!

Lili laughs.

LILI

First, I don't have the right training. And second, I'm too busy trying to make other people's food dreams come true.

JENNA

Oh please, who needs culinary  
school when-

Jenna is interrupted by Lili's ringing phone. Lili picks up  
and the frantic speaking of the caller can be heard faintly.

LILI

(into the phone)

Where are they going to find a  
replacement before tomorrow? Tom...  
hello?

(beat)

He fucking hung up on me.

JENNA

Ugh, fuck him. Well, what's the  
crisis now, a contestant's flight  
was cancelled?

Lili puts her head in her hands, suddenly exhausted.

LILI

Even worse. Jamie Oliver just  
dropped out of hosting. Tom is  
still at the studio trying to fix  
this before tomorrow.

JENNA

Ooooh. Maybe it'll be Gordon  
Ramsey. Or Chef Morimoto?

LILI

Who knows. But if we can't find  
someone soon, this'll throw off our  
whole schedule.

Jenna gets up, gives Lili a comforting pat on the shoulder,  
then heads to the kitchen. We hear the sound of dishes  
hitting the sink. She pokes her head back into the living  
room.

JENNA

I'm heading to bed. Get some rest  
and don't stress! Everything will  
be fine tomorrow and you'll be  
amazing as always.

LILI

Ok, ok! Goodnight!

Jenna turns off the overhead light and leaves the room. Lili continues to read her cookbook for another minute, then, certain that Jenna is in her room, walks into the kitchen to wash Jenna's dirty dishes.

INT. BEDROOM - 4:30 AM

An alarm clock goes off and Lili sleepily turns it off and rolls out of bed.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREETS - 4:45 AM

Lili runs in the dark, empty streets, sweat dripping down her brow, music pulsing from her earbuds.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - 6:00 AM

A freshly showered Lili pulls a tray of buns from the oven. When she sees that the buns are perfectly golden, she smiles to herself and does a silent cheer.

CUT TO:

EXT. LOS ANGELES HIGHWAY - 6:45 AM

Lili is stuck in standstill traffic. She calmly listens to a food podcast as cars angrily beep around.

CUT TO:

EXT. STUDIO PARKING LOT - 7:30 AM

Lili races out of the car carrying a large bag in each hand and runs through the studio main gates.

INT. COOKING COMPETITION SET - MOMENTS LATER

Lili walks onto set. Crew members adjust the set as other staff members trickle in. Lili walks over to Andy setting up the craft services table.

LILI

Hey! So, what did you think of your first day yesterday? I guess things got crazy after I left, huh.

Lili opens her bags and starts arranging her freshly baked buns on empty plates.

ANDY

(shudders)

The other producers sent me to tell Tom about Jamie leaving. I genuinely thought he was going to kill me.

(beat)

Did you make those?

Andy moves to grab a bun. Lili smiles encouragingly at Andy.

LILI

Let me know what you think.

ANDY

(mouth full)

I think I'm in love.

(swallows)

Maybe today won't be all that bad?

LILI

That's the right attitude! Have you heard any news about a replacement judge?

ANDY

Not yet. Tom hasn't arrived yet.

Lili grabs a notebook from her bag, quickly writes something, tears out the page and hands it to Andy.

LILI

Here. This is Tom's go-to coffee order. Go grab him a coffee for when he arrives and maybe he'll forget all about last night.

Andy gives Lili a giant hug to her surprise. She chuckles as he runs off. Done plating the buns, we follow her into...

INT. CONTROL ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The control room. One wall is covered with screens, another wall has print-outs of contestants' faces, and producers are milling around chatting.



Lili waves hello to some of the other producers, grabs a radio from a table, and walks over to OLIVER (early 30s).

LILI

Hey!

(gives Oliver a hug)

I didn't know you were coming back this season!

OLIVER

The hubbie got the chief residency position he wanted so we'll be in LA for the foreseeable future. At least I have a good batch of contestants this year.

LILI

Ooooh... very exciting. Who you got?

OLIVER

Army vet, single mom, high school teacher. I'm thinking at least one of them will get us some good footage. Definitely an emotional backstory in there. And who knows, maybe I have a winner!

(beat)

But you have the golden goose, don't you? Caleb Stevens is big time.

LILI

We'll see what happens. America loves to root for the underdog and your batch looks promising in that regard.

SAM (O.S.)

Well, well, what do we have here?

SAM (26) walks over to Lili and Oliver.

SAM (CONT'D)

The star producer back on set! After three years of your contestant winning you'd think the network would have fast-tracked you to executive producer. But I guess you're still in the fray with the rest of us, huh?

LILI  
(awkwardly laughs)  
I still have a lot to learn about producing. And no matter what any of us does, Tom will put us back in our place.

SAM  
Right... I'm sure Tom assigned you Caleb Stevens because he wanted to give you a tough time.

Sam walks away.

SAM (CONT'D)  
(turns her head)  
Oh! Good luck with Caleb! Try not to worry about the media firestorm that'll happen if he fails!

Lili and Oliver watch Sam join another group of producers.

OLIVER  
Don't listen to her. You're a great producer and you'll be fine. She's just bitter that she was assigned a vegan social media influencer.

Lili grabs Oliver's arm and pulls him to a corner.

LILI  
(whispers)  
What did Sam mean by that comment about Tom? Have people been saying things?

Oliver shifts uncomfortably.

OLIVER  
(whispers)  
After last season... some people started saying that maybe there was a reason you were having so much success.  
(looks at the floor)  
Apparently Tom has a thing for Asian women.

Lili becomes visibly angry.

LILI  
(loudly)  
Are you fucking kidding me?

A few other producers turn their heads in her direction. They turn away when they see Lili's glare

LILI (CONT'D)

(whispers)

I've been enduring his relentless abuse for years and people think I'm receiving special privileges? I can't believe it.

OLIVER

(whispers)

Of course it isn't true. People are just jealous. And Tom is a fucking scumbag who deserves to rot in-

The door to the control room slams open and Tom enters, clipboard in hand as always. The room falls silent.

TOM

A good fucking morning to you all! I'm sure you've heard all about the clusterfuck that is our Jamie situation. Should we have expected anything less from a chef who criticized Ramsey for swearing too much?

A few producers stifle laughter.

TOM (CONT'D)

Well, the network higher-ups found a replacement.

A cheer goes around the room.

TOM (CONT'D)

Of course, I have no clue who it is because they think it'll be "fun" to surprise the cast and crew.

There are audible groans.

TOM (CONT'D)

The new judge will get to set this afternoon. I'll need someone to meet them at the gate and walk them in.

(scans room)

Lili! Since you were nowhere to be found last night when I needed you, you get to be the lucky first person to meet our new judge.

Tom gives Lili a nasty smile. Lili averts her gaze but nods.

TOM (CONT'D)

Moving on, the vans will be arriving in T-15 minutes. You all know the routine. Let them take their selfies in front of the studio gates then confiscate their phones. I don't want to see any contestants walking around set without an escort. And I swear to God, if someone tries to leave again-

The door to the control room slams open again to reveal Andy holding a tray of coffee cups. Tom stops speaking and turns to him. Lili tries to make eye contact with Andy, but Andy doesn't see.

ANDY

Hey Tom!

(clears throat)

Umm, sorry for interrupting but I have your coffee. The coffee shop didn't have oat milk so I got you a few other options-

Without warning, Tom throws his clipboard at Andy's head. Andy ducks just in time but drops the tray of coffee. The room is full of a shocked silence. The silence is finally broken by the sound of Tom's radio crackling.

TOM

(checks radio)

Ok folks, looks like the contestants are here early. Get out there and make some good TV.

Tom walks out of the room, pushing past a stunned Andy. Other producers follow, stepping over the spreading puddle of coffee.

LILI

(to Oliver)

This is going to be a long day.

**END OF ACT I**

ACT II

EXT. STUDIO PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

The producers watch as four black SUVs pull into the studio parking lot. Twenty contestants slowly file out of the cars, dragging suitcases. Lili and the other producers move the bags to one side. Tom gathers the contestants together, a big smile on his face.

TOM

Good morning chefs! Welcome to the first day of "The Secret Ingredient"!

The contestants cheer and clap.

TOM (CONT'D)

My name is Tom and I'm the executive producer of this season. Now, I'll let you meet the producers who will give you your badges and a tour around set. I'll see you all inside. Get excited for this afternoon's first cooking challenge!

The contestants cheer and clap again. Tom heads back to the set and the producers look for their assigned contestants. Lili looks down at her clipboard. She has a picture of a clean-cut blonde man in his late 20s.

LILI

Caleb Stevens?

CALEB (28), tall, well-dressed, walks over.

LILI (CONT'D)

Hi! I'm super excited to be working with you! I'm Lili. I'll be your producer throughout this season.

Caleb offers his hand and they shake.

CALEB

Caleb. Caleb Stevens.

Caleb looks Lili up and down.

CALEB (CONT'D)  
So you're the lucky producer who  
got saddled with me. Big fan of my  
mom?

Lili smiles and hands Caleb his badge.

LILI  
She's an American icon. Here's your  
badge for getting around set. On  
the back is a list of emergency  
contacts, which includes my number.

CALEB  
What about the numbers for the  
network execs if I need to file a  
complaint?

There's a moment of silence before Caleb starts laughing.  
Lili awkwardly joins in. The other contestants and producers  
start walking back to set.

LILI  
If you'll follow me.

INT. COOKING COMPETITION SET - MOMENTS LATER

The set is now crowded with people.

LILI  
(pointing)  
To your left is craft services.  
Then you have hair and makeup. That  
room to the right is where we do  
one-on-ones and next door is the  
control room. Any questions?

CALEB  
(yawning)  
No. I've been on sets since I was a  
kid. This is nothing new.

Lili guides Caleb to a table with microphones. She grabs a  
mic to mic-up Caleb but he grabs the mic and sets it up  
himself.

CALEB (CONT'D)  
Sorry, I like to do this myself.  
We're all set.

LILI

Ok, at this stage I will need your phone - just for confidentiality reasons. You'll get it back at the end of the day.

Caleb hands Lili his phone.

LILI (CONT'D)

(joking)

No other recording devices on your person?

CALEB

Nope.

LILI

Great. So, this morning we'll be shooting your arrival to set and some one-on-one footage. Then you'll meet the judges this afternoon for the first challenge. You have your signature recipe ready?

CALEB

Yup.

Lili pauses to let Caleb explain further but he says nothing.

LILI

Ok... Well, when it comes to brainstorming recipes or just talking about your plan for a challenge, I'm your go-to.

CALEB

I'll keep that in mind.

(beat)

Where are the bathrooms?

Lili points out the bathrooms and Caleb walks in that direction. Lili spots Oliver talking to a woman dressed in army fatigues. Oliver sees Lili walking over and points ANA (35) toward craft services.

OLIVER

You know when they said she was a veteran, I had some expectations, but she shows up in camo? America's gonna eat this up.

(sighs happily)

So, what's the golden boy like?

Lili watches as Caleb exits the bathroom and joins Ana at craft services.

LILI  
He's a little... odd.

OLIVER  
His mom is Maggie Stevens. Some say  
all kids of celebrities are at  
least a little fucked up.  
(beat)  
You get a pass though when you're  
as drop-dead gorgeous as he is.

Lili and Oliver both laugh.

INT. HAIR AND MAKEUP - 9:30 AM

Lili watches as makeup artists powder Caleb's face. He directs them to put more powder on his nose.

CUT TO:

INT. SET OF COOKING COMPETITION - 10:30 AM

Lili watches as Tom directs the contestants in shooting their official entrance. Caleb stand out amongst the contestants as a result of his height and designer clothes.

CUT TO:

INT. CONFSSIONAL ROOM - 11:30 AM

Caleb sits against a backdrop as Lili asks him questions. A cameraman zooms in for a close-up.

LILI  
So Caleb, why did you audition for  
"The Secret Ingredient"?

CALEB  
(smiling brightly)  
Even though I work full-time as a  
lawyer, I've always loved cooking.  
You know, I grew up immersed in  
food. I figured this competition  
would allow me to make a name for  
myself independent of my mom.



LILI

Do you feel a responsibility to represent not just yourself, but your mom as well? Her restaurant has made "The Worlds 50 Best Restaurants" list for the past ten years. That's a lot of pressure.

CALEB

I'm just honored to be continued her legacy and I hope to make her proud.

Lili gives Caleb a thumbs up.

LILI

So, what will you be cooking for the first "Signature Dish" challenge?

CALEB

I'm actually going to be making my mom's recipe for rack of lamb.

Lili smiles at Caleb encouragingly.

LILI

Are you concerned about what the judges will say regarding your decision to make a dish that's not your own?

CALEB

(smile falters)

I'll respect the judges feedback but I there's a reason a classic is a classic.

LILI

So you're not worried about following too closely in your mom's footsteps?

CALEB

(clenches jaw)

No, not at all.

(smiles again)

Lili's radio starts crackling, startling both Lili and Caleb.

TOM (O.S.)

Lili! The mystery judge will be pulling into the parking lot in five.

LILI

Ok, Caleb. I think we have all the footage we need for now. Let me go grab Oliver and he can show you to the special luncheon set up for all contestants.

Lili moves to radio Oliver.

CALEB

Don't worry about it. I know my way around set already.

Lili hesitates. Her radio crackles again.

TOM

Lili! Have you moved?

LILI

(into her radio)

Ok, ok, I'm on my way Tom!

(beat)

Fine. Caleb, the luncheon is out on the lawn near the parking lot where you arrived. Please ask someone for directions if you get lost.

Caleb nods.

LILI (CONT'D)

I'll see you back at set.

Lili runs out of the confessional room.

INT. EMPTY STUDIO HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Lili jogs through the hallway.

LILI

(muttering to herself)

If Tom catches Caleb wandering set alone...

EXT. STUDIO PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Just as Lili opens the door to the parking lot, a silver sports car pulls into the lot. Lili jogs up to the car.

LILI

(into her radio)

Tom! I have my eyes on the judge.

Lili opens the car door and KALA (26) steps out, wearing a stunning suit and sunglasses. Kala freezes when she sees Lili and immediately pulls down her sunglasses.

KALA  
(shocked)  
Lili?

Log line: When a new judge arrives on the set of a cooking competition show and an entitled contestant causes trouble, a food-loving TV producer's carefully constructed life is thrown into chaos.