

THE FLAME

by

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INT. TENEMENT FLAT - BEDROOM./INT. SWANKY FLAT - LIVING ROOM.
NIGHT.

LENA (30) - gorgeous in an innocent-looking way, heavily made up, garishly colourful clothes and big jewellery - sits cross-legged on a bed, peering at something just below the camera.

LENA
No, you've not come up yet.

GRANT (O.S.)
How about now?

Lena swishes her hair about and slips into character - cute, coquettish.

LENA
Ooh - hello, handsome.

GRANT (32) - not bad looking, muscly arms, spruced up with a carefully ironed shirt with one button left undone at the top in what is clearly meant to be an attempt at doing casual - shifts awkwardly in his seat. He is sitting at a dining table in a large, candlelit living room.

GRANT
Hello.

LENA
You're...taller than I expected. Is that a sign of things to come?

Grant flushes, the implication making him uncomfortable.

GRANT
Where are the candles?

Lena's character slips.

LENA
What? Oh, don't have any.

GRANT
None at all?

LENA
You'll just have to make do with my smile to light up the room, eh?

Grant doesn't smile.

GRANT
It's part of the whole atmosphere. Makes things taste better.

LENA
Ooh, aren't we a little Heston Blumenthal?

GRANT
He's got three Michelin stars for a reason.

Lena leans in to the camera, puts on her persona again.

LENA
(breathes suggestively)
That what you want? Michelin stars?

Grant clears his throat, embarrassed.

GRANT
Some day. Have you got the wine?

LENA
Course. Vital rations.

She leans to the side and picks something up - waves a bottle merrily at the screen. Grant squints at the label.

GRANT
Is that a...Chateauf-neuf-du-Pape?

LENA
You don't have to sound so surprised! I like my wine.

GRANT
Good.

Lena gets back into character.

LENA
And I always think this one's got a very sexy label.

She holds the bottle closer to the screen and caresses it with her carefully manicured nails.

LENA (CONT'D)
Don't you?

Grant swallows.

Lena takes this as a sign of encouragement.

LENA (CONT'D)
I like the shape of a good wine bottle. Thick and hard...like a few other things I like to touch...

GRANT
Yeah?

Lena rubs a hand up and down the bottle suggestively.

LENA
Will you do something for me?

GRANT
What?

LENA
Will you get it out?

Footsteps approach on Lena's end. A door opens off screen, behind the webcam. Lena's head snaps round. She hurriedly shoves the wine bottle behind her back.

LENA (CONT'D)
What are you doing?! I told you I'm working!

LENA'S MUM (O.S.)
It's important.

LENA
Mum, you could at least knock!

LENA'S MUM (O.S.)
It's Charlie. He keeps on waking up coughing.

LENA
Away and give him some Calpol, then!

LENA'S MUM (O.S.)
I just checked his temperature. It's a hundred and four.

BEAT. The blood drains from Lena's face.

LENA
Give me a minute.

Footsteps retreat, the door closes. PAUSE.

LENA (CONT'D)
Sorry about that, not very professional...

GRANT
Who's Charlie?

LENA
Can we reschedule? I promise I'll make sure I'm not interrupted next time.

GRANT
Is he your - brother?

LENA
(distractedly)
No, he's my kid. Listen, I've got to...

GRANT
Of course. I'll send you a few dates and times. I hope...I hope your kid's okay.

Lena manages a worried smile - terminates the call.

Grant sits back in his chair, deflated. Picks up his full wine glass and takes a long, long swig. Sighs - alone again. As an afterthought, he leans forward and blows out the candle closest to him.

BLACK SCREEN.

INT. TENEMENT FLAT - BEDROOM/INT. SWANKY FLAT - LIVING ROOM.
NIGHT.

Lena settles herself onto the bed with a steaming plate of food on a laptray.

GRANT (O.S.)
Did you use the oven to heat it
like I told you?

LENA
Yes. Mmm smells delicious.

GRANT
'Cos the microwave really would
ruin it.

LENA
No microwaves involved in the
making of this meal.

GRANT
Good.

LENA
What now?

GRANT
Now we eat.

In so saying, Grant takes a generous sip of wine. An empty bottle and a nearly empty bottle sit next to him on the table, perilously close to a crowd of flickering candles.

Under his watchful gaze, Lena eats a forkful of food.

LENA
Mmm. Oh my god.

GRANT
Good?

LENA
That is...orgasm-inducing.

GRANT
It's alright, you don't have to do
the sex talk thing.

LENA
Well then, what do you want to do?

GRANT
How's your boy?

Lena hesitates, fork halfway to her mouth - the question has caught her off guard.

LENA
He's not too bad.

She looks at Grant - he sways a little, clearly tipsy. He probably won't remember this conversation anyway.

LENA (CONT'D)
Gave us a scare for a few days
there, but hopefully...how are
your...people?

GRANT
That's good, that's good. Oh, I
don't have 'people'. Just food.

Grant takes another slurp of his wine.

LENA
Right.

GRANT
Don't let it get cold after all
that.

LENA
No.

Lena plays around with the food on her plate.

LENA (CONT'D)
So what, do you want like a
girlfriend experience?

Grant gestures expansively at his surroundings - more candles
than you could shake a stick at.

GRANT
Candlelit dinner.

LENA
Is that why you're so nuts about
candles?

GRANT
It's romantic.

LENA
Yeah, 'til you burn your hand on
'em. I've known some guys into
that.

GRANT
Oh. Right.

Awkward PAUSE.

LENA
I've never had anyone send me food.
It's nice.

GRANT
It's what I do. Not gonna stop
doing it just 'cos my job's packed
up.

LENA
Aye. I get that.

A sudden fear strikes Lena - has there been a
misunderstanding?

LENA (CONT'D)
(awkwardly, panicky)
I can't pay you for it, though.

GRANT
Pfft! It's a gift. Enjoy it.

LENA
(phew!)
Thanks.

GRANT
Try a bit with the asparagus.

Lena does. Rolls her eyes in pleasure.

LENA
(through a mouthful)
Where did you get the ingredients
for this?!

GRANT
Work. I've got a key.

Lena almost chokes in surprise.

LENA
What?!
(swallows)
So I'm eating stolen goods?

GRANT
No one else is, so you might as
well. Plus it adds a bit of
flavour.

Lena looks at him, trying to figure out if he's being
serious. He looks at her deadpan.

LENA
No.

GRANT
It's true.

LENA
(laughing)
No!

He raises his glass.

GRANT
Slange. To flavour - stolen or
otherwise!

LENA
You're mad.

GRANT
Go on, join in.

Lena reluctantly picks up her glass and raises it to the
screen.

LENA
Slange.

At Lena's end, a knock on the door.

LENA'S MUM (O.S.)
(muffled, through the door)
Charlie's asking for you.

LENA
In a minute!

LENA'S MUM (O.S.)
(heavily sarcastic)
He's only your ailing son, I'm sure it can wait.

LENA
Literally one minute!

Footsteps recede. Lena sighs.

LENA (CONT'D)
Sorry. I'll be right back.

GRANT
No, it's okay. You've got to look after your 'people'. I'll still pay you the full amount.

LENA
Really? That would be seriously amazing of you, thanks.

GRANT
Just as long as we can -

Lena terminates the call.

GRANT (CONT'D)
- do this again.

Grant stares at the screen a moment, hurt. Drains his glass and slowly lowers the lid of his laptop - darkness descends.

INT. TENEMENT FLAT - BEDROOM/INT. SWANKY FLAT - LIVING ROOM.
NIGHT.

Lena settles into position on her bed while the chirpy Skype ringtone goes on...and on...she fidgets impatiently.

LENA
(under her breath)
Jesus, take your time, why don't you?

She looks at her watch. Gets her phone out. The ringing going on all the time. Taps on her phone, puts it to her ear.

LENA (CONT'D)
(under her breath)
And you can stop, and all.

Lena irritably taps her laptop. The ringtone cuts off. She waits.

LENA (CONT'D)
Come on, where are y-

GRANT (O.S.)
(slurred)
Hullo?

Lena's eyes dart to the screen, where his voice is coming from. She hangs up the phone, takes in the picture.

LENA
Hiya.

Grant is slumped against the table, looking like he's only just awoken from a drunken stupor.

GRANT
(slurred)
HHii...

LENA
Sorry, I thought we booked another session...

GRANT
We did, we did. Just...didn't think you'd turn up, so. I lighted the candles.

LENA
Right.

GRANT
Lit. Lighted.

Grant laughs drunkenly, manically.

GRANT (CONT'D)
For my flame...get it? Lit the candles for my flame...

LENA
If you say so...

Lena is distracted from this spectacle by a cloud of smoke drifting into view from one side. Grant is growing increasingly sleepy.

GRANT
S'pposed to light up my life. Make it like people. 'sno people. 'sjust me.

LENA
What's that? Grant, have you been cooking? Is something burning?

Grant lays his head down on his arms on the table. It looks like he's about to fall asleep.

GRANT
Rude. I'm chef.

He closes his eyes. The smoke is growing thicker, billowing in now.

LENA
Grant? Grant! Wake up!

Building in the background, the quiet roaring sound of fire.
Lena picks up her phone - dials fast, presses it to her ear.

LENA (CONT'D)
(into phone)
Fire, please.

She fidgets nervously, all the while keeping her eyes on the immobile Grant and the thickening smoke.

LENA (CONT'D)
(into phone)
I think there's a fire in my
friend's flat. He's unconscious, I
can't wake him.
(listens)
He's...crap, I don't know where.
It'll be Glasgow, but...

It dawns on her - they can't get to him if she can't tell them where he is. She chucks the phone down on the bed.

LENA (CONT'D)
GRANT!! Wake up, you lazy arsed
bastard!! WAKE UP!!

One of his eyelids twitches.

LENA (CONT'D)
THAT'S IT! YOU WANT THOSE MICHELIN
STARS?! GET UP!!

He groans.

LENA (CONT'D)
YOU'RE - BURNING THE FOOD! CHEF,
SERVICE!!

This does the trick. He raises his head with a jerk.

GRANT
What? No burning.

LENA
Look to your left!

He does - and blinks in shock. He wakes up fully, pulls himself to standing, leaning on the chair and the laptop, in so doing closing it, and our picture with it.

Lena stares at the blank screen in wordless agitation.

TITLE CARD: TWO HOURS LATER...

INT. TENEMENT FLAT - BEDROOM/INT. SWANKY FLAT - LIVING ROOM.
NIGHT.

Grant sits in a different seat at the table, bloodshot eyes, clearly hungover. No wine or candles in sight.

LENA (O.S.)
No lasting damage, then?

Grant shakes his head wearily.

GRANT
They said I was lucky. With my
blood alcohol levels, I should have
been spark out for a fair while.

He avoids her eyes, embarrassed.

LENA
Told you. Candles are dangerous,
pal. You were playing with fire.

Grant winces and chuckles at the pun.

LENA (CONT'D)
No, I didn't mean...

GRANT
How's your wee boy? Charlie?

Lena smiles, touched that he remembered her son's name.

LENA
He's better, thanks. He's fully
recovered and fully a pain in my
backside again.

GRANT
I'm glad. Look, I want to give you
something.

LENA
You don't have to do that.

GRANT
You saved my life.

Lena shifts uncomfortably - she could do with the help, but
she's got her pride.

LENA
I didn't do it for the money.

GRANT
I know. That's why I'll be sending
you my finest ossobuco.

LENA
(suggestively)
Never heard it called *that* before.

Grant flushes, awkward.

GRANT
No, it's a dish -

LENA
I'm just messing with ya, candle
boy.

Lena grins fiendishly. Grant shakes his head in bemusement,
lets out a shaky laugh.

GRANT
You know, some might say I'm still
playing with fire.

BEAT. There's sudden tension, eye contact. Lena chuckles wryly, blushes a little.

LENA
I wouldn't go that far. But...maybe
there's a spark. Or a lone flame.

They share a tentative smile.

THE END