

A Recipe for Failure

“You join us live in Leicester square as the first deliveries of the new initiative from the World Health Organisation are rolling in.” Louise looked straight into the camera as the focus came back to her from the massive truck coming to a halt behind her. “In just a few minutes, they’ll be off loading the first of the EverSummer bars to the food courts and we can all look forwards to a good meal.”

The Camera flicked off and she turned to check her make up in the mirror. No amount of blusher could cover the gaunt visage that she was displaying. She’d seen better days, the lack of food and need for emergency rationing had left everyone starving these last few months, and with her already having to look thin for the camera’s, she now looked one step away from malnourished. She looked at her crew, both of them working here for nothing just so they’d be some of the first in line to get the food when it was handed out.

The guards disembarked first, forty of them, all looking like they hadn’t been missing meals, all of them carrying fully automatic weapons and in sealed body armour. They didn’t look so much like the police as Stormtroopers with a bad paint job. Louise looked back over to the van as the tail lift dropped and the first pallets of food bars were wheeled out to the waiting politicians on the stage at the far end of the square. At the sight of the bars being held aloft, a ragged cheer went up from the crowd and there was a surge towards the railings. Louise looked at the Police standing in front of the crowd control barriers, none of them having to step forwards to push the crowd back.

Fewer problems than they’d feared, but this is England, we know how to queue, even in the face of global famine...

“Here we have the first of the food replacement bars,” The Prime minister held up the bar in his hand, “Enough calories, vitamins and essential minerals to supply a single person for a whole day, and all made at a price that will ensure that no nation goes without.” She peeled the wrapper off the bar and made a show of biting into the bar with zeal.

Looks like flavour wasn’t high on the list from that expression

The bars were handed out around the crowd, one to each person, with more on the way to individual fulfilment centres around the country and indeed around the world. Louise eyed up the bar she’d been given, in a red wrapper with no other design on it, simply the words, “Food supplement number one.” Written on the side.

It tastes like dishwater...

Louise managed to finish the bar, feeling better in seconds than she had done in the last month as the chemicals in the bar started to work on her. She turned back to the camera as her guys finished off their bars and summoned a real smile this time.

“So this is Louise Simmons, on location in Leicester square where the food really has come back to town.”

Later that night, Louise was on the toilet when the call came in from her boss. She stood from the toilet and washed her hands before taking the call.

"You need to get over to Downing Street, the Prime minister has been taken ill."

Louise nodded and called her crew, they were round with the van in minutes, arriving at Downing street as the ambulance left the scene. She caught the eye of the officer she normally bribed for information and he stood closer for a second.

"Case of food poisoning by the looks of it," He whispered, pocketing the fifty she'd palmed him.

"What, from the new food bars?" Louise whispered

"Couldn't say, but it's a safe bet, they had a delivery of all the different bars in here earlier on today, they were having a celebration meal earlier."

"Thanks," Louise went back to the camera crew and waved them off when they raised the camera to film. "Do either of you have any contacts at Barts?"

"Dated a nurse there once..." Jim shrugged, "Why?"

"Because if there's something in the bars, now would be a really good time to find out don't you think?"

They were on the way over to the hospital when Louise's phone rang again, this time to divert her back to Downing Street to cover the announcement of the Prime Ministers death due to a freak accident and a previously undetected heart condition.

Like Hell...

It took two days to arrange a meet with Jim's ex-girlfriend, and Louise brought along a sample of each of the bars with her.

"Look," Louise said, "It was something in one of these bars that did it, I'm sure, can you run an analysis on each of the bars and see if there was something in there that could have done it."

"Don't you think they'd have tested that when they were making them?" Jim's Ex looked at her in disdain, "You don't just roll out something on this scale without making sure it's safe, and no politician in the world will put something in their mouth without making sure some other poor schmucks had it in theirs' first."

"Just test it, get back to me when you can..."

It was another day before Susan got back in touch with Louise, asking for a meeting with her and her alone, in the open, out on the embankment. Louise came alone, still with a bit of a stomach ache from the sugary bar that she'd taken the previous night from the American embassy.

Too sugary, stick to dishwasher from now on...

Susan looked spooked when she arrived, walking up to her and ushering her to the side of the embankment.

"You were right," Susan said, "It was something in the bars that did it."

"I knew it," Louise smiled, "Which one...?"

"All of them."

"Can't be in all of them," Louise felt a chill down her spine, "We've all been eating them for days."

"Yeah, but we've been eating the same one since the beginning of this, it's not just in one of the bars, it's all of them."

"I don't follow..."

"The bars come from different regions, right?" Susan looked around at the people around her, "Each one was tested according to certain guidelines and restrictions, right?"

"Yeah..."

"Except what's the one thing that governments always do when it comes to something costing this much?"

"Farm it out to the lowest bidder." Louise nodded

"Exactly, and that's what happened here, except every country send out each of theirs to the lowest bidder as well."

"Not seeing the problem."

"The problem is in the combinations," Susan looked at her, "If you only eat one bar for life, in our case, the dishwasher, then you'll be fine." She pulled a sheaf of papers from her jacket and passed them to Louise. "But if you eat one of the English Dishwater bars and then eat an American All Sugar bar, you'll be dead in days."

"What? That's impossible...How...?"

"Because the English bar contains a variant on crab proteins and the American one contains a type of Persimmon juice within it, you combine these and you've got a cement like substance in a few seconds, add it to stomach acids and whoever ate it ends up shitting rocks till they die of it..."

"That's not possible, the lists would have been specific..."

"And they were..." Susan shook her head, "I checked, no country put two of the restricted chemicals into their own bars, the problem occurred when you look down the list of chemicals that the other countries put in theirs, no one cross checked..."

"Because everyone was too busy making sure theirs came out first for the global market..."

"And now all the bars have gone plain wrapper so no one can tell where the bars come from, so anything we eat could be one of the bars from another country..."

"Dear god, is there anything we can do about it?"

"Get an announcement made," Susan looked up the embankment as two tall men in dark suits started towards them, "and get it out before the establishment gets wind of it..."

"Go..." Louise looked towards the two men as her stomach ache grew more intense, "I'll get the word out."

She watched as Susan moved to the other side of the road, shaking her head as one of the men peeled off from his colleague and followed her. The other man stopped in front of Louise and held his hand at waist height, flashing the ministry badge to her.

"Miss Simmons," He said, "Would you come with me please?"

"What is it?" She looked up at him as her stomach gurgled and a bubbling sensation made its way up inside her.

"I've just been asked to bring you in for a chat," He said, his manner professional, but making no effort to conceal the firearm in his shoulder holster, "The Chaps at the club would like to discuss some potentially damaging rumours that have been circulating regarding the new food bars."

"Have you eaten any?" She looked up at him.

“Only the British ones Ma’am, like they recommend on the literature.”

“Alright...” Louise stood up, the motion making her head spin as something sharp spun in her gut.

She sat back down and burped, her hand covering her mouth as a reflex, coming away wet with thin streaks of red. She looked up at the agent and he reached to his radio, his words lost as the world seemed to spin away from her. She fell sideways, the agent catching her before she hit the bench, laying her flat on it and taking his coat off to cover her. She was aware of him yelling for an ambulance and she smiled faintly as she remembered what her mum had always said...

Always read the labels...