

# FIRST date



## The Worst Best Friend

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## **ALEXANDRA LAROCHELLE & LOUIS PATALANO, AUTHORS**

First published at the age of ten, **Alexandra Larochelle's** first novel was an instant success, spearheading a 6-title series that sold over 130,000 copies. More than fifteen years after the publication of her first novel, **Alexandra** has now published more than 15 books and writes for multiple projects in the fields of technology, publishing and advertising.

**Louis Patalano** has over thirteen years of experience as a project manager, narrative designer, associate producer, creative director, executive editor and more, both in the video game and television fields.

**Alexandra** and **Louis** have an ongoing collaboration, they founded together the scripting company DragonBox Conception, where they both work as creative directors for television shows and video games. **Alexandra** and **Louis** are teaming up again to write ***First Date*** (*Premier rendez-vous*), their first series published at Éditions Michel Quintin.

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# Chapter 1

THEO: FRIDAY, AUGUST 30

I shiver and pull my jacket hood over my head. The Café du Coin is just down the street, but the walk feels endless; first, because it's raining and I'm freezing on this last Friday of the summer holidays (it's like ... 17 degrees; ok, maybe I also have a really low tolerance for cold), and secondly, (read: mainly) because it's been exactly 32 days that I haven't seen Azalea. I knew it would be hard to leave her for four weeks of summer camp, but like we'd said before I left, our reunion will be all the sweeter for it.

Were it up to us, we would've for sure texted each other a million times a day, but the rules were clear (read: clearly too strict): campers were not allowed



## THEO

to use their phone at camp. We still wrote to each other at least five times while I was gone, but a letter can't replace the little dimple on her left cheek when she smiles or her adorable grey-green eyes that crinkle into crescent-moons when she laughs.

Plus, I have so much to tell her! I have a big announcement and I want her to be the first to hear it.

I push open the door to the café and the little bell rings overhead. In that same instant, outside, the day's first ray of sunlight pierces through the clouds, creating a rainbow directly over the café. The whole place is bathed in an orange glow and the beam of light falls directly on ... Azalea.

She's wiping down a table, her little red and white apron tied around her waist. She's sticking her tongue out and bobbing along to the rhythm of the music on her earphones. In the total silence of the place, I can just make out the chorus of *You Give Love a Bad Name* by Bon Jovi. I stop to watch her for a few seconds and laugh. She's just ... too *cute*! I've missed her so much ... her and her slightly melodramatic personality!



THEO

She suddenly looks up and completely freezes on seeing me. I get the impression she's just bitten her tongue in surprise! She drops her cleaning rag and races full speed towards me (although the expression on her face says she has indeed just bitten her tongue, ouch!). I take her in my arms and lift her as high as I can. I spin her around in the glow of the sun's rays and we both burst into laughter, exactly like in all those cheesy romantic movies she's always forcing me to watch with her.

— THEO! I'M SO HAPPY TO SEE YOU! OH MY GOD, I'VE MISSED YOU SO MUCH! HOW ARE YOU? WHEN DID YOU GET BACK? YOU'RE SO TANNED! WOW, YOU LOOK AMAZING!

— Whoa, Zalie! Stop yelling and take your earphones out!

— WHAT!?!?

— Take your earphones out!

— I CAN'T HEAR ANYTHING, I HAVE MY EARPHONES IN!

Laughing, I put her down and she takes out her earphones. She appears even more radiant than the



THEO

last time I saw her. We stare at each other in silence for a few seconds, to take in the moment.

— I'm so happy to see you again, Zalie.

— Me too, I have so much to tell you ... and also, a big surprise to show you! I'll be done in 10 minutes, shall we go to my place?

She says this with a little wink. She makes me laugh, Azalea does. She's probably the person who makes me laugh the most in the world.

— Just 10 minutes? I'd wait my whole life for you, if I had to.

She sticks her tongue out at me before bursting into laughter and heads into the kitchen to finish her shift, close her cash register, and collect her things. I take a seat to wait for her and look around me. Azalea's grandfather's café is really charming. The walls are covered in family photos that peek out from between shelves crammed with books and souvenirs from all across the globe.

My Zalie definitely has the coolest family in the world. Her grandparents were passionate about coffee (yuck) and travelled the world to find the best



## THEO

coffee beans on earth. I think every type of coffee tastes just as gross as the next one and it would've been much better if they'd looked for the best kinds of hot chocolate instead, but hey, no one's perfect.

Azalea's parents, meanwhile, worked for Doctors Without Borders when she was a baby, so my friend has photos of herself in a dozen different countries. In fact, her mother had her in Nepal, and it's because the Himalayas are filled with azaleas that she got her name. The only drawback to this life of grand adventure is that Zalie doesn't remember much of it. When she turned school age, her parents decided to settle back down in Quebec so that she and her big sister would have a more "normal" life. Me, I would really much rather travel around the world instead of having a normal life, but that's their choice I guess. And in any case, I can't begrudge them that, because otherwise I would never have met Azalea.

Zalie returns from the kitchen. She's tied her hair up in a bun (the hairstyle that suits her best in my opinion) and she smiles at me with all her slightly crooked teeth (but they just make her even cuter).

## THEO

— Ready, Teebee?

I love when Azalea calls me that. I got this nickname because of my initials: Theo Begin, T.B.

— I've been ready for 32 days! I've been waiting to tell you all about my month at camp ! I've met ...

She covers her ears with both her hands.

— LALALALA! Hold it, I want us to be cozied up under a giant comforter when I hear this!

I put my arm around her shoulders and we head out. The rain has let up and now that my Zalie is here, pressed up against me, it feels a little less cold. I listen to her talk about Josianne, a coworker at the café who she detests (I get why ... Josianne goes to my school and it's true that she's super unbearable), and that time, just last week, my friend dropped a giant bag of super expensive coffee beans from Vietnam all over the stairs and then barrelled downstairs in front of a ton of clients while trying to clean up her mess. I cry with laughter! Azalea really knows how to tell a story, especially an embarrassing one.

We get to her place. I've been away for just one month, but it feels like ages since I last saw Celine and





THEO

Arthur's beautiful house. When Zalie pushes open the front door, the house smells of her dad's delicious cassoulet. Yummm!

— Mum, I'm home and Theo's come for dinner!

— Hey, Celine! I call out to her from the entryway.

I hear Celine's footsteps approaching, but Zalie pulls me by the hand towards the stairs.

— Theo? I didn't know you were back!

Did you have a good summer at ca..

Zalie pulls on my hand even harder.

— We don't have time for this, mum! We have 32 days to catch up on. You can interrogate him at dinner!

— Understood! Celine says with a laugh. It'll be ready in 30 minutes.

— Ok, thanks! Azalea yells from the second floor.

— And leave the door open!

I have to hold back a snort of laughter.

Azalea rolls her eyes and closes her bedroom door despite being told not to, before dragging me with her over to the bed.



THEO

— Ok, tell me everything! she commands with a little smile.

I feel my heart beat a little faster and flames heat up my cheeks. I take a long deep breath before saying ...

— You first. You told me you had some big news and a surprise for me!

— Pshhh! That's mean, Mister Tease!

— It's not mean, those are the rules!

— Whose rules? Zalie asks with raised eyebrows.

— My rules of course. No surprise, no secret.

She rolls her eyes again and that makes me burst into laughter. Then, she gives me a mysterious look.

— Ok, fine. You know how my granddad had a knee operation this summer and hasn't been able to work at the café since?

— Uh huh ...

— And you know that I asked him to hire me so that I could help him and also earn some money ...

— Uh huh ...

Zalie gets up. She looks both nervous and excited.



THEO

— ... except I never told you exactly why I needed so much money.

— That's true ... I say becoming more and more impatient for my surprise.

— But you must have some idea, no?

I hear what sounds like a giant vacuum in my brain. Am I supposed to know this?

— Uh ... yeah ... ?

Zalie opens the door of her walk-in closet and shuts it behind her.

— Well, I hope you like it, because after all, I did sort of buy it for you, she says from the other side of the door.

— Bought ...? For me ...?

Oh no. I suddenly feel my heart stop. If this is what I think it is, it's really very bad news. No, no, no. I'm sure I'm wrong. She would never have bought it this early ... it's almost a year away! And in any case, she told me she had a lovely surprise for me. This would REALLY not be a lovely surprise. Except she can't know either, and we had promised each other ...

— Just a second, the zip is stuck in the back.



THEO

Oh no. The zip. In the back. Oh no. I really hope it isn't ...

The closet door opens and Zalie stands before me. I can almost hear an angelic choir playing on some imaginary divine speakers. Zalie is completely stunning in a magnificent burgundy dress that makes her look like a resplendent princess straight out of a fairy tale. What a horror story.

— I saw the pattern in a magazine and had it custom made for the high school Summer Solstice Dance. I couldn't wait, I was so excited. I wanted you to be proud of your dance partner. And the seamstress even told me she could tailor you a jacket to match my dress if you wanted.

— Oh ... uh ... wow ... uh ...

I should say something, but my mind is a gaping void. All I can think of is that she's going to kill me. Slowly. Cruelly. And justifiably.

— Ok, you seem to have swallowed your tongue. Do you like it at least?

She leans towards me, clearly frustrated by my non-reaction. Quick. I need to say something.



THEO

— I ... love it ... but ... I love ... I love ... uh, I love Louis-Philippe.

I slap my hand to my mouth. That's not exactly how I'd planned on announcing my big news. Azalea blinks two or three times, mouth half open.

— What?

— I've ... uh ... met someone. My boyfriend, in fact. I have a boyfriend. A love. I'm in love with my love. Louis-Philippe. That's my boyfriend, Louis-Philippe.

Ugh! I feel as if I might faint. That wouldn't be a bad thing. At least it won't hurt as much when she kills me.

Her face stays frozen for a few seconds, before melting into a broad smile.

— OH MY GOD, THEOOOO! WOWWWW! YOU HAVE A BOYFRIEND! I'm so, so, SO happy! Finally! You've been so afraid to make the first move with a guy for so long!

She puts her arms around my neck and hugs me tight.



THEO

— I'm relieved, I thought you were going to say you didn't like my 500 dollar dress.

— 500 DOLLARS?!

— Well yeah, being beautiful costs money! Oh, but I'm so happy, Theo! Finally, my best friend has a boyfriend. Tell me everything about him. Is he handsome, tall, blond, short, red haired? Does he treat you well? Is he the jealous type? Oh, I hope he won't be jealous when you take me to the dance, eh? After all, we promised we'd go together over a year ago.

Promised, promised, promised ... oh my god, she still doesn't get it. It feels like my heart has stopped again. How many heart attacks can you survive in a single day?

— Zalie ... I ... You need to know that, uh ... I've already asked him to the dance ...

Her face freezes again and I get the feeling that all the blood in her head has travelled to her toes. She grits her teeth and clenches her jaw.

— Excuse me ...?

— I ... well, he heard about the third-year summer solstice dance at Jolicoeur composite, like everyone



THEO

else, and he told me he'd really like to go. So, I ... well, I thought it would be a good idea if ... uh ... I asked him? But you can still go, you know! You might find someone nice to be your date! We could all hang out and dance together. The four of us. Eh?

Her face is so rigid that I can't make out any reaction whatsoever. When she opens her mouth, the words come out slowly and painfully.

— Get out.

— Uh ... what?

— Get out.

— You don't want to tal..

— Theo ... GET OUT! GET OUT! GET OUT! I almost fall off the bed trying to get up. I run towards the hallway and bolt down the stairs. I hear Celine call out that dinner is ready, but I don't even answer and fling open the door as I run out. I find myself outside, out of breath, my eyes wet with tears. I've forgotten my jacket on the bed and it's started raining again.



Theo and Azalea have been best friends forever and ever. But when Theo tells Azalea he won't be able to accompany her to the Summer Solstice Dance because he is now going with his new boyfriend, his lifelong friend is furious. She can't believe her bestie is going back on his promise to be her date!



Luckily, Theo has a foolproof plan to be forgiven: find Azalea a boyfriend before the dance. Along with his new beau Louis-Philippe, Theo develops First Date, a dating app exclusive for the students in their high school. Will this help Azalea find love and a companion for dance?