

DISPATCHES

Arts & Culture

The End of the World Smells Like Tomato Soup

Headventure 3

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Author's Note: Marius Sosnowski writes the other half of Headventures. The fictions collected below are my first for this column. The motto, for me, is "Anything goes."

Headventures 

AT A FRENCH RESTAURANT IN POTSDAM:

"Sir, are you okay? You've barely touched your Monet mashed potato."

"Yes," I told the server. "I'm okay. But my husband left me, and I'm not hungry. He left a note on the fridge. And a pair of slippers. He left a pair of slippers I bought him in Paris. He organized a search committee for my next lover, which is a kind gesture, don't you think? Don't you think that's a kind gesture? He was precise. In the note, he said, "I'm asking Michelle to find you another husband." The problem is, I'm not popular. I have a temper, I'm allergic to roses, and the smell of my feet fills every room. I can't help it. All of my ancestors ran. Marathons, mostly. When I think of Grandpa Gordon, I see

him at the finish line in Boston, hurling water over his face and the faces of people around him, including me—I was young, idealistic, and terrified of talking to people my age, a fear I haven't been able to shake. Everyone runs in my family. I ran this morning. I ran here.”

I looked up, expecting to see the server waiting on me with his watchful, caring eyes, ready to receive my order—a Manhattan, maybe, or a glass of wine—but he was gone. The restaurant was full. I looked down at the evening sun poking through my Monet mashed potato.



AT A DUTCH RESTAURANT IN LONDON:

“Ma’am, are you okay? You’ve barely touched your tomato van Gogh.”

“If this is what you call soup,” I said to the server. But I didn’t finish my sentence. The truth is, there was nothing wrong with my tomato van Gogh. In fact, I liked it. A little drippy off the frame, a little warm, but the flavor was light and clean. No, it wasn’t the soup. Dad had just left his husband, Claude, and I was feeling lost, lamplit, and light-headed. From the backyard of their relationship, which is where I sat as daughter and daughter-in-law, I couldn’t help but wonder: What now? No doubt I’d be asked to find Claude a new husband. This happened when dad left George, and then Sander. I found someone for George, and Sander died, thank God. But Claude. Claude was something else. He slept in his shoes. He ran to work. He read minds. But

there were perks, certainly. He yelled in the airport, which moved things along. He read poetry. He smoked American Spirits in the morning.

“Ma’am?”

“It’s fine,” I said. “Actually, it’s a little warm.”

I watched the server take my tomato van Gogh to the kitchen. The sunflowers were wilting.



AT AN ITALIAN RESTAURANT IN PARIS:

“Sir, are you okay? You’ve barely touched your Mona cake.”

I looked at the server in disgust. This was not the time. I considered yelling. I like to yell in restaurants. For a kick. For kicks and gigs.

“Excuse me,” I said. “I’m having a personal crisis. Do you mind, um, going away?”

The server did not go away.

“I’m sorry, sir,” he said, “but that’s no way to speak to someone. Not here. Not anywhere, really. I’m going to have to call the manager. If you keep this up, you might get the boot.”

“Please,” I said. No, I yelled: “I just left my husband, and I can’t, for the love of God, remember if I put my note on the fridge, on the kettle, or if I left a note at all. I’m distressed. Lost. Loved. None of this was planned. I met Andre last week at a conference in Egypt. He’s charming, he wears silk, he listens to podcasts.”

“Sir.”

“I could never listen to podcasts with Claude. And now, oh, I can see it all: Claude in the hall, falling over in grief, carving a hole in his heart with my slippers. No, he’s on the couch, talking to Michelle, listening to Michelle’s men, and here I am, trying for peace, for quiet, and I can’t even leave my cake unattended for five minutes without a word from someone.”

The manager put my Mona cake in a to-go box and asked me to leave.



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