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## Escargot

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BRENNA CROWE

# Escargot

It's raining and New York City smells like warm, wet dog. Aromas of rotting garbage, suspicious urine, and suffocating humidity percolate throughout the atmosphere, slowly killing us all.

We meet at Penn Station. A sizable orange and teal hat shadows light blue eyes, and a bright red smile kisses me on my cheek. Freshly manicured hands with cold rings squeeze my shoulders.

My aunt.

She's glad to see me.

We're going to a French restaurant she was told about by a periodical that writes about French restaurants. New York City with gloomy drizzle is expensive designer shoes dipping in oily puddles, and umbrellas dodging other umbrellas.

Someone let go of a pink balloon and it's floating past all the buildings. I'm jealous of its destination. It will float 28,000 miles above sea level before the pressure inside the balloon is more than the pressure outside the balloon. And it will explode into a million tiny pieces.

I want to explode. I want to burst and rain down chunks of my organs, bones, and blood on innocent New York City pedestrians.

We get to the French place and are showed to our table. My aunt rejects the first table and requests the one in the corner by the window. The waiter is slightly inconvenienced (a reservation of five was set to dine there at eight) but she slips him a twenty to soothe the irritation.

She is a lady who will always get her way.

A broad-shouldered waiter in a white shirt pours us tall glasses of water that would be too tall in France. Genuine France is a minimalist. She has smaller proportions. The fluid capacity for this water glass is about sixteen ounces, but a water glass in France is less than eight.

That is why they think Americans are so gluttonous.

My aunt is frantic. She's getting a new apartment soon. Everything she owns on this planet is scattered and scrambled. Her mind is also scattered and scrambled. Her gold and silver bracelets cling and chink in stressed motions that originate from her stressed mental state.

Sitting at that corner window table, sipping on the too-tall glass of water, an epiphany hits me. The word *emotion* contains the word *motion*. Motion means to move, so emotion is the movement of a mental state. If an object in motion stays in motion unless obstructed by an outside force, then a mental state will continue gnawing at the sufferer unless obstructed by an outside source. Another mental state needs to take the place of the previous mental state.

Looking out the window, an unsuspecting woman is hit in the head with an umbrella. Due to her incredulous expression, I cannot help laughing.

Maybe I'm a sociopath.

My aunt asks me how school is, and I tell her it's fine. I tell her that my classes, being social sciences, are all rooted in philosophy.

I ask her if she believes in God, a question I find myself asking too many people. People say no more often than not. I should start keeping graphs.

I'm not sure if everything is made to be sad or invigorating in a godless world.

She tells me she goes back and forth between atheism and agnosticism. Between godlessness and half godlessness. She doesn't ask what I believe. I'm glad she doesn't, because I don't know. I'm too young, and God is too abstract.

"Let me give you some advice, sweetheart. Number one," she holds up her pointer finger, "always wash your neck the way you wash your face. Whatever scrub, cream, or mask you put on your face—put it on your neck, too. Also, never go to bed without taking off your make-up. You'll get older quicker."

Number one makes me aware of my unclean neck.

I take a sip of the glass of water to wash down the advice.

The broad-shoulder waiter with the white shirt takes our order. We order escargots and coq au vin to share.

Maybe the waiter is god. Creator of the universe and of satisfying customer relations.

"Number two," she holds out her middle finger along with her pointer finger, "never stop being curious. It's what keeps you interested in yourself and the people around you."

I already know number two.

Our escargots arrive.

Being a snail must be a constant existential crisis. Am I a bug or a sea creature? Is this my home or is that my home? Every snail has a dick and a

vagina. If you were a snail, you could both impregnate and be impregnated by your snail lover.

I would not be able to orientate myself in such an ambiguous lifestyle.

I feel bad for eating such a confused life form, but not bad enough to refuse ingesting it.

“Number three,” she adds her ring finger, “make sure when in a relationship that the person you’re with loves you more than you love them. Always be the one with the control. Men cheat when you put them on pedestals. I’ve had my heart broken once or twice, and the only thing you get out of it is a seemingly chronic case of cirrhosis. I want to see you with someone who is going to support you.”

Mouthful of water.

I don’t know what to say to her. I have no desire to control anyone or to be with anyone out of necessity.

I don’t like talking to most people, let alone the idea of spending the majority of my time with a single person.

But that’s okay. Most people probably don’t think twice about my conversational efforts or about the idea of getting to know me better either.

People aren’t awful. I just thrive in solitude. To the point where I am a tightwad with the time I spend with other people.

Sip of water.

Our coq au vin arrives.

I lose track of the conversation.

I’m not listening, but she keeps talking.

If anything, I want to spend all day doing nothing in complete silence with another person and still have confidence in the existence of a meaningful and loving relationship.

But I get no pleasure from being with someone whom I have to search for reasons to care about. Maybe it’s my lack of understanding or my lack of confidence. Maybe it’s a concoction of the two. I just think there should be some purpose in intimacy beyond function.

Most people function, but the quality of that functioning is questionable; their levels of genuine joy are questionable.

There’s no ecstasy in running out at eight o’clock on a Sunday morning to get coffee from the nearest 7-Eleven, if it’s just routine.

There has to be more.

Sip of water.

Note to self: I can’t tell her this. I’d look stupid. I’m too young. Her frequency is vibrating closer to reality’s frequency. My tragedies are too minimalistic, too casual for her deep understanding of social relationships.

I finish my confused snails and pretentious chicken, and the too tall glass of water is running through my veins by now. Nowhere else to look to hide the shame of my hope.

Her darting clear blue eyes and her bright red lips tell me, “Great sex can only fill so many voids for so long. You have to do what makes sense in the bigger context.” Talking more than listening, she still has some food left on her plate, and her wine glass is two-thirds empty.

She pays the check, and I thank her and tell her I love her.

We go our separate ways outside the restaurant. She gets into a taxi, and I walk back to Penn Station.

The city smells like warm, wet dog when it rains.