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Welcome to the Other Side

ONE DAY IT'S SALMON, one day it's imported butter, another day is coconut-something-covered-in-chocolate. Most of the food there is covered in chocolate. That's what we sell. Chocolate-covered food, mostly.

I stand there at work, trying to empty my mind so that I can be more friendly, hoping this will help the customers have a positive shopping experience (or P.S.E.).

The uniform we wear is cool: white shirt, black pants, little checkered hat, black apron, etc. Don't forget the nametag, so people know what to call me.

When I get home, I am greeted by my round table with correspondingly round red table cloth, so the cloth hangs down at a pleasing ratio that the manufacturer was kind enough to think of, and I am also greeted by my pink easy chair with a pillow that is actually from a thrift store, but makes the room feel fancy, due to a series of colors in V-shapes that link the color scheme.

I can be overly wordy and analytical when talking about décor.

An ex-boyfriend of mine once said, "Poor Dudesie. Really analytical about the things that don't matter."

I remind myself I have to remember the beauty of past friendships, when we were elevated/hopeful/young. That's what happens in life: you get old. You look back. It was all so extravagaselegant (I made that up myself). I mean, where else can you get these sensations except from the reality of having fun with other people and a past full of such fun? Usually reality is not that fun. I don't know why we trick ourselves into thinking it is. It's a lot of effort, really.

The pathetic facts of my life, then, when I get to remembering good times for no reason other than that goodness and a pleasant time were real—The pathetic facts, as I here reiterate, melt like dewy sea foam, and I am once again in Montreal, on *Le Plateau*, with my best friend Genevieve. (We were both born in the downtown area, which she later referred to as the Leo Gray Area, due to the fact that one of her C.E.G.E.P teachers lived there. We were amused by things like that, like how one of her classmates loved the name, "Omar," so named everything "Omar," – The chair, the T.V. Stand, the pair of socks there. So, when she had a real baby, she of course named him, "Omar.")

What's in a name? I'm in sales. I feel like I should know.

Anyways.

Genevieve was so cool, I don't even know where to begin praising her in ways that would reveal how much I love and owe her. She inspires me to this day, when I stand at my cart with free food samples.

She worked in the school café, and bemoaned customers she didn't recognize when they ordered, "The usual."

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Her toilet was stocked with 1999 *Flushes Gold*, so that your pee or poo went down in glittering style. We found this funny, and would squeal, “Nineteen-Ninety-Nine *Flushes Gold!*” each time one of us exited the bathroom of the smallish-size *Le Plateau* apartment, in a building that had a turquoise awning that looked so totally 1970’s.

We got blue (pineapple flavored) Mr. Frozens, and sucked on them in sunlit alleyways, as we made our way from the *dépanneur* (corner store that we as Montrealers take great pride in calling a *dépanneur*, even though we don’t know the etymology of that word) back to her place. The sun was beautiful and northern.

We turned her apartment into an art gallery for my work, and we made a sign that we put on the door that said, “*Gallerie Poêle Turquoise*,” in French, which Genevieve was fluent in (When writing in English, however, she insisted on leaving off the accent on one of the “e”s in her name.) The name translates into English as “The Turquoise Stove Gallery.” We were simply overflowing with talent.

For her school (aforementioned C.E.G.E.P.) film class, she and a classmate wrote a movie about an artist. I played the starring role.

All that is in the gloriousness of my happy past.

These days, I’m kind of obsessed with a youngster named Sebastian Xavier. As I work at my job, standing there in my cute uniform (black-and-white checkered chef’s hat, black apron, black pants, white button-down shirt, black sneakers, nametag), I think customers trying the food samples I offer are, in all reality, telling me messages from Sebastian Xavier.

One customer said, “Does this have vodka in it?” And then I think that my friend/crush/younger guy is telling me to have a drink. It really, really seems like this is happening. Yes, I take psych meds. They work okay. I think. But I don’t really know. Instead of going crazy, I want to trick myself into going sane.

Honestly, I want nookie, but now I don’t think I’m going to get it. All said and done, as the saying goes, I wanted to make a difference in his life. He’s much too smart for this area, which used to be a small town, but is now growing into a medium-sized town.

I wrote Sebastian an email, but he said not to contact him again. So I believe him.

We all want love.

Can I take “no” for an answer? I once read that “yes” means maybe, and “maybe” means no. Way back in the day, once upon a time, I told Dudesie this, and he asked, “So what does ‘no’ mean.” And I had no answer.

I sometimes want to hop on a bus to British Columbia, from the Eastern Shore of Maryland, where I moved from Montreal, yet now forget my reason for moving, and go to British Columbia, where Genevieve now lives with her son and daughter. Genevieve joined the navy. She loves to sail. That’s why. She once said that being on a boat with no land in sight

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was an amazing feeling.

She grows cilantro in her garden. The details about Genevieve are beautiful.

I imagine arriving after a long trip (days on a bus), and Genevieve will be at the station, waiting for me with open arms. We would both squeal with glee, like old times. We would both go, "Eeeeeeeeeeeeeee," in a high-pitched voice. Then, we'd call each other, "Abraham."

I feel the love, the meaning, the hope. It's very good for a career in sales. I use the happiness of my past to bring me satisfaction in the present. Truth be told, I love my job.

As for Sebastian Xavier, he would most likely get a restraining order. So I can't continue bothering him. I saw him again on public transportation (this town has public transportation, but you have to call them in advance to pick you up, unless it's at certain routine stops), and he didn't say, "Hi," (or, "Hey," as the younger people say), but I did say, "Hi."

Oops. Oh dearie me.

One of these days, quite recently, I ordered Chinese food, and at the end of my burpalicious meal, my fortune cookie said, "Even a broken clock is right twice a day." I took this in terms of Sebastian Xavier, but I might have been mistaken, once again. Two minutes a day he might be in love with me. As for the rest, he probably doesn't think of me at all, except as a nuisance. I must stop. I must stop. I tell myself once more, I must stop!

If I had my way with him, I'd tell him how much I like his red-and-black plaid shirt.

I got home one day from work, and looked at my roommate's raisin bread that said "Swirl" on the plastic packaging, while I drank a refreshing glass of cool water.

Swirl. That's how a lot of reality feels for me.

I don't know if Sebastian Xavier is hacking my phone. Did he rearrange my icons? Or was that some weird turn of events that no one can explain, when dealing with all this new and disturbing technology (technology)?

What does Sebastian's room look like, as he is at his computer, hacking my phone, or perhaps just playing video games? How does he smell? Like laundry or clean spring rain?

Back in the days when Genevieve and I hung out, we had no cell phones. We had no internet. No email. No FB.

What did we have? The sunshine on a nice spring day. Walking through alleyways lined by slightly crumbling brick buildings, eating Mr. Frozens. Enjoying the breeze while we passed little crepe places called, "Ty Brieze" and "La Creperie Bretonne."

I imagine hopping on a bus to B.C., but suddenly I'm on a road on a steep cliff in Tibet. We go flying off the road, and plunge into the abyss.

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The abyss of timelessness, the abyss of timeless hunger.

No, I am on the bus on the dark road at night, and we drive off the road. No, we begin lifting off and flying to the moon.

No.

I'm just on a bus in Montreal.

I get off the bus and begin walking.

The city is beautiful. The sun's rays are piercing and golden. A flock of doves, suddenly, flies up, unsettled under the eaves of a slightly crumbling brick building. There is meaning to their chaotic disturbance.

Yes.

I know that even pigeons are doves. That's no joke.

Maybe.

I trip over some stunted flowers, noticing their multicolored beauty as they appear to welcome the warmer weather.

A pair of underwear lies in a half-melting pile of snow.

Dudesie said that you know it's spring in Montreal when you see your first pair of underwear on the curb full of melting snow. Snow melting in the wonderful, new sunshine, when everything in the world is beautiful at long last.

I sigh.

I steer myself towards a café, and remember I need to get back to some place, some place without a name. Happiness lives, and sprouts golden daffodils like nobody else's business.

At the café, I order a medium coffee. Then, I sit, alone except for some bald guy with an illegible tattoo on his arm, made blurry by the sag of aging skin.

Dudesie always said he liked me because I didn't have any tattoos. He came out and said it, "You know what I like about you, Dude?"

"What?"

"You don't have any tattoos."

Then, I'm back in the town in Maryland where I live, happy I have something to see, tomorrow, and something to sell, something more wonderful than salmon covered in ambrosia, or coffee-flavored feelings, or chocolaty laughter. I'm talking about just smiling at people for no reason, seeing if I can get people in a good mood, or, if they're already in a good mood, I could maybe get them in an even better mood. It's reciprocal, too.

I stir my coffee, two creams, two sugar: just the way I like it, though I'm thinking of going on a diet, or, as I was taught to say, by a fellow mental patient, when I was chilling in the program in Salisbury, Maryland, before I moved to Eason, "I'm cutting back."

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I can go to Montreal in my mind whenever I want to.

I can be in a cool café with marble table tops and pungent coffee, though the muffins are slightly crumbly, like much of the brickwork in Montreal. I love it. I love it! I love it...

I look out the window and a couple walk past, happily holding hands. Montreal is beautiful in the rain, or even in this sudden sun shower.

This weather is just perfect for the stunted flowers, I think. Genevieve would understand, if she were here for me to share that with her, but, then again, a lot can be shared without words, so maybe I wouldn't have to say a thing. She'd just get it. She'd get it.

I look around at the café décor, then I glance at the old man's tattoo, wondering if it once said someone's name. He looks lonely, but sort of resigned to loneliness.

The old man looked into his coffee, then at me, then he looked away.