

The Consulate Girl

Marguerite despised the taste of American coffee almost as much as she loathed the culture surrounding coffee. Patrons to the café would wander in and out, plugged into their phones, order in a hurried tone, "one non-fat, extra hot, hazelnut, black & white mocha," then return to their phones before adding, "y'know what? Make it a double."

People rushed everywhere they went. There was no appreciation for the finer crafts in America. Not in coffee, not in anything. She sipped at the cup of tar before her. There was no way she'd drink a liquid candy bar at 7am, so she settled for the flaccid excuse for a dark roast.

Her phone rang at the tiny table crammed against the fish bowl-like window at the forefront of the café. Phillipe Durand. The French Consul General for the consulate in San Francisco.

Also Marguerite's boss.

"Bonjour, Monsieur Durand. Ça va?"

"Bonjour, Marguerite. Nous avons une rendez-vous avec le maire du San Francisco a 8h30. Ou est-ce vous? Vous & moi avons trop de problèmes pour discuter avant son arrivée."

"Oui, Monsieur. Je serais la bientôt."

"Merci!"

She sat up from the cramped table and made her way to the accoutrements stand. Though she liked her coffee black back home, she added a small dollop of cream to help fight of the burnt flavor.

"Yup, yup. Just picking up coffee before coming in. Can I grab you anything? No really, it's on the way."

Marguerite turned just in time to collide with the man on his phone. An emblem of San Franciscan culture. Skinny fitted pants, a turquoise button-down shirt with the top two buttons unclasped, horned-rim glasses with lens slowly transitioning from dark to light. Had her coffee

not collided with his messenger, she still would've hated him -- that her chartreuse blouse was now stained with milky brown mud only exacerbated her opinion.

"Bordel de merd!"

"Oh fuck!"

The two of them stood opposite each other -- the shared moment lasted a millennium as a Marguerite catalogued a thousand possible deaths for her obnoxious companion. Would that it could be this moment for her to black out in a violent rage and wake up covered in stains of coffee and the man's blood. Or, perchance, a few moments in the future, wherein a bus might lose control and careen into the man when he chooses to jaywalk against his better judgement.

Whatever could be contemplated about his death, the only sure thing would be that it wasn't to be destined to happen today.

"I'm so sorry," he said to Marguerite. "Can I call you back," he whispered into his phone.

"Are you okay," back to Marguerite.

"Oui. No. My blouse is a ruin, what do you think?"

"Oh hey! Your accent...it's French, right?"

"Oui, d'accord."

"Correct me if I'm wrong but...Romandy?"

That had caught her off guard. Americans, especially male Americans, usually can't distinguish between British English & Australian English, much less the varieties of French. The stain of coffee had retreated from her mind.

"Yes. How..."

"My mother took me to Switzerland when I was about eight. I guess you could call it a pretty formative experience. Met a bunch of family there. I'm so sorry about your blouse."

Oh, that's right.

"Do you drive? I can give you a lift somewhere, to make it up to you."

"I'm on my way to work, we've got a meeting with the mayor."

"You don't say? I work at the Mayor's office. I'm actually on my way there right now. I could swing you by a TJ Maxx or something and get you something clean to wear. What do ya say?"

She considered it for a moment, but realized she wasn't weighing any other options.

"Okay."