

Doctor Snap

It was written on the sideboard menu in white chalk: PLAIN BELGIAN WAFFLE. As opposed to what, I wondered. Fancy Belgian waffle? Or maybe it wasn't about plain or fancy. Could one order a plain Bulgarian waffle? What the hell is a Belgian waffle anyway? And why would I care? Please take note: Rachel Sutton doesn't care about waffles, plain or fancy. Oh sure, I thought. As if anyone out there is taking note of what I care about. Once upon a time, Angie would have taken note. No. Better not think about that. She had moved on; I should do the same. It was over.

I sipped my coffee. It was black. Bitter. I liked the taste of it, the heat of the liquid. I closed my eyes and listened to the chatter and clatter around me in the café. The noise of the place was soothing. It occurred to me that I might be focusing on plain Belgian waffles in order not to think about my plain old misery. My plain old apartment, barely big enough for two, but Angie and I had made it work. That was then. Now, it was the place where I lived alone, with my plain old solitude for company.

“Purple toothbrush! Purple toothbrush!”

It was a child's voice. I opened my eyes and saw her—a toddler wearing an Army green baseball cap and a pink dress. The kid definitely had her own style. I found myself grinning, and realized it was the first time in days—maybe weeks—that I had found anything funny. Me and my deep-down funk: my girlfriend gone, my sense of humor nearly smothered by self-pity.

Screw it, I thought. This little girl in her Army baseball cap had the right idea.

“Purple toothbrush,” she said again.

Yeah. Color. That's the ticket. Mix it up.

I got up and went to the sideboard. I put sugar and cream in my coffee. Sampled it. Good. Nice creamy color. I remembered my red baseball cap. Bright red. And didn't I have a Pink Martini tee shirt somewhere? Yeah, I'll wear that. Pink tee shirt and red cap.

The waitress walked by, and I signaled her. She had poured my coffee, but this time, as she came toward me, I noticed her eyes. Beautiful blue eyes. And on her right shoulder, a sexy rose tattoo. How had I missed that? “Could I get one of those plain Belgian waffles?”

“Sure,” she said.

“And a side dish of blueberries?”

She smiled. “You can get strawberries too.”

“Sounds good.”

“Plain B with a red-and-blue side, coming up.”

I watched her walk away, then went back to my table and settled in again. The purple toothbrush toddler was drumming on an empty chair while her mother looked on. She seemed amazed at the kooky human being she had brought into the world.

“Great kid,” I said.”

“That she is. Keeps me on my toes.”

“What’s her name?”

“Ellie.”

“Hi, Ellie.”

Ellie looked up at me. “Hi,” she said.

I lifted my cup to her. “I like your style, Ellie.”

She considered this. “Hi,” she said again.

“Exactly. High style.”

Ellie tilted her head, made a “popping” sound with her lips, then went back to her drumming.

I drank my coffee, feeling at one with my surroundings. I wondered what Ellie would grow up to be. Maybe a therapist with unconventional methods. Today, in my book, that’s what she was—Doc Ellie, A.K.A. Doctor Snap. As in: Snap-Out-of-It-Already. I leaned back in my chair, awaiting the arrival of my not-so-plain Belgian waffle, and the girl with the sexy rose tattoo.

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