

Entry Title: The French That Got Away

Category: Print or Online Article

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“I’ve scoured Yelp and Trip Advisor while you were sleeping; The Egg Shop should be one of the best brunch haunts in New York, but we need to get there before brunch,” Mr. Honest Abs, my tinder date, told me. He’s a foodie. One who, due to corporate America’s proclivity against hiring people with his background, cuts out magazine coupons and searches Groupon to get his kicks on a dime. I imagined a brunch at a dark establishment where the coupons limit me to a dish I don’t want. As they serve the meal, I’d pull out my hand sanitizer to wipe off crusted spinach from my utensils, remnants of the previous patron’s lunch. I expected this place, which I knew nothing about, to serve soggy bread pudding under the guise of French toast. It would taste like stale bread.

I was a judgmental a-hole, I know. But, How can a place that serves eggs be great? I almost didn’t go, but I was as intrigued by the restaurant’s concept as I’d been by my date. So, I quietly walked to the Elizabeth Street café beside my sunny-side-up date.

As the name indicates, eggs are the bedrock of this breakfast-minded shop. The sunlight bathes the small space that seats roughly 30 customers. In a restaurant where crowds are thronging, getting in and out of your seat is an accident waiting to happen. Located in trendy and low-key Nolita, you’ll meet different types of foodies. The guy next to you may be donning a flannel shirt paired with an impossibly tiny beanie, and you might do a double take on the woman at the bar bearing an uncanny resemblance to your friend’s mom. You know, the one who’s part of your crew.

When we stepped into the tailored dining room, I noticed the delicious chefs having fun in the open kitchen which is framed in menu chalkboards. Besides advertising the drink menu, the chalkboard displays the restaurant logo, a faceless egg on chicken legs, and a grinning

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mouth with a golden tooth. There was also a message; “follow us on Instagram.” The white industrial space furnished in wooden benches and chairs trimmed in sea-foam green is Instagram-friendly. Well, that’s if your feed and brand are minimalistic white. The café is unpretentious, despite the trendy location. I was sure any egg-based dish would do a fine job of stilling my hunger. Nothing more, nothing less. But, first impressions don’t tell the whole truth. That was a lesson I’d learned a few months ago.

Three months before we visited the Egg Shop, I knew a few important things about my date. The handsome man with kind eyes and an affinity for floral shirts volunteered his time to help less fortunate children increase their reading and writing abilities. He graduated with honors, tutored and mentored in economics. Once, he took the shirt off his back and gifted it to a friend who liked the shirt. He was great on paper and Instagram-friendly. I mean he had abs. I thought that if things got serious, we’d travel between my hometown in Sweden and his home in New York. But, you can’t imagine a life on first impressions. The day after our first date, I found out that Mr. Honest Abs is a felon. A few months later, I realized a felon can’t travel. I can’t take him home. And my time as an international student in New York was coming to an end.

As I sat at The Egg Shop across from him months later contemplating how and when to break up with one of the kindest men I’d ever dated, the waiter's voice interrupted my train of thoughts.

“A Chai French Toast for you, Miss,” the waiter said.

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I was overcome by the beauty of my meal. The French Toast was fluffy and crispy. It looked nothing like the soggy mess I'd imagined earlier. The toasts, piled on a small bowl, gave off a blissful fragrant of cardamom, cinnamon, maple and cloves. It was Christmas on a dish.

Delicately sliced, aqueous, ivory-fleshed, crunchy Fuji Apples fanned out from between each toast. The masterpiece rested on French berries and was topped off with a few drizzles of maple syrup. When I picked up my fork, I realized my hand sanitizer and utensils would not be meeting today. My fork was spinach-less! This was all too perfect.

I sank the fork into the golden, cloudy toasts, I prayed this first impression wouldn't disappoint.

The toast was lightly sweetened, slightly crunchy, a little bit spicy and had an almost substantial chew. All I can say about the first bite is that if you could taste joy, this would be it. When I thought it couldn't get better, the dark chocolate ganache made an appearance at the bottom of the bowl. This now became the most ethereal French Toast I've had. But that was possibly the saddest realization I've ever had about food. You see, I can't take the Egg Shop home, and my time as an international student in New York was coming to an end.

We left The Egg Shop, and I ended it with Honest Abs a few weeks later. I searched high and low for a Chai French toast as criminally delicious as The Egg Shop's and a man as kind as Honest Abs, one I could take home. I found the guy, but the Chai French Toast eludes me still.