

Loose Lips, sink ships

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I don't know how I have arrived at this situation. The problem is that I think I feel unable to resolve it. I'm fascinated by the new horizons that were opened in my life and that allowed me to escape from the routine. The poetic shapes of fish hypnotize me. How did everything start? I don't know. I had a normal life: I used to watch TV, go shopping and for a coke at the nearby café. Now my life is devoted to fish, those cold-blooded gill breathing vertebrates, of which I knew nothing about until just a few months ago. Now they are my family. I know everything about their appearance, composition, nutritional value and preservation. And I am piscivorous. I eat only sea vertebrates. Before, I was a normal citizen; who would stuff himself with pizzas, hamburgers and pre-cooked food. After that, I went through a vegetarian stage, horrified by fat, by cholesterol, by the dangers of a possible fatal heart attack. For a while I ate only plants. I think that was a mistake, because I turned as green as a lettuce, I therefore decided I was going to eat only fish.

My life, beyond the abhorrent working day, is devoted to fish: buying it, cooking it, enjoying it, so much so that it has become the symbol of a new lifestyle. My home is decorated with fish related things: paintings, ornaments, the bathroom curtains, the walls... and particularly, the living room table, on which there is always a fish - beautiful, shining, marking its territory, telling us who the owner of that space is. Why is it if some people can put a fruit bowl on the table I cannot place a dish with fish in it? When I started this difficult habit, any fish type was appropriate. In fact I used to put whiting, horse mackerel, Atlantic mackerel and sea bream. And I must admit that it was interesting to see how the living room looked, dominated by a horse mackerel or a hake. But I became more and more refined and Atlantic mackerel or sea bream weren't enough for me. Nothing is comparable to the

beauty of sole, the expressive appearance of turbot, the indiscreet paleness of brill or, above all, the noble appearance of pout, which is arrogant and slight, suggestive and majestic, with such a seductive and captivating extended chin. I don't know; I have feelings for pout that I have never felt for anything or anybody else. It's not that I'm in love with pout; it's only that I consider that its appearance is enthralling. Perhaps it is because I have found in the eerie silence of fish a friendship that nobody else has ever offered me. The problem is however their conservation, because I can't let pout rot in the middle of the table and start to smell. That would symbolize failure for me. That means that fish last little time on the living room table and that I have to get rid of them just when we have started to become close. My obsession for avoiding those regrettable goodbyes led me to obtain information on conservation methods, looking for all types of information on google. Most of the results are related to fish smoking and salting, but I didn't like any process that could alter its appearance, so I investigated the possibilities of long term freezing and found out about investigations whose aim is inhibiting the oxidation of frozen fish oils; that is, avoiding their decomposition. I found some references on google about the Instituto de Investigaciones Mariñas (Institute for Marine Research), which was apparently located in the city where I live. Without thinking about it, I decided to phone. That's how I got to know Isabel.

At the beginning, Isabel was very reserved. I don't know if she saw me as an industrial spy, a postgraduate researching a subject for his thesis or simply a fool. She leads a Food Science and Technology team; which I enormously respect because she works for mankind. Her work is about healthy and beneficial foods, as is said of wholemeal bread on TV.

The first times I spoke to her I explained that as a specialized amateur in my own nutrition, I was very interested in finding anything out about prolonging the time for preserving fish. Isabel politely paid attention to me on the phone but she didn't say a word. Then, as I continued insisting and we got to know each other better, she disclosed some things to me. I thus found out that she studied the activity of some rare substances known as polyphenols, which are found in grapes, and that seem to be useful to delay the oxidation of fish lipids and muscles in frozen fish. I didn't understand what the hell

polyphenols are (I'm only a clerk), but they must be important because there are 60,400 entries on google with this word and we are assured that they have anti-carcinogenic properties and have protective effects to health. And I like that. Anyway, the information that I found was too abstract. I suppose that if I were capable of using Isabel's investigations, they would benefit the preservation of the beauty of the sculptures with which I decorate the middle of my table. My hopes were pinned on any great revelation that she could make to me.

I found out that Isabel removes something known as 'free radicals' from the fish muscle and, in order to achieve this, she gets those bizarre compounds from grape pulp. After that she separates the compounds through a complex scientific method (unknown to me) and studies the power of each of them in slowing down fish oxidation.

I know that what I have learnt is very important, although it's not very useful to me. I was disappointed because Isabel carries out her experiments with bluefish, like Atlantic mackerel, which is a species I had discarded a long time ago in favour of the imperial grandeur of pout. Atlantic mackerel is by no means the best option. But anyway it's up to her. Now, the important thing to me is that the fish which are in the middle of the living-room table should overcome the disintegration of time.

I have phoned Isabel more than a hundred times during the last three months. I kept check of the phone calls through the phone bill. I get the impression that she doesn't understand nor want me to phone her so many times, but this is a crucial mission to me. Besides, things have changed now. I'm aware that she has started to distrust me and be suspicious from my last phone calls; especially when I decided to be honest and I told her the true reasons of my interest. As I was talking to her about my uncontrollable passion for fish, my home decoration, the beautiful dishes on the table made of pout, sole and turbot, she became silent. The truth is that I wasn't aware of this because my in-depth account was passionate, captivating. I was too excited and I know that I shouldn't have confessed the erotic powers that fish can cast over me. When half an hour later, I had finished my detailed and reasoned explanation, she had fallen silent, producing a long and uncomfortable

silence that was only broken when I asked her if she was still listening to me. She nervously told me with a stifled voice:
'Loose lips, sink ships.'

I couldn't fully understand the meaning of her words but since then, Isabel has disappeared from my life. She doesn't answer the phone now and every time I phone the Institute they assure me that she doesn't work there. Polyphenols have disappeared from my life whilst I sink into the living room sofa watching how fish suffer their horrifying but unavoidable oxidation.