

The cherish of Paris *boulangeries*

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From a little town in the South of the United States, an ordinary woman is now in Paris with her two children and husband working mainly out of the city. Alone and with no pressing need to find a job, she enjoys the beauty of the European capital getting lost in *boulangeries*, *métro* stations and large boulevards.

Trying to adapt her and her children's life in this big new city, she discovers the magic melancholy of being anonymous in a cosmopolitan reality.

Senses are in the limelight: the colors of pastries fight against the grey of the sky and the perfume of *baguettes* covers the smell of tipsy *clochards*.

Being a foreigner woman in a metropolis seems to have both its pros and cons.

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There are places in Paris where even a grey day can become brightful. Small shops where the big city becomes warm and welcoming. The Paris of noisy *bistros* and *métro* stations echoing music in every corner owns also little bakeshops where the only sounds are those of crunchy biscuits and crispy scraps of *baguettes* in your mouth. Hearing, vision, taste, smell and touch are all involved in the thousands *boulangeries* all around Paris.



Whereas in chain bakeshops the shades of the pastries recall the technicolor pixels of girlish video-games and smartphone apps, all colors are genuine here in the *boulangeries*, where happiness is cheap and smiling faces always welcome you in your closed-eyes early mornings.

In these little places I feel newly at home.

I leave my twins at the bus stop and watch them waving their hand behind the window of their school bus. They attend an American Catholic Elementary School where only two children of their classroom are French. Korea, Canada, Italy, Germany, Great Britain: four walls close a melting pot of nations in. My twins are at least for seven hours a day in an anglophone soap ball.

What about me? Here in Paris, when my children are at school, it is just me and my *boulangeries* tour.

I walk along the main boulevards of the city, cross the tiny roads of the smallest neighborhoods and I let myself be guided by any bread perfume coming to my nostrils. Sometimes I walk into the shops, sometimes I just browse inside from the window. Sometimes I satisfy my palate, sometimes my nose and eyes simply get gratified by the beauty and scent of these delicacies.

I had a bakeshop in the States. But it was different from these lovely *boulangeries*. I used to sell cupcakes and sugary pastries. Chocolate muffins and hyper caloric sweets for fatty American widows. I loved my work but I felt like something was missing. There was not too much *finesse* in my shop. I felt it was too ordinary, too American... Is there any other way to better describe the atmosphere of my old shop?

In *boulangeries* butter is the main character of all recipes. With a bit of sugar here and there. You could even say that these are dairies instead of *boulangeries*... *Croissants, pains au raisin, pains au chocolat, tournicotis au pistache, viennoiseries aux amandes*... Cinnamon and chocolate, apples and vanilla, caramel and nuts. And special delicacies of taste, like bread with orange rind or sugar-coated doughnuts.



I am happy. Loneliness is my Parisian wonder world.

My husband is miles and miles away from this city where I feel alone among all other women sitting like me on their *métro* sits, protecting their bags from pickpockets. Even pickpockets are lonely girls popping in and out the *métro*. They move discretely among naïf tourists and absentminded workers. They are women stealing preciousness from the others. Just like me.

I look at all women on this metallic snake. One girl in particular catches my attention. She is so beautifully dressed. What a goddess she is. Her black eyelashes make her eyes deeper and her nose divides symmetrically her face. There's nothing misplaced in her *silhouette*. She is like this city, where alabaster and golden plates are equally distributed in the main circles and squares. Her legs are long, as long as the *Champs-Élysées* going from *Place de la Concorde* to the *Arc de Triomphe*. Elegance is just for a few predestined. Elegance is innate in *Parisienne* girls as much as their snobbish way to look at

my leather boots. I need to do some stylish shopping in the 8th *arrondissement*.

Then I stare at the drunk guy on this *métro*. He is so different from the people surrounding him. I am not used to the struggling contrast between the grace of this city and the hundreds of *clochards* disseminated all over the *métro* stations. They smell of wine and loneliness. I smell of vanilla and loneliness.

Popping in and out, spit out of the underground. Mounting and descending all these stairs. I see thousands of faces everyday. But it happens sometimes to meet on the *métro* some familiar eyes. Or maybe it is just that these Europeans are all so similar. Same backpacks, same *coiffures*, same shoes, same phones. Loud music in their ears. They all wear their headphones isolating themselves from the other close passengers. Y generation is how they call this phenomenon, where Y stands for the shape of the headphones cable.

Some events can actually *bouleverser* your day. If the *RER* train is delayed, the meaning of your entire afternoon can be changed. One woman committed suicide yesterday. She threw herself from the *quai* of the *métro* into the railways. She was pregnant: two lives ended in the same place at the same time, in the same body, in the same mind.

I wish my husband were here, with all his ups and all our downs together. He works in a tiny town in the south of France. He comes back home every two weekends, alternating his trips to Paris with his working weekends in the north of Italy.

I miss him during my promenades in the *île Saint Louis* where couples drink their love in fine glass *flûtes*. Music comes from the streets everywhere on the bridge connecting the two islands on the river Seine. On the dock some lovers kiss each other while ducks fight against pollution.

I miss my husband but I know life takes away from you all your certainties. I was sure we were destined to live together for the rest of our life in the outskirts of Dustin, Texas. I was sure my children were destined to be as ordinary as I've always been. Then he got this one-in-a-life opportunity and here we are: a blue-eyed American family in Paris.

Here my loneliness makes me extraordinarily new.

I'm just fighting with my everyday life. We all are. Sometimes we fight to make our days calmer, trying to eliminate obstacles and worries. Sometimes we fight to make our days less ordinary, creating new adventures to cheer things up.

My children are learning to write by typing on touch screens while I'm trying to learn a bit of French by reading the free press magazines left on the *métro* sits.

I am learning a new language and I am learning to live in a foreign country. Which makes me feel like I am back to my childhood.

French words fill my mouth with all their *R roulants* and nasal sounds. I am so ridiculous. I have decided to take private lessons instead of a group class. I feel more confident when it is only me and Madame Jordi explaining to me the basics of French grammar.

In the restaurant near our house there is a Korean-American waitress training to earn some money for her *Master 2* at the Sorbonne Nouvelle. Fees are really high but French education, she says, is fine and you cannot study Ancient Art in a better city than the *Ville Lumière*. This almond-shaped-eyed-girl is so extraordinarily brave. I mean, she faces every day the disgusted faces of French customers disapproving her bad accent. She always smiles in return and works hard, transforming every remark into kindness. Maybe when you are younger you do not fear judgments. Having two children makes me extremely vulnerable: I must behave not to disappoint them. But I feel overexposed here. I can perceive other people watching me and knowing I am not French.



How could I open my own *boulangerie* here in Paris? I cannot speak a word of French without knotting my tongue. But I could be a wonderful mute baker. There is no need to communicate by words when your soft bread and delicious cakes can express the sweetness of your soul. Isn't it true?

Then I just walk in this city and feel the spring restoring my mind. I let things pass me by, palaces invade my view and people march against my path. I get into a *boulangerie* and simply feel life is a heavy *croissant* to be filled with chocolate drops.