



L'esprit de l'escalier

flow writing by Noëla Zaharia

My friend Maurice is a chef. A French pastry chef actually. He likes baking, but not that much anymore. And not that often.

“*Merde!* They asked me to cook again. For the same event. For the same client. For the same reason. I am a chef. And a damn good one!”

Maurice is a free spirit. In his late 20s, he left France to live in a community serving village in an east European country, where he makes a living out of farming and occasionally baking pizza.

“Hey, Maurice, don’t you want to find yourself a nice lady and settle down?”

“I am settled down. The ladies, not so much.”

Maurice is a free spirit and he chases wild spirits. I was one of them. He is not a chaser, like the French say, *a chasseur*. He chases more his dreams than he chases women. Maybe this is why he feels so happy with himself. *Il est content*. Or maybe just avoiding love.

There was a party in the village and I asked Maurice to join. Didn’t know if he liked it. I just knew how working together in the kitchen made me feel. Seen, safe, cosy, competent. And very, very slow. *En retard*. As if I can take more time. For myself, for baking...

He would often spend time alone, as his mind would start scattering. He sometimes forgot which vegetables in the garden needed watering or when to stop watering them, so the young seeds can turn into sprouts. The same in relationships I guess...

Maurice was so good at baking, yet so distracted when being talked to. He would easily surrender my voice, going mindless as he would hear my thoughts telling him stories about my ambitions to be a dancer!

“Joanne, I’d love dancing with you!”

“Me too, Maurice!”

And he would slowly pull me up my feet and imagine dancing with me in the middle of the grass field as if no one else were there.

Maurice has very long arms. He needs to, as his baking style takes a lot of dough spreading and carving. His fingers are long and gentle, yet look harsh, tired of overwork.

“Joanne, I’d love talking to you!”

“Me too, Maurice!”

20 years later and Maurice is still living in the middle of nowhere. Baking and growing his vegetables. Travelling to cook yet again for the same event. For the same client. For the same reason. He is a chef. And a damn good one!

I am on the train writing this... Travelling with my dance company. Tired, sleepless, exhausted... A different project, a different production, a different adventure. I am my own chef. A boss, a *chef*, like the French say.

Damn, Maurice, this gray hair starts growing like your damn sprouts! Wish I said something 20 years ago. Wish you said something 20 years ago. Take it slower? Wish we baked our own French *merde* now!



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