

Reinventing My Photography Through Personal Trauma.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is about the journey that I took being homeless in Paris and using that to change how I do photography and what it means to me.

I explain why everything happened, how I ended up in that situation. I go over how and why I both changed my photography and how I started doing it despite my situation.

I tell about the process that lead to me creating a book now years later about that first year on the streets.

Language: English

Key words: photography, change, trauma, process

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Motivation

In an effort to pursue my dreams of being a photographer based in Paris, I moved there in the year 2018. Instead of reaching my dreams I ended up becoming homeless and I was on the streets for almost two years. It was during that period that I turned to photography to cope with my situation. I started doing a project, in which I would take photos everyday. It turned out to become a longterm project, still ongoing and with the ambition to do it for the rest of my life. At the time, I was doing the photography project without any real plan nor any specific goal. I would just take photos of what I wanted, to try keep up practise, which is how I have been doing ever since.

Looking back it's hard not to see how my project to start photographing everyday both changed and saved me and my photography in equal measure. I can't imagine how I would have managed otherwise, in those moments where I was very close to going under and giving up, it was in those moments that I at least had my photography to concentrate on. There were a couple of months where I had yet to start my project, I did occasionally photograph but I didn't feel I was doing anything in my days and my mind just couldn't cope with everything. It was when I decided to start the life long project that I became more focused in my mind, no longer was it a complete mess, I had a firm thing to hold onto. My days used to be just about surviving and I would be pretty aimless. Now I had something to think about, like trying to find a photo every day, to force myself to be creative no matter what. It took years to start realising what kind of effect it might have had on me. Being in that situation and the photography project I started has changed me as a person, but I am not sure if it was for the better or for worse.

After all this time that has passed, I felt I really needed to do something with all the material that I have amassed thus far. I hadn't thought much about my time back then and had barely looked at all the photos I had taken. In an effort to both start dealing with the trauma and to make something concrete out of my project I started to write about my experiences and thoughts, started to sort and select from my photos. Everything would together go into a book.

I had many questions about what form the book would take, what should I write about? I was wondering about what kind of effects my experiences had on me. What about the lasting trauma, could this project about making a book about my history on the streets help me finally start dealing with the experiences I had back then?

It was those thoughts I had in the back of my mind when I was making the book and hopefully I got to know myself a little better during the process. This paper is about that process.

2.0 History

2.1 My Past Photography-Self

I used to be the most comfortable in the studio when it came to my photography. As such my primary interests lied within fashion photography, portraits, and very arranged photoshoots. I never thought that any form of documentary nor personal projects were for me since I used to be more interested in metaphorical truths which I thought I could the best explore and express through the kind of photography I was doing.

I always needed a concept planned before I started to photograph it. I used to think that my photograph were “created” and in my arrogance I thought that snapshots of daily life was something I was above. Because of that I often had periods of me just waiting for creativity.



At home in the studio.

2.2 My Life Before the Move to Paris

When I was doing photography studies in Finland and part of those I got to go to Paris for two weeks to do an internship at the cultural institute of Finland. It was during that trip that my whole life plan changed. After my internship in Paris in 2015 I knew that I wanted to move to Paris and start my artistic life and career over there. When I finished my studies later that same year the plan was to move to Paris as soon as I could, so I decided to stay in the same city as my school was, even after the studies were done, and try to make my move in a nice orderly and proper fashion. Life always gets in the way of even the best laid plans.

Being stuck in a small city where most of my friends had moved on from and having no job, I ended up in a period of struggling economy with lots of debt to deal with. Everything led to severe depression which culminated at a point where I didn't know if I could survive. After lots of visits to the psychologist, that fear I had just didn't seem to disappear. The harder my life got, the stronger that fear became and thus the closer it got to where I actually couldn't handle it anymore. I knew I had to do something, that I had to move on. So I decided on a fixed date, first of November, where I would just move to Paris and hope for the best. All I had to do was to sell all my stuff and find a new home to my cats. It is actually what I managed to do, I sold everything I owned except my laptop and my camera, and luckily found a nice family to take the cats, and even had a few months budget for my new life in Paris.

2.3 Why Make Paris My New Home?

One could wonder why I would be so sure about Paris, so much so that I would go through so much and take such a huge risk moving there? During the internship in 2015, something happened to me, something that I can only describe as falling in love with the city. I discovered that in a sense the city had the same “pulse” as me, made me feel like I was home. I think part of that is because I was born and spent the first decade of my life in the Swedish capital Stockholm, a big city full of adventure, especially for a kid, and it was that sense which I lost when my parents decided to move to a small city in the northern Sweden, where once grown up I would feel little stressed, like I was getting stuck, like I was missing cool adventures, like I was missing life. I have been like that in most places that I have lived, especially my school city after the studies, so it became clear that if I wanted to find peace I had to move Paris. Of course I realise it could be any big city but Paris was a city I was already in love with so in my mind I had already started to make it my home.

2.4 So, What Happened?

I came to Paris with a budget for a few months and with the hope that I would find some kind of job before it ran out, but living in an airbnb and living as a tourist spending money all over the place, so of course it quickly started to run out. I managed to stay afloat only two months. So on the fifth of January I was on the streets with only twenty euros in my pocket. Not fully sure why I didn't try to get money to fly back home, I guess it was a combination of being scared to go back to the misery that I knew waited if I went back, or mostly it could have been my optimism that I wouldn't actually be on the streets that long, that it would sort itself out somehow. I should have known better, that isn't like that how things tend to go. When the harsh reality of my situation hit me, things became much more simple in a sense, I didn't question what I should or shouldn't have done, being in my new reality it was only about survival, not even about survival long term but just about surviving the day and the night, it was like that every day. Living one day at the time.

2.5 The Spark that ignited my Project

When everything went the way it went and while I was concentrating on just surviving I started to feel guilty about that the fact that I wasn't photographing in any way I thought I should be. At first it was because of me having a degree in photography who was here in Paris trying to make my dreams come true, I should be doing so much. That was why I had come all this way after all, so I should be living the life where I was having cool photoshoots in all the cool spots in the city. Which I obviously wasn't. It made my self-esteem crash, both as a person and as a photographer. It was then that I started to ask myself that:

"Me as a photographer, who didn't photograph, who even was I?"

That question kind of shook me to the core and made me realise I really needed a change. Because I started to feel guilty that I wasn't photographing anything at all, at least not on a regular basis, didn't even have my camera with me, since it was safely in storage. So at one point I had to decide if I was going to be a photographer or not. I was scared that if I didn't photograph I would lose my muscle memory and skills, so I decided to start photographing every day, didn't matter with what or even if it was good or not but I had to keep at it. At first I just wanted to do it as practise with no time frame in mind. When I started to notice how it felt like that I was again a photographer while searching my daily photos, I decided that this project, it would be for life as long as I can.

2.6 Back to School

After almost four years of daily photography, I still hadn't really thought about what I would do with my photography, what the goal was or even if there was one. And I felt I really needed to do something with the body of work that I had. It was by chance that I heard about the masters program at my old school and I thought it could actually be the perfect opportunity for me to figure out how to take the next steps in my photography, to get opinions and help that could lead me to form my content. For the masters project I started planning a book that could nicely gather everything I had, to have all that material come together to one coherent thing. I chose to do a book about the first year I was on the street, the year of 2018. It would be a combination of photos and text about my experiences, about my life and about Paris. It would serve as a foundation for later books, that could be a series, one book for every year.

3.0 Research Conducted

3.1 Comforting Search for Inspiration

During my time on the streets I would essentially spend my days in libraries and then often with different photography books. Since I have a history in fashion photography at first I tended to gravitate towards different books about fashion photography, all the classics from the big ones. Like Helmut Newton or ever newer ones like LaChapelle but that world start to feel more and more distant to me and I started to thirst for more real stories and I craved genuineness.

I started slowly immerse myself in more personal work from photographers like Nan Goldin, her book *the Ballad of Sexual Dependency*(1986) was a huge inspiration to me, not because my situation was anything like her depicted in the book, where she shared her life with groups of people, drug use and abuse, but because it legitimised the idea of documenting and sharing ones worst periods in ones life.

Another inspiring photographer was Anders Petersen, for example his books *Cafe Lehmitz* (1978) and *frenchkiss*(2008), those books about new places and new people were amazing, his ability to explore and get to know new cities and its people intimately are things I still immensely aspire to and hope to have as a skill one day.

Lastly, since I was now living in Paris I found it hugely comforting to follow the works of both Brassai's *Paris de Nuit*(1933) and Henri Cartier-Bressons *À Propos de Paris*(1994) and their other books about Paris and Parisians. It was both interesting to see what my new home looked like in the past and it was inspiring because they also had such skill to get close to people and make Paris seem so interesting.

3.2 Industry Exposure

Since I had no idea how to tell my story, and I didn't even know if it was a story I should tell, if there really was an audience for it. My exploration of the photography world was in different stages. My biggest effort went to see what else was out there by visiting photography events and seeing current movements in the medium, and to talk to other photographers and other industry professionals when I had the chance and get their opinions on both my story and the book I was making.

First stage was to see what was being shown in different photography events. By visiting both Photo London and Paris Photo as part of the masters program and just try to take in everything that was being shown so I could get a vague idea of the current trends. One thing is clear that personal stories are always welcome but there was still a certain insecurity hanging over me, that was I, someone who deserved to tell my story when there are so many other more deserving to tell their stories?

In the second stage I started to talk more about my story and my idea to make a book about it with professionals in the industry, both other photographers but also with people working in galleries and publishing. The more I showed my project and the more people didn't seem to hate it, the more confident I became. That is always a danger of being so isolated with ones project for so long, one can start to doubt it, after all I did was to photograph and now work on my book and barely interacted with the photography world at large, so this was the first time I could get an idea where I stood with my project.

4.0 Project Development

4.1 The Photographing

When ending up on the streets I managed to put all my stuff in storage, so at first all I had with me was my smartphone, which was the cheap OnePlus 3. Turns out it was actually exactly what I needed at that point, since in my situation I needed something that was always with me but that didn't take up too much space and didn't make it a hassle to have with me or to take out. There are many photos that I'm not sure I would have gotten if it wasn't for ease of access to my phone and thus a camera. Also there is the fact that no one usually minds a person with a phone but a person with a "real" camera grabs attention and makes people uneasy.

On the downside the phone has technically pretty bad photo quality but still some of my best photos from that time I took with my phone. So it actually managed to completely change my mind on phone photography. I am now a firm believer and think it is a viable option for everyone. I used to think the technical aspect of phone photography was too bad, but it's all about content and if the photo is good in the subject matter, then the technical quality is secondary. This was essential to get started with my project, since I didn't need to worry too much about technical stuff and only had to think about subject and composition.

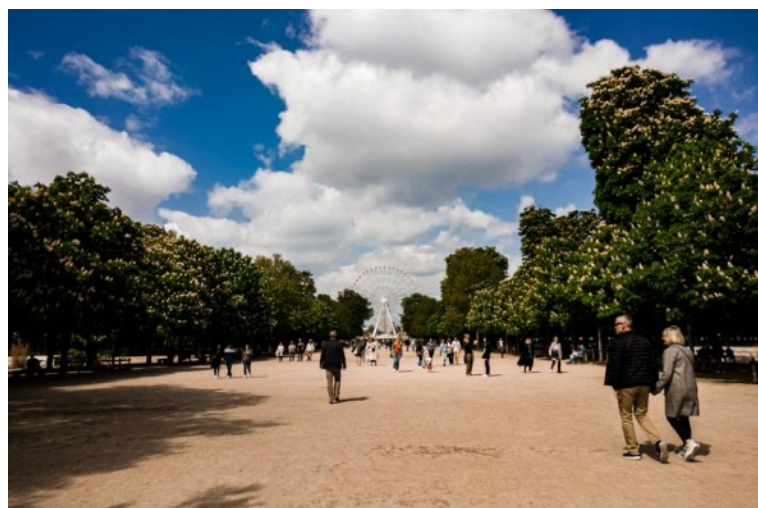
When I finally managed to get a backpack I did go and get my full frame Sony A7 out from storage and now that I was using it again, it clearly improved the technical quality my photos. Sure it was more of a hassle to get out whenever I wanted to take photos but by this time I had become fully invested in my new project and had started to again feel that ember of passion. So every time I had my camera out and was exploring the world I became the photographer that I always envisioned myself to be.

4.2 The Editing and Sharing

I still didn't have my computer with me until quite a bit later, so I found a way to transfer the photos from my A7 to my phone so I could edit them there. I didn't want to hassle too much so I relied a lot on the phone application VSCO and had some filters as a base. It did lead me to think a lot about what I want in my photos when it comes to editing and about the look I want for them. I always chased the feeling of black and white photos but didn't want to disregard colours to reach the same feeling. It was a long evolution that resulted in the style I have today, and the style is partly born out of on how to make Paris look the way I want it to look, how I think it looks the best. Which is sunny summer days where the stone buildings, sandy parks and blue skies have this play between yellow and blue in a way I love. I still not sure how the look would work in other parts of the world for longer series.



My VSCO edited version from back then.



My evolved own edited style that I use now.

When I started my big project one requirement I put for myself was that I had to post online everyday, so everyday I had to have one photo ready. That way I could get feedback on a constant basis, direct feedback and judgement on my selection of a photo. It wasn't much more than the amount of engagement I got but it did keep me motivated in the trying to improve in both the quality and selection. How did I decide to show everything? Daily Instagram. It was a way for me to not be completely alone in what I was going through. Posting was a great way for me to keep thinking about taking photos and not only to keep quality in mind, but that this was me explaining my new home and showing what was now my life. I don't think I could have managed to keep going on with my project if I didn't have the pressure to post every day. Also hearing from friends reacting to my posts, it did help me not feel as isolated in my situation that I actually was.

4.3 The Book

When I started working on my book there was this central theme that I wanted to touch upon, on how photography saved me during a difficult period and at the same time how that bad situation might have also saved my photography. That was something I wanted to dive deeper into and while it is a main driving force for the book to even exist, I found that the book became something much more than that. It became a story about survival and escape, it became about finding a way to work on and heal a trauma, and maybe most importantly it became about making something real. To validate my experience.

Something I could leave behind to my future family, so they can know my journey.

After I had decided on the direction of the book, I didn't really know where to start, I had to begin by reminding myself of what I actually experienced back then because I had barely reflected on it, it had been too much to deal with it. A place to start was to go through all my photos and selecting those I liked that had potential to be in the book. Once I had started to go through all those photos and dig up the feelings and memories, I started to just write down everything that came to me. Since I hadn't really reflected on my time back then it was little jarring to again see what my life was. Sure it was hard, those emotions that came up were some that I thought I had come over for good but I had just surpassed them. It was a lot like that, looking at photos to trigger memories and feelings and then just freeform write everything down. When it came to the writing, I started to ask just how personal and open can I be, what is appropriate? I think where I landed on openness was a good place, where I could be honest about everything but not be too indulgent on the bad stuff.

After just writing without structure for awhile I had to look over what I had and start actually piecing together a narrative that both stayed true to my experience but also could work together as a final form. The final form became telling the story of one year, the year of 2018, it felt like the most natural way to tell the story. The biggest question was though what shape it would take. I wanted it to be somewhat linear but not too much so, because I also wanted to group segments in a way that made sense in thematic and artistic sense.

That's when I thought seasons would be good for linear progression yet within them I was more free to build series and group that were influenced by the vision I had. That way I could build a good narrative that wasn't too rigid.

When selecting and finding photos not only did I have to go to my "real" photos but I went back to look through my Instagram stories to find what I felt could help tell the story, even though they weren't the best as photographs and also had their different styling, like having bold text on them, but my thinking was that it is better to have a photo, even a bad one then not have a photo at all if the story benefitted in any way from having one. I even started going through videos to take screen grabs from, because they were the only thing I had of something I thought was important, like from inside the shelter.

5.0 Reflections

5.1 What did I Learn by Photographing Everyday

Something that might have started as a project born out of desperation, turned out to be something I seriously needed, I don't know where I would be now otherwise. While I didn't think it had no tangible effect on me at the time, it was the most important thing I could have started doing. It has become such a clear passion my project, so much so that I don't see what else I could have been doing, imaging not doing it and I can only think I would be so much worse off. It is such a stark reminder that yes photography is important to me and it gives me meaning. It is so wonderful to have all those photos to look back on, even if there are lots of heavy emotions in those memories, but it would have been immensely more sad to not have anything from that time to look back on, nothing to show for after all that I went through. Photographing everyday became such a natural part of who I am that I feel empty when not doing it, well I can imagine feeling empty not doing it, since I haven't missed a day yet. There are days where I have barely managed to do it but those would be days like when I was sick with covid or other situations of emotional turmoil.

Some of the things that I learned could be seen as evident. For example things like actually be out there exploring is key to taking good photos. It sounds so simple but I didn't have that mindset before. Also routine, to take photos everyday has become routine now that I never even have to reflect on if I want to or if I feel creative, those thoughts don't seem that relevant anymore, instead I just have days where I have harder time to find a photo and some days where I find many. I am at that point where I feel weird being out without a camera, but as long as I at least have a phone I will be looking for photos. Problem with routine though is that I'm so used to always be looking for and taking photos, specifically out on the streets of Paris, that when I do something that's vastly outside my usual routines I can come close to forgetting to take photos.

5.2 Insights when making the Book

What I think was the biggest and most difficult lesson I took from making the book was that I need to photograph a lot more, and I mean quite a lot more. It was when going through all the photos and all the memories that came back, that I started to realise that there were so many photos that I wish I had but which I never took. So many moments and situations that I just didn't have any photos from, memories I wish I could have shown in my book to build a more complete story. In the same vain I think what I photograph should be more personal and show more expressions and feelings that I might be feeling in different situations. Without a sense of intimacy and a personal touch my photos are in danger of being just some tourist snapshots from around Paris. That is a challenge that I need to fully take on, showing my emotional state in my photography, to show my life in Paris that works as a series that could be in my books. Doing that by incorporating myself more in my photographing that feels holistic with everything else that I do. It would help if I keep a book in mind so that I can fill in the blind spots while I can, while I am in the moment. The goal is to hopefully to come to a place where I can work on a book the same time and about the same year that I actually photograph, so that I can organically work on it and at the end of the year I would have an almost finished book.

I try to think of that when I photograph today but it still happens, that I can be so much in a situation that I forget to take photos to document it, it happens more than I would like. So I guess I haven't become the photographer through and through that I expect of me. And that might be a good thing, I still need to be a person.

5.3 Impressions from the Industry

Since my time on the street where I have just photographed without any real plan nor a specific purpose. Meaning I didn't even get to know what my photography really was on a whole. It was only when I started to show my work to other professionals that some trends started to become clear. How people saw my photos, how they could see the isolation and alienation in the what and how I photographed.

I always thought the core in my work was purely the content itself but having it pointed out to me by my mentor, Steve Bisson, that a certain language is emerging, where I keep certain distance, often isolate people all in a visually interesting light and composition. While those are rare, with enough time there will be enough to build a central collection of works. And it with those new sensibilities that I can see the world.



Examples pointed out to me of the emerging language in my photography.

Now that I have finally started to put together my photography into a cohesive work I start to see what it all is about, now there is a journey, how it all is going somewhere but also how it is a clear slice of time and further I and everyone gets from it, the more interesting it could become.

5.4 What's Next for my Photography?

Where am I going with my photography? I do know what I'm doing on a day to day basis with my project and I know I want to build a longterm body of work, in part to show my future family. However that is just one of my goals for my photography. What will my body of work actually consist of? The start of my project had such a clear theme and story but not all my years will be like that. At this moment so much of my life might not be that exciting as back then. Since my project is in large part my life and my story it has to be what it is. So a lot of focus will be put on how to make interesting photographs no matter what state my life is.

Then there is my street photography. During the process of doing throughout examination of my past work there have been some realisations that I need to change some things. For example that my street photography might never really go deep enough into subjects, no sense of real exploration. There is so much more that it should include to reach the heights that I expect of myself to attain one day.

What is it that I want to discover? What do I want to learn about in my exploration? What can I teach others through my work? I should make a bigger effort to both capture current times since a lot will change and some changes will be permanent in our world. A lot of the value in my work might be in the time that has passed between now and then. I have to make an effort to document more and more, have a more complete view of the world around me. Even boring stuff because the boring stuff might only be boring to me and only be boring at this point in time.

Since all this is a lifelong project and I should have a set of goals which I always try to reach for. I should try to be more in the middle of stuff that is happening and also to try and be more involved. A lot of the change that is happening is political and not in a good direction, I want to be more involved and in a way where I can use my photography as political expression where I can tell people what's going on. The primary purpose has to be awaken empathy and sympathy in those that might lack it, towards those who the most

need it. I used to have a stance of not photographing those that have it worse than me, since I don't want to exploit misery for my own gain, but I need to start documenting everyone, can't sweep misery under the rug, world is going to have a lot of misery and that needs to be talked about. I need to make sure I do it well and with respect. Tell others that might need to hear and certainly those that need to be told.

It will be a long journey and that is kind of the point. But first, the next step, the work with the book of 2019 starts.

5.5 Personal

The project to photograph everyday makes me go out every day, not only to find a photograph but to actually try and live a life and that is one of the biggest secondary effects the project has had on me and my life. In a sense my reason to start the project in the first place, to survive and keep myself sane, is still doing that, helps me from going under. There is still quite a bit trauma for me to deal with. Things that has affected my self-esteem and trust for society at large. While the situation was entirely self-inflicted, it still makes me feel unsafe and I am always waiting for things to fall apart again. At the same time, I keep reminding myself that I did survive before, I will survive again.

I do realise, that at some point I need to start living again for real and start rebuilding my life. To try and have some hope for the future towards which I need to take my steps. If I should take something from my time doing this masters is that people have been very acknowledging and that I am actually seen and heard, that I'm not completely alone.



2018

Pertti

TO YOU

This book is dedicated to you, my future children and family, even if I managed to find you or not. I had to go through a lot, and it has been difficult to come to the point where I might have you in my life. I think I have been close many times but life can be a little unpredictable.

This is about the journey I started in 2018, this is a story about hardship, broken hearts, but also about adventures and good moments. This is hopefully about a journey that led me to you.

Hopefully Yours,
Pertti

PROLOGUE



Packed and ready to leave on my Parisian adventure.
Helsinki 1.11.2017



Finding inspiration.
Centre Pompidou 13.11.2017



Paris Photo 2017
Grand Palais 09.11.2017

DREAMING

I had received my degree in photography, I had my dreams to go to Paris. So in late 2017 I moved here permanently. I was so hopeful, so full of dreams and had so much I wanted to do. Too excited to be in Paris where I had dreamed of being for so long. I now lived the life, full of inspiration and momentum, so I didn't pay attention to just how fast I was draining my finances.

Housing and food does cost money. Still I took those for granted, I assumed they would always be there, somehow.







My first Christmas dinner in France.
15eme Paris 09.11.2017





CHAPTER 1

WINTER

FALLING

Falling in love with the first woman I meet in Paris might have been little foolish but doing it just days before my life would fall apart completely is something else. I had promised myself to never fall in love with someone who couldn't be with me for real, yet here I was again with the worst possible timing. It was with those butterflies in my stomach that I fell.

It happened, I had nowhere to go and I was on my own. That first night just didn't want to end. Sitting down too long and it became too cold, so getting rest or any sleep just wasn't possible. To keep warm I started walking around the neighbourhood in a small hope to get warm or at least become enough tired to fall asleep, but neither happened.

That night also had its contrasts, all while I was trying to survive, she from before, Alexandra, was sending horny texts and also saying sorry she couldn't help me. All I wanted was to be there with her.

Then the rain came. Wandering around I tried to just find cover and I escaped into the entrance of an apartment building. Sitting there by the door not knowing what to do and I noticed Paris started to have some life again. Early morning workers started going to work and one kind man kept the door open so I could go into stairwell. My first instinct was to run away and I kept saying sorry since I felt I was doing something wrong. Not only something shameful but something that might actually be illegal. At least I wasn't in the rain any longer.

Finally at 6h00 the metro opens! Used one of my last tickets to get in, sat down in the first train and fell asleep instantly and then kept riding the same train back and forth. Until it was time to meet someone from the internet that would give me some food from McDo.

That first night did teach me something crucial, water! I think for the first time in my life I experienced how awful it can get not having water. Seriously that headache was no joke. From then on I started to make sure to always have water with me and I had to learn where to fill up my bottle. Thankfully Paris acknowledges the importance of water and drinking fountains are all over the place, even can be found in the forest! And I was never denied a glass of water when asked in cafes and such.

When the night comes and the world goes to sleep, that should be the time one can relax, but for me the night was the worst. When I should be sleeping all I was doing was to wish for the day to come, counting down the hours. The night means the world closes and there is nowhere to go. Sleep was hard to come by and keeping warm became a constant search. So the nights were just a long wait for day to come so I could finally go somewhere and rest.

Some nights, while I still had a few coins left, I found a restaurant that was open all night and bought their cheapest coffee and sat there reading a book as long as I could. It worked great the first time, even a second time but the third time they said I had to actually order food, which I couldn't. After the cafe I would wander into the nearby shopping mall and wait for them to turn on the wifi and phone charging stations.





Early morning walk in central Paris. Other than some workers getting into the city, it's empty.
Rue de la Verrerie 14.2.2018







Late night visit to the Louvre.
Louvre 10.1.2018



Bathroom in an always open restaurant where I could spend the night.
Au Pied de Cochon 8.1.2018



An open shopping mall where I would seek shelter to get away from the cold.
Forum Les Halles 9.1.2018





At the shopping mall trying to keep warm and waiting for the wife to come on.
Forum Les Halles 28.1.2018



HOMES OF RANDOM PEOPLE

I was trying to find help everywhere I could, I went to gaming forums, couch surfing sites, anonymous messaging apps. Very hard to find real help, I tried to reach out for a couch online a few times and got a some responses but they were either far away from the city and often had a slight sexual innuendo, like a man invited me to come over to their home but I had to share a small single bed with them. If I was so inclined I would have jumped on those offers and would probably had found a safe crowd quickly but didn't really feel that was for me.

Thankfully someone I knew, they knew someone that could help me a bit, they would get me some food, some more McDO, and also get me in touch with people that could offer me a bed for a few nights and that was indeed exactly what I needed.

However I think one of the painful things I had to learn was that people come and go and rarely stick around too long. I understand that I am a stranger to them but still I couldn't help but to feel little defeated by it. It took awhile but in the end I accepted that it was part of the human experience and I had to try and find a way to manage on my own and to try find and rely on help from institutions rather than people.





A very affectionate dog at couch surfing.
La Defence 12.1.2018



Couch surfing a long walk outside Paris.
La Courneuve 14.1.2018





As Scandinavia born, I should be used to the snow and cold, but I barely coped.
Tour Saint-Jacques 19.3.2018



MY LADY

One of the snowiest winters in Paris and that's when I have to walk everywhere and constantly in search of shelter. Ending up on the streets in the middle of winter, I thought I could brush it off since I come from northern Sweden and Finland. Part Swedish viking and part Finnish Sisu, so when I realised that cold isn't something you get used to nor something you can just will away. It was then that the reality really started to sink in, it wasn't panic like one would expect, it was more directed inwards with strong desire to just end it.

Not knowing anything as a starting point, not having the correct info about what I should do was hard. The fragile state of my situation made me feel like I couldn't take too many chances. I started to try and get shelter in the waiting rooms of hospitals. I used to think that I was a picky sleeper that I needed that world's best comfort to be able to sleep, but the floor of a hospital corridor with some smelly gentlemen wasn't too bad when I hadn't had a good night's sleep in a long time. Hardest part was finding a comfortable position where the pelvic bone didn't hurt against the hard stone floor. Once I became a regular at the hospital called Hotel Dieux right next to the Notre Dame and got my routines in, I often managed to get a foldable bed and a blanket.

One particular night staying inside the waiting room of Hotel Dieux, I was on the phone with Alexandra and again she was spinning a wonderful fantasy where I existed in her world and suddenly she hangs up on me. "Oh well I'll go to sleep then" but turns out I was too cold and too weak. I keep yawning and shaking and then start passing out, I try to tell the quand in the waiting room that I don't feel too good and get escorted to the emergency room and collapsed onto the floor. As I get taken into intensive care I keep hearing people worried about me, yelling and asking if I am ok. The nurses talk about how I was white as a ghost, the doctors spend the night going through my bag, reading my CV trying to figure out who I was and why I was there. I excuse myself that I haven't showered in a week. Funnily there was nothing really wrong with me, they were puzzled why I had looked pale as a ghost that kept collapsing and losing consciousness.

During the night I was sure I heard my phone ring and all I wished for was for it to be her and her knowing what had happened to me but in the morning I realised no calls or messages had come and that I was back to being alone.





For a few months, every morning I would wake up right beside Notre Dame.
Notre Dame, Paris, 15.1.2018

KEEPING WARM

If a thing like that is possible, then I think I might have developed an allergy against the cold. Going months of never really getting warm, always having that shiver in my spine... that can make someone like me who grew up loving spending the winters on the ski slopes in the northern Sweden, go to being grumpy old man complaining about cold winters and longing for sunshine and warmth.

I often wanted to be one of those that spent a lot of time in libraries reading photography books or even graphic novels or comic books but I always seemed to have something more important to do. It wasn't until it was the only thing I could do to stay warm and not be stuck out in the cold. Oh how immensely I valued it. Not only was I now doing something I always wanted to, and had all the time to do it now, but it was also safety from the element, but most importantly it was an escape from my usual reality and a way to ease my mind. Despite all the pretentiousness, the tiredness and the eyes shutting the moment I felt safe and calm, falling asleep with the comic book in my hands.

Escaping to a Starbucks in a fever, never really getting warm. Spending my day half asleep sipping the smallest coffee and watching a borrowed Netflix. Days were pretty much only about getting through them. Worst feeling was the feeling of imposing. I often had to use the bathroom or only to get warm in public places like McDonalds or Starbucks but since I couldn't buy anything most of the time I had to ask for a glass of water and as understand it, they can't deny someone asking for water by law, but I certainly didn't feel that welcome to stay there, but what else was I going to do?











Finding a regular hot shower in an abandoned Metro station was heavenly.
Boulevard Saint Martin, Paris, 21.3.2018



EMOTIONAL MESS

The beginning was a desperate time, not only did my life come crashing down where I had no clue what to do or even if I could do it, so every bad thing I thought about myself became so much more intense. The anger going inwards was real. Like how could have I put myself in this situation and why did I have to be alone, why don't I matter? It was in those moments where everything started to become too much, that is when I did go to some very dark places. There was this growing dilemma, on one side I desperately wanted to end it all but I also couldn't. It wasn't about me hurting or punishing myself but it was actually about saving myself from the pain. Strangely the reason as to why I wanted the end and why I couldn't were the same, to take care of myself and to save myself.

Using an app for public anonymous messages seemed to be the only I could voice my feelings , kind of like a cry for help by whispering into the void. Of course a whisper that was never answered . But knowing at least someone saw it and heard me was somehow better than to suffer all alone , even if they didn't care. But I knew there was one person that would see them and it was the only person I wanted to reach.

Feeling like the loneliest person in Paris I thought I saw you everywhere, my heart jumped every time I thought it was really you.

I always wanted a family, sure, but maybe it was being completely alone and without a home that it became all I wanted. It felt genuinely like that was my purpose and dream, so it was with those thoughts it hurt so much to fail as a man, knowing it is my job to provide and take care of a family and here I was totally incapable to do any of that. Having spent so much of my life insecure and not feeling worthy of love or having a family, and here I was at the bottom and realising that my insecurities and fears had finally come true. What I always wanted and dreamed of became painfully clear when everything seemed impossible. I used to wear a brave face and even rejected what I wanted because I didn't feel deserving.

The disillusionment made me very angry, sad, and defeated. No bad feelings were directed at anyone, I understood positions held by others, I only blamed myself for being such a fool all my life, I should have known better. It became so easy to drag every fear to its extreme, I was single because no one could ever love me, not having a home could only be because I don't even deserve to be part of society, I

So not only did I spend my days trying to survive and longing to belong but all I wanted was to be near her again. The one person I wanted go home to went and got another boyfriend and moved in with him all while sending me yearning texts. While it was immensely flattering, it gave me hope, but it did hurt being a fantasy that was forgotten as quickly as she had orgasmed.



The river Seine was the one way I imagined an escape.
Seine Paris 17.1.2018

CHAPTER 2

SPRING









Slightly bizarre feeling, visiting and seeing historic art pieces, just because I needed somewhere to be warm.
Musée D'Orsay 1.4.2018





Waiting for the buss to the shelter under a metro line.
Quai de la Gare, 9.4.2018

115 TO BIRTHDAY

Spring came and with that hospitals no longer allowed people to escape the cold during the night. In desperation I once again tried what I had failed before, tried to the only number one can call, 115, the emergency number for those on the streets. Every morning in the same telephone que hoping not to get disconnected too many times, calling the same number over and over again sometimes over hundred times in one morning, fighting for a place in the que, for a chance to be connected to operators, hoping to be early enough to get a place to have a bed for the night at a shelter.

Sooner or later I did get connected and got through to those ladies that always answered the calls, they had the sweetest voices. Maybe I just thought so since living in such harsh and unpredictable life, so just hearing a warm voice and a nice person who actually cared about one's situation. It did a lot to lift ones spirits. Sure it also meant that a bed and meal waited there at the end of the day. So at least for that day I didn't have to worry about how I would survive.

When I got into the routine of shelter life, it gave such a sense of security because I no longer had to worry about things and could take one day at the time. You have to be at the shelter in the early evening and you have to be out early in the morning, so the routine became essentially, wake up at shelter, walk to public shower, walk to shopping mall to charge phone, walk to social restaurant to eat, have a lovely walk to language course and then walk back to train station to charge phone before jumping on the bus to shelter and then repeat the routine next day. This is a routine I very much adapted to, because breaking from it too much could mean no food or place to sleep. The security was thin but still being without it was so much worse. The panic I would feel the few times that the routine got ruptured.

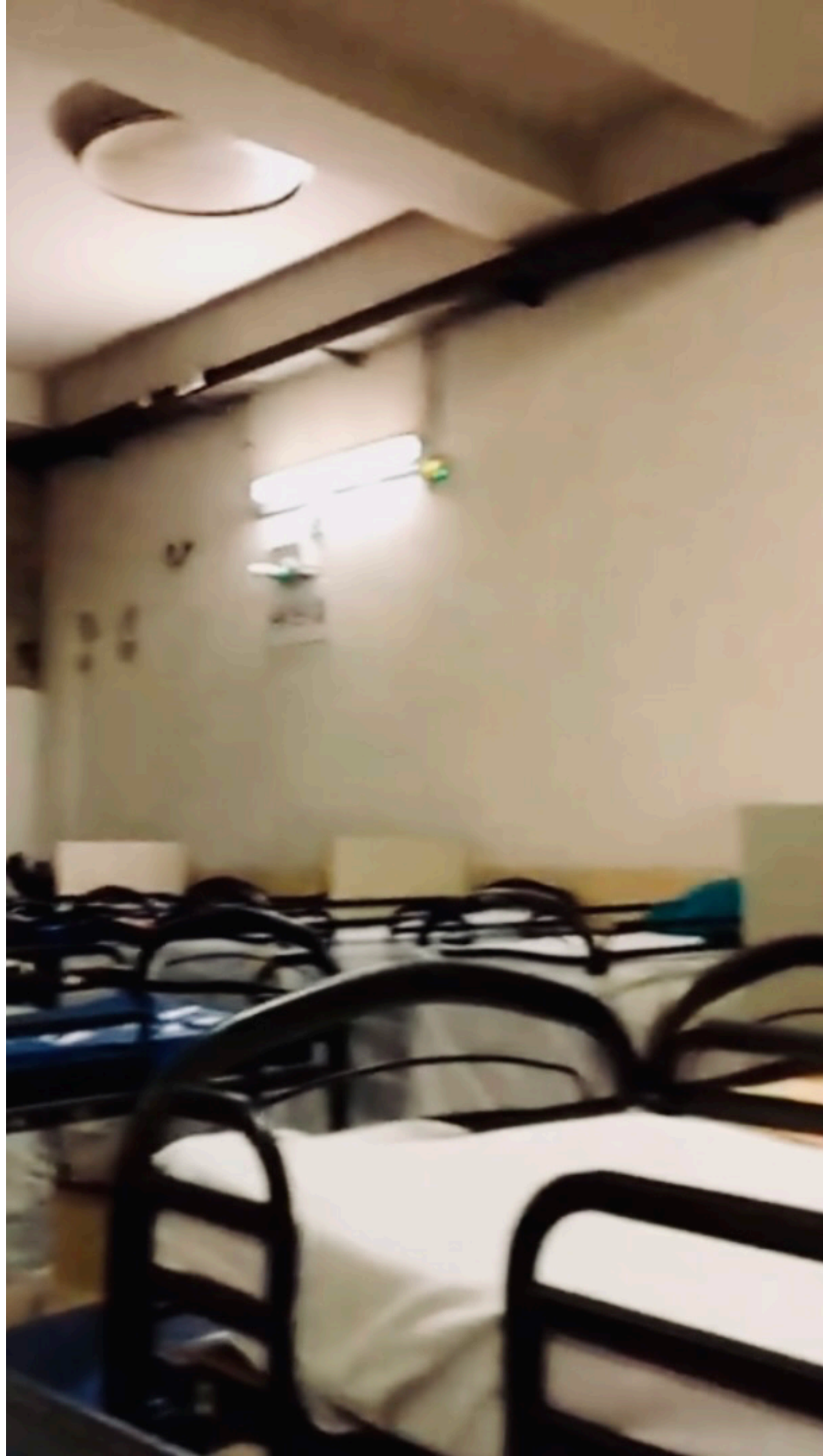
It was my birthday and I had one euro, to celebrate I did a calculation on what was the biggest amount of calories and sugar I could get for that one euro. After some researching I decided to get a box of chocolate chip cookies, it was my present to myself. It was alright. Then I got a surprise money transfer from a friend in Finland and with immense joy I directly went to Starbucks for some birthday coffee.

The length I otherwise go for a coffee, wait for hours in the cold? Even walk all across Paris? Of course. I thought I was a snob when it came to coffee but when you don't have a choice on the matter, a bad cup of coffee is still better than no coffee at all. I quickly learned to like it, well it didn't take that long since it was a huge plus in an otherwise a luxury devoid existence.

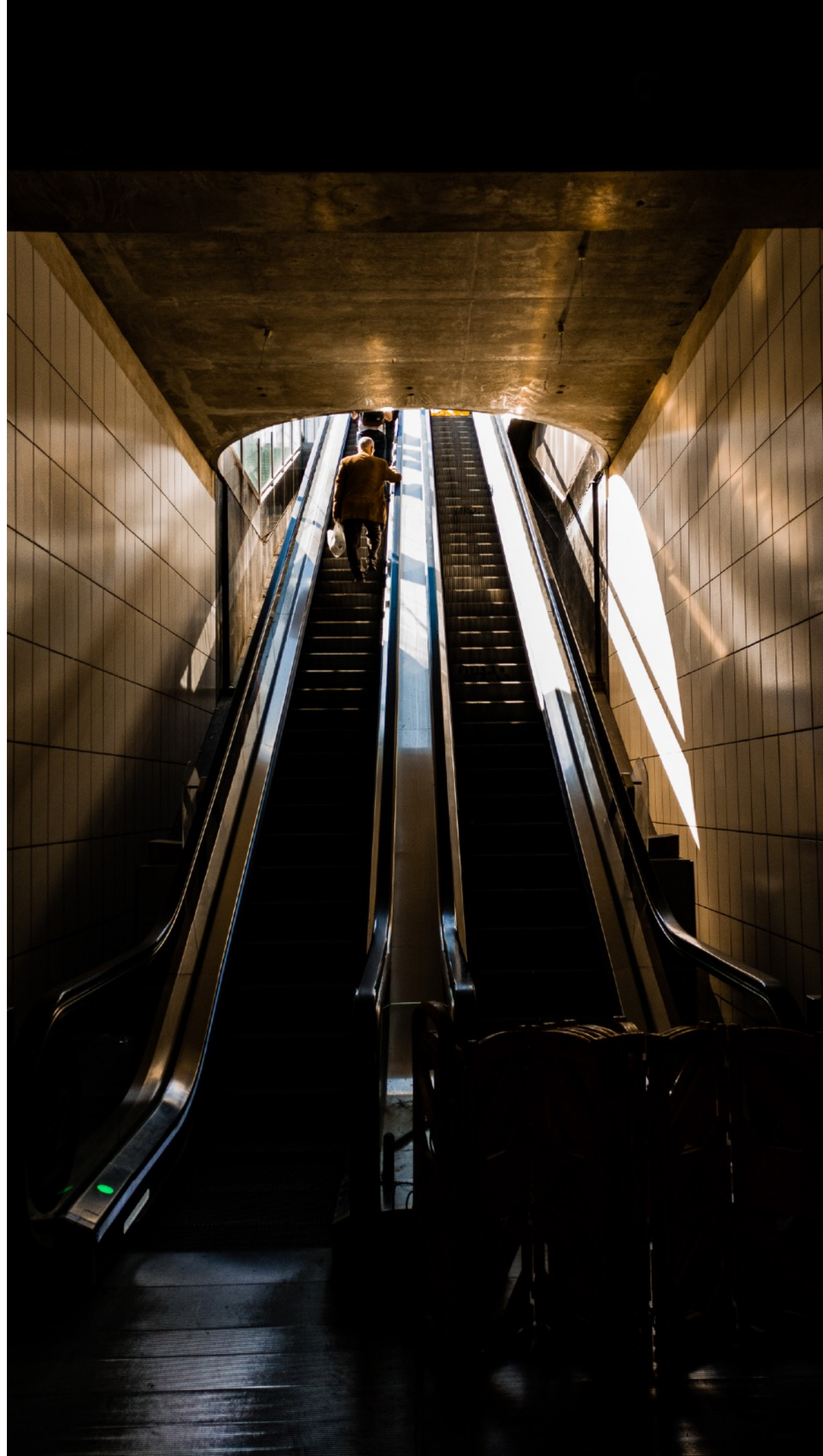
I did get some very bad habits, severe sweet tooth, since I was in survival mode all my body cared about was fast calories and hold onto them for dear life, but since I was always on the move there was no risk of weight gain. On the contrary, I kept loosing weight.



Morning ritual for everyone, every morning, calling 115 hoping to get a place for the next night too.
Centre d'hébergement d'urgence Paris 18ème 13.4.2018







THE SUN

After a hard cold winter constantly freezing, I couldn't believe how good it felt to have a warm sun on my face finally. To be able to be outside and not worry about anything and just find peace sitting down and enjoy the Parisian parks. The spring was here and with that came life to Paris, the city is always lively sure but it is different with the nature waking up again. It's both nice to be outside and also more to discover. I realised that there will always be something interesting to see and find and most importantly it wasn't a pain to be out, to be walking through cold and rain to get to places. I remember the first time I finally knew the spring had come and the winter suffering was over, was when I had to walk across Paris to a meeting at the unemployment office, not only did I have to take off my coat but also arriving there I was all sweaty. What a wonderful problem to have!

There was this park right on the bank of the Seine that I walked through every day and it was always full of people and it made me so happy when they would have stuff like public dances going on. Wished that I would be able to return and partake in the dances but at the moment I felt too shy and alone.

I walked around so much that I chewed down the iron hinges of my shoulder bag so the strap flew off and made me carry the bag by hand. It was the biggest pain. The moment I had some money a real backpack was the first thing I bought. I also chewed down my shoes quite immensely, so much so that I got some new shoes donated to me. Of course I would be picking nice shoes. They looked very nice but they were obviously meant to be worn on occasion, not constant daily use, so I spent a summer bleeding from my feet pretty much nonstop, at least I can say that I have bled for the streets of Paris.

With the spring people are coming out more and more. Some come out to air everything they are displeased about and can finally make their voices heard. I knew Parisians were quick to take to the streets to protest for good causes but it could feel little strange when I was walking my usual route and suddenly run into huge crowds and police, fires and pillows of smoke. No time to linger, just had to continue to language school.

The language school was a needed escape, I felt so normal spending my day there with other normal people who also were new to Paris. Most importantly it was an escape from not doing anything and an escape from the routine of just surviving.





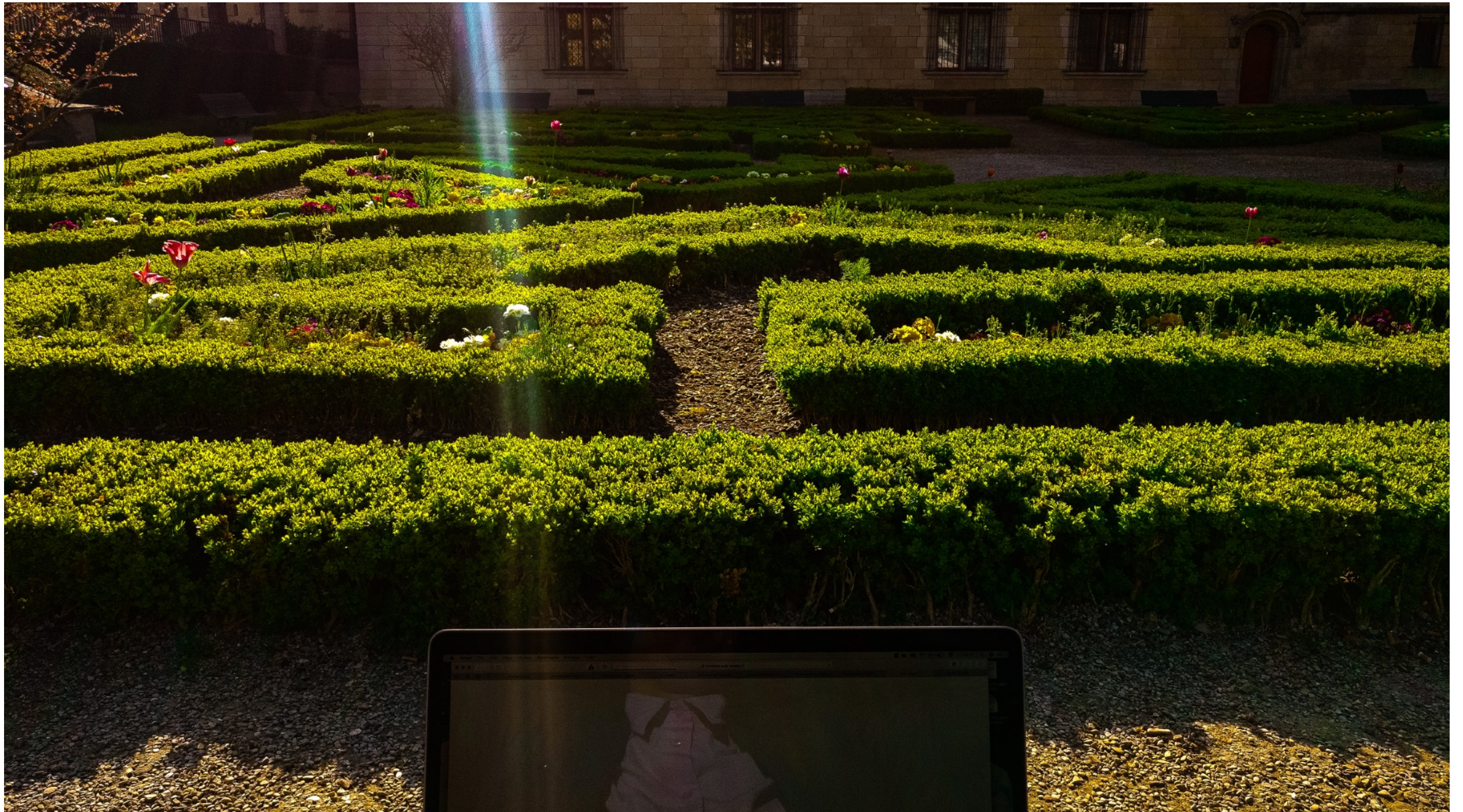




Protests usually end up with something on fire.
Odeon 29.5.2018







One sits down and uses the wifi where one can find it. Sometimes it can be pretty nice!
Jardin de l'Hôtel de Sens 20.4.2018



Public bathroom selfies.

BECOMING A PHOTOGRAPHER

Between surviving and remembering who I am, who I am supposed to be, I realised after a while that I wasn't really photographing that much, so me a photographer who wasn't photographing, who even was I? With the fear of being nothing, I built the need to photograph more, I started to photograph every single day, feeling like that if I miss even one day I would start becoming less.

It took a very drastic event, a dramatic turn in my life, to humble myself. I seriously used to think I had to photograph something cool to feel it was worth my time and attention. My project to start photographing every day not only saved my heart as a photographer, but might have saved me a person. I was again doing it for the joy of the craft, it was again a passion I had forgotten. It kept me busy and creative during a time where I was constantly on the tip to falling under.

Every morning I would leave the shelter just as the sun was starting to rise and it gave an unique view of Paris, both in its lighting but also the streets were mostly empty and calm. Just walking around taking the scenic route to wherever I was going, became a nice way to take a breather and find interesting photos. There is something to say about involuntary exercise, all the places I had to visit all were in the opposite sides of the city and I had to walk everywhere. No time to lazy about, wake up, walk an hour to shower, then walk an hour to lunch and from there also an hour walk to language class and after that a last one hour walk to the train station to charge phone and use wifi before taking the assigned buss to the shelter. That is a lot of hours out and about exploring. Many photos I only found because I just happened to be there, and the only reason I happened to be there was because my life forced me to. Having to walk back and forth to the same places I had to get creative with the routes I took just so I would have some variety and find new photos. Thankfully Paris has almost an infinite amount of things to discover and find, small nice streets to discover is always fun.

It's funny, the more you do something the more you start to identify as that thing, who would have thought it was that simple? The more I photographed the more I started to feel like a photographer to the core, not only someone that exercised it as a profession but as someone who identified as such as a person.

Many times I got people curious about my story, as I would tell it, I would often hear how brave I was. I never did feel very brave, this was just something I had to do, come to Paris, and now to do my photography. I never thought I would actually end up on the street but it seems to have woken up something in me.

It was funny meeting social workers because they would always be so surprised by the contrast between my situation in general and what I did, just opening my bag and showing that I had a full frame camera and a MacBook Pro in my backpack for my daily use, would always kind of make their jaws drop.









My roads often led to Centre Pompidou.
Le Marais 6.6.2018



Me sitting inside Starbucks observing another one sitting outside.
Rue Monge 8.6.2018



Courtyard in front of the language school and one of my nun class mates.
Paris 7eme, 25.5.2018



Escaping the rain can often lead to interesting places.
Bibliothèque François Mitterrand. 28.4.2018



Stairs to psychologist office.
Paris 4eme, 30.4.2018



PORT de PARIS ARSENAL

Fayolle

VHF 20

Conti
Ker
BECA



People are finally starting to really enjoy the sun.
Jardin du Luxembourg 8.5.2018



It blew my mind to find an old Roman Arena.
Arènes Lutèce 16.5.2018



Parisian parks make for good Inner-city Camping.
Quai Saint-Bernard 15.5.2018

CHAPTER 3

SUMMER





Having a trip away from Paris for a day.
Château Fontainebleau 18.9.2018



Paris really comes alive during summer. People dancing by the Seine.
Pont Neuf 24.8.2018



Started a tradition, having a beer for Fete Nationale at one of my favorite parks.
Jardin Luxembourg, Paris, 14.7.2018

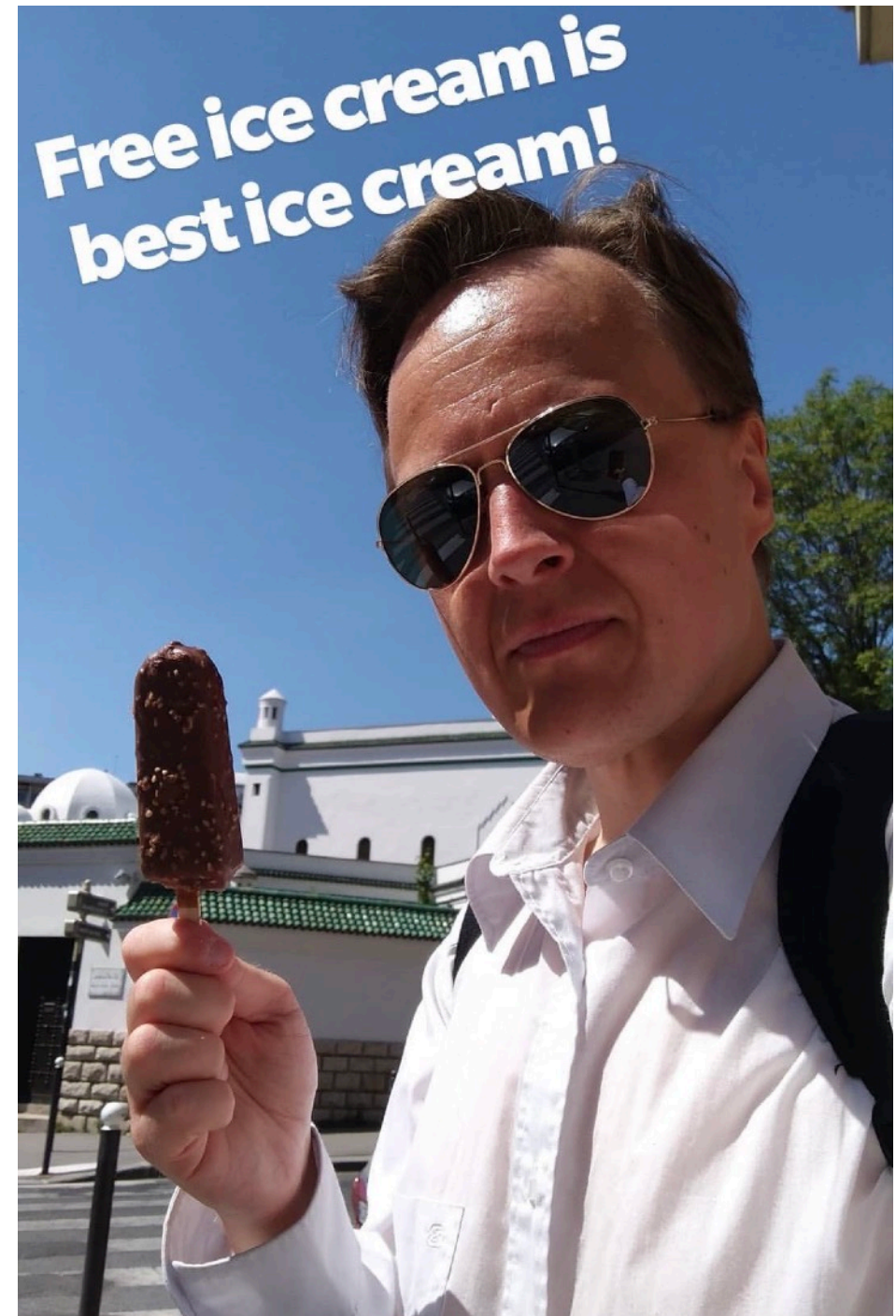
HAPPINESS

After all that surviving and managing, now suddenly there started to be moments where I was genuinely enjoying life, because here I was in Paris living the dream that I had longed for a long time. It is kind of funny how I was living in the middle my dream despite my situation, I used to imagine so long of all the things I would do once I had made my life here, to sit in a nice cafe being creative and productive all while listening to great music with my headphones, and now that was exactly what I was doing on my better days. Yet I didn't really realise it and was often mostly preoccupied with everything that was wrong.

A kind stranger from the internet sent me money, with no real purpose other than just to be kind so I took the opportunity to get some new sunglasses and since I was always outside and loved the sun the glasses were very welcome, also one has to look cool for summer! It was also when the social restaurant offered ice cream as dessert that I felt things could turnout alright, I had survived the worst and I am actually enjoying myself, because who doesn't like free ice cream on a warm summer day? And to top it all off, having good music in my ears while walking around made just everything just a little bit better, no matter if I was having a bad day, there was music just for that, and as I mentioned before having a day sitting in a cafe writing and there were also tunes for just that, I had music for all the highs and lows.

A huge surprise to me was how much I would fall in love with being surrounded with all the ancient places and history that surrounded me in Paris. When I discovered an old Roman arena it was clear that I would probably never want to leave Paris. Some days I spent in world famous museums with art from the best artists of humanity, sure the reason might have been that I was there because I had nowhere else to be and it was dry and warm, an escape during a rainy day. I loved everything I was now experiencing and had moments where I got immensely inspired by it.

Summer with constantly white shoes from all the time spent in beautiful parks with their white sands. Usually I would use my laptop in libraries but when they are closed I just had to use wifi where I could find it. Early mornings sitting in a nice park and checking email, all while the morning sun was warm on my face, it wasn't too bad.













For once, I should work on my full body tan.
Parc Georges Brassens 7.8.2018

VACATION

What does a vacation look for someone in my situation? How does one take a break from ones everyday life? I got to borrow the apartment for almost two weeks from a friend at language school while they went to Spain on vacation, all I had to do was to look after their cat, so a win win for me, since not only do I have a place to stay but also because I love cats! The incredible feeling of normalcy! It made it possible for me to live as a normal person for a moment, I could just chill out, eat what I wanted and just enjoy a movie without any other worries.

It was a hot and nice summer and I had no obligations. I just got a pay check from callcenter work. After a hard winter, no being able to do anything, not having anything. It was the perfect summer break now that I could do anything I wanted. I went on shopping sprees, I bought a game that I had wanted to play for a long time and then spent my summer mornings playing through it. I bought a new suit, new shoes, new perfume, and even got a fancy pen for all my writing. Felt like a normal person. With what I had left I decided to spend on some experiences that had been lacking severely, so went and spent an evening at a cabaret.

For that summer it felt like there was hope again. It felt like I wasn't completely alone anymore. That there might be a way out of it all. Then it all went back to normal. Turns out the thing my friend was promising me, to be there for me, wasn't something his partner wanted, so I could only say thank you and wish them the best. I have rarely felt so sad. I cried on the metro. But life goes on and I had to learn how to survive and move on.





Bought a new suit!
Rue de Cronstadt 7.7.2018





Cats and video games, two of my favorite things.
Rue de Cronstadt 10.8.2018



Got a job in strange new lands outside Paris.
La Défense 18.6.2018





New selfies for Tinder, with new suit.
Rue Cronstadt 13.8.2018

CINE X



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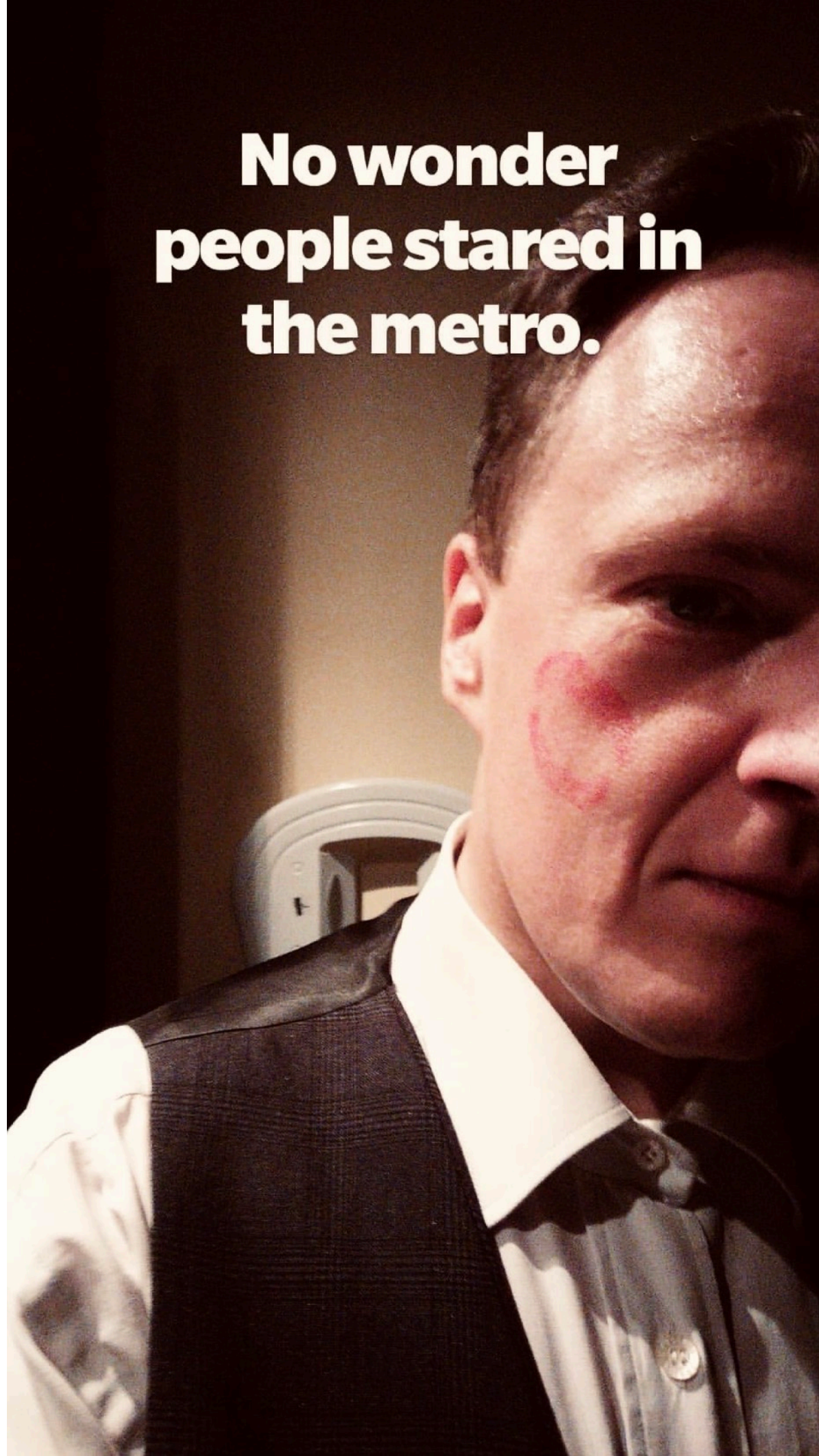








**No wonder
people stared in
the metro.**



Got some smiling looks in the metro, after a cabaret visit.

Paris 4eme 30.4.2018





CHAPTER 4

AUTUMN











Paris is cold again so coat is out of storage.
Boulevard Malesherbes 29.9.2018





BACK TO ANGER

After a summer of enjoyment, a summer of so many good things, where things seemed to actually be possible and now again winter was on its way and all possibilities seem to slip farther and farther away again and the feeling of hopelessness started to set in for every degree that the temperature dropped. The cold started to be harder and harder to handle. A feeling of defeat set in, after a summer where I felt things were going the right way and here I was again, not knowing if there even was a way. It was at the pace that things evolved or more precisely didn't evolve that made it hard to hang onto hope. I used to be a person that lived for weekends as I assume most people do. Being in a situation where the weekends means less places that are open where I can stay in doors and during the weekend the bureaucracy doesn't move, so no chance of good news, even if I didn't fully expect those, but there is a difference in not expecting and knowing for sure there won't be any. Having your social worker start crying because how hard I was having it. A thing like that took me back a bit, should I not tell how I handling my life?

It was so bizarre to be living in the middle of everything yet feel so disconnected. People in yellow vests were starting to demonstrate more and more and I often found myself close by where they were or had been. I'm all for people making themselves heard but here I am trying just to mind my own business walking to the buss and have to go through crowds and get teargassed.

I already knew that Parisians liked to protest but now it seemed to be something more in the air and while I lived my life disconnected from society I couldn't help but to run into traces and hear discussions always be about the yellow vests. They seemed to be a passionate and a lively bunch.

The anger from desperate people is quite something, myself included, feeling completely powerless and desperately wanting anything to improve can make anyone a bit irritable. Once going around in a shopping mall to keep warm I was approached by a woman in the same situation as me and she asked me to buy her a hotel room and when I tried to explain I was in the same situation she gets angry and starts yelling at me to speak French. It was at fist little hard to see it since I was so preoccupied by my own existence but once I started to see other people be in the same situation as me and seeing them handling it. It wasn't all of them that could, some I could see over time as they had harder and harder time and sooner or later they wouldn't even recognise me or didn't want to since they were in such bad state.



Sneaking onto busses when the rain gets little too heavy.
Bastille 7.12.2018



As part of a religious gathering they offer sleeping arrangements in an abandoned office outside Paris.
Argenteuil 15.12.2018





The shelter let me try out lots of different deserts.
Centre d'hébergement d'urgence Paris 18ème
19.9.2018

← go ahead



would be not moved on. So you are fine. :)

i do think that i care in an active sens

Mm ok, I appreciate that then. But yes you are awful at showing that in that case with how easily you always get rid of me. :P

3:49 PM

it could seem easy to block you on my phone but it ain't easy to block you from my brain



Dis quelque chose de gentil...

ENVOYER





Traces of the yellow vests.
8.12.2018 Rambuteau





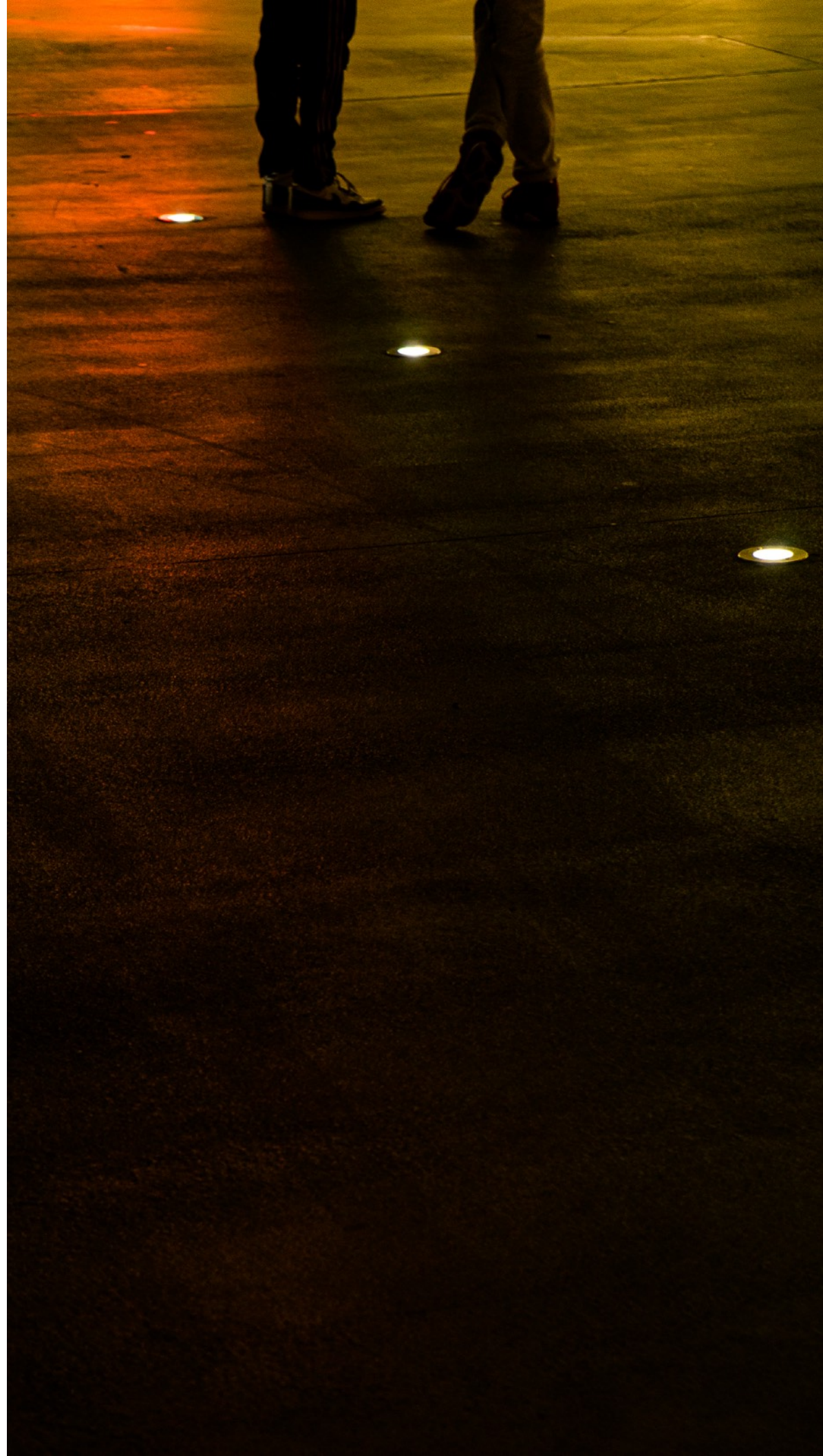
CONFLICTS

It was a little difficult to choose my battles of morale with some of my situational friends. During dinner time we were usually the same group that ate together and it was always a good time. There were a sense of brotherhood and sharing but to actually have conversations other than about women it would often become disagreements. I did have to be careful with what I said. I made sure to always try to stand for good things but didn't press too hard on people who had completely opposite views. I only had to take it as ignorance and hope it wasn't too important for them so they would act out those bad views. There were several culture shocks that lead to have insight into how people thought from around the world, things I took for granted, such as gay right and gender equality could sometimes be seen in an opposite way and trying to argue was pointless and one just had to admit defeat and let go because in the end I couldn't choose who I saw everyday and had dinner with.

Even the best of people, at least the ones one would assume couldn't be too bad, could turn out to be pretty bad. I was in a language school with catholic nuns and they seemed to have zero empathy toward the homeless and the poor. So I could feel quite a bit of shame whenever talk of those topics came up. Might be why I seemed to get along the best with a South Korean in the same class, who was gay and also scared of the nuns, that they would find out.

Once in the early morning waiting to shower I was met by a man that was angry because I was using places meant for those in need, see as I was well groomed and always wearing a suit I couldn't possible be in need, thankfully two African men called him racist and all got into a heated debate which I didn't understand anything of so I just stood there in the que patiently waiting for the showers to open. That kind of anger happens when you live rough you just get so tired that you no longer have the energy to have manners and you just need to get in get that shower and coffee . It takes one person to push a bad mood and everyone does it.

I heard often that I didn't look homeless, like somehow my suits made me and my situation incompatible.









CHAPTER 5

WINTER AGAIN



LES ENFANTS DE
NE SONT PAS ADMIS
EN SALLE

LE PLACEMENT DES
PAR LE RECEPTEUR
PAR ORDRE D'ARRIVEE
DANS LA SALLE

Fermeture des portes

Le Café Théâtre des Bains Montmartre

LES ENFANTS DE
NE SONT PAS ADMIS
EN SALLE

LE PLACEMENT DES
PAR LE RECEPTEUR
PAR ORDRE D'ARRIVEE
DANS LA SALLE

Fermeture des portes

Le Café Théâtre des Bains Montmartre

MALE MORGAN/DOU **ACCEPTÉ**
Paiement Espèces ou
Cheque

PAS DE CB
CHEQUE
OU
ESPECES
UNIQUEMENT

MALE MORGAN/DOU

ACCEPTÉ

Paiement Espèces ou

Cheque

PAS DE CB

CHEQUE

OU

ESPECES

UNIQUEMENT

MALE MORGAN/DOU

ACCEPTÉ

Paiement Espèces ou

Cheque

SOLITARY HOLIDAYS

Getting a Starbucks gift card as a Christmas present from a friend meant so much more than the giver probably understood. Since it's not only the coffee I would be drinking but it was also not being stuck outside and could legitimately spend all day in a warm place with wifi and ability to charge my phone. And probably most importantly, for a moment I could feel like a normal person. Having no real money, I kept dreaming of all the things I would do once I had any, because to be at most places in Paris there is a fee, even if it is sitting and writing in a cafe. Those moments when I had some money that is just what I would do, make a coffee budget for Starbucks, because they had good wifi, a good coffee/price ration, and you can sit there all day and then leave warm and dry and even have a fully charged phone.

Christmas spent in a Starbucks playing video games, it wasn't as bad as it might sound, coffee and games, two of my favourite things. Christmas decorations everywhere, cold weather and red moody light, all in all did at least build a bit of Christmas feeling outside. I've always loved video games and maybe I have often used them as an escape when life wasn't what I wanted it to be, but when I was just trying to survive and all I had was hardship then having the opportunity to escape into a video game was a good healthy way to save my mind. If I couldn't keep my mind busy and off the bad stuff, then I don't know what I could have done.

New Year's Eve, as much as I used to love it and how much I wanted to experience it fully in paris, but I would rather just have dinner at the shelter and go to sleep early. Was deeply asleep even before the clock chimed midnight. Only to then wake up in the morning to messages from Alexandra that had come during the night. It's incredibly just how many times I kept thinking I saw her through the year but we never actually met up. How did one night together have such a lasting effect on me? It was like I had never truly loved before or like I had never had my heart broken before. She was the one, or more correctly was supposed to be the one. I could see everything with her and I wanted everything with her, more than anything.

I can only smile when I think how naive I was, how I kept hoping, dreaming and got my belief ignited even by the smallest hints that there was an "us".









A woman probably waiting to party on New Years Eve.
Le Marais 31.12.2018



Christmas Eve, appropriate lighting as I leave Starbucks.
Rue St-Denis 24.12.2018

EPILOGUE

What DO I Want?

- Love - give/receive
- Very sexual
- real closeness
- real communication
- Brutal honesty
- playfulness
- curiosity
- eagerness
- Open mind
- often be together
- Be in touch
- little crazy
- mutual support
- encouragement
- mutual self-improvement

What DO I NOT want?

- personally be jealous
- be needy
- any bitterness
- Broken promises
- lying
- Not telling things as they are
- intentionally hurting emotionally
- not making an effort to be together
-

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Life certainly can take turns, while I knew, or feared that it was possible that my move to Paris could go wrong, I even joked about becoming homeless before it happened and even assured people who were worried that Paris had safety programs and soup kitchens that it would be alright, but never did I actually think that it would happen for real, even in my darkest moods before the move I still had some optimism, so it was a huge shock both physically and mentally when it finally happened for real.

I woke up many previously ignored fears, insecurities, but also repressed dreams and it all came back to the surface. When you have nothing but yourself it's hard to not begin a journey of introspection and that is sometimes done with the worst possible reinforcement.

It made me question everything I knew to be true. It was like destroying everything that I was, breaking apart and not even picking up the pieces but just shedding them all over the place and not even thinking there would be a day where I would have to start picking them up again, even less, the thought that I would have to start putting them together, to start fixing myself. It really was a year of waking up, letting go of all the dreams and fantasies that I had spent all my life waiting for. Every aspect that I believed in came completely crashing down. The biggest and hardest was realising that all the security I thought I had around me, was not there, the belief I would somehow find my happily ever after was now something that started to hurt me. What I had to learn was that I just had to survive and at times I didn't know if I even wanted to.

I was in the middle of what was the worst period of my life yet it felt like I was exactly where I was supposed to be and there were moments where my dreams were coming true. It was a time of opposing forces, of hardship and misery and of discovery and experiencing things for the first time in my life.

I sometimes think that my start in Paris was in the end something good. Strangely I think I fell in love with Paris even more during my rough time. Not sure if it would have been possible get to know Paris so in detail, how else would I get to know Paris so intimately? Where I literally had to walk everywhere and even sleep where I could. Every library that became my home, every park that became a small rest. In me being forced to be out all the time and moving around from one corner to another, I got to see and experience the city in a way very few can, or even should and it has given me a sense of belonging to the city that I'm not sure I have felt anywhere else. I was stuck here and even if I had somewhere to go back to I'm not sure I even wanted to. They say those that go through hardship together form a bond and maybe that is what happened with me and the city.

I don't know if I really learned anything from falling down that drastically or if I'm ever going to be able to heal the trauma. That is my biggest fear, having to go through all that but not learn anything important from it, that I as a person didn't improve in any way. Because if that was the case then all that I had to go through didn't count for anything and I had failed myself. Only time will tell and if this book did find its way to you, then something surely did go right.

THANK YOU

Paris, I have to start by thanking the city itself and everything that is within. Thanks to you I survived and managed to keep sane.

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Text and photography by Pertti Teurajarvi

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