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→ J'ai commencé en camping...

→ Quand on s'est rencontrés avec ma femme, on avait un projet d'ouvrir notre propre restaurant....

→ Je suis vétérinaire de formation...

→ Juste après avoir obtenu mon BTS de tourisme...

→ J'ai commencé la restauration en job étudiant, en parallèle de mes études...

→ Mes grands-parents et mes parents avaient chacun un hôtel...

→ Quand j'étais étudiant, je me suis retrouvé à travailler dans un des pires bouchons lyonnais du Vieux Lyon...

→ J'ai commencé à travailler à côté de mes études, je faisais le ménage...

→ Dans ce restaurant où j'ai travaillé, je tombe sur une nana qui est la responsable de salle et qui me prend sous son aile...

→ Je travaille pour un grand hôtel de luxe, et mon rôle, c'est d'accueillir nos clients...

→ Quand j'avais 19 ans, j'ai commencé à travailler dans une auberge de jeunesse...

→ Ma mère est britannique, et comme énormément de Britanniques, elle a une chambre d'hôtes...

→ Depuis mes 18 ans, j'ai enchaîné les petits boulots alimentaires à côté de mes études en école d'art...

→ I came back to my family roots, to a small village in the south of France during the second confinement...

→ When I was in high school in the States, I worked at a local diner and that's what gave me the base level of experience that I needed to do well in the job I have now...

→ I started in hospitality when I was fourteen. I saw an ad in the paper for this two-week housekeeping course...

I started out working in a campsite. I was 19 and I wanted to be a barmaid, to work during the tourist season. In the beginning, I was getting hammered because you don't know the job or the people, you're still learning... on top of that, you have to learn a whole menu, make desserts, run food – you're doing a lot of things at once. Everyone's in a rush, there's a lot of pressure, and it's not always very pleasant. There's always an element of power at play in any work environment: you're going to be put under pressure, you're going to get hazed a bit.

Each space has a role: the dining room, the bar, the kitchen... and what's more, in a big campsite like this, everyone has their place. There are relationships between people that you might not know about. The first year was cool because I thought, I'm 19, it's chill, I'm eager to learn stuff, and I can drink as much as I want. And in the restaurant business, you kind of just keep your mouth shut about certain things. I came back the following year, and it was a lot more relaxed. But the year after that, there were new seasonal workers and things got a bit tense because some people were saying they were underpaid, but I didn't know about all that stuff yet and I wasn't really looking at my pay slips at the time. I just said to myself: I'm fed, I'm housed, I've got money in my pocket. I hadn't yet gotten used to reading contracts.

Then I went to Chamonix for six months. We were in a former hotel-restaurant, where we were housed in the old rooms. I really liked working during the tourist season. I don't know if it was because I liked alcohol, but in any case, I was in the mood to party with the chef and my colleagues. There was also a pool table, a foosball table and free-flowing *génépi*. The restaurant business kept me around for a while, partly because of the alcohol. And because I don't have a degree, so it was kind of the only place where I knew how to do things well and that made me feel valued – and I was pretty good at what I did.

Then I moved to Besançon and really settled down in a place that did year-round catering, which was different from what I'd done before. That's where the most violent stuff happened. I didn't originally want to be a server, but they asked me to be *chef de rang* and I did it. But I wasn't very nice to people there, because clients were constantly sexualizing me as a waitress and it pissed me off. I didn't want to be talked to or treated like that.

It was very complicated with my bosses. I didn't want a permanent contract, because I knew I wouldn't be doing this for the rest of my life. I told them “I don't want a permanent contract, but I'm willing to stay on”, so they paid me under the table. And there were times when I didn't get paid at the right time. Finally, I said to my manager: “If you don't pay me, I'll send you to the labour courts.” He got scared after that. I was really multi-skilled, doing both services - I had my whole floor as *chef de rang* - and I was at the bar from 11 am until 2, 3, 4 am. So the stakes were high for them. But obviously, they didn't want to keep me after that, and for me it created a feeling of “Okay, I quit, I don't want to do this job anymore.”

When my wife and I met, we had a plan to open our own restaurant. It's a field where there aren't 50,000 possibilities for advancement. So acquiring a certain amount of experience, and then eventually becoming your own boss, that's when it can get interesting – with all the difficulties and joys that it brings. That's the normal progression. Otherwise, you work in one place, get fed up, and move to another. After a while, it's redundant.

I used to work in a lot of restaurants and bars. When I moved here, I worked at the bar and as a waiter. I love being in contact with people, laughing, teasing customers - in a nice way, of course. Humor brings people together. Especially when it's not mean-spirited. And when it's sincere. It's not just commercial: here, we really like people. And people like to be liked. We have customers from the neighborhood, people who come in practically every day. We also have people who come regularly, because there's a business complex nearby. The clientele is loyal. Sometimes, people who are just passing through stop here for a break. Word-of-mouth is important, that's what works.

Hospitality is also important. Because before being waiters, we've all been customers. Whether it's for a meal or a coffee, we like to be greeted with a smile. We're not asking to become friends or anything, just for a warm welcome that goes with the service. Because it's all fine to be served well, to eat well, but if the waiter brings you caviar, and just throws it at you... It's a package deal: well cooked, well served, well received. And then to try to do business in an ethical fashion, that respects people. And to create relationships.

It wasn't always like that in the restaurants I worked in before. It's difficult when you work in a place where you have an idea of how things should be, and then the way that the establishment functions is different. You're forced to submit to their way of doing things, because that's how it is: you're not the one who gets to decide. It gets tiring, because you're not yourself. Me, I like serving people, exchanging a word or two, just to break down barriers. And some bosses don't like that. The thirty seconds you spend chatting with the customer, for them it's time when they're paying you and you're not bringing them any money.

But here we have the freedom to do it our way. And above all, when you see that it works... since people are so well received, you exchange a joke. Even if they're cheesy (or as I like to call them, "server jokes"), and sometimes they're a bit lowbrow. But there's an effort to reach out. The morning customers are regulars who come by every day. We laugh, we chat, we exchange ideas. It's friendly. At lunchtime, there are quite a few people we know, who come with their families or colleagues. We've already had birthdays, retirements and even a wedding here.

I'm a veterinarian by training. I knew it was going to be difficult because I'm a native of Normandy; the countryside is a bit rough, and I worked with cows. It's a lot of blood, and I have thousands of anecdotes that would make you wince. And then I got to school, where I began to understand that these people have a particular vision of life, where it's all about the bottom line. After a while, I couldn't take it anymore.

It was really hard to stop studying. But I ended up working in an old Lyonnais *bouchon*, a fairly upscale restaurant. And I fell in love with it, because I no longer had any moral responsibility. I'd moved on to the other side of hospitality. In health professions, people take hospitality for granted, whereas in the restaurant business, people consider it a plus. A smile or a kind attitude – people are very grateful. My first career made me angry at men and their intellects; I couldn't understand them. In the restaurant business, I could comprehend the emotional impact better, because I was more in contact with the customers. And it helped me to assuage certain social anxieties through work.

Working as a waiter, I didn't want to stray from the idea of being attentive. For example, if there's a child in the dining room, you don't want to rush the parents, even if they're making noise. And the restaurant where I work now allows us to do this, because we have around forty place settings, not 150. We have this aspect where we can be careful, we can be benevolent, and we're really very attached to our work. Every plate is prepared with care. We also pay attention to everyone's individual habits. Mrs Picart doesn't like whipped cream. So I'm not going to be sending her whipped cream, we'll remember that. I really think that's what makes the difference in our business.

It's sometimes said that the customer is king, but in France we cut off their heads. I'd even say that the customer is king, but we're God – in the sense that we're lucky, because our manager protects us a lot. Whenever she senses a potential problem with a customer, she's on our side, not that of the clients.

I had some clients one day when I was working at a bar opening. The customer asked for fries. The chef hadn't made any fries. The manager came in saying, "Yes, we have fries" "But the chef doesn't have potatoes. So the chef can't make fries." "Yes, well, he'll buy some!" The customer was king, that was the very definition. I don't think we can work that way any more, because this old-fashioned notion of hierarchy, where there's a clear division between the boss and the employees, no longer exists. Nowadays, you can't just snap your fingers to get what you want. It doesn't make sense anymore, because people working today have diverse backgrounds and experiences, and there's a lot more empathy. I know that this kind of establishment will close rapidly, because the more pressure you put on people, the more they'll stop wanting to work.

Just after graduating from my BTS in tourism, I landed a job as a reservations agent for a large, well-known hotel group in the luxury sector. At first I was very proud to have been chosen, and happy to specialize in hotels with a largely English-speaking clientele, as I would be able to practice the language on a daily basis. It was an eight-month fixed-term contract, and looking back, I don't know how I managed to stay that long.

We were in a call center in Lille, and were supposed to represent the world of luxury, to know all about the rooms we were selling without having seen them, paid minimum wage (1,153 euros/month at the time), and faced with pressure in terms of time and finances (we had very little time off). I was told I was going to the toilet too often (I had cystitis at the time), I was yelled at more than once because there were calls waiting, and we weren't allowed to talk to each other. We had to use the roughly forty different criteria of a "leading hotel of the world" chart in each of our calls. The calls were listened to by a manager and then evaluated, with a bonus of fifty euros per month at stake. I never got the bonus - the manager always chose short calls.

The customers were demanding (understandably so, given the amount of money they spent on their vacations). They had very specific requests that had to be respected. Apart from four or five abusive requests, they were relatively correct, but at no time was I considered the clients equal. One day, a man booking a double suite in Cannes asked me over the phone, "Are there many there in the summer?" I didn't understand and made him repeat the question. "Many Arabs, Madame, are there a lot of them in Cannes in the summer?" He seemed to think I could talk to him about that. I was also invited to an orgy that was to take place a few weeks after the reservation at one of the group's hotels in Alsace (all over the phone, of course), and to top it all off, I was told to go die. Yes, for a hotel room. In short, I was at the service of the rich, for whom I had to be irreproachable in my job (without having had all the training), my managers were always trying to get me to fall in line (because, according to them, I was too wild), I was poorly paid and I developed chronic stress.

This was ten years ago, and I'm still traumatized by the sheer amount of self-sacrifice demanded by the managers and customers, for a pitiful salary. After that, I decided to never work in luxury again, and was given the opportunity to work as a youth hostel receptionist in Budapest, Tirana, Sarajevo and Izmir. These short experiences reconciled me with the tourism industry. However, it will never be my first choice of employment, as the whole system needs to be overhauled, and I no longer want to be "at the service" of the very rich.

I started out working in restaurants as a student job alongside my studies. And then I kept going, because it's an environment that has taught me a lot. I was a shy, introverted person, and being in contact with customers allowed me to open up, to assert myself in front of people and to show that I existed, that I was there. I think it's a great job, because you're always in contact with the clients. You see the human side of people, as well as the slightly inhuman side – in the sense that sometimes there's no hello, no thank you, no goodbye. They're just there to eat, there's no respect... and on the contrary, there are people who do simple things and who say thank you often.

It's refreshing to see another side of people – ones you could cross on the street who completely change once they're in a restaurant. I used to work in a five-star hotel, so the customers were pretty important. Sometimes they'd snap their fingers at me, so I would come to take their order or verify that everything was fine. At times, this job isn't rewarding at all. You can feel like the errand boy, who's just there to serve the client with nothing in exchange, no reciprocal respect. The part of the job that I like is when you can feel happy to have met the customer. But human beings can sometimes be very unpleasant.

I'm currently working twenty hours a week in a small local restaurant, from Monday to Friday. It's a restaurant with a very warm, friendly atmosphere. There are customers that I see every day, so I know their habits. I know where they want to be in life, I know a bit about them, and that allows me to talk to them more. I can tell that the interaction is very pleasant when they know who I am and I know who they are. It's more fluid – it's almost like being friends. Compared to a normal, average customer – where you're very nice and courteous – when you know the person a little better, it's nicer to talk and interact with them, while still doing your job and providing a service.

I've found that the more humble people, with more modest incomes, are the most pleasant, because they know how to appreciate the little things. They're my favorite clientele. These are the people who ask for the least amount of changes to the dishes or otherwise. Or, they might request a change, but they do it with all due respect, specifying "if it's possible, and if it's not possible, it's okay. Thank you, sorry to bother you". These are little moments that show that asking to change things bothers them, and that they need us to be understanding. When we see details like that... we're more likely to take care of someone who's like that than someone who's been unpleasant. There have been times when I've said in the kitchen: this person, yes, that person, no. Because respect goes both ways. We're respectful with them, and they have to be respectful with us.

My grandparents and my parents each had their own hotel. My grandparents' hotel was fairly small. In those days, it was called a "*pension de famille*". My parents' hotel was larger, in a ski resort. So my parents had employees from time to time, but they weren't the kind of bosses who just managed things. My father did the cooking, and my mother managed the rooms and the service, and also took care of reservations, the reception, etc... They were both involved in all the hotel's tasks.

That's how I grew up. It was quite a peculiar childhood, because we didn't really have a private place. Our rooms were hotel rooms; the kitchen was the hotel kitchen, where we ate with the employees. And at my grandparents', with this boarding house spirit, our TV lounge was also the guests' lounge.

My grandparents' hotel is right next to Lourdes. People came for the pilgrimage and returned every year. I used to call some of them "papy" and "mamie", because they came to stay with my grandparents for 35 years. One of them was retired, but he was a gardener by trade, and every time he came, he trimmed the hedge on our property.

At my parents' hotel, there were a lot of spa patients, because it's near a thermal resort. So there were a lot of people coming back year after year. In those days, people stayed much longer at hotels. Nowadays, people come for a week, whereas in the old days, they stayed a month for treatment. We developed a much richer relationship with those people. When I was little, I didn't see the money aspect. Of course, it was my parents' job, so there was bound to be a financial transaction. But I was more interested in the relationship with the people involved.

In the summer, my mother had her office in the reception, and it was open to the public. All day long, people came to talk to her about their grandchildren and their life at home. They came for the human contact, but at the same time, she always had to be at the service of the guest who came to say "I need a bigger pillow...", or "I'm too cold at night...". The customer is king: in my home, I've heard it I don't know how many times, and I knew I should never say anything back to the clients. It was always "yes, yes, okay, fine". And then afterwards, I'd see my mother come into the kitchen and say "Ah, he's getting on my nerves, nothing is ever good enough for him!"

I didn't understand why it was like that, but I internalized it, too. I knew almost instinctively that I had to play a role in front of the guests. The ones who came back year after year, I liked, but in front of the others I didn't know, I had to put on a facade of "Yes, everything's fine! It's a great place to live!" But in the kitchen, we had family problems like everyone else.

When I was a student, I found myself working in one of the worst *bouchons* in Old Lyon. I really needed the money, and the idea was to work fifty hours a week, which is a lot in the restaurant industry - especially at those kinds of rhythms and hours. Because you do the lunch service, and then you have a break. You don't even have time to go home for a nap, and then you're back on the job in the evening until midnight. And the job wasn't reported to the tax authorities, but it was paid at the hourly minimum wage as if it were. We're talking about eight euros an hour. But at least we got a free meal. I think I had frozen *andouillettes* for lunch every day.

The kitchen staff was only people of color with precarious legal status and living conditions, who were often paid under the table. And that created friction, because you had a room on the first floor which was well insulated and very clean, and a room upstairs, where when the restaurant was too crowded, we would move people. And part of the upstairs overlooked the kitchens: you had a kind of opening where the food was passed through, and you could see the chefs through it. And I remember groups of self-titled "proper Frenchmen" who wanted to dine at a "good" bouchon, and who saw cooks who didn't correspond at all to their expectations of what a "proper" French cook should look like. And so they left the restaurant, saying "Oh that's nonsense, I don't want a cook like that". I encountered similar situations more than once, because the Old Lyon district is increasingly becoming a haven for fascists. So there was my boss, who wanted to make a quick buck by employing people of color to serve fascists. It created a weird situation, with all sorts of social and economic issues colliding.

Beyond that, most of the customers were foreigners, lots of American tourists. I thought the food was really bad, but when it was Americans, English or Germans, they always had a big smile on their face. But when there were French people, we were often told it wasn't good. As a waiter, you're inevitably a bit of a punching bag between the customer, the kitchen and the boss. You're always on the front line, taking the brunt of it and having to make excuses. Often, when things got heated, I'd pull the student card and say, "I'm just here to pay for my studies, so stop yelling at me!" I'd try to find ways of protecting myself, because it's really tiring. You say *bon appétit*, but you don't say it from the heart.

The drama reached its climax when a lady found mouse droppings in a typical Lyonnais dish called *cervelle de canut*, a type of *fromage blanc* with garlic and lemon. Knowing that throughout the day, I served this same *cervelle de canut* to I don't know how many people... for me it was too much. I left the next week, because I couldn't take it anymore. Even in the movies, even in a French comedy about Lyon's *bouchons*, they'd never dare make that kind of joke.

I started out working a student job, cleaning houses. I soon progressed to being a chambermaid in a 4-star hotel. I've always been fascinated by that profession, chambermaid in prestigious hotels. It's always thrilled me, the idea of touching luxury in that way. I come from a relatively well-off family, but I'm not rich either. I've always worked alongside my studies, but I'm not in any kind of economic difficulty. Working is a personal choice.

To me, the ideal working conditions are to be alone. I wanted to find a job where I would talk to as few people as possible. So being a chambermaid is perfect. From 9am to 5pm, you don't talk to anyone. You can go a whole day without a word if you want. It's very formal, the soap has to be put down like this, the toothbrush like this. I don't think about the movements I make anymore. There's something really meditative about it. I tell myself that it's a luxury for me to have all this time when my body is doing things, without asking questions.

There's pressure to be efficient, but then again, I'm young, I'm physically fit. But my colleagues all have bad backs. I don't think we have to make the same effort. I work three months of the year, and I'm twenty-four. That being said, it's hard work - at the end of the summer, after three months, I'm completely shattered and I go to the physiotherapist, and he tells me "Yikes, you're a mess".

There were about seven or eight maids a day. And we each did about ten or eleven rooms. Very quickly, something happens where you start forming bonds with people who smoke. I think we all smoked. When you arrive in the morning, if you don't have a room available, you're kind of stuck. Either there's a "Do not disturb" sign, or the guests haven't left yet, so you can't really do anything. As a result, everyone is looking around a bit, and we're all thinking, well, let's go for a smoke. Some bonds are created rapidly like that. I thought it was great to be just among women. We talked to each other, gave each other advice.

I kind of started a revolution in that hotel. In the first hotel where I worked, we were paid the French hotel minimum wage, but not in the second one. So I really stirred things up. Because I said to myself: I don't care about losing my job. It's only for the summer, I can afford to complain.

I talked about it a bit to the others, I got the ball rolling and I ended up telling the governesses: "If we don't get the minimum wage, I'm leaving, because it's better paid everywhere else and I don't see why it shouldn't be the case here". In the end, we obtained the minimum hotel wage, with an extra €25 per Sunday worked. If you work every Sunday, that's an extra €100 a month, which isn't bad.

At the restaurant where I worked, I ran into a woman who was in charge of the dining room and who took me under her wing. She became one of my best friends. She and I got along without necessarily talking to each other, just in terms of our work capacity. She saw that I was independent, that she didn't need to spoon-feed me. That created a bond between us in a very macho environment.

I used to call the guys "miso soup", because we have an expression in French, "milk soup". It's when your personality and mood change very quickly. I used to say we don't have milk soups, we have misogynist soups. One day it's "you're extraordinary," then the next you're a piece of shit, you don't know how to recognize a fork, they teach you how to serve water... it's a feminist heresy.

What was really great about this woman was that we made an incredible female duo, extremely efficient and always in good spirits. What I like about working in a restaurant is that it's all about the body. You're not far from choreography: there's people and chairs in motion. Learning to move quickly with your body, carrying heavy or hot items, requires the agility of a dancer. And it was great because with this woman, we danced together and didn't need to communicate. In visual communication alone, we pretty much knew what we had to do. So it bonded us, and we had a lot of drinks together at the end of the shifts, listening to Rita Mitsouko and catching up on each other's lives.

I was paid under the table in that restaurant, and I didn't think I was treated very well. There was a lot of misogyny, they wouldn't give me a raise, and the atmosphere was terrible. The customers had all the power and the bosses made them very aware of it. I remember one day when a sleazy guy asked me for another glass of wine while touching my butt. I took his hand and put it on the table. I said, "Look, I'm not a hooker, I'm a waitress. I'm not here to sell you my ass. I'm here to sell you food, so stop." And then my boss came in and told him "Oh, sorry, sorry, sorry". Then he turned to me and said "Don't talk too loud, come on, we'll put another waiter in your place". Finally, all these little things made me say to myself: I quit. I'm done working for these bastards.

I work for a large luxury hotel, and my role is to welcome our guests, whether French or foreign. We focus on providing accommodation, because that's our job; we are innkeepers. But beyond that, we work on experiences. That's what our customers are looking for: authentic, memorable experiences. So, of course we take care of the hotel, but we also take care of all the other aspects of hospitality.

Hospitality is about giving of oneself, opening up to others, showing empathy towards different situations, and being attentive to clients' needs. It can be about specific things, like the comfort of the room, but there are also expectations in terms of day-to-day exchanges. My notion of hospitality is doing things from the heart, with sincerity and authenticity. Sometimes, because we have standards of excellence, we can get lost in things that seem mechanical. But when you keep being yourself and maintain your personality, you also open up a bit to the guests.

Every customer has different expectations. We're going to adapt, we're going to personalize our welcome according to what we know. I don't think anyone can remain insensitive to that. If we know that, for example, a customer likes to have a Diet Coke when they arrive - they've come a long way, they've just gotten there, and they have a Diet Coke - it's simple, but it makes them happy. I think that travelers who come to the hotel are looking for a service that they recognize from a specific brand or chain.

We're also trained to deal with complaints and delicate situations. Hotels are 365 days a year, 24 hours a day, so anything can happen. The beauty of this job is that we're always solution-oriented. It's all about people, with their good and bad sides. But we know how to try and turn things around. Sometimes, the complaints we get can be transformed into something positive in the end, if we manage to deal with the problem properly. So even if sometimes we're dealing with problems that aren't of our making, we find solutions, alternatives. And even if we don't have the solution, we've shown empathy. Our focus is really on customer satisfaction.

It's important to take an interest in different cultures, because that's what can lead to misunderstandings. When encountering a new nationality, it's not about generalizing, as everyone has their own personality. But what makes us different? And how can I put myself in the other person's shoes to ensure a successful interaction? Often, all you have to do is read a bit, take an interest in their culture, and try to put yourself in their position. That's what hospitality is all about. You can't have something standardized for everyone. We're all different; even French people are all different. But that's also part of emotional intelligence. It's not easy. And sometimes, there can still be misunderstandings. We're only human.

When I was 19, I started working in a youth hostel. The first summer, I worked nights, from midnight to 7am. I was in charge of the reception and the bar, and as it was an association and not a real bar, I got to choose when I closed it. It was a very lonely job; I sat behind a computer and watched TV shows to pass the time. I was paid 1,700 euros a month for four nights a week. For me, it felt like a real luxury, but it was also very exhausting. I remember feeling completely worn out. The following two summers, I worked there again, but as a receptionist, 35 hours a week. It was less tiring, but at the same time much more time-consuming. I couldn't watch TV anymore, and I had to talk to people all the time.

In summer, there's quite a few visitors. It's mostly tourists, not just young people. Every year, the same clients would come back. There were a lot of people taking long bike trips, as well as middle-class cheapskates, "cool" leftist types. It was mostly people who knew about the youth hostel network, who knew how it functioned - there weren't many guests who just turned up by chance. It's €17 a night, breakfast included: that's a price you don't find anywhere else. There was a charter, something a bit cliché about welcoming everyone, something else about inclusivity, then a line about secularism to counterbalance the rest. Because in the old days, giving pilgrims a place to stay had been more a role of the Catholic Church. There was this thing about welcoming everyone, without regard to religion, race or gender, and with affordable prices.

I worked there in the fall and spring, too, and it wasn't the same demographic as the summer. Quite regularly, there were people who I knew wouldn't be able to pay. I made it a point to always accept them, even though I wasn't supposed to. I would tell them, "Yes, leave me an ID, and tomorrow you can pay my colleague." Except that every time, I knew very well that my colleague was just returning the ID and that there was nothing she could do.

After that, I stopped working with them. They pulled a sly move on me once—a little scheme where they didn't have me sign my contract so they could add extra days without asking me. I thought it was a shame because they had been really fair with me the whole time, and then it all went wrong at the very end. But I think it has to do with the way the youth hostel system functions... Each hostel is its own association, but they're all part of a larger national association. There are hostels that operate at a loss, like the one I worked at, and there are hostels that make too much profit, the ones in the big cities. So it helps balance things financially and ensures there's a network across France, without each one being under pressure to be profitable. Except it was becoming less sustainable, because a lot of private hostels opened up and were taking all the regular customers. I think at the hostel where I worked, there was pressure to save money. I think that that's why they pulled that little scheme.

My mother is British, and like many British people, she has a bed-and-breakfast. There's no separation between the B&B and our home, so I literally grew up in a place dedicated to "hospitality". My sisters and I had to learn how to answer the phone, take reservations, welcome guests, help with breakfast...

I began working in restaurants during the tourist season in the summer just after I graduated from high school in 2015. What motivated me was purely economic. My village is very touristy, and during the summer it's a ritual for young people to work in the restaurant industry. But when I finished my last contract in 2022, I said to myself "never again". I think my experience was very similar to that of all the other people who have held this kind of post. The pay is ridiculous compared to the work we do, the hours are insane, and the split shift format is exhausting because the break isn't really a break—your mind is still occupied with the thought of having to start again in just a few hours. There's also a fair amount of competition, which I've never been a fan of. That said, there is something very satisfying about delivering a perfect service and experiencing a genuine, well-earned fatigue. There's a kind of rush that I miss sometimes.

In my first tourist season, the chef, who was also the owner, was helped by his two parents. They were old-fashioned—he was a former police officer, and she was a homemaker. I never heard many outright offensive things, but they exuded intolerance. As a person of color, I could clearly see that they viewed me as a lazy worker who didn't do the job well. Whenever I made a mistake, I was harshly criticized. There was no kindness or desire to teach me the ropes. I spent a season being yelled at. I really thought I was terrible, and when I returned to waiting tables two years later, I was extremely stressed. The head waitress was tough on me at first, but I think she saw potential because she trained me really well, and in the end, we got along great. She even told me that I was the best waiter they had, just before the end of the season. But even so, I feel there is a culture of 'tough love,' where there's an idea that you have to go through some hazing to really 'get the hang of the job.'

Currently, even going to a restaurant as a customer gives me a bit of anxiety because I know what the workers feel—I understand the essence of their job. I think that putting that much energy into providing a meal for people shouldn't be so stressful or exhausting. Especially since once the customers are done, they go home and forget about us, whereas we don't forget about them. I can't even count the number of times I've gone home after a bad shift, replaying the scenes in my head, even though it's just people having a meal. I've never brought my work home with me as much as I did working in this industry. What frustrates me even more is that it's not even my career; it's just a means to make a living.

Since I was 18, I've juggled various part-time jobs alongside my art school studies. It hasn't always been a choice, but I was also driven by curiosity to understand those around us, who provide services we often take for granted. Working was my way of discovering the world; an experience, rather than an obligation due to financial circumstances.

Now I'm a chambermaid in a hotel where the luxury of the surroundings contrasts with the difficulty of the work. Relations with customers vary, from cordiality to contempt. Often, they don't even notice us. But at work, I deal with power dynamics from superiors and customers that amplify this feeling of invisibility. "Welcome" and "hospitality" should mean service and mutual respect, but in reality, these terms are often used to mask unreasonable expectations and excessive workloads without recognition.

One day, I knocked on a room for the evening service. A couple opened the door to a room that reeked of excrement. I asked them if they wanted the service, and they smiled and said "yes", before leaving for dinner. Upon entering, I went straight to the bathroom and discovered the dirtiest toilet of my life, shit all over the toilet seat, the floor and the sink. I called my boss, saying I couldn't clean that room, and wouldn't in any case. She understood and told me not to do it. The next day, the room was spotless, cleaned by the guests themselves.

One summer, I was working in a restaurant. Every evening, I was the one who cleaned the toilets and finished the kitchen. My colleagues always finished ten minutes early to go and have a beer. Exhausted and angry, I told them it wasn't fair to let me finish alone. One colleague looked at me, annoyed, and told me to "fuck off", that I was "busting his balls". No one reacted, no one supported me. I quit my job that night, leaving everything behind.

What keeps me going are my colleagues, most of them friends from school. The atmosphere among us, the small acts of camaraderie and moments of solidarity are very important to me. But it's a tough job. The rooms we clean sometimes reflect a lack of respect from certain guests. You have to stay resilient and not let these behaviors get you down. In my current job, the pay has decreased by four net euros per hour. Giving up breaks and working unpaid overtime does happen. Working conditions, discrimination, and lack of recognition have often made these jobs challenging. Yet, I managed to view them as experiences, holding onto the hope of finding a place where I would feel comfortable. And I found that in this luxury hotel; despite the difficulties, I feel reasonably well here.

Pendant le 2^e confinement, je suis retourné à mes racines familiales dans un petit village du sud de la France, puisque l'art était considéré comme non essentiel à cette période, et tout était fermé. Je me suis dit : « Ok, je vais réemménager et créer une résidence d'artiste. » Mais avant tout, il fallait que je rencontre des personnes du milieu culturel dans cette région rurale, et que je trouve aussi un travail. J'ai commencé à travailler en tant que surveillant de plage dans une station nautique des Gorges du Verdon, où je louais des pédalos. Tout le monde dans le village était content pour moi.

Travailler dans cette station était une sorte d'étape obligatoire pour tous les habitants du village ; à un moment dans leur vie, tout le monde a soit déjà travaillé là-bas, soit eu un frère, une soeur ou des cousins/cousines qui l'ont fait. L'endroit était géré par un binôme. Ils étaient tous les deux musiciens – ils adoraient Brian Eno et Frank Zappa, et nos discussions étaient vraiment passionnantes. Le reste de l'équipe était principalement composé de jeunes, là pour leur job d'été. Travailler là-bas permettait vraiment de sentir le coeur de la vie touristique, principale activité économique de la région ; dont la majorité de la richesse locale en découle.

Aujourd'hui, avec le Centre d'art pour lequel je travaille, nous collaborons aussi avec des organisations touristiques, bien que ce soit un tourisme très différent. Travailler dans les deux secteurs permet d'avoir une perspective interne sur la manière dont nous voudrions développer le territoire, quel type de tourisme privilégier, et ce qui peut être amélioré. La frontière est très fine entre le tourisme de masse et le tourisme d'élite. Cela soulève deux questions : Le tourisme d'élite est souvent plus « vertueux ». Le problème est de savoir si l'on peut proposer une offre élitiste tout en restant accessible à tous, sans tomber dans les excès du tourisme de masse. Et même dans un tourisme dit vertueux, où tracer la limite ?

Ma grand-mère, qui m'a transmis l'amour de ce territoire, disait toujours : « Pour vivre heureux, vivons cachés. » Et c'est vrai. Après le Covid, il y a eu un boom du tourisme dans la région, accentué par les réseaux sociaux. Les endroits où nous allions l'été, comme la rive du ruisseau, se retrouvent soudain peuplés de gens que nous n'avions jamais vus auparavant. Nous n'avons pas toutes les infrastructures que possèdent les villes. Ce que l'on a, ce qu'il nous reste, c'est notre environnement. Et maintenant, il y a certaines périodes de l'année où nous ne pouvons même plus y accéder. Cela crée des tensions, car les habitants ont l'impression de subir le tourisme. Cet endroit, isolé, difficile d'accès, se voit peu à peu dégradé, colonisé.

En français, le mot pour « summer camp » est « colonie de vacances ». C'est un peu comme un camp militaire. Une sorte d'avant-poste dans une guerre absurde. Dans « colonie de vacances », il y a un peu une connotation coloniale. Les personnes venant d'un endroit et se rendant dans un autre se sentent comme en territoire conquis.

Vacances, c'est aussi marrant, car c'est le mot qui désigne « holiday » en anglais. Ce mot a la même racine que « vacuum », qui signifie le vide. Les gens arrivent ici en pensant que c'est vide et que les habitants sont là pour les servir. Un exemple pour illustrer ce propos : tous ces vacanciers qui viennent garer leur camping-car juste à côté du camping, car les places coûtent trop cher. Le lendemain matin, un agriculteur arrive et leur explique : « Désolé, mais il faut que vous partiez d'ici, j'ai besoin de travailler. » Et les gens répondent : « Non, nous sommes ici. » L'agriculteur rétorque alors : « Écoutez, si vous ne bougez pas, je vous déplacerai avec mon tracteur. » Puisque bien sûr, cela ne peut pas être un endroit où les gens vivent et travaillent ! Une partie du fantasme implique que non, ce n'est qu'un lieu de vacances. Et la dichotomie est là, et elle fout tout en l'air.

Aux États-Unis, lorsque j'étais au lycée, j'ai travaillé dans un petit resto local, et c'est ce qui m'a donné l'expérience de base dont j'avais besoin pour réussir dans le travail que j'ai maintenant. Je travaille dans un bar international, où ils-elles mettent vraiment un point d'honneur sur la qualité du service. Lors de l'entretien, ils-elles m'ont demandé : « Qu'est-ce que vous n'aimez pas dans le service à la française ? ». Ils-elles veulent offrir un service à l'américaine. Et c'est plutôt marrant, car quand je parle avec des client-e-s français-e-s, ils-elles sont un peu du genre : « Ouais bon, c'est un peu trop là, vous savez, ça va ».

Je travaille là-bas parce que j'ai eu du mal à trouver un autre emploi en tant qu'Américaine. Et je l'aime bien. Ce n'est pas le job de mes rêves, ni quelque chose que je ferais toute ma vie, mais pour l'instant, j'aime bien mes collègues, et je n'ai pas à gérer beaucoup de caprices de la part des client-e-s. C'est juste étrange que ce soit un travail aussi essentiel et pourtant si difficile d'accès, et si peu reconnu dans la société, surtout en ce qui concerne notre rémunération et la façon dont nous sommes considéré-e-s par rapport à d'autres emplois.

Quand j'ai commencé, j'avais cette mentalité typiquement américaine où je donnais beaucoup de moi-même dans ce que je faisais, en essayant vraiment de faire en sorte que tout soit parfait pour tout le monde. Je faisais tout ce que je pouvais, car c'est ce qu'on nous apprend aux États-Unis. Et maintenant, j'en suis arrivée au point où je me rends compte que tout ce que je faisais ne changeait pas grand-chose ici, alors je ne vais pas me casser la tête pour des gens qui n'en ont rien à faire. Je ne suis pas propriétaire du bar ; ce n'est pas mon problème. Il y a un côté libérateur à ça.

J'avais une responsable avec qui je sortais parfois en boîte de nuit après le boulot. Et la première fois que ça m'est arrivé, je me suis dit que jamais je n'aurais pensé un jour faire ça. Pour moi, c'était une dynamique très étrange, mais en réalité, c'était très cool. J'ai même l'impression que ça a rendu notre travail ensemble plus facile. C'était comme : « Nous sommes amies, nous sommes des connaissances, et je respecte le fait que tu sois mon responsable, mais tu respectes aussi le fait que je ne sois pas simplement une personne à diriger ; je suis aussi ton amie et nous travaillons bien ensemble. » Tout ne doit pas être si hiérarchisé.

J'ai remarqué que les personnes qui ne travaillaient pas très bien ici n'étaient pas aussi bien traitées. On leur donne les boulots de merde, on a moins de patience et de compréhension envers elles parce que les responsables ne veulent plus s'en occuper. Mais en même temps, ils-elles ne veulent pas passer par toute la procédure pour les virer. Alors, ils-elles ne leur accordent jamais de vacances, les font fermer tous les soirs et les poussent tout simplement à bout. Je travaille avec beaucoup d'étudiant-e-s, beaucoup de personnes internationales, et elles ne savent pas que si, en France, tu démissionnes, tu n'as droit à aucun avantage. Elles ont 20 ans, viennent d'arriver, et c'est leur premier travail. Et j'ai l'impression que le bar les exploite un peu pour ces mêmes raisons. C'est un cercle vicieux de personnes qui arrivent et repartent parce qu'elles trouvent un autre boulot ou ne sont là que pour six mois. On est constamment en sous-effectif. Les responsables sont toujours très stressé-e-s parce qu'ils-elles doivent former de nouvelles personnes. Et c'est là que je me dis : « Si vous payiez mieux, les gens resteraient plus longtemps. Peut-être que si vous donniez aux gens les horaires qu'ils demandent, ils ne chercheraient pas de nouveaux emplois et on ne serait pas en sous-effectif ».

J'ai commencé dans l'hôtellerie à 14 ans. J'ai vu une annonce dans le journal pour un stage de deux semaines pour être hôte de ménage dans un hôtel six étoiles sur la Gold Coast (la Côte d'Or). C'était environ 200 \$ ou quelque chose comme ça. J'étais de loin le plus jeune. Après le stage, ils-elles nous ont tous-e-s proposé un emploi. En réalité, c'était juste un moyen pour elles-eux d'être payé-e-s pour former des gens. J'ai accepté car ça payait 14 \$ de l'heure, et pour un gamin de 14 ans, c'est beaucoup. J'étais un gosse timide, et je savais qu'à l'époque, mes grands-parents avaient dirigé des pubs à Manchester. Je pense que, parce que j'aimais James Bond, je voulais être à l'aise avec les gens riches et découvrir un autre mode de vie. Je l'ai fait. Et certain-e-s d'entre elles-eux sont des connard-asse-s.

À la suite de cela, j'ai suivi un cursus à l'école pour obtenir un certificat 3 ou 4 en hôtellerie, et peu après, j'ai décroché un job dans un grand hôtel où je travaillais dans les banquets. Il y avait des moments où tu passais trois heures à polir des verres, assis avec des gens qui devenaient tes ami-e-s, à discuter, à dire des conneries, à écouter de la musique. Puis j'ai déménagé à Brisbane où j'ai travaillé dans un autre hôtel, toujours dans les banquets. C'était mon truc. J'arrivais à porter beaucoup d'assiettes – j'étais très doué. Je pouvais aussi porter de grands plateaux très lourds ; j'étais en bonne santé, jeune à l'époque, et un truc chouette, c'était ma capacité à empiler des verres à vin, donc au lieu de porter une grande caisse lourde, je pouvais faire ça quand on dressait les tables. J'aurais dû être mieux payé... Puis j'ai découvert la drogue, l'alcool, la musique et la littérature, et la vie bohème. Alors j'ai arrêté de travailler, et pendant sept ans, j'ai vécu des allocations chômage.

Ensuite, j'ai déménagé en France où j'ai commencé à travailler en cuisine. J'ai trouvé un boulot dans un bistrot en bord de mer où j'ai été cuisinier pendant cinq ans. Puis l'endroit a été vendu, les propriétaires ont changé, mais moi, je suis resté. J'ai été en quelque sorte vendu avec l'affaire. Il y avait aussi un hôtel-restaurant à côté, en vente, et le nouveau propriétaire m'a demandé si je voulais en faire partie, avec lui et sa femme. J'ai finalement accepté, et puis tout est parti en vrille. C'était un bon patron pour moi, car je partais souvent en tournée et ça ne le dérangeait pas, mais je pense qu'il avait du mal avec le fait de travailler avec moi sur un pied d'égalité, puisque maintenant j'étais là pour prendre des décisions. Tu sais, je voulais payer les gens quand ils-elles faisaient des heures supp, leur faire signer des contrats. M'accorder un budget pour la cuisine. C'était tout hors de question. Et comme les propriétaires étaient un couple, j'étais en nette minorité.

Cette idée de « l'hospitalité » dans le secteur de l'hospitalité, c'est comme une fausse forme d'hospitalité. Parce que tu payes pour un service. Mais il y a des interactions sociales – la plupart du temps, elles ne sont pas fausses. J'ai rencontré beaucoup de personnes géniales, mais je pense qu'au final, tu crées plus de liens avec tes collègues qu'avec tes client-e-s. Cela dit, je travaillais avec un mec irlandais juste incroyable, dans un bar à huîtres. Ce type connaissait le visage et le nom de tout le monde, et il avait une mémoire photographique. Des gens qu'il n'avait pas vus depuis dix ans entraient, et il leur disait : « Comment va ta fille ? ». Il y avait une vieille dame qui venait tous les jours manger une douzaine d'huîtres et boire un verre de Riesling, sept jours sur sept. On pouvait voir qu'il y avait une véritable relation authentique entre lui et cette vieille dame. Si elle ne venait pas, il appelait chez elle.