

Place de la Revolution

by Kate Brown

We are a funny story, my brother and I. Twins of Africa in a kitchen on wheels the size of a cupboard, we serve tourists baguettes and pain au chocolat, in the gardens adjoining the square where the tricoteuses did their knitting, heads were chopped and blood fed the gutters. Sometimes, when I have a really sharp knife in my hand, I wish...

My brother is the sweet one, the queue on his side of the booth is always longer. "You were lazy coming out of the womb," he tells me. I smile. Smiling is not something I do very much. My brother smiles at all his customers. I save my smile for the ones who smile first, the ones who smile with their eyes.

The man who owns our kitchen wagon is Paul. He is a name on our white uniforms. He is four yellow letters. Each morning, my brother pins his name tag on top of the letters, concealing them entirely, pretending they are not there. I pin my badge just a little higher up my breast than the P, the A, the U and the L. I think myself to a place above this person we have never seen.

The man who turns up every day and tells us what to do, the man who thinks he owns us, is called Mohammed. When my brother and I get home in the evenings and turn on the light, I try to stamp on at least one cockroach before they run and hide. This is what I would like to do to Mohammed.

My brother's name is Souleymane. I am Haïdara. These are not the names we wear tagged for all to see.

"Too muslim," said Mohammed.

"What? The tourists'll think we're going to fly the baguette stand into the side of the Louvre?" My brother smiled. He still looked kind. Mohammed was confused.

I suggested we call ourselves Sophie and Frederic.

“That's too French. The tourists are foreigners. Good German names, that's what you need.”

I chose Ingrid. I thought it was a beautiful name. I wasn't sure if it was German, but Mohammed was satisfied. He said something about Ingrid Bergman and started licking his lips. Souleymane had spent a day visiting a cousin in Berlin last year. He knew one German name, he said. He'd seen a mother hitting her little boy on the U-Bahn and shouting at him. The boy's name was Kevin.

