

## Arrêt 4

### Parc P.A.Q. #26 (avenue Lartigue, entre Maisonneuve et Logan)

Written by Kama La Mackerel

The very first time I came to Montreal was for a visit in May 2011.

I knew nothing of the city, let alone its history or the cultural context I was stepping into. I was really just a baby queer who had recently immigrated to Canada & had been living in a small white town in Ontario. I came to Montreal 'coz I was looking for the “thrill of the big city.”

I got off the *Gare d'autocars de Montréal* at 6am, after having spent the night on the Greyhound. My Couchsurfing host would only be available to welcome me at 10am, so I had some time to kill. I walked around the block, taking in the morning air, in which I could detect a faint trace of stale beer, late night party & back-alley sex. This was during the pre-GoogleMaps days, so I followed the scent until I was blinded by the sight before my eyes: lines of pink balloons, shining like thick bubblegum clouds against the backdrop of a crisp, blue sky, flooded in the gold hue of the morning light.

Was this gay heaven?

Mesmerized by the magic of the street I had just stepped onto, I conveniently ignored the used needles, the pungent smell of chlorine & piss, the many homeless people. I looked up at the pink clouds & the bright blue sky— the gay gods were smiling down on me!

I walked along Ste Catherine for a few blocks & stopped by a *boulangerie* to get myself a morning treat. The second I walked in, the waiter— a beefy, slightly effeminate middled-aged white man with tattoos and a buzzcut— flew down on me like a bird of prey: I guess I was fresh meat.

I looked at my feet as I ordered a croissant and a coffee:

“Aaaand, how do you like your coffee?”

“Bbb... Black,” I responded bashfully.

The waiter pursed his lips, the shine of his irises leered my body up & down, licking agency off my skin. With a wet flash of teeth, he said:

“Ooooooooooh, *black!*”

I was flattered in that moment.

I was also deeply ashamed.

I felt

seen

desired

rejected

fetishized

mis/recognized

all at once.

I didn't know it then, being just a baby queer. But this tension between being invisible & hyper-visible would become the default of my experience of the Village, of Montréal, of Québec, as I settled here & made a home out of this place.

This experience would become symptomatic of all the times I would be invited in, only to be told I could not bring the fullness of my self. Of all the times I would have to chip away at the shine of my integrity

only to be offered scraps of recognition. Of the times when representation will matter more than transformation. When Black trans women will be thrown under the bus for the benefit of cis white gays.

Like this parc, my sense belonging to the Village, would remain adjacent. A hidden gem taking up conditional space. An existence whose avowal relies on it being relegated

to the margins.