

AURORA

I passed her by. I did not pay her any attention, near the supermarket of this district where I would spend the next two months. This woman who sat there and begged for a few pennies. I guessed the best would be that she'd believe I did not speak French . I would not have to talk to her, ever. I could act as if I did not understand she was begging with her two boys. I passed her by with my almost one year old daughter in her pushchair, and let whatever words she was saying vanish in the wind. I did not think more of her that day.

The following day, my friend showed me around the neighbourhood, and heartily recommended me to the local shopkeepers. A dark-haired little boy ran after my friend. He seemed so pleased to meet her. The boy flew into my friend's arms and took immediately her hand. I followed them, dragged into his wake of joy, to the supermarket where they joined gambolling the woman who sat and begged. They sat next to her. My friend introduced me in her own beautiful words as I bent down and squatted. She explained who I was to Aurora who gave me her broadest grin, her gold teeth sparkling as she smiled. I knew that whatever I could wish for, Aurora remembered this fair haired girl, a foreigner, with her babydaughter, who strode by her without a single glance. But NOW I really SAW her. NOW I really SAW her boys.

When my friend got out of her bag some photos that she had taken of Aurora's sons, I sunk a bit deeper . She let Aurora know they were gifts, and an even brighter smile lit up her face. Aurora said to me: „See you soon“. I would have indeed to get to the supermarket again.

My friend told me that Aurora came from Romania. She had three sons. It was „easier“ for her to be begging in the Northern districts of Marseille than try and surviving in Romania. She cannot have her older son with her because she is not certain that any school in Marseille would take him. He lives with his grand-mother in Romania so that he can at least go to school there. Her older son is ten years old. My daughter is ten months old. I felt a pang in the heart. I am thirty four. Aurora is twenty nine.

Later on I took time to chat with Aurora. Aurora and her two younger boys loved to see my daughter and welcomed us more than cheerfully when we were on our way to the supermarket. I gave them a few coins. One day, they waited for us because they wanted to give us a present. It was a doll. Boys do not play with dolls, she said. Armando, the youngest of her sons, the broadest of smiles on his lips, gave the doll to my daughter. The doll was to be called Armanda. Aurora apologised: the doll was so small. They had a much bigger doll « at home » that we should get next time. My daughter went everywhere with Armanda until the end of our stay in Marseille, and when Aurora and her sons saw how much their gift appealed to her, they did their best to let her have some presents each time our paths met.

I am happy that we did not look past this window which opened for us in Marseille. We have there, now, beautiful friends from Romania. I just had to look up and and open my eyes.

Translation: Dominique Poulain