

Baked in Translation

The day Joseph's life began to fall apart was gorgeous. Thin streaks of light were just beginning to peak over the horizon at Byron Bay. The air was sizzling with energy, crisp and clear on an early autumn day. Joseph's apartment was perched right above his bakery, overlooking the sandy shore and squawking seagulls. He stood, towel in hand, at the top of the stairs, watching the waves crash against the beach. The sun felt warm against his bare skin. His legs and arms all showed distinct signs of being an avid surfer. Muscular, but not bulky. Leaving his towel hanging on the fence by the edge of the beach, Joseph padded across the sand into the cool, salty water. He waited a few seconds before wading further in, letting his body adjust to the temperature. As a large wave came towards him, Joseph suddenly threw his arms up in front of him and dove under it, surfacing on the other side dripping wet but triumphant. He was in his element. Almost.

Back at the house, Sarina was just beginning to wake up when Joseph swung open the rickety flyscreen door, smelling of salt and sand. His dawn wake-up call meant she often spent the early hours of the morning alone, restless and unable to get back to sleep. She rolled over in bed, feeling the usual twinge of guilt whenever she thought of her husband these days. Three years they had been married, and together for a total of five. They had first met at a music festival. Young, irresponsible in the best way, and both interested in the same music. It had been hot and sweaty at the Blues Festival that year. Sarina, adorned with mud splattered gumboots, traipsed through crowds of hippies, teenagers and musos. The air was humid from the now distant storm, dark clouds lining the horizon as the last glimpses of the bright orange sunset peaked through. Spotting the food trucks amidst a throng of hungry festival-goers, she trudged across the muddy path to take a closer look.

"You should try the churros, they're really good."

Sarina turned, not certain where the voice was coming from, and stared into the face of a young, handsome looking man licking sugar from the tips of his fingers.

"Sorry?"

He laughed softly and held out a hand. "Hi, I'm Joseph. I'm training to be a baker."

"Oh really? I'm a music teacher."

"Well that fits then," Joseph smiled and Sarina felt her body tingle slightly at his expression; a mixture of intrigue and lust. She tried to shake the thought away. There were certain types of people that hooked up at music festivals, and she wasn't one of them. Besides, a baker? Not exactly her usual type. But Joseph was still staring at her, and Sarina couldn't shake the thought.

That passion had been the foundation of their relationship, the building blocks for their love for each other. It always seemed like they had wanted the same lifestyle. Lately though, that had changed. Or rather, it had changed a while ago and Sarina had ignored it. The problem wasn't that she didn't love him. But there was something there, and she didn't think she could let it fester for any longer. She was a music teacher, and he was a baker. Two completely different fields. Maybe they just weren't compatible after all. Sarina heard the shower sputter into a steady stream of water and lay back impatiently. She would have to wait a little bit longer at least. Getting up, she threw on a dressing gown, slipping her feet into fluffy white slippers. It was two hours until she had to be at work, and half-an-hour before Joseph would head downstairs to the bakery. It seemed better that way in her mind; less time to stew over things. The bathroom door clicked open and Sarina felt a wave of nausea course through her body, the nerves finally kicking in.

"Joseph,"

Sarina sounded nervous to Joseph, too serious for so early in the morning. She stood in front of him with her arms crossed protectively over her chest, face carefully reserved but eyes that held a hint of fear.

"You OK, Sar?" his forehead creased with concern and he moved closer towards her. She quickly put her hands out to stop him, her mask slipping for a second to reveal panic.

"Just stop," she said, her voice ragged. "I need to talk to you for a second."

"Is... is everything alright?"

She paused, unable to get the words out. Joseph felt his heartrate increase.

"I uh... I don't think this is working anymore, Joseph. I'm sorry. I just don't think I'm passionate about the things you do anymore... about you."

It felt for a second as if his heart had stopped completely, his entire body freezing as his brain processed the words. Not passionate? She didn't love him anymore?

"What are you talking about, Sarina?" Joseph forced the terrible words out of his mouth, barely able to concentrate on his surroundings.

Sarina sighed tiredly. "This, Joseph. It isn't working anymore. Surely you can see that?"

"No," he shook his head rapidly, not wanting to accept what he knew deep down was the truth. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"We're just not interested in the same things. You love baking. It's your passion. That's fine, I get it. But... that's not all I want in life. I need more. And I don't know if I can get that from you."

Joseph stared back at her helplessly. "I can give you whatever you want Sarina, just give me a chance. We're good together, you and me."

"Joseph," she shook her head sadly, looking away from him. He clenched his hands together tightly, fighting the urge to breakdown. He didn't want to believe it. Didn't want to think about the possibility of Sarina leaving him.

"Just give me another chance, I'm sure there's still passion between us," Joseph implored.

Sarina sighed, rubbing her face with her long, slim fingers and. She was beginning to doubt herself too. Everything was so rushed, so fast.

"Look," she began, then faltered, her brain clouded with too many emotions. Joseph watched, waiting for her to speak.

"I'm not going to move out immediately anyway, maybe I just need a bit of time to think things through." Sarina spoke up cautiously. Joseph looked relieved, his body relaxing slightly and the crease lines on his forehead smoothing out. Sitting down on the bed Sarina breathed out deeply, feeling her body sink into the mattress. She stared down at the floor and kept her eyes fixed there as she heard the floorboards creek, Joseph's footsteps slowly padding away until she was alone in the silent, empty room.

For a few days, hardly a word was spoken between them. Sarina still felt guilty for dropping such a bombshell on her husband when he clearly still loved her. She knew she was doing the right thing, but it hurt nevertheless. Joseph was still in shock. His body was going through all the normal motions but his heart just wasn't in it. Swimming was a form of exercise. Baking was a job that needed to be done. On the fifth day after Sarina's devastating news Joseph woke up with renewed energy. He wasn't going to wait around for her to leave

him. He was going to make an effort to win her back. To fight for her. Shower her with love and affection and convince her that he was worth being with. He left for work with a spring in his step, desperate for his newly formed plan to work. The bakery was bustling with customers when Joseph walked in, a wide smile spread across his face.

"Hello," he greeted some of the regulars warmly, shaking their hands on the way into the kitchen. It was just after eight in the morning, parents taking their kids in for breakfast and to grab their first cup of coffee before they headed into work. Pushing through the doors marked with "STAFF ONLY", Joseph stepped into the warm air, breathing in the smell of freshly baked bread, melted chocolate and greasy bacon, a combination that was always interesting. The kitchen had an open layout, Joseph's way of trying to encourage relations between staff and get everybody to work together effectively. A large bench filled the central area, pots and pans hanging on a rack above it. The stoves and ovens were scattered around the outside, with another set of benches separated slightly behind an exposed brick wall. This was generally Joseph's area, the place where he tested out new ideas and came up with innovative products.

"Morning guys," Joseph called out to the staff, slipping an apron over his clothes and pulling on a hair net. They smiled back at him warmly, relieved that he had finally moved on from his mood swings of the past few days. It was a fully staffed kitchen that day, meaning Joseph was merely a smiling face and a spare pair of hands to help around when needed. His favourite job was experimenting anyway, testing out new ingredients and recipes when he wasn't really needed. Testing, tasting and trying again until the product was perfect and ready to be sold. Not normally sullen or depressed, Joseph was back in his element as he had realised that there was a way he could win Sarina back. His talents had always lain in baking. Since he was a child he had loved to get his hands dirty and cook, whether it was patty cakes for his school fete or lamingtons on Australia Day. If he could create the perfect treats for Sarina, maybe she would finally understand his passion and see why it was so important to him. Then maybe it would be important to her too. Strengthened by his newfound plan, the majority of his day was spent creating and experimenting in his food laboratory, tasting and re-testing until he came up with the perfect product. Sarina had always loved cherries. On their first date she had ordered a cherry tart from a lavish restaurant overlooking the ocean, the red stains left around her mouth giving Joseph the perfect opportunity to reach across and delicately brush them away with his thumb. It was still one of his favourite memories.

That evening he arrived home with a self-saucing chocolate cherry pudding for his wife, baked in miniature form inside a patty-cake pan. Sarina looked up at him from where she sat marking homework when he knocked on the office door, holding the surprise eagerly behind his back. She still looked tired, the exhaustion of keeping up the façade for so long finally breaking through. The bright light shining from the computer screen emphasised the bags under her eyes, casting shadows across her face. There were no other lights in the room and Sarina sat in silence without the usual radio chatter in the background, her actions that of a robot merely repeating tasks that it had been programmed to do.

"What is it?" she asked dully, pulling one knee up to her chest protectively and wrapping her arms around herself.

"I made you something," Joseph pulled the pudding from behind his back and held it out towards her. "At work today. I know how much you like cherries."

Sarina looked surprised, taken aback by the gesture. She dropped her arms and sat up, a small smile tugging at the corners of her mouth.

"That's sweet, Joseph. Thank you."

She spooned down a few mouthfuls under the attentive eye of Joseph, his inner perfectionist desperately hoping she liked it, and his inner romantic hoping she would understand the significance of his gift.

Sarina nodded as she licked the spoon clean. "It's delicious, Joseph. Really. I love it."

His face fell slightly and he quickly ducked his head, not wanting her to see his disappointment.

"You're welcome, honey."

Joseph left the room feeling disheartened. He had been sure it would work. His amazing plan for rejuvenating their passion. For the first time he felt doubt, worrying that he wouldn't be able to express just how much he loved her through his food. But this couldn't be it. This couldn't be the end of their relationship. After five years together, Joseph wasn't going to give up so easily. Every few days he would try out a new recipe, finding inspiration from special memories with Sarina and different foods that he knew she liked. The time they ate meat pies with their feet buried in the sand in St. Kilda; their first kiss under

the dim street lamp after feeding each other macaroons; the day that Joseph proposed to Sarina, hiding the ring inside a pavlova. And each time he created something new he would bring it up to Sarina, hoping with all his heart that she would remember the occasion, and how much love there had been between the two of them. He thought he was making progress but it was always hard to tell with Sarina. One day, she would be in high spirits, the next she would be down and dull, hardly even acknowledging Joseph's existence in her life. He began to think that his job would be never ending.

After a few weeks of regular experimenting and frantic brainstorming in the bakery, Joseph came home one day to find Sarina standing resolutely in the kitchen, her arms folded tightly across her chest.

"Sar? You okay?"

"This isn't working Joseph, I'm sorry but it's not. I know that you're trying but I don't really think there's any point anymore."

"Why not? Did I do something wrong?"

"There's no passion anymore Joseph, there's nothing between us."

Joseph shook his head. "Don't say that, Sarina. There can always be passion. That's what I've been trying to show you."

"With the baking?" Sarina raised an eyebrow at him, taking a deep breath in. "You can't just fix everything with food."

"You're not getting the point! Don't you see how much I love you?"

Sarina threw her hands up exasperatedly. "I can't take this anymore, Joseph, I really can't."

Joseph stared at her for a second, his mind whirring frantically as he processed everything that had happened in the last few weeks, everything that had happened in the last few years. And finally, after convincing himself for so long that this relationship was perfect, Joseph realised the problem. They just didn't like each other as much as he had thought they did. Deep down, they weren't suited, and they'd known it from the start. Maybe they had internalised things, ignored the truth because it seemed easier than ending things. But now Joseph realised that he wanted to be with someone who truly cared about who he was and what he did. And that person wasn't Sarina.

As Sarina packed her bags and left the apartment she'd shared with Joseph for the past few years she felt a sense of relief. Stepping lightly down the stairs she felt the first kick of new life inside her. The extra kilos were not only from Joseph's quest to lure her back. Joseph had always known his passion, but she seemed to have lost hers somewhere along the way. In one crazy night with a stranger all that had changed. She and the baby were free now and they could find theirs.