



In The Summer, When It Sizzles

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“To wander Paris after midnight. Could anything be more divine?” Natalie asked, not because she felt it or anything other than exhausted, but because it was the thing one should say as the lights extinguished on the Eiffel Tower.

“How apropos, Nat,” Marcus said, rotating his map as they lingered momentarily under a street lamp one block from the monument.

“It’s funny how safe I feel here,” Natalie said. Actually these dank, dark streets gave her the creeps. She wasn’t fond of walking in heels and her choice in footwear affected her mood easily.

“I told you not to wear pumps,” Marcus responded intuitively.

“I had to keep up,” she said. He was six foot three.

They walked together without touching, both stumbling a bit—the belated payoff of that extra bottle of Bordeaux at dinner.

“La Tower Eiffel... they always claim she’s so phallic...but, no. No! No one ever mentions the vulva beneath!” Natalie sighed, glancing over her shoulder one last time at the Tower, which was no longer illuminated.

“My Frommer’s did,” Marcus retorted as he struggled to find where F met 16 on his map.

“Such a lovely surprise,” she sighed again.

“Yes...Well, if we want to get back to the Champs, we must turn by the Troc here.”

They walked on, up a street, at an angle that was parallel, but not exactly parallel to the Seine and its predawn emptiness. The sidewalks rose in a way that perpetual auto commuters weren’t accustomed to or amiable towards. Natalie and Marcus were forced to pace themselves with mutual glances and mid-stride hand grasping as the incline doubled before them. It was almost bearable, but Marcus took out his guidebook anyway for a healthy dose of excusable distraction.

“To see so much in one day.” Natalie put this forth while she thought of the garden statues at the Museum Rodin and how remarkably the seasonal elements had conditioned them.

“We’re packing it in, dear,” Marcus smiled.

“They say the most ridiculously, delicious hot chocolate is for the taking at La Duree. Supposedly, it’s sinfully rich.” Marcus folded the corner of the page he had just strained to read.

“Oh, darling, but look...Regardez! What is he doing?” Natalie asked with a bit of alarm as they were within feet of this bearded man, his alabaster caravan, and exposed penis.

Marcus’ head snapped up at the foreignness of her tone and he saw the bearded man, who obviously hadn’t had much contact with a washcloth in quite sometime, making good friends with his organ of copulation. Gently, he was swinging his genitalia and staring straight at them. It was small, but fully erect and he stroked it with a speed and dexterity which would have probably caused severe chafing, if not for the puddle of spit his mouth had just planted into his cupped palm. His eyes were headlights upon them, his smile a slack jawed leer, and his pelvis thrust back and forth just enough to make the recipients of the gesture grimace at its even keel.

“He’s...oh my lord...he’s...” Marcus declared as he turned to Natalie and screamed like none other than a banshee.

She cackled and screamed, too, and they ran laughing, without breathing, back down the elevated street in the opposite direction of the bearded man, his achromatic vehicle and ejaculating rod.

Marcus thought it was wonderfully wild. A man behaving in the open like a beast released from his cage. The liberation of his libido in the wanton moonlight. It would be delightful anecdote from their trip that he could share with a few close acquaintances and maybe even work associates, should a tangent conversation arise. Still, what he didn’t understand was the turn on. They were a comely couple, of course, but they had dressed demurely this evening. Marcus wasn’t even wearing cologne.

This was a first. Marcus had seen a man play with himself before, but never in person. It was on a video monitor in the back room of an adult bookstore where he had attended a cross dresser support group meeting prior to his proposal to Natalie. Marcus wanted to put his hobby to rest if he was going to settle down, and the group had been recommended to him by an online chat buddy in similar circumstances. When Marcus entered, the secretary was reading the final page of the last week’s minutes and as Marcus looked from the transsexual pornography on the mounted television to the faces of the support group members, he knew he’d made an awful mistake in coming. He had worried on the drive over that his lipstick clashed with the purple flecks in his vintage Von Furstenberg wrap, but compared to this gang, he could have easily passed for Rita Hayworth’s homely, statuesque twin.

The majority held the shape and carriage of iron workers by day and the few slim enough to potentially evoke a touch of feminine mystic were dressed as if they'd picked the most uncomfortable appearing sofa from a Sears catalog and requested that the company craft a dress of the same dowdy fabric. Stockings too nude for their legs, heels that held no communion with their wardrobes and wigs unaware of the advent of hair spray and the comb marred all in attendance. From the quality of their make up, regardless of the application, and the shaver burn on their cheeks, Marcus could safely assume the mascara, foundation, eyeshadow, and not to mention razors were likely purchased from the dollar store around the corner.

Marcus had seen enough. He wanted no part of a lifestyle choice that included bargain shoppers so unbecomingly cheap and pathetically naive that they could not comprehend a decent girdle was worth its weight in gold. As soon as he entered his apartment that night, Marcus headed to the closet, opened his opaque garment bags and emptied his finest couture into the trash. Next went his "sister's shoes" and all the lingerie he'd purchased for Natalie conveniently in the wrong size. Marcus didn't even wince as he ripped the violet press-on nails from his fingertips, tossing them into the sink's disposal. At the height of his extravagance he had made the investment of buying five sets, since only the thumbnails would fit. Now these fancies would be history.

It was only during firing off a nasty e-mail to Cherise, his online chat buddy who had suggested the support group, that Marcus shed a resentful tear. He had never told anyone "to go to hell in a hand basket" before and the fury of his lengthy retort and this petulant comment at the letter's end deeply disturbed his concept of himself.

In Paris, after midnight, as the couple ran across the curb to a diagonal side street, hidden from the bearded wanker's gaze, but not his post-autoerotic groans, Marcus decided to relent and remove Cherise from the block list of his Instant Messenger and e-mail accounts. From what he knew of the man through their previous internet banter, he was confident Cherise's response to this tale of illicit onanism would be full of flushed enthusiasm. Anyway, it would be appropriate to thank him for the suggestion of that quaint bistro he had taken Natalie to for lunch in Marais the day before. The coquilles St. Jacques and coq au vin were outstanding.

"Je suis...Je n'ai...How do you say 'I can't believe that vile incident just happened' en francais?" Natalie fingered the pulse on her throat, her eyes gleaming with moist jubilation and her mouth wide from catching her breath.

"Who knows? That was truly obscene. That freakish thing. Up and down...around and around. I'll have nightmares for weeks." As Marcus said this he took his fiancée's handbag from her arm, placed his map, guidebook and miniature magnifying glass inside and returned the purse, a practical Kenneth Cole with a hint of Hepburn flair, to his own right shoulder.

"Honey, no. You don't have to do that. You mustn't," Natalie protested.

"I must," he responded, "I wouldn't want this load weighing you down. He might be jumping into that frightening home on wheels at this very moment ready to hunt us down."

"You're right. You're so right! Let's run! Run! Courir!" Natalie exploded.

They both wanted desperately for their adrenaline to continue its ecstatic coursing. Natalie clutched Marcus' hand and took off. Through the Left Bank they raced down convoluted paths, past lovers nuzzling, crepe vendors snoozing and everyone smoking, at a lunatic pace. They went this way and that, dashing and darting, wanting to stay lost and in locomotion for as long as possible before the break of day. By the time the lady and the gentleman found themselves face to face with their hotel at the Latin Quarter's end, they were both ready to go to bed. Natalie put on her nightgown, Marcus opted out of showing her his, and they made love for the first time on their sojourn to the city of lights.