

THE PRIM AND THE PROPER

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Paris in the 1970s was like a whore nobody could afford. She was beautiful, elegant, sexy as hell, and held the promise of a night you would remember for the rest of your life. Problem was, she was just too damn expensive. It was a great time to be in France, so long as you could speak French. I ate, I drank, I screwed women I had no business being with. For a 21-year-old, life really didn't get much better than that. France didn't just sell you the French lifestyle, it made you want to renounce your citizenship and "cross the pond" so to speak. It was like going to Thanksgiving dinner and being able to sit with family members your own age, or sitting at the grown-ups' table and listen to their bullshit over dinner. I arrived in the country, not knowing anything more about it than its most famous export was a talking cartoon skunk. I left, feeling empty inside. I fell in love with the country, but I don't think France ever loves you back. It's a double edge sword for sure. Everything is larger than life in Paris. It's like the intersection of the planet. You meet all types of people, from all types of cultures and lands. You begin to see how small and unimportant you and your country are in the grand scheme of things.

Of course, I left on a much different note. I suppose it wasn't really the fault of anything France did, as much as they were simply unprepared for it. Sometimes though, I miss her. I miss her beauty and charm. You have to take the good memories along with the bad ones.

Everyone thinks they know what beauty is until they actually do meet it.

I was an exchange student at the Sorbonne. My entire junior year was supposed to be about cultural enrichment. I was getting enriched in every possible way.

Her name was Nanette. She was French in every single sense of the word, right down to her snobbery and distaste for most things American. She was gorgeous and elegant. She was also a snob. I was also madly in love with her.

"I just do not understand how a country that was built upon freedom and shaping your destiny is preventing the people of Vietnam from doing the same thing," she once asked

I tried to explain to her that Vietnam was tearing America apart. Half the country was totally against it and half the country was supporting it. When Nixon announced his plan to end the war and the last soldier had left, it felt like a giant tumor had just been removed from your body. Finally, the country could begin to heal.

"You could do so much good for the world, instead you are just destroying it," she said

"Honey, remember Napoleon? France hasn't exactly been a model for peace and understanding either. Every country has blood on its hands. France isn't any different." I added.

"No, it isn't, but that doesn't make it right."

I never cared much for politics or war. I was fortunate enough to be old enough to miss the draft. Had I been born even a year earlier, everything could have been different. My whole life could have been different. I didn't know anything about the horrors of war, I didn't want to. I just wanted to get drunk and screw beautiful exotic women. I think everyone in Paris was thinking the same thing.

Her best friend was Maxine. She was French and Dutch. The two of them had a very strange relationship. I never really knew what a "frenemy" was until I had a chance to observe the both of them together. Once, in a while, Nanette would drop a comment about her or something she did. I thought it was kind of odd. I mean I was a 21-year-old guy, in the company of two very beautiful women. I didn't really notice anything about her, except that she was beautiful and I was lucky enough to be in their company. I was becoming a better person just by being around them. That's how incredible these women were. Looking back on it, they may have been beautiful, but they were also very insecure about themselves and their relationships. Just because a woman is beautiful on the outside, doesn't mean she is beautiful on the inside. I think these women were still trying to find out who they really are and what they wanted. They might certainly give off the appearance of self-confidence and adulthood, but it was just that, an appearance. In reality, they were no different than the awkward, dorky girls I went to school with in Texas, they just hid it better. One night, Maxine said, rather announced that the three of us were going to a hot new club in the city called THE PRIM AND THE PROPER or the P&P, as most people called it. It was the place to be.

"We're going. I will make the arrangements." Maxine said in her broken English. There is just something about hearing foreign women speak English. Their accents just make them even more desirable. I fully planned on screwing Maxine as well, I just had to wait for the right time. The girl was not exactly shy, so I figured I wouldn't have to wait long.

I did have class in the morning. I knew I shouldn't go, but they were going with me or without me. I had no choice.

"Everyone is talking about it. I hope we can get in," said Nanette.

Of course, the girls could be let in, it was just me that was the problem. I was kind of a third wheel as far as getting in was concerned.

"I will tell them either we all get in, or no one gets in," said Nanette as she put her arm around me. She would do this from time to time. Tease me, just a little. Just when I was about to give up and pull away, she would always pull me back in. Last week, I was just about to call it quits. She was meeting someone else that night. She pulls me back into her apartment and make out for half an hour before her date. No sex, but pretty close. I was her puppet and she was pulling my strings.

"I hear they have a....I am not sure you say it in English, but it is a house that rests in a tree," said Maxine.

"You mean a tree house?"

"Oui...a tree house. They have one in the middle of the dance floor. It's a real tree in a giant wooden box. The little house sits on top." she said

"Well then, I guess it's settled. We're going to the P&P," I said, trying to sound enthusiastic.

Truth is, I was already exhausted. These late nights with the girls were beginning to wear me down. I just wasn't built for this nonstop club hopping and partying. As incredible as it was, my body needed a break. I could have stayed at home and gone to bed around nine that night. That would have been just fine with me. No, that it mattered to the girls one bit. We were going. It had already been decided upon.

We left around eight that evening. I had two espressos and took a pack of cigarettes. The girls could go through a pack and then some in the course of an evening. Perfume and cigarettes. It was like an exotic mixture whose aroma led to endless possibilities. Maybe you would return him empty-handed, maybe you wouldn't. It was the uncertainty that made it all the more exciting.

Everyone in Paris smoked. There was smoke everywhere. I remember the first time I saw a warning label on cigarettes. Most French people thought it was a joke.

"Look, Nan, right here. It says that smoking may be hazardous to your health." I said

"So is dropping napalm on Vietnamese children. What's your point?"

She replied.

I figured I should just let it go. I did. People nowadays don't understand what the world was like before the internet and mass communication. You could live in your own little bubble and keep the rest of the world out. Nanette lived in her own little beautiful bubble. I was intruding. Life was different then. I miss those days.

I guess the most horrifying things are horrifying because it is the very last thing you ever expect to happen. We don't expect horrific, life-altering events to happen to us. They happen to other people, we just see them on the TV. You always see the killers, but rarely see pictures of their victims. The victims are the real story, not the killers, but it is the killers who become famous. We all know about the Boston Strangler and Jeffery Dahmer, but how many of us can name a single victim from these killers? I certainly couldn't. It's like we're celebrating their accomplishments, not mourning the victims. I hate how the media does that. I hate the media in general. It conditions you to accept the things you despise about society. Even back then, I was conditioned to accept that I will wake up tomorrow morning and go about my business and nothing terrible will ever happen to me. I won't experience horror. I won't have to see something terrible. Your life should be about living, not surviving a horrible experience. That night at the P&P was horrible in every single sense of the word. Even now, years later, I'm still in its grip. I can't forget it, no matter how far away from Paris I get, or what I do, it doesn't matter. I wake up and think I'm still there in that disco, hearing that music, dancing, and being totally oblivious to the horror going on around me. I was like a child in a sense. My world was still rated G, I hadn't even experienced a PG movie yet.

The P&P was like an X-rated version of Willie Wonka's Chocolate Factory. It was a super sexy circus, with larger-than-life characters and personalities. It was adults being children again. It was also the place to be as far as the in crowd in Paris was concerned. Many would just stop by, long enough to have their pictures taken, then leave. There were drugs, whores, decadence, and pretty much everything else that made people want to go a disco. The cheapest drink was like ten francs. A bottle of wine could set you back hundreds of dollars. Most of the people that went inside never even looked at the bill. They just paid and went about their way. It wasn't just French people inside. Arabs, Africans, Americans, and even Russians. It didn't matter who you were on the outside, only who you were on the inside of its walls. It was the promised land, the land of disco milk and honey.

We got to the line, which was like a mile long. It was chilly outside, so I gave Nan my jacket. She never wore a jacket the whole time I knew her. It could be snowing outside and she would be wearing a skin-tight dress with boots. She always had to look good. We could be on a plane that was about ready to plummet into the ocean at five hundred miles per hour and she would be trying to put on makeup. My jacket was really her jacket. She didn't have to say anything, she would just hug herself and rub her shoulders. That was my cue. I took off my jacket and put it around her. I was being groomed for the position of the boyfriend. I was still on my probationary period.

I put it over her shoulders. She just smiled at me and put her head on my shoulder. It wouldn't be too much longer and we would be having sex.....or so I thought.

We must have waited outside for over an hour. The line was moving, albeit moving slowly. It looked like it was starting to rain. I knew better than to suggest to the girls that we leave. I figured once the rain started falling that would be enough to push them over the edge. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, we got to the front of the line. There were a few huge rent a thugs guarding the entrance. I knew this was probably not going to end well for me, it never does. The truth of the matter is, had they sent us packing that night, they would have done us a huge favor. A very huge favor. Instead, they just let the girls in. One of them stopped me as I went to walk in with them. I put my best game face on.

"No, monsieur." he said, stopping me.

"Look, my old man almost died at Cherbourg, so you guys can keep your little country here. Give me a break." I said.

"An American. I hate Americans, but I love American girls," he said smiling in broken English.

"You should visit America sometime. By the time you leave, you'll probably hate everyone." I said and walked by him.

I could tell he wanted to stop me, but there was some kind of drama behind me. When his back was turned, I just walked in.

The Disco was in an old warehouse building on the outskirts of town. We had to take a taxi from the train station to here. I had no idea how we were going to get back. It was too far to walk. Maybe the girls can weave some of their magic and we can hitch a ride with someone. I should

probably have just put my foot down and said "no". I should have. I was already tired and was running out of smokes. I had no idea how I was going to pay for the girl's drinks. My parents had been sending me money to keep me afloat. I was dirt poor. The girls had been conditioned to think that every American was loaded and rich. I didn't want to burst their bubble, but I was far from rich. I couldn't blow my money in here, I'd be broke for the rest of the month. I think my old man understood.

"No girl with half a brain is going to want to be stuck with somebody who's poor," he said to me once. He was right. I wasn't sure if the girls liked me, or just liked the image they had of me. Either way, they were my responsibility for the evening. I was their escort and I knew better than to screw it up. I found the girls in line at the coat room.

"Thanks for waiting," I said

"Sorry, my sweetie. We saw a famous French movie star and followed him in. They thought we were with him. He gave me his number." said Nan as she proudly held up her hand with this French guy's number on it.

"Lucky you," I said and took off her jacket.

Two girls were working in the coat room. They looked like they belonged on the JETSONS with their weird silver dresses and makeup. They took Nan's jacket, or my jacket, and gave us a number. The girls, as savvy as they were, were just small fish in an ocean here. The place was gigantic. The warehouse had been converted into a disco. There were two other floors upstairs. Not sure what they were used for. Probably drug dealing and making pornos. Nan took me by the hand and we went over to the dance floor. She put her arms around me and we started dancing. About halfway through the song, she reached in and started kissing me. I do mean kissing me, with tongue and everything. She smelled incredible. I was getting hard. It was like the seventh grade all over again. I wanted her badly. I wasn't sure if this was just another one of her tests, or if she actually wanted me. I had no idea if I was still in the friend zone or not. I figured friends don't passionately kiss like this.

"We make love tonight?" she whispered in my ear.

I smiled back and kissed her. After months of prep work, I was finally going to see the results of my hard labor. I just hoped I would stay awake long enough to enjoy it.

Maxine wasted no time in finding a potential love interest for the evening. The guy was European, probably French or English. It would be nice to have a decent conversation with someone. I had been speaking French for so long now, that it was almost second nature. When I spoke English, it was like reminding me that this was only temporary. When school ended, I had to leave and go back to the states. Nan would be here and I would be there. It was a modern tragedy.

After the song ended, I decided to get us some drinks. I knew what Nan and Max drank, but I figured, since I was going broke, I may as well be classy about it. I asked him what was drinking in French. He quickly heard my accent and replied in English.

"A Yank? Thank God. I was getting rather tired of speaking to these frogs all the time. My name is John Hastings." he said and I shook his hand.

Turns out he was a student here as well. He was only on loan from his University in England. I bought him a scotch and soda. He said he would buy the next round.

"The girls are lovely. Are they spoken for?" he asked

"Nanette is mine, Maxine is currently single, most likely for the next ten minutes or so," I said as we watched her on the dance floor. She could dance. God, could that girl dance. Maybe we would all end up back at my place, drunk and just have a three-way with each other. Probably not, but it wouldn't hurt to ask. It was hard to hear him over the music, but he spoke loud enough to make out what he was saying.

"I was there at Woodstock in 69, at Yazger's Farm. He never showed."

"Who never showed?"

"Jesus," said Hastings

"Why would Jesus show up at Woodstock?" I asked

"I was on acid the whole week. He said he was going to show up. Acid and weed, they're the body and blood of Jesus Christ. Woodstock was like a giant church. We were all gathered there to see a miracle. He was supposed to come down from Heaven. It was going to be beautiful. We could all stop killing each other and learn to live in peace and harmony."

"Must have been some good acid," I added

"I was so depressed. I just didn't understand why he would lie to me like that, you know."

"Are you always this honest and open with people you just meet? Or am I just special?" I asked

"Oh, trust me, you and your lady friends are very special," he said and walked away. He was odd. Most British people I met here are quiet and very stand-offish....until they get a few drinks in them. Those people can drink....and drink and drink. I didn't think much of it. I was too busy being mesmerized by Nanette's exotic beauty. Her mother was from Algeria and her father was an officer in the French Army. If she were Muslim, she never acted like it, not at all.

I should have realized then that something just wasn't quite right about this place, but I was 21 and in love. I was also naïve as hell. People that go to Discos aren't looking for Jesus, they're looking for something else.

We enjoyed our drinks. Maxine quickly lost interest in the English fellow and was on the hunt for the next contestant. She was wearing a dress that barely went down to her knees. She was wearing a heavy sweater she put away in the coat room. Her shirt was skin tight. She wasn't even wearing a bra. Panties were also questionable. I'd say three drinks and she would probably be yours for the evening. Three expensive drinks, I should add. Sometimes the two of them would

play games with me. They would sit beside me on the couch in her apartment and play with my hair, which was getting very long, or rub my legs. I wasn't sure if this was normal for young French women or not. Maxine came out of the shower the other night and dropped her towel in front of me. I tried not to look, but of course, I did.

Nan said something to her in French and stormed out. I had never seen Nan get jealous before. She was always the alpha female, the shot caller. You could stick her in a group of ten other women and by the end of the night, she would be their ring leader. The amazing thing about her was that she was never bossy, pushy, or rude. That was not how French women were. They were more like sharks in a tank, just circling and swimming around, waiting for the right moment to pounce. When they smelled blood, it was on. Nan seemed to have this sixth sense about men. Truth is, she was way out of my league.

Every once in a while though, she could be very immature and insecure. She stormed out of a party one night and got into an argument about France's involvement in Vietnam back in the fifties. They labeled it a "tactical retreat". Maybe they were just smart enough to realize it was a no-win situation. Smart leaders have to carefully pick and choose their battles. France got this one right.

"I just do not understand how someone can support war? How do you justify the destruction of an entire country for no reason?" she said as she started sobbing.

I didn't know what to say. I just put her head on my chest and hugged her. Maybe that was really what she needed. We kissed that night and have been a pseudo couple ever since.

Then there was the time she nearly got into blows with a shop merchant because she gave her the wrong change. I literally had to restrain her from attacking this woman.

"She needs to learn how to fucking count!" she said as we left the store.

I knew what I was getting into. I knew she was a powder keg, but it didn't matter. She was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen and she wanted to be with me.....me. I wasn't sure if she was doing these things to test me, or if this was the way she was.

Maxine pulled me onto the dance floor. She pulled me in close and put her arms around my neck. Nan shot her a look that was not very pleasant. We danced and finished the song. When it was over she kissed me on the lips. I was kind of frozen. I sort of kissed her back, but I didn't want to piss off Nan. Bruce Banner doesn't have anything on her. I walked back over to her and put my arm around her.

"She is a little slut."

"She's just having a little fun."

"I will give you fun," she said in her heavy French accent,

She pulled me and kissed me. We made out for almost ten minutes. Dancing and kissing. I didn't want it to stop. Maxine came over and we all sat down.

"How bout some drinks?" said Maxine.

"You buying?" I asked

I could tell by her look, she most certainly was not. I walked over to the bar and ordered 3 red wines. Costs me almost a hundred Francs. The bartender actually expected a tip. I reached into my wallet and gave him my last coin. That was it. I was almost out of money and we still had to get back to the train station.

"Lovely specimen you have there." said a man in English.

"Thanks.....how'd you know I wasn't French?"

"No Frenchman would be caught dead in what you're wearing," he said.

"I see. Where you from in the States?"

"Fort Worth. I'm on loan to a French oil company for a while. Figured I'd stop by and check out the scenery. Names Walt Dawson." he said and stuck out his hand.

"Brandon.....Brandon Debiasi." I said and shook it back.

"I saw you kissing the tall one there, but is the redhead with anyone?"

"She's all yours. Come on over, I'll introduce you." I said

"Here," he said and gave me a bunch of money.

"What's this for?"

"Tell the girls I bought the drinks."

I let him carry them over. He sat down next to Maxine. The two instantly hit it off. He was fluent in French and more importantly fluent in picking up girls. Watching a guy like Walt was like watching an old craftsman doing his trade. It was like watching an artist paint your portrait. I figured it wouldn't be too long before he and Maxine disappeared. I ordered another scotch and soda. That was my third one. I don't know what the hell was in there, but I began to feel rather light-headed. I could tell Nan kind of felt the same way. She would never admit to it though. She always had to be the last one out of the club. Which usually meant I had to be the second to last one to leave the club when it closed. Usually, I didn't mind. Tonight I did mind. I was already tired before we started this little safari and now, I just wanted to go to sleep. Nan took my hand and put it in hers. It wouldn't be too much longer before we were a bonafide couple.

"So what company do you work for?" I asked

"Just a small oil company. You've probably never heard of them."

"So do you like, help them find oil?"

"Something like that," he said looking at Maxine.

It struck me as odd. Usually, Americans love to tell everyone what they do for a living and how much money they make. This guy didn't. Sadly, most French women seemed to love it. Dollars can be a better ice breaker than booze sometimes.

He and Maxine hit the dance floor. The way they were dancing, it was hard to believe they just met. You'd have thought they had been dating for a few months. I wouldn't consider Maxine a prude by any means, but even by her standards, this guy was skyrocketing right into her panties.

"Something about him. It bothers me," said Nan out of nowhere.

"I know what you mean. He's very evasive."

"His eyes.....they are so cold. So empty, like there is nothing behind them," she said.

"I hadn't really noticed," I said

Nan was exceptionally perceptive. She noticed things I certainly never would. I loved that about her. It was like very useful stealth intelligence. She could size anyone up rather quickly. That made being with her even more exciting.

"Look, I don't want to be a bitch, but I am tired. Can we leave soon?" she asked

I was kind of stunned. She never left a party early.....I mean never. She must be really over it."

"Yeah.....what are we going to do about Maxine here?"

"I will talk to her. She can stay if she wants. We go home." she said. She put her head on my shoulder.

I looked at Walt and Maxine. I was going to have to peel them apart. I had a feeling that leaving right now was not exactly what Maxine wanted to hear. I looked at Nan. I had never seen her like this before. It was almost like she was drugged or something.

I wasn't quite certain what I saw. I was buzzed and my view was partially obstructed. I pulled out a cigarette when I saw this girl come running towards us. The closer she got, the better I could see. The girl was covered in blood. She was screaming and hysterical. She was frantically trying to get anyone around her to help her, but most of the people just ignored her and kept on dancing or moved away from her. It was surreal. A moment later, two of the club's referees came over and took her away. They were dressed like the referees you would see at a football game or rugby game. I wasn't sure if I was hallucinating or not. I tried to run over to her, but she was gone. I couldn't see past the rest of the people in the club. It was so crowded in there, that you could barely see a few feet in front of her. I walked back to Nan. She looked like she was ready to fall asleep.

"Let's get out of here. I don't want to be in here anymore."

She nodded and stood up. We walked over to Maxine. We tried to tell her we were leaving, but she just ignored us and kept on dancing. Nan got very angry and started yelling at her in French.

"Guys, it's fine. I'll take the young lady home. I don't mind."

"Thanks but no thanks, Walt. We came as a threesome, we are leaving as a threesome." I said

Walt gave me a dirty look. His mood and demeanor seemed to change instantly, like had accidentally flipped a switch I shouldn't have.

"Maybe the two of you should just go home," he said.

"Walt, I'm from Texas too. No straight guy in that entire state would have commented on my wardrobe, which I happen to think is just fine. I know that state. You're not from Fort Worth." I shouted

"Who cares. Just leave," he said.

I saw him motion to some of the referees standing in the corner.

"If she wants to stay with him, let her stay. We are leaving," she said and pulled my hand. I looked back and saw Maxine was totally oblivious to what was happening. I didn't like Mr. Walt, not one bit, but I knew I had to get Nan out of there. I figured I'd put her on the train back to the city and then go back for Maxine. I just hoped it wouldn't be too late. We went back to the coat room and stood in line. Nan was fading fast. She could barely stand up.

"What is wrong with me? I feel so sleepy."

"I think somebody played with our drinks. Let's get our stuff and get out of here." I said

She nodded and leaned against me. I was pretty much holding her up. I was about two hundred pounds. Still small by Texas standards, but Nan was about a hundred and thirty soaking wet. The effects of the drug were going to hit her hard. When it was our turn, I handed the girl my ticket. I turned around and there was that goofy Hastings fellow I had met earlier. He just looked at me and smiled.

"Leaving so soon?" he asked

"Nan's not feeling well."

"Well, that's too bad. I know the manager here. She could rest in his office if you like?" he said

"No thanks, we're just on our way out," I said.

I saw him look at two of the referees in the corner. One of them was on roller skates. They looked like they were actually going to block our exit.

"You know Brandon, I'm almost a hundred and forty years old?" he said

"Really? You look pretty good for a hundred and forty. Does your dick still work when you're that old?"

"Does it ever," he said and put his hand on Nan.

I pushed him away, grabbed my coat, and took off with Nan. She was so out of it, I don't think she even knew what was happening. The referees tried to block our escape, but a large group of people was leaving at the same time. They couldn't stop all of us. Hastings just waved them off and I left with Nan. Once we were outside, I knew there was no way I could just leave Max in there. I had to get her out of there. Hastings probably knew it as well, that's why he let us leave. He knew I'd be back. Was I the target or the girls? I didn't know what the hell was going on in there. What the hell did he mean when he said he was almost a hundred and forty years old? What kind of drugs was he on?

I put Nan in a cab. I told the driver to take her to her parent's house in Le Visonet. It was going to be expensive, but it was my only option. I knew the address because we had spent the night there a few weeks ago. I told the cabbie her parents would pay for the fare. Just ring the bell at the house. She was asleep. I put her in the cab and closed the door. At the time, I figured it was my only option. I had to get Max out of there. I left my jacket in the coat room. It was the only one I had.

"You lay a finger on her, I'll murder you!" I said in French to the driver.

"Oui Monsieur. I take the lady home."

He drove off and I walked back to the club entrance. The line was much shorter now. The two huge Frenchmen guarding the door were far more cordial this time. They just moved out of the way and waved me on in.

I didn't know if they were just ready to leave for the night, or if they were setting me up. I had no idea. That was almost too easy.

The club was still packed. Finding Max in here was going to be nothing short of a miracle. I walked up to the balcony. I could almost feel someone's eyes on me, following my every move. I checked the bars, she wasn't there. I walked through the huge dance floor as well, but she still wasn't there. There was only one exit from what I could tell. She couldn't have left. I would have seen her. She must still be in here. There were private lounges and rooms on the top floor reserved for VIPs. If she was in there, it was hopeless. The floor was sealed off with security. They weren't going to let just anyone up there. I was in there for over an hour. There was no sign of her. I was beginning to get worried. Maybe Walt just wanted to screw her, maybe he didn't. Either way, the guy set off my shit bag alarm and that bothered me. It was far more right than it was wrong. I decided to check the ladies' rooms. Hopefully, I wouldn't cause much of a scene. It took quite a lot to make these French women blush. I went in with two ladies. I tried to explain to them in French why I was going inside. They were so drunk that they didn't even care.

"Maxine.....are you in here?" I asked in English

"Who the hell is Maxine?" asked someone from one of the stalls. She flushed and came out a minute later. She was wearing a tee-shirt with jeans and cowboy boots. No doubt about it, this girl was most definitely American.

"One of my friends. I lost her in here about half an hour ago." I said.

"What does she look like?"

"She's got red hair and is hot."

"Well, that really narrows it down. If you look hard, you can probably find a hundred girls that look like that."

"She's wearing a flower dress, with a white belt that has a huge buckle on it. They look more like leaves than flowers. Little triangle leaves."

"You know, I did see a girl like that a little while ago. Shaking her ass on the dance floor. Very drunk. The guy she was with just looked like a jerk. Was she wearing these big oval earrings?"

"Yes.....it had to be her. Nobody but Max could possibly pull something like that off."

"I'm not sure, but I think I saw her go up to the tree house."

"The tree house? You mean that thing in the middle of the room?"

"Yup. You might want to check up there. God only knows what he's doing to her up there."

"What do you mean?"

"I've heard some stuff about this place. Most of the people here are cool, really cool. Good people, the kind that would invite you over to their house, let you smoke their weed, then let you sleep on their couch, you know like most French people, but there are others here, I don't know who they are. They're like a cult or something. Weird ass people. They just give me the creeps."

"Yeah, I think I've run into some of them. Look, I appreciate your help. What's your name?"

"Lilly. Lilly Gerber of Santa Monica, California. Can't wait to get back there. Sunshine and beaches. Not like this cold, miserable place."

"Thanks, Lilly. She's probably just blowing him up there, but I figured, I'd just make sure she's okay."

"Must be nice to have someone care about you like that. Have you slept with her?" she asked

"No, she's just a friend," I said, a little taken aback by her question.

"You will. A girl like that, you won't be able to resist her," she said

I left the bathroom and walked over to the tree house in the middle of the dance floor. There was a make-shift rope ladder used to climb up. I was still drunk and under the effects of whatever they had slipped into my drink. I figured if they had drugged me, it was done just to throw me off my game. I think whoever did this wanted the girls. I was just in the way. My head was pounding and the room was spinning. I had to concentrate hard not to fall off. I dared not look down. I grabbed the rope handle for dear life. Watching all the people in the club, I knew if I didn't find her in this tree house, I may as well just give up. There had to be thousands of people in here. There was just no way I was going to find her. I got up to the top of the tree, where the little tree house was located. It was surrounded by wooden boards that made a balcony. There was makeshift furniture on the boards. Everyone looked at me as if I had intruded into their personal space. I distinctly got the impression that I was not supposed to be here.

"Je cherche la femme." I said

"Are you looking for Maxine?" said one of the ladies with a French accent.

"Yes, have you seen her?"

"She is inside. Would you like to come in and join us? I think we could all be very happy together." said the woman.

As screwed up as I was, I knew this was wrong. Something about all this was very wrong. I knew if I went in there, I might not come out. If she was in there, I would have no choice. I wasn't leaving here without her."

"Could you just tell her that Brandon is looking for her?" I asked

"Why do you not come inside and ask her yourself."

"I'm afraid of heights. It's taking everything I have just to be up here."

The woman rolled her eyes and handed her drink to her friend. She came back out of the tree house a minute later.

"She says if you want to talk to her, you can come in. Do not be shy."

"I'm not shy, I'm not stupid either," I said

The woman walked over to me. She stopped and whispered in my ear.

"You don't love Nanette, you love her. You wouldn't want anything to happen to her now, would you? Imagine how you would feel knowing you could have saved her?"

I pushed her out of the way and walked past two people hanging out on the balcony. I opened the door and stepped in. The room was just that, a room. It was lit by candles and a small lantern. It seemed very out of place in a disco, with thousands of people dancing and grinding below. I looked over and saw a group of old women and a very old man sitting in chairs. In the middle of all of them was Maxine. She looked to be sleeping. The old woman was rubbing her hair.

"Such a pretty little thing," she said

For some reason, the walls of the tree house seemed to drown out the music below. You could feel the amplifier, but not really hear the music. I quickly came to. I knew I shouldn't be in here. Neither should Maxine. We had to get out of that room and out of this disco ASAP.

"Maxine, honey. It's time to go." I said half-heartedly.

"Brandon, take a seat. Talk to us. Tell us about yourself." said one of the old ladies.

"Not really much to tell. Maxine and I came here together, we should leave here together." I said

"I knew a girl like her once. Beautiful girl, so full of life. Came from a very prominent family in Russia. Perhaps you have heard of her. Her name was Princess Anastasia." said the old man

"Yeah, wow.....you guys really are old, huh? Look, if I could just take the young lady, we'll just be on our way." I said and tried to grab her off the couch.

One of the old ladies grabbed my arm and squeezed. The old bitch had a death grip on my arm. It was like she had a robot hand. It seemed to almost crush the bone in my arm. I looked at her and saw this very, nasty look on her face. In all my years since then, I have never seen a person have the same look on her face. It wasn't human. It looked like it belonged on a rabid animal. The old woman's eyes were completely devoid of anything. They were jet black. As if she was just a walking corpse. It was as if I was interrupting a fresh kill for a pride of starving lions. I broke free of the woman's grip and grabbed Maxine. As soon as I did, I knew something was wrong. She felt cold to the touch. She was dead. I tried to feel for a pulse. There was nothing. She had this weird bite mark on her neck. I turned around and looked at the group of old people. One of the ladies stood up and walked over to me. I realized then that these people looked old, but they were not old. Not at all. Not in the same sense we know it.

"Can I have him first?" asked Lilly, as she came strolling into the little room, which was now almost completely packed.

"Lilly, what the hell is going on here? Who are these people?" I asked her.

"Don't worry about it Brandon, just accept what's going to happen to you and it will be much easier for you," she said.

"Accept what? What the hell is going on here. Is she dead Lilly? What the hell have you people done to her?" I screamed almost hysterically.

"Brandon.....Maxine is exactly where she wanted to be," said Lilly very casually, as if she were talking about the score from a soccer game.

"I'm going to enjoy watching the life drain from your eyes." said the old woman, as she got up and walked over to me. The smell that came off of her almost made me gag. She smiled and I could see her dentures were completely blood stained.

"See this cane. It's made from human bones. My very first kill all those years ago. A young man much like yourself. He loved exploring himself and others. We explored each other for a night, then I killed him. Used his bones to make my stick here. I've had it for so long, It's almost ready to be replaced. I think maybe I'll do the same for your bones. Would you like that? Would you think that to be a fitting way to die young man?"

"You people are monsters," I said softly.

I didn't wait for him to finish. I pushed him out of the way and jumped out the window, head first. I rolled off the balcony and fell onto a branch below. I could feel my ribs crack as I hit it on my side. I dropped another ten to fifteen feet onto a group of dancers below. I landed right on this big African dude, who broke my fall. We were both hurt, but I was hurt worse than he was. One of the branches was stuck in my jacket. I thought maybe it had stabbed me and was stuck in me. I got up and reached into my jacket. I'll never forget the look he gave me. It went from anger to panic. He reached into his shirt and pulled out his gun. He must have thought I had a gun as well. I don't know why he did what he did. It was so stupid. He made a bad dream even worse. I saw it just in time to move to the side as he fired. It hit a girl in the back, killing her instantly. The entire dance floor erupted in chaos. I knew I had to get the hell out of this place and fast. Fortunately, my lower body was fine. I had separated my shoulder in the fall and my side felt like it was on fire. Everyone was running in a hundred different directions. I somehow managed to get to the front door with the rest of the panicked mob and into the street before anyone stopped me. They had their people out on the street looking for me. One of them must have spotted me. He ran over to me, pointing."

"*Ici! Ici!*" he shouted.

I wasted no time. Just as he was about to grab me, I kicked him in the nuts. He dropped to the pavement. I managed to blend in with the rest of the crowd for two blocks until I found a cab. I had my hand on the handle and opened the door.

"You okay?" he asked with a French accent.

"How'd you know I was American?" I said and slammed the door shut in his face. I ran and ran for what seemed like an eternity. I was certain they were following me. At one point, I ran through a deserted park. I found a public phone and tried to call the police. I saw two men out of the corner of my eye. I wasn't sure if they were from the club or not. I wasn't going to find out. I dropped the phone and kept on running. Somehow I lost them.

By the time I got back to a familiar part of the city, the sun was coming up. I had been running and resting for almost three hours. I would jog for a while, then take a break and start all over again. Paris was massive. It was like I was running forever.

How on Earth I managed to do all that with a broken rib and busted shoulder, I'll never know. Thank God for small miracles. It was almost eight in the morning when I stood outside the Police Precinct. I knew I should probably get some rest before I talk to the cops, but I figured it would look better for me if I went straight there. I told the cop working the door that I need to speak to an Inspector about a murder. A few minutes later two French Inspectors, the American equivalent of detectives, came to the door and took my statement. We spoke for almost three

hours. They took me to a hospital and I was treated. We then all drove out to the P&P. I fell asleep in the car. It took almost an hour from the Precinct. I had the worst nightmare of my life in that car. It was like they were taunting me, telling me they were going to get me. I saw what they really were. I saw what they had become. I was never going to get away from them.

The police had already been on the scene for hours. They had already found Maxine's body. The paramedics had already determined that she had most likely died from a drug overdose. Later tests confirmed that she had heroin in her system. I pointed out that she could easily have already been dead and they simply shot her up to make it look like an overdose. The cops naturally did not believe me. I can't blame them, I probably wouldn't have believed me either if the situation had been reversed. After about an hour, one of the detectives woke me up in the car and filled me in on what they had determined so far, which was not much.

I want to point out here that I don't think cops are bad people, I just think that many people who are cops have no business being cops. It's a job that requires far more brain power than most of them are capable of giving. I'm not just referring to French Cops, but cops in General. Most of them just see the job as an easy way to a great retirement and will not do anything to jeopardize that. A textbook example would be what happened to me. I know my story is hard to believe. Sometimes, I can't even believe it happened, but it did and it happened exactly the way I told it, word for word. I didn't embellish or lie in any way. You are seeing it the same way I did that night. It's been burned into my memory like a computer chip.

Problem was that they had a shooting at a nightclub by an African in the country illegally. Turns out, he somehow shot the only daughter of this wealthy French Industrialist. I'm sure you can fill in the rest of the blanks. The French Police didn't even try to hide their disdain for Africans, let alone, Africans who kill wealthy French daughters. Maxine was quickly forgotten about and I became the state's star witness against their defendant, who I honestly believed was not the same individual I fell onto that night in the club. We were only a few feet apart when we looked at one another. I didn't think it was him then and I don't think it was him now. The Police had the wrong man, but he was poor and black with a criminal record, so who cares? I was instructed by the Police to say exactly what had happened. I told them to piss off. I wanted them to find Maxine's killer. They made it very clear that they believed she had overdosed and that was as far as it went. No one wanted to listen, no one cared. Maxine was a nobody. A hot nobody, but in the French social pecking order, she was at the bottom of the food chain. I tried to tell her father in French what had happened to her, but I don't think he believed me. It wasn't going to bring her back anyway. She was gone and so was Nanette. She never made it home from the club that night.

It wasn't until the next day that I realized something was wrong. Her mother stopped by my dorm room looking for her. Her father came to the school with the police a short time after. The last person to see her that night was me.....well, except for the person who killed her.

I was grilled again by the detectives. My story was the same then as it is now. It has never changed. I know they killed her as well. They would have killed me too, but I escaped. It was a miracle, but I somehow made it out of the club that night alive. They said that they had witnesses who saw me get in the cab with her. They also found the cabbie who said that he dropped both of them off near her house, but that I had ordered him to stop before we got there. I quickly knew

where this was going. I could cooperate with them, or I would be at the mercy of the French legal system which operates under the principle of "*guilty until wealthy enough to buy your way out of it.*" I could say that the African they had in custody was the same guy I fell on and shot the girl, or I was probably going to be linked with Nanette's disappearance and would most likely be charged at some point. I had no choice. The French legal system is even more screwed up than our legal system. It was too great a risk to take. I cooperated and sent an innocent man to prison for a crime he didn't do, so I could save my own ass. No, I certainly am not proud of it. I left the country a few days after the trial and returned home. I've never been back since.

Losing Nanette hurt worst of all. I felt like her death was my fault. I told her parents what had happened, but I don't think they believed me. I think they felt like I had something to do with her death. In a way, I suppose I did. I made a snap decision. I had no idea how organized, or how widespread these people were. I never thought the cabbie was one of them. I hope she died quickly. I hope she didn't suffer. Her body has never been found. Maybe, I can still hold out some glimmer of hope that she is still alive. If anyone could talk their way out of being killed, it was her. Maybe she joined them. They seemed to prefer beautiful people. Everyone listens to beautiful people. She could have become an asset for them, to lure more unsuspecting young men to their deaths.

I was working in Texas, three years later when I got a call from a French TV show asking me if I would like to be on the show and tell their viewers what happened that night at the club. They were trying to prove the African guy was framed and innocent and I ended up telling them about Maxine and Nanette. They were so intrigued that they let me talk for almost an hour on a major French TV station. I refused to go back to France, so they sent a film crew to film me here in the States. Pretty soon, the station received dozens of calls from families all over Europe stating that their sons and daughters had also disappeared from nightclubs over the years. The TV Station took their case to the Head of the French National Police and asked him to investigate, but he refused. Nothing was ever done about it. As far as he was concerned, it was an open and shut case. In my mind, it is far from open and shut. It will never be shut. Not until these people are stopped.

I don't know who, or perhaps I should say, what those people were that night in the club. I don't know if they were vampires, demons, or just very evil people. I don't know. I do know they are some type of cult that drinks human blood. They think it keeps them young. To them, people exist for their pleasure. We are not human beings with hopes and dreams and desires. We are just-food. That's all. I almost wish they were vampires. I could accept that, better than the thought of knowing these were just people, like you and me, who became these monsters. The very thought that they actually chose this type of existence is mind-boggling. Human beings can sometimes be the scariest monsters of all.

You never know what you're going to step into until it's too late. I found out the hard way when evil came into my meek little existence and changed it forever. It was only one night of my life, but it has scarred the rest of the nights of my life, for as long as I live.

I have children and even grandchildren now. My grandson says that he wants to go overseas and have an adventure. I'm not sure how much he knows. I'm not sure how much my own son has told him about what happened that night. I want him to go overseas, but I want him to know, that

evil can strike anywhere, especially in places you least expect it, like a nightclub, in some shitty, Paris neighborhood. You might only encounter pure evil for one night of your life. One night out of thousands of nights in your life, but you will spend the rest of your life, trying to get over it.