

Scènes de la Vie Americaine (en Paris)

Victoria Leigh Bennett



abuddhapress@yahoo.com

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Just as Balzac wrote one of his many works on French life and set it in Paris in *Scènes de la Vie Parisienne*, so I have my small CNF to add about Americans in the City of Light, young Americans like me at the time, of about the age of 17. And just as love and amorous excitement in general was often Balzac's subject, so, in a minor way, is it mine in these three short vignettes.

I

It was the mid-1970s. I was an American long-haired girl, in the requisite blue jeans and frivolous top that made up the female youth costume of the time. With a study group composed of other high school students, I was staying at a lycée (a high school), in a dorm whose name I no longer recall; we'll call it the Lycée Voltaire. It was the summer break for French students, and American and other students from all around were housed in Paris. Our group had probably two hundred, plus a handful of counselors who were doing their best to contain the general pandemonium and brouhaha of so many

potential pieces of jailbait. Some of the boys had already thrown water balloons down at Spanish prostitutes in Barcelona when we came through there, several of the girls had gotten sick and thrown up on the perilous twists and turns of the bus as it made the hairpin curves an immense number of feet in the air through the French Alps, there had been a great deal of complaining and revolt about the morning service of a breakfast consisting of chunks of heavy bread and butter, with semi-sweet cocoa served in what looked to us like soup bowls. The counselors were tired, and glad to be in a civilized major city, even though they bore the distinctly uncivilized along with them.

At this particular time, I was myself in a nervous state, because I'd had to report to the main counselor that another of the counselors, a nun of the old school who shaved her head and wore a wig and a full, tight habit, had made a pass at me in the darkness of a tunnel on the train through Spain—yes, I know, Freudian train in the tunnel, funny to everyone but me—and had continued her determined pursuit in Paris. The main counselor wasn't pleased with me, and to understand the gravity of the situation, you'd have to understand that it wasn't like it is today, with the "Me-Too" movement in relative good health, and with everyone who's anyone or who wants to be helped

able to hope, at least, to find an ally. It was the primitive Dark Ages by comparison. But he seemed to have reason to believe me, and it has only recently occurred to me that they had been counselors on the same trip before, and that he may have had previous experience of her foibles, shall we say. Though I wasn't Catholic, I'd had no particular prejudices against her before that. Finally, though, I won my point. I was allowed to keep my room alone, that she had tried to arrange a co-habitation in for herself.

That night, I was out on the hall with the others, watching as people gave each other sensual backrubs without undressing, drank sneaked-in

booze, threw love notes written in bad French out the window in Midol bottles to passing boys, all to make up for not being allowed to go out unsupervised. And I was getting bored at the lack of action for myself, when a sudden rush drew everyone away up the hall except for a Spanish boy from another group, and me. He looked at me, I looked at him. He put an arm around my waist in a gentle, exploratory fashion. This seemed all right, so I leaned towards him. He kissed me; I kissed him back. And there I was, in the middle of my first real tongued kiss. I liked it. I really liked it. But just then, a counselor appeared ahead, looking

around for miscreants. I gave my name to the boy and bolted.

Fate sometimes plays strange tricks. That night, an authoritative knock came at the door. I jumped up, but then a thought came. Boy, or nun? I didn't dare open it; and thus, I was never to find out. I lost my opportunity, but not my virginity, in the romantic City of Light.

II

Paris was glorious in the summer mornings! The air was as fresh as a grackle's wing, which is what it occurs to me to say just because there were some birds which looked amazingly like American grackles, with purple splotches on their wings and a few speckles here and there, roaming and darting free, turning arabesques in the air outside our dorm windows. Our dorm was built on a square plan, with rooms on all four sides and an open courtyard in the middle. The air was also heated with a mellow, balmy, helpful sun, throwing its beams into every stray

corner and nook, lighting up what had been well-hidden the night before. Unless someone had had the foresight to clear it away. But that didn't always happen.

On this particular morning, what hadn't been cleared away, and what was especially glorious, was what had happened to one of the biggest nuisances on the whole trip. We'll call him Sonny Melson. Now, as an adult in my own time, these days, that is, I would naturally try to find out what made him that way, what drove him to be such an annoyance, I might even try to counsel him as to a better course of action. I would show some sympathy for the miscreant, you see. But so many

times when we are adolescents in a group, we are simply not interested in someone's problems if they are being a problem to *us*: that is an acquired adult perspective, which a few gain early, to their great advantage as kind human beings, while the rest of us more or less muddle along as inexpert "haters," to use today's term. No, let me be fair; it does seem that except for the shooters today, who go in and shoot up a whole school for the sake of a grudge towards a few, and who are considered to have some serious problem which is then treated to the best care it can get in the time and place concerned, it does seem that today's students are more feeling towards their fellows. When a person is not a

shooter but a minor though constant pest like Sonny Melson, though, I just wonder if their sense of humor wouldn't also have gotten the best of them in the magical, tricky air of a Parisian summer, when a punishment so clearly was due.

Now, Sonny had only bestowed a casual insult on me and left me alone. We were going through the French Alps at the time, and due to forethought on my part, I had come provided with something everyone had been instructed to pack: rolls of toilet paper. At that time in the small towns in various parts of France, the restaurants were simply not equipped to handle the sanitary demands of two hundred or more people, even if they'd been warned

in advance. So, I had done as requested and packed extra. It followed that in a spirit of camaraderie and goodwill, when I'd had my turn in line at the toilet—and it was not doing well at that time, operating very sluggishly—I cooperatively passed the roll to the next in line, and assumed that she did the same. The result, however, was that the toilet got clogged, as someone had been too generous with the paper, or the demands of the many, to misquote Mr. Spock, outweighed the demands of The Pew, and so it went. This wouldn't normally have been Sonny's business, but he had wasted a verbal squib on me, too, so I could feel for the spirit

and endeavor and bright sparks of wit that had gone about his punishment on this lovely day in July.

For, Sonny had had something to drink the night before, and had, being Sonny, had too much, and in the stillness of the night, the other boys had gone into his unlocked room and performed an engineering feat. Gently and quietly, so quietly and gently, they had lifted Sonny from his bed; they had taken heavy ropes, gotten from who knows where; they had then suspended from Sonny's balcony his bed, his chairs, his table, and even somehow his square mirror. His suitcase they had packed and suspended from the ceiling fixture, where truth to tell, it wasn't going to stay much longer, as the

wires were already pulling loose when we all got a chance to gather, in milling groups, outside the door to look in.

Vandalism? Yes, it was. And I am ashamed that I had no part in it; I mean, I am ashamed that I approved of it. Well, I'm ashamed, at least, a tiny, tiny bit that along with others, I promptly took advantage of the counselors' confusion and need to address Sonny's grievances and got out as quickly as I could with my street map and sundries and some money to go on a ramble of Paris without having to say where I was going exactly, or when I would be back.

Ah, and thereby devolves a story! I had heard all the instructions, I had always paid attention to the cautionary tales, I was a cautious girl by nature. But Sonny was in dutch with everyone, not only with me, and it was just too beautiful outside to take precautions. My mother had probably told me to watch what I ate. I knew that things were a little pricey sometimes. For the sake of my figure and my pocketbook both, I possibly should have avoided buying a cassis ice cream. And for the sake of my reputation, I definitely should not have! But I had no sense of reason or proportion where cassis was concerned, and though I'd been warned not to sit at an outside café table alone even during the day

(though no one had exactly explained why this applied only to the “young ladies,” as they had put it), I did it anyway.

It wasn't sheer lawlessness on my part, after all. I had, with the best of intentions to keep a straight path towards where I wanted to go back to---the Louvre---lost my way. I shrugged; I'd go another day. But when I got my ice cream and had eaten most of it, it was necessary to pull out the street map, try to locate signs and landmarks, and find my way back again. By now, the counselors would have begun to take a head count. And to look at the map, I spread it out on a café table just by me on the street, standing up all the while. A perfectly

proportioned and attired waiter bustled out towards me, but I glanced up and waved him away. He looked affronted, probably because I was availing myself of one of his tables without buying anything. I concentrated on the map, following from the last place that I'd recognized. In thought, I sank into the chair. The map was in an eye-straining combination of red and blue, and the street names were sometimes abbreviated. I looked up in confusion.

Coming towards me down the street was a tall, handsome young man who waved a hand at me to stay where I was, and I figured that he'd seen my street map and was coming along to help. Thank

God! I thought. Finally, a fully friendly Parisian. It's not that the general citizen was so unfriendly, it was just that they were so universally aware that Paris was the center of the known universe, and they didn't understand why everyone else, particularly foolish, pompous Americans, didn't see it that way.

Now, here is where you'll either have to take my word for it or not, because the fact is that I no longer speak French or even read much of it, not having regularly kept up with it. But at that time, I knew a fair smattering of it, and could sort of understand what was going on. So, I'm just going to give you most of the conversation in English, and

you'll have to understand that we were talking in French, as well as I could converse, anyway.

“You like the ice cream?” he began, as I hurriedly crammed the end of the cone in my mouth.

When I had finished chewing, nodding all the while, I said, “Yes. Cassis.”

“Ah, cassis. My favorite, too. You want another one? I'll buy it for you.”

“No, no,” I tried to make a joke. “I'll get fat!”

“Oh, the diet, yes. Women like that too, sometimes. But I get fat; I eat what I want.” He was very far from being fat.

“Look, I’m lost. Here’s my map. Do you know where we are?”

He tried a joke this time. “But, we are here. Here we are! Right here, at this excellent café. Would you like something to eat, to drink?”

I felt the conversation was getting a little circuitous, getting away from me a bit. “No, no, diet, remember?”

“Ah. Yes. Vous parlez mal, très mal.” I do remember that; with the usual sense of Parisian superiority about speaking better than anyone else, including other French people, he wanted to let me know how badly I spoke. “But how are you lost? What hôtel is your residence?”

“I’m not at a hotel. I’m staying at the Lycée Voltaire. Do you know where that is? I’m studying here for the summer course.”

“No....no, I don’t know where that is. But I will help you find your way. I am a good guide.” And he smacked his chest with one open hand.

A little late, I wondered what the point was of not sitting down in public, but as we were now on the move, and he was busy consulting the map from one side, I didn’t worry about it too much.

Here’s the summation of our conversation, as we went on and on, from one corner and intersection to another, with him making good-natured and periodic forays into tobacconists and candy stores

and notions shops to ask after the place we sought.

And even I could see, when I looked in the windows at the counter clerks, that they were giving slow, negative shakes of the head.

“Do you like to study?”

“Yes. I don’t always understand it, but I like it.”

“Good, good. That is a good student.” A pause.

“And do you like Paris?”

“Oh, yes, I love Paris! Particularly the Louvre, and Notre Dame.”

“I see.”

“Do you?”

“Pardon, do I--?”

“Do you like Paris, too?”

“Mon Dieu, I hardly know! I have lived here all my life.”

“The countryside is pretty.”

“The parks, near Les Invalides, they are pretty, too.” Another pause. “You would like to go there, perhaps?”

“No, I can’t. I’ve got to get back before they know I’m gone.”

A triumphant laugh, for some reason. “Oh-ho! You are a bad one! You leave your teachers and go for a walk without them.”

“No, we’re allowed out sometimes. They just didn’t know we left today.”

“We? There are more of you? You have someone with you?”

“No, we all went our own ways.”

“What? What is that again?”

“I’m alone right now.”

“Yes, yes, okay. So, do you like to sing? Yes?”

And here, he sang a few little notes of a comical arpeggio, gesturing with one hand up into the air and nearly dropping the map. I’m not sure how, but somehow the map was totally in his possession now.

“Well, sometimes. I don’t sing really well.”

“Do you like to ride horses?”

“Yes! Well, I haven’t ridden for years, but I used to take lessons. At a—I don’t know how to say this—a day camp.”

“Day camp?”

“Yes. Where children spend the day during the summer for recreation. Away from their parents.”

“Ah, day camp!” He nudged my arm in a friendly way. “Do you like to play tennis?”

“It’s okay. Do you?”

“Okay, as you say. But—” and here he stopped on the sidewalk, putting his arm around my waist in a familiar way, as if to a long-time female friend, “do you like to make love?”

Whoops, I thought. So that's what it was about not sitting down at café tables! The next minute, I wondered how I could've been so stupid. This was the city of romance, everybody, even I, the night before, had wanted to fall in love here. Get sexed up here, I was honest with myself in the next moment. Only, not with a street loungeur of some kind who thought he'd picked me up at a café.

Angrily, I shrugged him off and grabbed the map, tearing one corner of it off.

“Look, Buster—” I started, in my best street English, learned from old movies on Channel 9 back home.

“Oh, no, you are angry. Please don’t be angry!
Maybe you like the women?”

“NO! I just have to get back before I get in
trouble!”

He seemed to make some sort of quick
readjustment to his mental sensibilities. “All right,
all right, okay! We will find the place. Let me go
in here. Stay right here.”

I watched him suspiciously, but all he did was go
into the bar next door and proceed to the telephone.
He consulted with someone for about five minutes,
and then beckoned to me to hold up the map to the
window. I don’t know how he could see much of it
through the dirty glass, but he seemed to be tracing

a path with his finger on the other side. He gave a swift nod.

When he came back out, he smirked at me like a mischievous little boy. “But you have a bad temper!”

I started to say something else to set him on the right path, but he said “Chhht. Just come along. I now know where we are going. Or close by.” He took my arm in a totally unromantic way and steered me forward into the center of the sidewalk again.

In no time, I recognized in front of us the tall wooden gates surrounding the lycée. “This is it! This is it!” I said, relieved. Not that it hadn’t been

an adventure, but a little too charming an adventure, as far as I was concerned.

He walked me up to the gate, looked at it curiously, and then said, “I will shake your hand.” But he waited, as polite as he could be, for me to offer my hand first.

Nothing to lose now, I thought, and I leaned toward him and offered my hand. He shook it, my sidewalk gallant, and just at the last minute, he leaned in and planted a kiss on my cheek, in a very chaste way. “That for my American student,” he grinned again, I suppose having to win the argument somehow, to get away with something.

Then, he turned, putting one hand in a pocket, and looking back once to wave before going on his way.

And I went on in, thinking that it hadn't been the worst day I'd ever had, and readying myself for the questions likely to come.

III

It was our last week in Europe, in Paris, before we had to travel to England. We'd stay there for a week or so, and then fly back home to the States. Our counselors had proposed a visit to a light and fireworks display to be held at Les Invalides, and since fireworks had always been the finale at the county fairs and July 4th celebrations and other sorts of parties I'd been a part of at home, it seemed natural, if a little less than exciting. I'd gotten a taste for talking to French people, and I was bored to be going to something only with the American members of my own group. Precious of me, I

know, but I could feel the letdown of the upcoming school year at home already. No furniture hanging over balconies; no handsome Spaniards to kiss in dark hallways; no sexy Frenchmen just dying to pick up the objects of their mistaken apprehensions. And even the plumbing mostly worked right. No buses leaning over sheer edges of cliffs where the bottom you could see was so far down that you didn't want to look, but then you did anyway. But there were a few more deep chasms for me to look into still, though not the literal kind.

It was the day of the light show, and I was on the Métro alone, strap-hanging, riding the first subway I'd ever been on. I'd gotten to be a fairly seasoned

traveler on it in my short jaunts. It had immeasurably improved my ability to navigate Paris without getting lost, though I found myself looking now and then for my former would-be amour, wondering about him a little. Wondering if he was attempting to squire other neophytes around Paris, or if he'd learned his lesson as I had learned mine. I was woolgathering this way when something didn't sound quite right. I listened. In the midst of the chatter-chatter-chatter of Parisian conversation all around me, which I couldn't understand unless I selected one particular conversant to concentrate on, I heard something which sounded quite foreign, then abruptly familiar: two Americans talking. It

was two American young men, near me, who seemed to have just met, themselves.

I butted in, as many an American considers only friendly behavior, but which is foreign and strange behavior to many people from other lands. Soon, I was carrying on a robust dialogue with Jason Branzig, from Fire Island, NY, and Jack Andrews, from some place I can't recall (perhaps because he mumbled it, and it was multisyllabic) in North Dakota. To close my stories out, I would love to tell you that I remembered our conversations of that day, during which we three careened around Paris wildly and adventurously: going into a MacDonald's for a burger, to find that they served it

with a fried egg on the inside instead of lettuce and pickles, and that it was perfectly legal for us at our age to pick up one of the half-liter bottles of cheap red wine provided with it at the front counter. Or, perhaps, you would be interested to follow the humor of the scene when Jack, unable to hold even that small amount of liquor, had to be dissuaded from picking all the flowers in a public park and wiring them to a woman in Toulouse that he'd fallen in love with when his group was staying there. That's what he said, anyway. He conceived of it as an appropriately wild and romantic and French gesture, for some reason, the denuding of public property, but when he became obstreperous

and wilder, and we threatened to leave him, he collapsed into a fat sack of clothes on a bench—for he seemed to be wearing things several sizes too big for him. Then he wept, vomiting profoundly into the side bushes the next minute. This to our good luck prevented him from wanting to touch the vegetation, but he had to deliver several more speeches on the subject. And I wish I could recall them for you, except that such things as making fun of drunks isn't considered pretty or appropriate or funny anymore, and we take better care of our public situations now.

At the time, though, we alternated among laughing at him, scolding him, and trying to drag him along.

By the end of the day, it'd worn off, but it was also obvious by the end of the day that he must've been drinking earlier too, that his original hail-fellow-well-met attitude had been more disingenuous than ours. And I can't even recall the exact words in which Jason made these things clear to me, as I had less experience of rampant drunks. But I took the two of them by the dorm area and got permission from one of the counselors for the two of them to sit with me for the light show. It was a public performance, after all, and they could get tickets like anyone else for general admission. The counselor I approached was the one I liked the most, though he wasn't the specific counselor of my

subgroup, nor the main counselor. He was Mr. Maddocks, and despite the name, he affiliated with his Italian relatives, and had been delirious to be in the Italian Alps for the one day we'd been there. He had always seemed to me, during our brief acquaintance, to be a very wise man. He inquired of the two guys what groups they'd been with, and while Jack was a little vaguer, Jason mentioned someone Mr. Maddocks had heard of before, knew slightly, something like that. So, they were apparently cleared for landing, thus to express it.

That afternoon, Jack said he had some things to attend to, but he would meet us at the gate before the show. Jason and I sat down on a bench just

inside the lycée gate. He put an arm companionably behind my back and gave me a kiss. Not as exciting as the Spanish kiss I'd had, but pleasant and comfortable. I snuggled up to him, and after a few minutes, he kissed me again. All in favor of this method of proceeding, I kissed him too, and after another few minutes, it began to feel more than just pleasant, it began to feel like something I shouldn't be doing in public. And sure enough, confirmation of that very point came along next.

There was a stern cough. Then, a voice said, "Excuse me, but as you can see, the other benches all have lawn equipment and potted plants on them.

Would you please scoot across a little and allow me a place to sit down? If you don't mind."

The tone was a little censorious to fit the young man I saw standing there, shorter than I, taller than Jason, probably no more than six to eight years our senior. A full, curly head of red hair, and a pointed beard.

There was plenty of room on the bench, so we moved to the far end closer to the building and he sat down. Maybe he felt he'd been too harsh in his tone, for the next thing he did was to give us a kind smile and ask, "So, where are you from? Are you studying here?" I was trying to place the accent, which I'd never heard before, some exotic version

of English, at least to me: I was a person from West Virginia in the United States.

We both answered at the same time, and then stopped and took turns, but for some reason, his friendly smile had disappeared. “Americans. Yes, I always have found American young people to be precocious.”

Jason looked at me and shrugged. I thought, precocious? What did he do when he was our age? Didn't he make out? What planet was he from, anyway?

“Where are you from?” I asked, as politely as I could muster.

“New Zealand,” he answered, with solid intent to state something, though what wasn’t clear. Like a lot of young Americans, I suffered from geographical myopia; all I knew about New Zealand, really, was that it was somewhere near Australia.

Timidly, with a desire to appease, I asked, “Is that where there are aborigines, or is that Australia?”

If red hair signifies temper the way some old stereotypes have it, then his hair became on the sudden the reddest, angriest head of hair around. At any rate, he was angry with me in particular now, not because I was a stray American caught making

out in his vague line of vision. “Don’t call them that! The correct name is ‘Maori,’ they’re ‘Maori’s,’ and they are the first peoples in both Australia and New Zealand.”

“Okay, sorry!” I said. “I didn’t know.”

“That’s just it, Americans never know.” Jason and I didn’t respond, and after a minute, the slightly older man pulled out a book and flipped through it, randomly turning down pages, or so it seemed.

“Do you go to school in Paris?” I asked. Jason looked towards him too, as if also waiting for the answer.

“I’m going to be teaching here in a couple of weeks,” he answered, seeming to have forgotten his previous hostility.

“Well, good luck,” said Jason, taking a moment to raise satirical eyebrows at me, whether in disbelief at the encounter or at whether Red would make a good teacher wasn’t obvious. He stood up and said to me, “I’ll come by here tonight when you’re ready to leave with the group for the show—eight, was it?”

“Eight-fifteen.”

“Okay, see you then.”

“Bye.”

After Jason had gone, the man whom I now thought of as Red waited a minute, looked at his watch, then turned to me. His gentleness was back in force. “Don’t you think you’d better go in?”

“Me?”

“I.”

“I, then. Why?”

“Because you need to be with the other students, and to be getting ready for the show tonight. Not neglecting your social responsibilities sitting out here on a bench with a teacher. Or a teacher-to-be, at any rate.” He did smile again, though, as if to smooth out the words.

He went back to fumbling with his book, and I went in. Boy, he really did come from another planet if he thought I was in any way an important member of the group inside! But maybe he just didn't want to talk anymore or felt uncomfortable himself at being with a student he'd never teach. I did know something about New Zealand now, though. And Australia.

And I was soon to find out more about Jack, and just possibly, about Jason, though that was less certain. We went to the light show with the group, Jason and I, though Jack never showed up to meet us. And Mr. Maddocks sat on my left side and kept careful watch, I felt, over the hand-holding and

occasional snuggling Jason and I did from moment to moment. At the end of the show, I asked Jason if he wanted to exchange addresses to write, as I knew he was leaving for Bristol on the next afternoon; he had some relatives there whom he was going to visit before rejoining his group in London a few days later. He was very enthusiastic, and we exchanged addresses. The exotic still seemed to be with me a little in that address on “Fire Island, NY,” and I felt more reconciled to the trip home.

Mr. Maddocks, though, oddly enough asked me and Jason if we would go with him to a little café just around the corner. He was friendly to us, and we couldn’t just say “No,” so we went. I don’t

know what Jason thought we were going for, but I was afraid we were in trouble for what are now known as “public displays of affection.”

It wasn't that at all, however. Mr. Maddocks asked us where we had met Jack, and we told him, over cups of espresso that I didn't like then, but felt it would be childish to refuse. Then came the corker. Mr. Maddocks asked, “And did he tell you some big shaggy dog story about falling in love with a woman, and wanting to go back and be there with her forever, and all that?”

“Yes,” I said, and Jason told him about the near-fiasco with the flowers in the park, and the vomiting

binge. “I think,” I said, “that his frustrated love has driven him to drink.”

“We’ve heard from a relative who isn’t his mother or his father, but who is willing to take him in and see him through a rehab, if we can somehow get him through his problems with the French police.”

“For drinking?” Jason sounded really surprised.

“For attempted rape,” Mr. Maddocks was certain about it.

Jason and I both expressed our own varieties of incredulity, and when he had heard us out, Mr. Maddocks said, “Apparently, both his parents drink heavily, and he’s been sneaking into the booze since

he was yea high to a grasshopper. The woman was married, and moreover, she and her husband were Jack's host family here while he was supposed to be studying French and math this summer. The French are sticky about Americans who come over and abuse their privileges as guests, as they should be, and even more so than are the Greeks and Italians, who don't like rough customers either. French punctilio carries some added points with the American ambassador, too. It'll take some doing to get him home and in a rehab program, counseling, all that. Be careful whom you get together with on the subway from now on, both of you." He tilted the tiny cup back and then set it down. He pointed

to me. “You are coming with me in a few minutes, it’s too late to let you make your way home by yourself. So, I’ll go off, and you two say your goodbyes, and hope to see each other again soon somehow, and then come around that corner right there.” He pointed where there was a high wall from which we weren’t likely to be visible. “Jason, nice to meet you, good luck to you, and all the best.” Then, he disappeared.

And thus, very soon was ended one fine European summer, where the place I was in the longest was France, and the place I loved the most was Paris, and my best chance, I thought, for a continued exotic romance back home was with

Jason. But I wrote and I wrote, for half a year, and he never wrote back, not even once, not even sending me a postcard. And I'd have liked a postcard, I thought, from a place, even in the States, called "Fire Island." The only postscript I got was the discussion I had with a Canadian friend of mine who, when she heard about Jason, laughed out loud. "You're so naïve!" she said.

"Well, he said he would write. I mean, I had at least a 50-50 chance of that coming true, didn't I?"

"Not if he's from Fire Island, you don't! That's a gay guy's paradise."

"Don't be silly, he's my same age."

“You know you’re straight, don’t you, at your age? Depend upon it, he’s gay.”

I thought about this, but then said, not so much to myself, but to put her in her place, and also to acknowledge another part of the truth, “Well, if he’s gay, I guess I’d better kiss more gay guys then! He really did a great job with those loving embraces, and all that French kissing; and in Paris, too!” That shut her up.