



DYLAN LANDIS

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If you frequent cafés, you will at some point encounter a Turkish toilet, a “squatting” affair that may be little more than a hole in the floor.

This from *Fodor’s*. Leah is having trouble enough with the airplane, which is little more than a few tons of steel falling through a hole in the sky. She does not need toilet trouble on top of this. The success with which the airplane stays out of the ocean stands in direct correlation with her grip on the left armrest, plus or minus a few degrees of error, hopefully, because at some point she will need to visit the lavatory. Unfortunately she failed to consider this when Terrence offered her the window, and now his legs are a turnstile between her and the aisle. An aisle passenger might just be getting up to stretch, but everyone knows what the window passenger is getting up to do.

“How’s it coming?”

He nods at the book that has dropped to her lap. He’s taken over the history reading, all those Louis-by-the-numbers. Leah knows the French kings only by the legs of their eponymous chairs: the florid, the fluted, the curvaceous with carved shells, absorbed by osmosis from her mother, the decorator. Terrence is doing the history because Leah mistrusts libraries and never went, despite the list he slipped under her door. The prudish crinkle of plastic covers, due-back cards spattered with dates—they make her anxious. Only thing she likes is the official library card with its embossed metal plate. Even better she likes her new passport. She likes being the kind of woman for whom a passport is an absolute necessity. The way men just ask her to Paris and all. When she gets back to Amherst she will fling it onto her desk and leave her door open; maybe someone will wander in. *This guy took me to Paris*, she will say. *We’d just met, I swear to God. He paid for everything.*

Plus how was she supposed to fit all those books in her suitcase?



“Listen to this,” says Terrence. He’s reading *Next to God: French Kings and Their Courts*, a library book—he’ll have to schlep it back. “When Louis *Seize* went strolling around Versailles, his gardeners had to run ahead and hide behind the fountains. When he approached one, they’d turn it on. When he was out of earshot, they’d turn it off. Then they’d get the next one going. All those gardeners sneaking around.” His face is lit with expectation.

“Why?”

“No water pressure.” He sounds triumphant. “Now guess how many fountains.”

“Twenty. Fifty.”

“Fourteen hundred,” says Terrence. “And he thought they all were spraying at once.”

“Poor gardeners,” says Leah. And while she’s at it, poor Terrence, thinking he has brought Restaurant Leah, and maybe even Negligee Leah, to Paris.

Terrence yawns hugely behind his hand. “What are we doing tomorrow?”

Leah grips the guidebook, her place lost; she tries to remember through her fingers what she’s read. She’s been skipping around. She ignored the hotel part because Terrence took care of that; he has booked a moderate hotel, six nights in St. Germain des Pres. She has yet to correlate the neighborhood with its arrondissement number. She has yet to study the map.

“I thought the sewers,” she says. “You can climb down into an actual—”

“Next,” says Terrence. He seems amused.

“It’s a real museum,” says Leah. “I mean it’s clean. You can’t fall in or anything. It has historical displays.”

“Of sewage,” says Terrence.

“Yes. No,” says Leah. “A sewage *system*.” Streams and tributaries, she wants to tell him, rumbling black rivers, snaking pipes. She wants to follow its tunnels; she wants to see the murky, beating heart of it. She wants to find out if she is attracted or repelled, or maybe both. “It wouldn’t be in *Fodor’s* if it wasn’t clean,” she says.

Terrence’s seat is reclined. He raises it slightly to look at her. “We have seven days,” he says gently. “I’ve been saving for three years to have those seven days.”



She has done something ungenerous, something bad. She chips a flake of polish off her thumb, polish she applied yesterday, clumsily, with Maybelline. She was fairly sure the woman Terrence invited to Paris would have hot red nails, like flares.

“I’m sorry,” she says. “Let’s start with the Eiffel Tower.” Terrence waits. “Or the Louvre,” she says.

“Ah.” His eyes close and he turns his face up to the air vent. “Picasso. Cezanne.” His eyelids are slightly blue. “I want to see every room in the Louvre.” And he falls asleep with his rosy lips parted, like a child’s.

We are going to do things, Leah thinks. There is going to be a bed.

A sheet of light slides under the window shade. She flips to *Museums*, reads just enough to learn that no Picassos or Cezannes hang in the Louvre. They’re in the other, the Musée d’Orsay. She wonders if Terrence’s last thought before sleep was that already she has let him down.

Badly. She plays chess badly.