



“WHY
COULDN'T
I JUST SAY
non?”

Lily Heise moved to Paris hoping to find love, but discovered instead that she had to be careful what she wished for.

THE SUN WAS setting over the Seine. The picnic to which I'd been invited was drawing to a close and guests were trickling away as stars sprinkled across the sky. While I was bidding *au revoir* to the remaining attendees with a customary double-check kiss, a set of lips lingered on my cheek a moment longer than was usual, and my eyes locked with those of a handsome man as he pulled away from me. I was leaving when, suddenly, the dashing stranger leapt over a wall to stop me. “Do you want to be good... or do you want to be bad?” he asked in a seductive tone.

Yes, he actually said that. I wouldn't have believed it myself if I hadn't been there.

Needless to say, Paris is a world away from the old farm I grew up on, near Bancroft, Ont., a town of about 4,000. I spent hours in the fields, travelling in my mind to cobblestoned streets, dreaming of exploring the world's greatest museums and encountering attractive foreigners. So, when the opportunity arrived to go on a student exchange to Italy during my graduate year of high school, I seized it. After only three months abroad, I knew I belonged in Europe.

As a teen, things never really worked out with boys—that is, until later in high school, when I dated a very attractive older guy (he was “perfect”: popular, handsome, sporty and a musician). When he was going back to university in “the city” at the end of the summer, however, and I realized that was it between us, I experienced my first heartbreak. In the midst of pining for the unavailable men that followed (his best friend, a world traveller, had taken an interest in me as well), I couldn't help but fantasize—again—of an idyllic life in Rome or Paris, within the arms of a *beau mec* or a *bel ragazzo*, like the boyfriend I had while I was on exchange in Italy.

My studies at the University of Guelph brought me one step closer to my dream, when I spent a semester in Paris on another exchange. I adored it so much I moved back permanently after graduating. The City of Love's sublime streets and picturesque buildings were, I thought, the perfect setting for amorous activity. I was sure I'd be swept off my feet in no time.

And I was—very quickly, indeed. Finding romantic candidates was not a problem. But the men who pursued me, although exciting, were a letdown: I was fielding inappropriate propositions from married colleagues, impulsive →

pick-up attempts by policemen, and persistent phone calls from guys I shouldn't have given my number to in the first place. Why couldn't I just say *non*?

I quickly realized that smiles and direct eye contact were not polite signs of greeting, as they are in Canada, but rather silent invitations to "come hither." Unless I was striving to establish a harem of male admirers to rival the collection of mistresses of the French kings, I needed to shed some of my friendly Canadian-ness and learn how to play by Parisian flirting rules.

So, logically, I looked to *les Parisiennes*. They often come across as cold and uninviting, yet upon closer examination, I realized they're not; they've simply perfected the *savoir faire* for efficient, desired seduction.

First, I had to master *le regard*: the look or gaze. For a first encounter, you hold the initial eye contact for a second longer than usual, turn away briefly, then look back once more, this time more intensely. Next: *le sourire*, or the smile. The broad Canadian smile had to go; it only perpetuates the problems initiated with friendly eye contact. On the other hand, a little smile followed by a locked gaze clinches the deal.

While many females fawn over French women's style, I always thought the messy hair, minimal makeup and clothes worn for several days straight were hardly seductive. I did learn, however, that it's more what's underneath that counts.

PARISIANS HAVE SIMPLY PERFECTED THE *savoir faire* FOR EFFICIENT, DESIRED SEDUCTION.

Case in point: One lunch hour a few years ago, an older colleague proudly (and possibly too vividly) described her recent purchase for a new beau. It was from Aubade, an incredibly sensual and racy brand. Did I mention that it's expensive? She must have spent over \$300! Now, truth be told, she wasn't exactly a "sexy lady," but the lingerie boosted her confidence and appeal. While I personally don't break the bank on super fancy undergarments—it doesn't take much to add some hidden allure—you've always got to be prepared for a surprise seduction...

One summer, I thought I'd mastered *le regard*, *le sourire* and *la lingerie*: I lined up an exciting lover from the city of Poitiers, reeling in a handsome man on the dance floor at a club. He began sending me romantic messages that persuaded me to visit him



Writer Lily Heise, in her adopted home of Paris.

for the weekend. "48 hours before my eyes meet yours, 48 hours before my lips flutter across yours. Sweet dreams," was his pre-visit text message. (No, really!) After our fervent weekend, I received this: "If we must only keep the best to live life to the fullest, I will keep every moment we spent together."

I thought this was it—until he vanished for several weeks. When he finally re-emerged, it was to announce that his ex-girlfriend had arrived on his doorstep, suitcase and baby in hand.

And so the stories continued as I gained footing in *Parisienne*-style flirtation. I was once courted by a count, right out of one of my childhood fairy tales (again—really!). He was the successful president of his own multimillion-dollar company, jetting around the world for important meetings, to which he insistently invited me. The perfect catch had a catch, though: This count already had a sleeping beauty—and three adorable kids—at home. I was living the cliché embodied by Kate Hudson in *Le Divorce*.

The quest to find my amour was panning out much differently than I'd envisioned it back in that Ontario field. Over the past 13 years I've lived in Paris, I've developed a knack for finding men—and stories about them to share afterward—that are unlike those of even my Parisian friends: I've dated jet-fighter pilots, renowned writers, filmmakers, rock stars and international men of mystery—all of them with some sort of hitch. I really do want a happy ending, so why can't I find a happy medium? It seems beyond my control.

That said, I feel lucky to have glimpsed life behind the scenes of the European romances so often depicted in movies like *A Room with a View*, *French Kiss* and *Chocolat*—the ones that inspired these grandiose dreams of mine. I've ended up feeling deflated more often than I'd ever thought possible, but I'm not ready to give up. Not yet. The sky above those sprawling fields is endless. ☺

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