

PARIS

Then there was Paris. We were miserable. It was very hot. We were in a little hotel on a street off the Rue de Magenta a few blocks from the Gar de Nord. The hotel looked in on a courtyard shared with an apartment co-op whose tenants celebrated the end of July and the coming *vacances*.

We spent five days there at the height of the worst heat wave on record. Enduring sweltering nights wrapped in hotel linen, we counted the days to our departure. She maintains we made love once. I do not remember. Love, the making of it, does not ring a bell.

Late on our last night, the courtyard echoed with the sounds of a man and a woman making love. The expressions of the lovers resonated through the courtyard. The woman cried out, "Oui monsieur. Oh oui, monsieur, merci monsieur."

And she said, "She's faking it. No woman really feels that way. She's acting. Maybe she's a whore. Listen to the way she calls him monsieur."

"Yes," I agreed, stroking her thigh.

She took my hand from between her legs.

"So?" I asked.

"No woman cries out something like that while in the throes of passion," she said.

"No?" I asked, thinking of other loves.

"Not that way," she replied. "There are whispers, cries, moans, but that woman's faking."

So we listened to the lovers the way you listen to an amateur orchestra, listening for squeaky notes, misplaced fingerings. We lay there nearly naked, so close that our sweat intermingled and yet we were as distant as foreign moons. We waited, and listened, to the gurgled ripple of laughter passing from throat to throat of the apartment revelers drinking to their impending vacations, to the woman's

theatrical, impassioned cries and to the man's animal grunting, all commingling above the courtyard. In the sweltering Paris night, the lovers' lies became transparent, and their voices were joined by others, a swirl of laughter, of moans and breaking glass, an orgiastic swirl that echoed through the court as though the heat had finally gone to the entire feverish city's head.

She turned and traced her finger down the length of my spine, drawing her tongue across my sticky Adam's apple.

And in the infinite heavens, the Great Deceiver smiled.