

I Hate The French

The first time I saw her she was leaning against a wall smoking a long cigarette in the ladies bathroom directly under a no smoking sign. She was attractive in that mature elegant woman kind of way. She had a devoted and clean sense of style that she wore about her like good Louis Vitton luggage and there was arrogance in her stare and superiority in her smile.

I didn't like or dislike her on sight, frankly I didn't think much of her one way or another, except that I do remember noticing her. Maybe I notice everything, I like to think that's true, but more and more I feel I walk around in the general haze everyone else does. Ignoring the dull din of noise that constantly surrounds me in the grey soup of the world. So maybe there was something spectacular about her, but if there was I certainly couldn't put my finger on it. I let the cool water run over my hands, looking at my reflection in the mirror, trying to be casual about it and not let the woman know how intensely I was studying it.

God, I looked terrible. This hair has got to go. What I once could have described as glossy spun gold had been bleached and tortured to a straw-like platinum, that just did nothing for my already too white and pink complexion. I mean, this color didn't even look good on porn stars with perfect silicone figures let alone ridiculously overweight girls with somewhat pretty faces that were really letting

themselves go at the ripe old age of 25. My boobs had gotten huge though; I suppose if there was an upside to depression and weight gain it was giant boobs.

Moving to Los Angeles had been hard on Sarah and I; we'd both been depressed and broke. It occurred to me for the first time that maybe Los Angeles had been a mistake. It was filled with all these beautiful fake looking people and was just hell on the ego. And what the fuck was the point of living in a city near the beach when you were always too busy, too poor, too self-conscious, and stuck in too much fucking traffic to ever get there? Sarah and I hadn't been to the beach once since moving here...and I honestly couldn't imagine going...certainly not until I looked more like a 25-year-old girl and less like a beached whale. Ugh. I dried my hands off, disgusted with myself and I suddenly remembered the woman standing behind me and hoped I hadn't actually said that "ugh" out loud. I saw her reflection looking at me in the mirror. She had been staring at me this whole time. It was weird. I took a lip-gloss out of my bag and applied it, attempting to patiently wait for my mother and Sarah to finish with their business so we could get back to the table.

To my horror, this reflection woman spoke to me.

"You're very beautiful." She had an accent "And I should know," she continued, "I photograph for Vogue." Her voice was soft and lilting, I think she was French.

“But you’re fat.” She was *definitely* French. Also, possibly, a mind reader. I think my head shot right off my neck at that moment. I don’t remember anything for a few of those desperate aching wooden seconds. Who are people who talk to strangers in public restrooms anyway? Especially at nice restaurants. I mean, who are people who even say *nice* things to people in expensive restaurants, let alone people who say horrible hateful things, the kind of things you go your entire life trying to avoid. The kind of things that slice to the quick and gather like little cuts in places people can’t see, until you have so many that you can’t even wear short sleeves anymore. I reeled back, shocked, my head returning to the universe even less sure it belonged there than before.

“What?” was all I could manage.

“I mean it. I have been all over the world and I’m telling you,” she continued not missing a beat yet somehow taking a languid drag off that cigarette, “You are *very* beautiful, stunning really, but you have ruined yourself...why would you do that to yourself?”

French cunt. French cunt. French cunt. French cunt. French cunt.

All I could hear in my head was my raging heartbeat and the ocean outside the window and the door and her pulling on that cigarette with her perfectly poised lips. I said nothing, as the only thing I could think was to yell “French Cunt!” at the top of my lungs and jump her like some kind of white trash WWF wrestler in heat. Who are these people that get to walk about free on the street and cause

this kind of heartbreaking pain to complete strangers. Even at the moment it was happening, my heart pounding in my fingertips and my eyes wet with rage and quiet quiet sadness like blankets laying on top of useless things, I knew that this moment would haunt me forever. To my continuing horror, she wasn't done,

“You know men don't like that,” she said matter-of-factly.

As if in 25 years of broken hopes and promises, love evading me like clever devils hiding in the brush, that the idea had never occurred to me. That I didn't see the disappointment in my own father's kind loving eyes every time he looked my way. That I didn't see in his face the feeling that I had ruined some genetic blessing I had been given, and become something less than others, something I would fight against my whole life. That he and I both knew this tiny fat fact would make everything I did in life like climbing mountains in stiletto heels. I turned away from this woman. This thing. This aberration to the world that had killed a little part of me in that bathroom on that beach and in that moment that I could never get back. I hated her for so long. I hate her still. And I never even looked at her except through that mirror.

I sometimes wonder if she wasn't just me.