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JARDIN

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JARDIN

Two girls sitting on a backless park bench in Paris. They sit side by side, close, studying a magazine or score spread out over their laps. A well-dressed older man approaches, stops in front of them and speaks. They look up only after he's been talking a few moments.

MAN—You make me happy. It makes me happy to see you women sitting here, studying something –you don't laugh, you don't giggle—you're serious. I like it that you're both wearing jeans, one still cobalt, the other faded—deliberately, perhaps—towards sea blue, and you're wearing white sneakers, and fuzzy socks. Yet you don't look at all alike, though you're both wearing long woolen scarves. You're clearly not sisters. You look like the essence of girl, girls in Paris, real ones, ones who are up to something meaningful. True.

FIRST GIRL—What do mean 'true'? How do you know we're true?

MAN—I hope you are, but that's not what I meant. I was commenting on what I had been saying, and observing that what I said was true. You and your friend are what I mean.

SECOND GIRL—How did you know we were Americans?

MAN—I didn't. I spoke to you in English because that is the only language I command. I know a few words of some other languages, but not nearly enough to express my admiration of you, or, more precisely, my admiration of the sight of the two of you sitting here, now.

FIRST GIRL—We're not like that anymore—you've changed all that. You've disturbed the very picture you admired so much. You're like a little boy with a crayon in the Louvre, scribbling on the paintings.

MAN—No I'm not. Am I? I'm sorry. At least you admit you were a pretty picture sitting there.

SECOND GIRL—She never denied it.

FIRST GIRL—In fact I implied it, by likening us to a picture in the Louvre, where they have only the finest pictures. And you spoiled it.

SECOND GIRL—See? Men spoil things.

MAN—True, that's true too. And you're ganging up on me. But that's part of the beauty of you two. You are so much more, shall I say, *picturesque* together than either of you would be separately.

SECOND GIRL—I feel insulted.

MAN—Picturesque doesn't mean more beautiful; it just means 'like a painting.' You are what you are, each of you. But you have put yourselves together on a smooth park bench in the Luxembourg Gardens—you have, in other words, composed yourselves. A composition, a picture. See?

FIRST GIRL—We can't see the picture because we're in it.

SECOND GIRL—We are it.

MAN—Exactly.

FIRST GIRL—So leave us to be the nice picture.

MAN—I like the way both of you have your legs crossed at the knee. But your legs are not very long, so they stick out little, at a 33 degree angle, stay, from the other leg. I like that.

SECOND GIRL—That's very weird. My legs are long enough to reach the ground. Maybe you should start using your legs.

MAN—I am using them. I am standing on them.

FIRST GIRL—I can think of a better use for them.

MAN—Do you want to sit on my knees? There's one for each of you.

FIRST GIRL—Don't go there.

SECOND GIRL—Is that what you want? Is that why you came and talked to us?

MAN—I don't know, I don't think so. I was drawn to the beauty of the image you two formed in my sight—something about your tautly folded bodies, the intensity of your study of what you're reading, it looks like music, is it music? I was drawn to the image. What could be stronger than an image? What I saw meant youth and

hopefulness and art and Paris. Paris the way it looked when I first came to this city a long time ago.

SECOND GIRL—How long ago? Were you here as a child?

MAN—No, I was as much of an adult as I am now. But Paris was very different then.

FIRST GIRL—Was it better then?

MAN—It was different.

SECOND GIRL—There were no internet cafes, no Moroccans, no Tour Montparnasse?

MAN—There were no boulevards, no Métro, no Eiffel Tower.

FIRST GIRL—You know, you're scaring me. How old are you?

MAN—Why should you feel scared?

FIRST GIRL—You don't look that old.

MAN—How old don't I look?

SECOND GIRL—You know what she means, the Eiffel Tower was built in 18-something, more than a hundred years ago, and you're certainly not 100 years old.

MAN—There was no Gare Saint-Lazare, no Arc de Triomphe. But there were wounds...(*thoughtfully, slowly*)...the houses on the streets, you could see bullet holes in them, the stone chipped away, the stucco gouged, and sometimes whole walls would be cracked, who knows how. There were rats. Now the city has learned to hide its wounds, but in the old days that's what you mostly could see, the ravages of time and war, the big bold flourished signature of anger all over everything. People smelled. Not the way of today, where I'd have to nuzzle my face against you, burrow into you, just to smell you at all.

FIRST GIRL—There he goes again!

MAN—Who?

FIRST GIRL—You. You're coming on to us, and in a pretty creepy way.

MAN—Sorry, I was just explaining the difference between what I knew then and what I know now. You could smell a woman from five feet away. It was strange then, intimacy was forced upon you. We didn't have to be naked, or all alone, or in the dark. Whenever anyone was near, you were intimate with them. If intimacy means sharing the knowledge of one another's body. Does it?

SECOND GIRL—Does what?

MAN—Is that what intimacy means?

SECOND GIRL—I don't know. We don't talk about intimacy much anymore. People who talk about intimacy are usually trying to get something.

FIRST GIRL—When did you come to Paris first?

MAN—When I wanted to talk with philosophers and you would call intellectuals. And I wanted to see the noblemen and noblewomen, what you'd call celebrities. Because I lived far away.

SECOND GIRL—You sound American. Is that where you lived?

MAN—I'm glad. I think a lot about America these days. You sound like you're from Boston, right?

FIRST GIRL—Framingham.

MAN—Close enough.

SECOND GIRL—Where are you from originally?

MAN—From my mother's womb.

SECOND GIRL—Smartass. So where was this famous womb when you were getting born?

MAN—Between the horns of her pelvis, beneath the laboring engine of her great heart.

FIRST GIRL—Leave him alone, he's just trying to get us involved. Ignore him. We have to finish this piece.

MAN—So it is music!

SECOND GIRL—No it isn't! It's an advertising layout for a poster.

MAN—Thank you.

SECOND GIRL—You're welcome. What's your name?

MAN—Antoine. You'd say Anthony.

SECOND GIRL—I can say Antoine.

FIRST GIRL—How did you know we're American?

MAN—Because I love you. (*pause*) Understand, I am speaking both abstractly and impersonally.

FIRST GIRL—You love me impersonally. I see.

MAN—No, you don't. I love you plural. Je vous aime, in other words.

FIRST GIRL—I wonder what the love of a man is worth when he doesn't tell us where he's from or what he does.

MAN—If you accept my love (just one love for the two of you, a man has only one love), you'll learn all those boring circumstances.

FIRST GIRL—God damn it, when did you come to Paris. What year?

MAN—Define 'you.'

FIRST GIRL—You, you in front of me right now, you who started this conversation. Who else were we talking about.

MAN—Always and everywhere I have been talking only about you.

FIRST GIRL—The one who just said "I have been talking"—that "I"—when did he, or it, first get to Paris?

MAN—But "I" is such a strange thing; "you" is strange, too, but I is the strangest. Even though it's such a little word, the littlest word of all in written English, even so, there are a lot of people wandering around inside it. Let's say you read a book about Paris during the German Occupation; wouldn't it be true to say that while you were reading the book your mind was in Paris? If so, and your mind is part of you, then isn't it true to say that you were in Paris in 1943—even though you also weren't born till (*pauses, looks at her keenly*) forty-five years later?

SECOND GIRL—But then we could be anywhere at all, at any time!

MAN—Not exactly, because “we” is harder than “I”. You and your friend are in Paris right now, but so am I. Is it proper, or even true, to say that “We” are in Paris now?

SECOND GIRL--Why wouldn't it be?

MAN—You might not want to be a member of a “we” that included me. But I can say –and you can too—that I can be anyplace, anytime. So I can tell you truthfully that I first came to Paris when Stephen Tempier was Archbishop, and Thomas Aquinas was teaching in the schools. They did not get on well together. Something about “Being.” You’ve been to Vassar, you’ll remember more about it than I do.

SECOND GIRL—How do you it’s Vassar? Did my father send you to check up on me, is that what all this is?

MAN—Your father doesn't know I exist. He barely knows that you exist, I'm afraid.

SECOND GIRL—That's the truth.

FIRST GIRL—What is all this about? All this stuff about I and you and being and history....we're right here, right now, and we have a poster to lay out for a series of lectures that begins Wednesday, and you're distracting us.

MAN—Maybe I can help you. What are the lectures about?

FIRST GIRL—Oh just go away!

MAN—But if I do, you'll never know.

FIRST GIRL—I'll come after you then, if I want to.

MAN—But then I'll be a different person, at least I hope so. Change is our only hope! As it is, I'm only the one talking with you and your friend now.

Somewhere else I'll be somebody else. And so will you. We'd pass in the street and never even notice one another. How precious the moment is when we recognize one another!

FIRST GIRL—I suppose so.

SECOND GIRL—You never told us who you are.

MAN—You asked my name and I said Anthony.

SECOND GIRL—Antoine.

MAN—That's right, you remembered. I didn't even ask you your name, or hers.

FIRST GIRL—Don't you want to know?

MAN—Not all that much—a name doesn't last as long as you do.