

*Lettres Américaines: A Yankee in Paris.*

**Letter 1:**

Dear Evelyn,

I arrived today in Paris after many days of travelling. On the way here I couldn't help but feel a sense of trepidation - would this exhausting trip be worth it?

Let me tell you, Evelyn - it was worth it.

Paris is a magnificent city! Upon arriving I was instantly struck by the architecture. Unlike New York, where giant towers of steel pierce the very heavens, Paris feels more personable, warmer even. Brick-laden structures seem to have that effect. If I were to explain it in metaphor... perhaps, New York feels like an inhospitable, cold tundra, with massive spikes of ice jutting out of the ground, while Paris is more like a temperate forest that heats the soul in a comfortable way.

I have learned all this and more just by travelling around the city's boulevards, meandering through beautifully sculpted plazas, glass-roofed promenades, and breathtakingly gorgeous parks. It amazes me that just ten short years ago this was a country subsumed by war.

Speaking of walking, I really must tell you about the people! Here in Paris, the boulevards are lined building to building, with a great mass of bodies that moves forward without ceasing! Quite unlike New York, I must say, where the people are so fast moving and entirely concerned with making money. The people here take things slower, greeting friends they come across, perusing window displays... it all feels so lifelike and full of energy! In fact, the French have a word that describes this very phenomenon! *La foule*, or the crowd!

Such a beautiful language! So many complex ideas, so many fascinating sparks of life, all contained within a single word! Were only English half as eloquent as this beautiful tongue! I

feel so clumsy when I speak it, but from the mouth of a native speaker it is so smooth and elegant!

I truly am having a fantastic time here, Evelyn. My only regret is that you are not with me to experience it as well.

Love,

Paul.

**Letter 4:**

Dear Evelyn,

I am continuing to enjoy my time here.

I spent a large portion of my time today at a *café*, simply watching the crowd continue down the expanse of one of the boulevards.

A beautiful day it was surely not, as the sky had settled with a plaid gray that seemed to suck any vibrancy out of this colorful scene. Yet, I was strangely not bothered by it. Relaxing at a beautiful little shop, feeling the comforting warmth of a mug of coffee in my hands, watching the piping hot steam leisurely puff into the air, and simply watching the spectacle in front of me resulted in a rather satisfying experience.

Really, *la foule* is such a fascinating thing to watch, the mass undulating its way all around the city, people splitting off alone or in small groups to go do any random thing. It consumes everything in its path.

Well, maybe that isn't the right way to put that.

A better description may be that *la foule* envelops everything. I can't help but feel a slight sense of pride when I acknowledge that I too have been part of that wondrous, mystifying body. This is an accomplishment of humanity! The construction of such a wondrous city, filled with wondrous

people... I can starkly believe that more places in the United States have not adapted this method of living!

Watching the boulevards seems to be a rather common practice, even for Parisians. This is a fascination that surely crosses cultural boundaries. Sitting at tables all around me were many different people, simply enjoying life.

And you won't believe it! One of them actually came up to talk to me! He asked me a question in French that I couldn't quite catch, and when I tried to answer in my own broken garble he laughed and started speaking English! He introduced himself as Henri and we struck up quite an interesting conversation about travel and the wonders of the modern world.

I believe I have made my first international friend, and I hope he will be the first of many.

I hope that you have been well.

Love,

Paul.

**Letter 7:**

Dear Evelyn,

What a scandal! What licentious behavior!

Oh, dear Evelyn, I am so glad you are not here, for you would have just attended truly the most whorish display!

I suppose I should explain, otherwise my reaction would be truly perplexing.

Henri invited me to a performance with his friends this evening, and I instantly agreed, as I thought it a good chance to not only make new acquaintances but also to see one of those famed Parisian theaters!

They told me it was a show, and I figured that it would be along the same lines as those of the legendary Broadway... but I couldn't be more wrong.

The venue was breathtakingly beautiful, as are most things in Paris. I could almost feel the history of where we went, almost as if Louis XIV himself had attended performances there! It was packed, too, full of spectators of what would surely be an event to remember.

But, well, it wasn't quite like that. No sooner had the curtains rose that a woman bounded onto the stage wearing the most scandalous thing I have ever seen! I hesitate to call them clothes, they were so... so... My vocabulary fails me!

This woman waltzed into view wearing nothing but a skirt (and I truly hesitate to deign the article with that description!) fashioned of what appeared to be bananas, garishly emblazoned with diamonds, and nothing covering her chest!

I couldn't quite believe my eyes, and I assumed that my opinion would be quite prevalent throughout the room, but when I turned to Henri and his acquaintances they were nothing short of enraptured!

Indeed, this sentiment seemed to grasp every member of the audience, and I began to hear whispers about a créole goddess, a black beauty of primitive make!

I suppose I should have mentioned that she was black, no?

I wanted to leave quite immediately, for this was a scene no civilized person should have watched, but Henri had invited me, and I didn't want to appear rude. I expected an experience of Shakespearian proportions, and was instead greeted by this strange ensemble of foreign music and primitive dancing...

Ah, how tame the pleasures of Broadway seem now!

I do wish I was back home in New York with you, Evelyn.

I consider Henri quite a close friend, but I may need to put some distance between us, if only for a few days.

I hope you have had a much better day than I.

Love,

Paul.

**Letter 8:**

Dear Evelyn,

I was sitting today at my favorite spot along the Boulevard Beaumarchais (incidentally the same place where I met Henri for the first time) when in the newspaper I discovered the name of the woman who so scandalized me the other day.

Apparently, her name is Josephine Baker, which I found to be a rather strange name for a French woman, until I discovered that she is in fact American!

How bizarre, that the French are so obsessed with this woman, who assuredly would garner no additional fanfare in the States! I am indignant, of sorts, that I did not receive the same reaction, despite myself being American!

It seems here in France that a black man or woman is a very rare thing indeed, and something to be in awe of! If they are so fascinated by someone by the color of their skin, why, I invite them to come to America, where on the streets of New York you can find a black man on every corner!

I am afraid Evelyn, that after the theatrical event from a couple of days ago, I cannot help but see sexual imagery in every little thing, even when I did not before.

Indeed, in the very newspaper I read about Ms. Baker, I saw an entire page dedicated to advertisements for products of the sexual nature, and even more damning, addresses for whore

houses! How scandalous is this, where in a newspaper that any child could read, are the street and building numbers that sell dark pleasures of the flesh!

Assuredly, this is a city of sin.

At the very least, there was at least one advertisement that proved to be of a more wholesome nature, for *la Jardin zoologique d'Acclimatation*, which seems to me a very good way to take my mind off of the many things that have been plaguing it as of late.

I hope to see you soon.

Love,

Paul.

**Letter 11:**

Dear Evelyn,

It seems that everywhere I go in this blasted city, I am reminded once again of the French obsession with all things considered exotic.

I was not able to go to the *Jardin zoologique* as quickly as I wanted to, as you have no doubt surmised from my previous letters. Well, had I known what awaited me there, I doubt I would have gone.

Upon reaching my destination, I was greeted by a poster advertising an exhibit that professed to showcase humans, apparently of the Ashanti people! On the poster it showed a number of men and women, dark of skin and dressed in very little, posed in provocative positions that seemed to portray them as primitive and otherworldly!

I was instantly affronted, yet a very little part of me was consumed by savage curiosity to see what this strange showcase entailed.

I'm not sure what I expected, but when I arrived at the enclosure, I was struck by the very number of visitors crowded around it! Even worse was the amount of children, gawking at the people sitting in the exhibit area with wide eyes! Children, Evelyn, children! All of the dark skinned women wore nothing to cover their chests, yet the parents seemed to pay it no heed, instead whispering to each other about these strange people, so different from themselves!

I left quickly, but not before taking one last look at these strange creatures, adorned with tribal wear and garbed in primitive wear made of animal skins. How bizarre!

Upon coming to this city, I have been struck by the difference between it and New York... yet I cannot help but worry that these same scandalous things are occurring all over the world, and even in America.

Ah, I worry for your virtue Evelyn, and that of every young woman who would have to see such things!!

Are all cities bastions of sexual pleasures and fascinations with base aspects of life? I am afraid that it may be the case.

My heart aches to see you again.

Love,

Paul.

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