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EXCERPTED FROM ISSUE 2: **the Prodigal Son's Return**

less days, and ran every morning to catch one of the gigantic, hot buses headed toward the island's various beaches. Paradise and Paraga were close to the center of town and easy to access, but we'd heard about one called "Elia" from Antonios and the locals who'd served us dinner. The buses to Elia were on the other side of the port. We arrived sweaty and surrounded by tan Americans all seeking the same undiscovered beach.

A heavy older woman in a straw hat sat across from us on the bus, a large camera hanging from her leathery neck. It looked like she was traveling alone.

"Wow, you guys are tan! How long you been here?"

R took the bait.

"Just two days. We're leaving tomorrow actually."

"Oh I see. Honeymooners?"

"No," R laughed and looked away from me, out the window of the bus. "We've been studying abroad in London."

"Great city. I was there with my husband a ways back. You two were probably still in diapers. The only city that's prettier in the rain than in the sun, don't you think?" She chuckled and laced her hands over her stomach. I had to ask.

"Where's your husband now?"

She didn't seem surprised. "Oh, you know. The usual. We left each other. I don't mind. Traveling's more fun without someone else's head blocking every sunset, right?" I watched her stomach ripple as she laughed.

Elia was better than the others, but didn't quite live up to our expectations.

The bright reds and oranges of the seats on Virgin Atlantic flight #11 to New York seemed out of place on the chilly London morning as we left. Once again, we'd requested seats next to each other and once again we'd been seated across an aisle. I made sure the row was free of attendants before leaning over towards R, the plane racing down the runway. I wondered if any kiss could really compete with the neon lights of Amsterdam or the Aegean Sea at dawn.

We waited for our luggage inside the dismal waiting room of Newark airport. I wondered if a love this simple had a chance. The grey walls and sad faces of the workers put an end to my wondering. No love is ordinary; we could compete here. And that was a start.

I threw out my guidebook on my way out of the airport, and the pictures I took never made it out of their drugstore envelopes. R bugged me about that all summer.

pick it up if you didn't have to?"

The last time I was in Paris, I thought the mixture of freshly baked bread and dog 'merdre' was somehow fragrant in this city of love. Funny how romantic ideals are only emphatic when there isn't any romance. Now it just smelled awful.

"This is it, I see the street name, Rue de Montparnasse."

"The Comfort Inn – Sacre Coeur?"

"No, the one . . . next to it." I pointed to a pale pink townhouse with ornate, rusted iron fixtures around each window. I thought it was gorgeous.

"Maybe we could stay in the Comfort Inn?" R said, putting down my overpacked suitcase.

"No, no, no, this is the point. We're gonna be starving artists in Montmartre, we're going somewhere where they barely understand us. We're going somewhere with no TV. That's the point. It's Paris."

The truth was, R couldn't afford to stay anywhere else, so I'd created the image of romantic Parisians living in poverty to passively force him into a realistic budget.

I used my sad version of Franglais to convince the owner of the building to give us a room. A 5th story walk-up sans bathroom. The shower cost 2 euros, and was on the first floor. I thought it was hilarious – we opened the windows and let the February breeze come in the room, collapsing on the squeaky bed.

The next day we planned on faithfully adhering to the guidebook's list of Parisian activities: the Eiffel Tower, the Sacre Couer, the Luxembourg Gardens and the Ile de France. But we decided to eat brunch first in one of the outdoor heated cafés near our hotel.

As soon as R realized the 7-euro meal contained only a few baguettes, a croissant and bitter, black coffee, he started pouting.

"I can't believe they don't even give you eggs," he complained.

"Well, we're not in New Jersey. It's not like we're at Perkins. Do you really want to feel like you're at Perkins in Paris?"

"I just want eggs." He crossed his arms.

I tried poking him in the face with my baguette. I thought this might elicit a smile. Instead, he swatted it away like a fly, sending it clear across the café floor. I looked at where it had landed, next to the foot of an elderly French man, enjoying a smoke with his croissant. A small bulldog with sad, watery black eyes sat loyally by the man's feet. It looked at me curiously before nibbling delicately at the baguette. I gave up.

"Ok, that's great. So here are the keys, and here's the map. I'm going to see the Gardens." I rose from my chair.

"You're not seriously leaving me