



JE NE T'AIME PLUS

STEPHANE [04/10/2005 2:42 PM]

Are we still on for tonight?
We need to talk.

“Je ne t’aime plus.”

What do you mean . . . you don't love me anymore? I sat there, dumbfounded, staring at my boyfriend—or rather, my **ex**-boyfriend—his words slowly sinking in. Once they had, the emotional floodgate opened, unleashing hot tears streaming down my cheeks.

What did he just say? He had never said that he *did* love me, so how could he *not* love me anymore? While I was trying to grapple with this unpleasant detail, another one hit me. *Hey! I was being broken up with!* This made me cry even harder.

Here I was, in my tiny Parisian apartment, overlooking the eternal City of *Amour*, which had just transformed into the City of *Désamour*, as I was now unloved, dumped, ditched, or, in French: *larguée*.

This wasn't how things were supposed to happen.



PARIS JE T'AIME . . . ?

ROBERTO [04/12/05 12:05 AM]

A beautiful woman in Paris will
always attract the attention of men!
Big kiss, Roberto

“*MEN!*”

“I’m okay, Naughty. It’s really for the best.” I sighed, looking into my empty wine glass.

“You’re right, you don’t want to date a Frenchie anyway,” declared Special Kay, topping me up. “They only tear out girls’ hearts and rip them to pieces!” And with that severe statement, she emptied the rest of the bottle into her glass.

“Hey! You forgot me!” piped up Pussycat, holding out her equally dry glass, and with that we uncorked another bottle of *Saint Amour*. At least our favorite beverage would always be there for us, but would this be the only place we’d find a little *amour*?

My sad eyes drifted from my faithful friends towards the window. My *chambre de bonne* apartment (former maid’s quarters) situated under the rooftops of Montmartre might have been tiny, but the impressive view went on forever. Out there was a majestic, twinkling city—full of passionate promise. I couldn’t help but agree that Paris really was the

romantic capital of the world. It wasn't just the beautiful buildings and picturesque passageways. There was something more, a special ambience that the city exuded. Love could practically be found around every corner, and romantic impulses could strike at any moment: a chance encounter in a park with a sexy stranger . . . a flirtatious *bonjour* . . . an offer to grab a drink. These were the sort of events my dear friend Roberto noted in his text message, sent from the opposite side of the *métro* platform while surveying how the passenger next to me was checking me out, edging closer and closer to me, preparing to make a move.

Was this passion merely the way of the city, or was it something rooted in French culture? I thought it had to be a bit of both, or at least a case of cause and effect. Did the French live for love? Were they more passionate—in all senses of the word—than other nationalities? French *amour*, in its most intense forms, has been expressed throughout the ages in fables, literature, art, film and song: the 11th-Century loyal lovers Abélard and Héloïse; the powerful mistresses of the kings; and, of course, the tortured Victorian-era fictional heroine Madame Bovary. For me, the anti-hero of the sexual revolution, Serge Gainsbourg, and his erotic, contradictory song—*Je t'aime, moi non plus* (I Love You, Me Neither)—summed up the situation accurately. The power of love can compel a French person to quickly throw out a “*je t'aime!*” after only a few dates, but the reverse passion can just as easily incite them to declare a “*je ne t'aime plus*” . . .

Such was my current predicament, but why? I seemed to have had this sort of very innate “*je t'aime, je ne t'aime plus*” and other strong French tendencies in me since the minute I was born . . .

I was convinced that the stork must have downed one glass of *rosé* too many on that hot August night when he delivered me. Instead of gently setting me down in an elegant Parisian apartment, with carefully polished parquet floors, molded ceilings and large “French” windows overlooking the Seine (and why not throw in the Eiffel Tower, too), I got plunked down on an old farm, in the middle of nowhere: rural Canada.

I couldn't have been further from my “true” home. Bohemian cafés and tree-lined boulevards had been swapped with rolling fields and endless forests; baguettes and Camembert were eclipsed by fresh corn on the cob and cheddar cheese. Nevertheless, my “French-ness” began manifesting itself at a young age.

At five, I held dainty tea parties for my French *poupées* (wine replaced tea in the adult versions with my Parisian *amies*). At nine, I ended up enrolled in the very first French immersion program in my tiny country town (I ask myself often if it was started just for me). At 12, I dressed up as a “fancy lady from Paris” for Halloween (a little more of the *real* me coming out). At 16, a psychic prophetically foretold me living and finding love in a faraway land (concrete proof!). I thus immediately set out to find a way to Europe and managed to send myself away on a student exchange. Well, I ended up in Italy instead of France, but I was getting close, and was teased by a one-week class trip to Paris with my Italian school: I was in a state of *je t'aime* bliss! At university, I finally succeeded in living in Paris, once again on a semester abroad (though I can't say we seriously studied anything besides French oenology and the best ways to flirt with the cute Argentinean boys in our residence). I was truly in

seventh heaven, in perfect *paradis*. I knew I'd found my rightful home and would live one day *je t'aime*-ingly ever after.

After university, I found that the fastest way back to Paris (without having to marry myself off) was to sustain myself through various means. I did everything from teaching English for a school I found out was owned by Scientologists (a revelation learned only after locking myself into a long-term contract), to working another teaching gig at a faraway suburban university run by a creepy womanizer. Then there was translating painfully boring medical articles interspersed with a slightly more glamorous stint as a horribly under-paid art gallery slave. What I did for a living didn't really matter: I was in *my* city.

But here I was receiving a *je ne t'aime pas*. Did my city really **not** love me anymore? Its sparking optimism told another story. My gaze wandered back into the room and to *les filles*. I struggled out a smile. At least the girls—and the *Saint Amour*—would help me forget my current woes.

“Come on, cheer up!” pepped Pussycat.

“Lily, you know what you need? A spicy summer fling. Spring is in full swing. The ground is perfectly fertile, ready for sowing a few seeds of *amouuur*, ripe for the picking in summer,” said Naughty—quite, well, naughtily. “That will make you forget about Stéphane in no time.”

Stéphane—the source of my present heartache. In all honesty, the flame between me and my unaffectionate ex-boyfriend (how oddly un-French) had been dwindling for some time. My natural French-ness should have allowed me to confidently declare, “*je ne t'aime plus*.” Unfortunately, that particular capacity was over-ruled by my Canadian indecisiveness and passivity, which made me completely

incapable of breaking up with anyone. I usually resorted to the cowardly tactic of not returning phone calls, or texting ridiculous excuses as to why I was suddenly never available (washing my hair, babysitting a friend's pet iguana, off in the Arctic protecting baby seals . . . to name a few). I had even once shamefully broken up with someone by posted letter (which horrifically arrived on Valentine's Day, even though I'd planned for it to arrive several days *before*. Curse you, late postal service!). Yet, after dating for nearly two years, Stéphane and I had passed the point where any of those awful maneuvers would be even mildly acceptable. This break up had to be done in person and, in the end, he'd beat me to the “*je ne t'aime plus*.” I actually wasn't really heartbroken; I had a serious case of “bruised ego blues.”

Gazing down into my now half-empty glass of *Saint Amour*, it was almost like it was smiling up at me, agreeing with Naughty's idea with chipper exclamations: *Yes! A summer fling would be perfect! Exciting! Adventurous!* That is exactly how a little fling should be and that is precisely what the French call it: *une aventure*. The love vibes of the city could surely throw an attractive, fun, interesting *homme* my way. The sensual wheels of my mind began to spin wildly.

“Well, girls, what's life without a little *aventure*?” I finally replied with sassy conviction, ready to take on the challenge. In fact, I already had the perfect candidate in mind . . .



A MAYAN GOD UNDER THE PARISIAN SUMMER SUN

— I'll dance if you sing —

*Private dances, concerts and serenading . . . this was what
a summer fling was supposed to be all about. May my quest begin!*



Since living in Paris, I'd tried my best to have French friends, and somewhat succeeded in befriending a few *Parisiennes* (and befriending—and romancing—even more *Parisiens*). Nevertheless, my world tended to revolve around the expatriate crowd. Case in point? The girls: Naughty, a seductive dance student from Toronto who'd earned her nickname from enticing boys on the dance-floor merely to practice her new moves; Pussycat, a secretly seductive photographer from Montréal; and Special Kay, a former cheerleader turned health-nut from California.

Over the last few years, I'd been organizing social activities for “the Canadian Club”—a group of hodge-podge expats—rather than just Canadians. While we did all kinds of non-Canadian things, one of our main activities was a monthly meet-up at a Canadian pub called *The Reindeer*. Located in the

fashionable Saint Germain area, it was a place of stark contrast to the chic neighboring Parisian cafés. As soon as you walked through its door, you were instantly transported into an overwhelming Canadian cliché, with sports paraphernalia plastering the walls and pseudo-Canadian specialties on the menu . . . but a little taste of our native land did us good now and then.

I have to admit that I favored meeting at this kitschy bar mainly because I had a secret crush (well, my adoration might not have been completely secretive) on a particularly attractive bartender who worked there. He didn't look very "Canadian"; he was far from the broad-shouldered hockey-player types found working in most *real* Canadian bars. This was not to his detriment: his different looks gave him extra bonus points in my book. He had a nicely muscular build, olive skin, dark silky hair tucked behind his ears, and a killer smile . . . the perfect image of a seductive garden/pool boy. He fit the "fun summer fling" bill to a T.

After a bit of investigating, I found out that he was indeed not Canadian, but Mexican. Odd that he was working in a Canadian pub and not a Mexican one; he was totally adorable, I didn't care one *peso* where he came from. Being Mexican actually upped his value for me, and it gave him an exotic edge! In addition to his dashing good looks, he was always extremely sweet to me and often slipped me free drinks—a man after my own heart! Was he just being kind or did we share a mutual attraction? I was determined to find out.

I took extra care getting myself ready for my first "being single" pub night. I had to dress to impress, or rather, to seduce. No casual Canadian-wear for me. That said, it was only a Wednesday night (a.k.a. more of a casual night) so I

couldn't look like I was trying too hard. I thus opted for a cute floral skirt and a slightly low-cut black top. This might be the right combo to capture some south-of-the-border prey. It was time to spice up my life with a little *caliente* Mexican seasoning!

I waltzed into the pub in the most nonchalant way I could, trying not to look directly at the bar where my sexy bartender would be. My bait worked, for I instantly caught his eye.

"Hey there, Lily *la Tigresse!*" he shouted enthusiastically. I turned my head in his direction, feigning surprise at seeing him, then strutted over to the bar to say hello.

"Wow! Don't you look pretty tonight!" he complimented, leaning over the bar to give me a kiss on each cheek, surely inflaming them. *You are also looking absolutely divine, Mr. Sexy Bartender*, I thought.

After making it through some petty small talk without fainting, I swooned over to the girls . . . "Isn't he *sooo* cute?"

"Lily, stay away from bar boys. You should know better. They're nothing but trouble," warned Naughty. "And besides, you don't even know his name."

"Since when has that ever stopped *you?*" I scoffed back. "Remember, I'm just looking for a little pick-me-up *fling.*"

Nonetheless, this time she was right; I didn't have the slightest clue as to Mr. Sexy Bartender's name and I couldn't very well just go around calling him "Mr. Sexy Bartender." But this was not a huge problem; his name could easily be obtained. It just so happened that we were hanging out near the bar, so I discretely listened for any name-calling from the other side.

"Hey, Sam, two pints over here." *Sam?* Well, there you go, his name was Sam. He didn't really look like a Sam and it wasn't a very Spanish-sounding name, but did it really matter?

Sexy Sam, Seductive Sam, Succulent Sam . . . it had a nice ring to it.

I was totally smitten. Sam was more than perfect for my summer fling. To achieve my goal, I started hanging out at *The Reindeer* at least once a week, sometimes twice. I even succeeded in finding out which nights he worked, and dragged the girls there as often as I could, and it seemed that on each new visit, the flirt meter fluttered higher and higher. Despite this, words never turned into actions. What did I have to do to win him over? Something would have to give, and soon.

"Lily, he could just be flirting for more tips. He's a bartender in France after all; he needs to work extra hard for them over here," said Naughty, who was still totally against my Mexican heartthrob. "He may even have a girlfriend, which we all know certainly doesn't stop guys in Paris from flirting with other girls."

"Stop spoiling my fun! Haven't you seen the way he looks at me? And he's 10,000 times nicer to me than he is to anyone else," I retorted, attempting to plead my case.

"Is that so? Well perhaps you're blinded by love, but he keeps going over to talk to that girl sitting at the end of the bar."

I wasn't blind at all. In fact, I *had* noticed that Sam had been chatting a lot to this other girl sitting all by herself at the end of the bar . . . very, very suspicious. I hadn't seen her around before . . . who could she be? I had to stay calm, as cool as a Cosmo. I could not let myself be overcome by jealousy. Ordering another cocktail would help my nerves . . . and tear Sam away from the possible threat. I flagged him down in the least desperate way possible.

While he was making my drink, I fished around for some

answers. "So, what have you been up to these days?" I coyly inquired, leaning seductively against the bar.

"Actually, I've been showing my cousin around, and practicing for the concert."

I gave Naughty an "I told you so" smirk. Obviously the girl at the end of the bar was his cousin and not his *girlfriend*. And did I catch the second part right? *A concert?*

"*Obbbbb*, when's your concert?"

"We're playing for the 80's theme party in two weeks," he announced, proudly pointing to the nearby poster. "Are you coming?"

"Of course we are, aren't we?" I enthusiastically confirmed, alternately nodding my head at both Sam and Naughty.

"I guess we are . . . now," Naughty smugly conceded.

Wow! Sam was a musician, how exciting, how sexy! I imaged myself being serenaded with love songs in Spanish while lazily lounging in a beautiful Parisian park—perfect summer-fling-ness. And through more flirtatious chatting, I also discovered that he was not just a bartender, but was actually only working there to put himself through business school. Creative, smart, hardworking, charming, I was totally sold! . . . And counting down the days until the 80's night.

Paris in the springtime is absolutely the best time of the year to be in love. The city suddenly awakens from hibernation. After the chilly gray winter months, everyone's sexual appetites stir. Short skirts pop out of closets about as quickly as the cherry trees bloom, much to the approval of eager male admirers, allowing Paris to regain its title as the city of *amour* after a long winter's rest. With all that love in the air, it was easy for me to be swept up in the excitement.

One especially lovely sunny afternoon, the weather was just too nice for me to take the *métro* to my next appointment, so I decided to walk, soaking up the glorious rays along the way. I haphazardly chose my path, following the sunniest streets, and eventually ended up around Les Halles, a busy pedestrian area in central Paris, home to a dilapidated shopping mall and narrow streets lined with cheap street-wear clothes shops. All of this tackiness and hustle and bustle were completely eclipsed by the gorgeous weather.

As I strolled through the crowded streets, I was pulled out of my sunny dreams by the sight of an amazing dark-haired cutie, armed with a guitar, walking straight towards me. Stunned, it took me a minute to decide whether I'd come across either the reincarnation of the Mayan god of music or . . . *Sam*? Could it really be him? Our paths crossing in such a hectic area—was this destiny calling? The deity in question also did a double-take when he saw me. Realizing he had seen correctly (that he was indeed approaching a charming northern princess), a huge, handsome smile spread across his face. He seemed absolutely thrilled to see me, too. He was with some friends, but took a second to say “hi” and give me *la bise*, the French cheek kiss, before we rushed off in our respective directions.

That completely made my day! I was probably the happiest person on earth . . . or at least in Paris! Being a staunch believer in fate, I took this chance encounter as a definite sign that something was bound to and *meant* to happen between us.

I dragged Naughty, Pussycat and Special Kay to the 80's night, but the bar was so packed that I didn't have many chances to talk to Sam. Even so, Sam's performance was spectacular and the more I saw him, the more I was 100%

positive that he was destined to be my fling (or maybe even more!). As convinced as I was, I did realize that there was a tiny glitch in my plans—why hadn't he made a move? He really seemed to like me (as more than a friend) and I'd given him plenty of opportunities to ask me out. Maybe he was shy? Cautious about putting moves on clients? Naughty suggested that he might even be gay, but then again, she thought half the guys in Paris were gay (I had to admit, they often could be a bit on the feminine side). Or could it be that he had . . . a *girlfriend*?

During the next Canadian Club get-together at *The Reindeer*, I made the mistake of mentioning my concern to Naughty, who promptly took it upon herself to find out the truth. “When he's not around, I'll just ask one of the waitresses if he's already taken,” she schemed.

“Not if I'm here to stop you!” I was completely against her plot, but my pleas fell on deaf ears. I didn't want the bar staff to think I was the reason behind her inquiring; it seemed like junior high school antics, and I didn't want to be the pathetic drooling admirer of a girl-friended Sam.

“Okay, okay, I won't ask anyone tonight. I'll come back with Special Kay in a few days without you and find out then.” This caused raised eye-brows and attempted protests from Kay that were quickly quelled by Naughty, who was determined to carry out her new mission.

I agreed on her compromise and stayed home, thoroughly mortified by her plan, yet impatient about learning her findings. Actually, part of me almost didn't want to know; I was quite happy living in my little Mexican dream world. He couldn't have a girlfriend. It was obvious that he equally adored me . . . *right*?

The next day I checked in for their report.

“So, we managed to talk to someone.”

“You didn’t mention *me*, did you?” I would never be able to go back in there if Sam found out.

“Well, we sat down at a discreet table and ordered some drinks. As soon as we felt it was safe, we stopped a waitress. I said that I had ‘a friend’ who thought Sam was cute and was wondering if he happened to be single. Since I was with Special Kay, the waitress probably thought she was ‘the friend!’”

Poor Special Kay—she didn’t deserve to get pulled into this. She was highly selective when it came to men; I doubted she would be caught dead dating a bartender, even if he was absolutely to die for. Kay was looking for a sweet Frenchman to marry, yet she kept going out with her boss’s evil son, hence her current bitterness and weariness towards *mankind*.

“And so . . .?” Even if I was against her tactics, I couldn’t hold out any longer.

“She didn’t know a Sam! They don’t have a Sam working there!”

“What do you mean?” I asked, baffled.

“His name isn’t Sam . . . it’s *Julio!*”

Julio? It seemed that I needed to get my hearing checked. Well, at least Julio made more sense for a Mexican name than Sam. And Julio was much more fitting for a ravenous lover’s name. How tempting and exciting: *Jullllllio*.

I came back down to earth and to the *real* question at hand: “And so . . . did she know if *Julio* has a girlfriend?”

“Well, once we got the name settled and she realized who we were asking about, she confirmed that he indeed has a girlfriend.”

My heart sank deep, deep, down into the bottom of my chest. That was **not** good news. I’d been totally convinced that he was supposed to be my summer fling. Fate had handed him to me on a silver platter . . . well, more like a beer tray. Or rather not at all—I’d been deceived by destiny! *Woe was totally me!* But wait a second! I couldn’t give up just like that. What did this waitress know? Maybe she’d gotten confused over the purported Sam aka Julio and just said whatever came to mind. That was possible . . . *right?* Or maybe *she* had a secret crush on Julio and wanted to stave off any possible female threats? Yes, that was more like it. The girl was clearly completely untrustworthy.

I would not and could not lose hope. We all agreed that he flirted much more with me than he should if he really had a girlfriend; and, he gave me far more attention than any other girl in that bar.

One Friday night, I went to the pub with a few of the girls. It wasn’t such a busy night so I got a chance to chat up Julio. Too much time had gone by since our doomed flirting had begun. Summer was nearing and I needed to get my fling started! I had to make my move that night. Another Cosmo would help.

While he was preparing my drink, our conversation got a little heated, and I wasn’t the only one throwing logs on the fire!

“So, Julio, when’s your next concert? I would love to hear you perform again,” I pitched.

“Well, we aren’t really a band, but I hope to play again soon. Or else, I’m available for private performances . . .”

“Oh, really? What *kind* of performances?”

“Well, I could dance, if someone would sing for me . . .”

Je T'Aime, Me Neither

he said, with a sly little smile.

"I'm not a very good singer, but I *am* a good dancer and I could also be a very good audience. When can I arrange a private show?" I dared, leaning closer to him over the bar, inches from his succulent lips.

"Any time you want," he proposed, staring me straight in the eyes. *Wow, hot stuff. I was absolutely, divinely melting! A private dance with Julio?* Locked with Julio in a shared gaze, I turned the *risqué* level up a notch.

"Is that so? How about after work . . . tonight?" I couldn't believe I'd just said that . . . and I think he couldn't either. We were frozen in an intense moment, painfully shattered by a drink request from the other end of the bar.

I can be remarkably daring when the occasion calls, which it has a few times in my life. Tonight was about to make its way onto that list. Time was ticking by and the girls wanted to leave to catch the last *métro* home. I had to act—it was now or (*maybe*) never. I grabbed our drink bill, turned it over and scribbled down my number as Julio was coming back over.

"When you finish work, I'd love to take you up on that dance offer." And with that I slid the precious piece of paper across the bar. He picked it up and had a look. Now it was his turn to blush.

"Hope to see you later," I said, with my own sly little smile as I turned towards the door.

Had I really just given him my number? On my way home to the northern steeps of Montmartre, I was both extremely nervous and on an incredible high. *Was he going to call? Had I shaved my legs that morning? Was I wearing sexy underwear?*

That was the first time I'd offered out my number without being asked for it . . . and it would **be the last**. Once home,

April Lily Heise

I stayed up for a good hour or so fretting, awaiting his call—however, my phone lay silent. Nor did he call in the nights or weeks that followed. My hopes were utterly and irrevocably dashed. I'd gotten it wrong—*but how?* What had happened to fate? Could it be possible that Julio didn't like me after all?

Sadly, I had to accept that Julio was not meant to be my summer fling. There would be no declarations of *je t'aime*, or in this case, *ti amo*. I would eventually, *somehow*, get over him. I hated to admit it, but Naughty was right; I had to stay away from bar boys; that was surely the problem. Though slightly depressed, I couldn't let this little defeat get me down—I merely had to come up with some good resolutions to help me find an even **better** candidate for my summer fling. But, the question remained: could I find another *petit dieu* with as much sexy godliness as my little Mayan God of Music?



DAVE [05/13/05 7:52 PM]

Care to meet up at the Rendez-vous
for a drink? Would love to see you.

Summer Fling Resolutions - May

- Stay away from sexy bartenders (or maybe just Mexican ones?)
 - or maybe more globally, stay away from bar-boys altogether
 - or even bars (nah, too restrictive, perhaps just Canadian bars?)
- Don't fall under spell of sexy charm (so hard not to!— this will be a tough one)
- Don't disregard carefully-obtained information such as "Yes, he has a girlfriend"
- If potential candidate has a girlfriend (don't waste so much time next time!)
- Don't blindly believe in fate!
- Don't give out phone number before being asked for



MUY CALIENTE?

BOBBIE [05/22/05 1:24 PM]

Hola Guapa. I hope your Saturday was good! I'm doing fine, well rested! I hope to see you as soon as you have time in your busy schedule! Kisses

"I don't think we should be doing this . . ." uttered a faint voice from the back seat.

"Don't worry, we'll be fine. Besides, the two of us could take him, hands down," I whispered back.

Do you remember what your mother always told you when you were a kid? Never talk to strangers, never take candy from them (did free drinks fall into this category?), and above all, never ever get into strangers' cars (did "never go home with them" come after this?).

I gave Naughty a reassuring smile. For now, we'd only broken the first and third rules. Here we were in a slightly beat-up little red car, zooming through the empty Paris streets as dawn was slowly waking up some people, and putting others, ourselves included, to bed. To bed . . . *but where?*

"Come on, *pleeease* . . . we take your friend home and I make you breakfast at my place," pleaded our Spanish drier, one hand on my leg, one hand on the steering wheel, eyes wavering dangerously in between.

I shot a somewhat less reassuring glance back at panic-stricken Naughty. How did we end up in this mess? How had our mothers' concerned advice slipped our minds? A long night and numerous Mojitos were certainly to blame!



Saturday night had rolled around and Naughty and I were out loose on our own. Naughty never missed a chance to go dancing, and as Special Kay (who, like her taste in men, was also more selective with her music styles) had other plans for the evening, salsa dancing was the first suggestion on Naughty's lips. *Por qué no?* I hadn't been salsa dancing, and in particular back to *La Piñata*, since Kay and I had gone out there a few Halloweens ago. On that occasion, another random Spanish-speaking *chico* had tried to tempt me with his "breakfast menu." This one was not so difficult to turn down, given that he was sporting a plastic witch-hat-and-hair combo as a costume. On the other hand, *La Piñata* was only a few streets away from *The Reindeer*, and thus a stone's throw from memories of Julio . . . perhaps this night would give me a chance to find a new *corazón*.

My spirits instantly perked up with the fiesta energy of *La Piñata*; the lively Latino rhythms blasting through the air summoned us to the dance floor. Salsa imperatively involves dancing with a partner, usually of the opposite sex, so we'd spent the night swapping overly sweaty, overly friendly dance partners until one overstayed his one-dance quota. This was Bobbie from Madrid. I immediately wondered where on earth

he got such an oddly un-Spanish name. Was it a nickname? My querying was the result of my past mix-up over Sam/Julio. A later glance at his passport proved that this was indeed his real first name—his parents must have taken some good drugs back in the seventies or else were extremely fond of the English language.

Had I found a real Latin lover this time? Was I just trying to make up for the Julio upset? Julio was pretty hard to replace. Granted, if I were a reasonable person, I might have stayed away from all Spanish-speaking *bombres* after my last experience, but that wasn't really fair. I couldn't let Julio give them *all* a bad name either. Maybe Bobbie would be different.

Back on the *caliente* dance floor, I had managed to engage in a little conversation with him. It turned out that he'd been working in Paris for a few years, was about my age, and liked dancing . . . *bmmm, maybe he was worth a try?* He was rather cute, friendly and had a terribly sexy accent. And, to his credit, up to that point, he hadn't put on any sly moves.

As the night was rapidly becoming morning, Naughty and I decided it was time to leave the club. Bobbie said that he had a car and with true Spanish chivalry, offered to drive us home. Finding a taxi at that hour in Paris was always a daunting task, so we accepted his invitation. It seemed like a good idea at first—that was, until we were en route and he began insistently begging me to go home with him. Naughty's roommate was away for the weekend and we'd planned to have a sleepover at her place. As it was, we would have to make do with the few hours we had left of the night/morning and it was out of the question that I ditch her for some *chico* I'd just met (unless he'd been Julio's twin brother, of course).

"*Please . . .* I make a good breakfast. I get fresh croissants

at the bakery. Do you prefer tea or coffee . . . ?”

“But she can’t!” piped up Naughty. “We are both having lunch tomorrow with my . . . aunt. She’s in Paris only for the, *umm*, the weekend and she’s expecting us promptly at . . . ten.”

Good one, Naughty. Now we just had to make the story believable and stick to it.

“Yes, I love her aunt. It’s so great that she’s in Paris,” I added. “She would be really disappointed if we, I mean, I didn’t go for lunch. You see, she rarely comes to visit and I haven’t seen her in a really long time.” *More like never before in my entire life—so I wasn’t really lying then, was I?*

“But I can take you there . . . *after* breakfast,” rebutted Bobbie, trying to seal the deal with his cutest smile.

“Oh, I wouldn’t want to trouble you. She lives—I mean she’s *staying*—right near Naughty’s place. And it’s very, very far from where you live,” I continued. Would that be enough to subdue him?

“It’s more than near—she’s staying in the same building!” tacked on Naughty. Okay, maybe our story was getting a little far-fetched.

“But it’s too sad to end such a wonderful evening . . .” he declared, caressing my cheek.

“She **HAS** to come with me!” cried Naughty, reaching a new level of panic.

“She’s right. I really must go. But we can have breakfast another time,” I promised, hoping that this would finally satisfy him.

Luckily, we were nearing Naughty’s building in the posh 16th *arrondissement* of Paris, which was still soundly asleep (at least until Bobbie’s rattling car had noisily raced by). Only

a few more of these snooty streets left to hold him off.

“It’s so nice of you to drive us home,” I thanked him sweetly.

“Yes, my aunt will be happy to know we made it back safely. You can drop us off right here!” ordered Naughty, her stress level reaching its ultimate height.

With numbers exchanged and a quick kiss goodbye, we jumped out of his dingy, double-parked car, trying to avoid smacking the door into the adjacent row of neatly parked Mercedes and BMWs. We scurried inside, praising Naughty’s good aunt who’d saved the day—or rather, helped us with our early morning escape from Breakfast with Bobbie.

After an all-too-brief sleep, Naughty and I groggily crawled out of bed for our aunt-less, Bobbie-less brunch on the sunny terrace. There, I had the whole city before me. The lazy Seine River, lined with its docked *péniche* houseboats, and peppered with touristy *bateaux-mouches*. Beyond them lay the imposing *la Grande Dame de Paris*: the Eiffel Tower. Further afield, we could glimpse the shiny dome of Les Invalides, and further off into the distance, the snowy dome of Sacré Cœur Basilica crowning Montmartre. The glistening city looked so perfect; I wished my mind could have reflected this same glorious peaceful state.

“Naughty, I don’t know if I really want to see this guy again or not.” There it was—my inevitable indecisiveness surfacing.

“Well, he did seem pretty clingy. I’d watch out for that. But at least he’s not a bartender, and he *is* a good dancer . . .” This latter factor granted him an automatic first approval from Naughty. *Hmmm . . . what did I have to lose?* He might turn out to be a really great guy, and the perfect little pick-me-up

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summer fling that I was looking for. He wasn't as incredibly sexy as Julio, but maybe that was part of Julio's problem: he was just too darn adorable for his (and my) own good.

BOBBIE [05/17/05 8:43 PM]

Free for a Spanish dinner
one of these nights?

Bobbie had kindly offered to make me an authentic Spanish dinner, an invitation I really couldn't refuse. By sending me a message within two days, and trying to invite me to dinner instead of skipping straight to the whole breakfast thing again, he earned some major points!

However, in focusing on these positive points, I naively skipped over one major factor that would later surface—during our date.



We decided on the following Friday night, the best option in spite of the fact that I had to teach at the University the next morning. On the other hand, my class could provide me with a good excuse to make it an early night.

BOBBIE [05/18/05 9:33 PM]

Great! You don't need bring
anything. Just your pretty
blonde self! A vendredi!

Abbb, flattery! That immediately won him some more points. But upon learning where he lived, he almost lost them again. Bobbie lived in one of the sketchiest areas of Paris:

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the northeast of the city. Its aging high-rise apartment blocks were a far cry from the picturesque postcard Paris I'd been admiring from Naughty's balcony the previous weekend. It wasn't necessarily a dangerous place, but nonetheless, it was a district where being "your pretty blonde self" can often draw unwanted attention. While being far from an elitist, I did care about my personal safety! I decided that I would take the risk and venture into this potentially perilous territory. It couldn't be that bad, and it was for a good cause . . . *right?*

That Friday night, at precisely ten minutes after the assigned rendezvous time, I made my way up the *métro* steps under the gawking stare of the crowd of men loitering around the *métro* entrance, cat-calling or hissing at any attractive damsel exiting the station. *Yuck!* This was not the ideal way to start off my evening, but the creepy men quickly slipped out of my mind when I saw Bobbie's enthusiastic smile.

"*Bonsoir ma Tigresse!*" He greeted me with a smooth kiss on each cheek before rapidly whisking me away to the safe haven of his nearby second-floor abode. After a quick tour of his place and a rapid scan of his bookshelf (he scored some more points with a good collection of French and Spanish literature and no photos of possible girlfriends or children left behind in Madrid), we settled down on the sofa.

It was *apéro* time, which normally involves, oh, I don't know, something to drink such as *vino* or *cerveza*, and usually accompanied by olives, peanuts or chips . . . and don't the Spanish do tapas? It seemed that this tradition hadn't been imported by this particular Spaniard, as the only thing served for *apéro* appeared to be . . . **ME!** And Bobbie was hungry! *Hold on there . . . we hadn't even finished with the basic small talk.* I managed to remove him from my lips to ask him a few

questions about himself. At that moment, remembering that he had, in fact, invited me over for dinner, Bobbie broke out some flat soda from the fridge. Where was the vodka to go with it? And the munchies?

I managed to learn a bit more about him while pretending to enjoy my deflated *eau-de-Sprite*. Time was getting on and, true to Spanish eating habits, he got up to get dinner ready around 10:30 pm. Bobbie had promised me a traditional Spanish meal. When I'd told him via text message that I was vegetarian, he had said *no problema*—he'd make *tortilla* (in Spain, this is a thick omelet made of egg and potato). Great! That sounded yummy. I'd never had a real homemade one prepared by the loving hands of an actual Spaniard, and was looking forward to it.

From the kitchen, my cute chef sounded hard at work with the clanking of pots and pans, when he suddenly popped his head out:

"I had a busy day at work, and didn't have time to go shopping, but luckily I already had this one," Bobbie proudly declared, showing off a packaged *tortilla* from the local discount supermarket. Points were rapidly plummeting from his previously adequate score.

"I also forgot to get some wine, but very luckily again, I have some left from a few nights ago."

WHAT? Pre-made tortilla and left-over wine? Those offerings certainly didn't pass, especially considering that there was a nice, big, *fancy* supermarket right across the street from his place. He must have had a siesta or two during a few crucial classes of "Dating 101" and "Wining and Dining 202." Not wanting to be too snobbish, I smiled and shrugged it off. Besides, my grumbling stomach and increasing doubts about

this guy called for an immediate remedy—days-old wine would have to do. We finished our tortilla and green salad (i.e., lettuce), talking about a variety of mediocre subjects. He cleared our plates and came back only with his big smile. No dessert? No *digestivo*? *Nada*? Once again, I brushed it off; maybe he was just not much of a cook . . . or host . . . or out to impress me at all.

We retired to the sofa. After we had managed to talk for a few minutes, he pulled his Latin lover card again, stronger than before. If he had impressed me with dinner, he probably would have had more instant luck, but he had lost most of his good points and would have to work hard to get them back. Talk or flattery would have to come first. Detaching the lip-suction, I got his lips moving in another way.

"So, what are your life's ambitions?" I was hoping to spark up conversation by asking him stupid questions, but only had the time to ask two before he attacked me again. Struggling to back him off, I had to pull out all the stops.

"Bobbie, this is a little much for me. You see, my last boyfriend was so unaffectionate, I need a little space."

"But I'm Spanish! I can't help myself—this is the way I am!"

We can't very well change our genetic make-up, now, can we? I'm not sure if passion is found in DNA, though. Maybe it is. Or maybe we northerners just can't bear being smothered by kisses from someone we barely know?

Somehow, the clock was dangerously ticking towards 1:00 am and I had just missed the *métro*. This was when I realized my mistake . . . *What had I been thinking?* Apparently I hadn't been thinking at all. Dating rule #15: Don't be lured into having a first real date at either person's home. This will

inevitably lead to TROUBLE.

Unfortunately, I would only start applying this vital rule after a few more dating mishaps.

Bobbie was trying to coax me into staying for “a little longer,” a vague time frame that would inevitably meld into “all night,” and I did have to work the next morning. For two years (I’d started at the university just after the art gallery job flop), I’d been trudging out to the suburbs (quite similar in appearance to Bobbie’s neighborhood) two nights a week and every Saturday morning to teach English conversation classes at a university. On the surface, it was a rather easy, well-paid gig. Yet, it came with a few downsides—location, schedule, was and worst of all, the sleazy program director. I was pretty sure that he’d hired me for my looks rather than my credentials; however, this was during my poorest époque in Paris, when I was reduced to selling off most of my books for rent money, and forced into eating discount supermarket pasta with olive oil. Obviously in a state of desperation, I tried my best to ignore his inappropriate comments and ogling (sexual harassment workplace policies aren’t strictly enforced in France—or maybe they don’t even exist?).

It was clear that my better judgment mechanisms had malfunctioned earlier on in the evening (like when I had agreed to come over in the first place), leaving me to choose between Plan A (risking my life outdoors while trying to hail a taxi in what could easily be referred to as a Parisian ghetto), or the far more terrifying Plan B (staying over). Even though he was too affectionate, it was kind of nice to have at least a little attention. It was certainly better than what I’d been used to with Stéphane, that being pretty much none at all! Or was it better? I obviously wasn’t totally into him or I would have

been a little more receptive. But what about my summer fling? I was looking for someone fun and easy-going, after all. It only had to last the summer. Did I have to be so picky? He was definitely very, very passionate and very into me (perhaps his admiration had clouded his social etiquette earlier in the evening?). Maybe I should just go with the flow and give him a try. The consequences would have to be dealt with later.

“I drive you to work in the morning. *Stayyyyyy*,” was his plea of a few hours prior. And my final response had been “Okay.” In the end, it was a bad idea; with all that passion of his, he barely let me sleep a wink. And, after all that, I fully realized that I wasn’t into him and highly doubted that he was my summer fling candidate. He, however, continued to become more and more attached to me.

At 8:00 am, the Parisian roads were still very empty, reminiscent of our previous early morning drive when I’d refused his breakfast invite. This time I got my tea and croissant, but I wasn’t sure that they’d been entirely worth it. *Ugggh*. Teaching was going to be rough; maybe I could put a movie on for my students, or perhaps they could do some independent reading or something while I took a wee little nap?

“You can drop me off at the lights,” I instructed as we were approaching the campus. The last thing I needed was for one of my adoring colleagues or the slimy school director to see me with Bobbie (actually, that might have been a good thing; they might have left me alone if they thought I had a new boyfriend).

“Good luck with your class, my *Tigresse*.” And with that he managed to get a little good-bye kiss as I leapt out of his rolling car.

Je T'Aime, Me Neither

After making it through the relatively painless lesson—helped along by some dreadfully grim, but absolutely necessary coffee—I hurried home as fast as I could and hopped into my nice, *empty* bed. I was already in a deep sleep when his cute message arrived.

BOBBIE [05/22/05 1:24 PM]

Hola Guapa. I hope your Saturday was good! I'm doing fine, well rested! I hope to see you as soon as you have time in your busy schedule! Kisses

Would my busy schedule have any time for him . . . ?
Jeez, that required some serious contemplation . . .

This all happened at a stage in my dating life before I'd realized that there wasn't any point in torturing myself with seeing someone more than once, even when the attraction vibes weren't there. But as I was freshly back on the dating scene, eagerly seeking my summer fling candidate (and also being incredibly indecisive), I decided to give him one more chance. And, I wouldn't confess to the girls that I'd stayed over on Friday—I'd be in for a lynching.

Somehow we met back at his place (it obviously takes me a while to learn my lesson!). However, this time I'd come armed with conviction: I was going to stay strong and I was not going to stay long.

I think Bobbie could tell that I was a little distant and less receptive than before, so he gave it his all. He was also armed with his own conviction mission, which was to passionately seduce me, with no holds barred! And he wasn't serving up flat soda this time . . . the only items on the menu seemed to be Latin love kisses!

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Okay, I give up! I don't want a Latin lover! What had I been thinking? Truce! Truce! Or rather, S.O.S.! Or whatever it is in Spanish—Ayudame! I had to escape, but unfortunately for me, Naughty's aunt couldn't save me this time.

"I have to go! Now!" I desperately screeched. I'd successfully pushed him off for a long enough air break to tell him that I wasn't ready to get all passionate, and that I needed some time (well, maybe a lifetime before I decided to see this *Señor Amor* again). I was expecting more over-emotional pleas to try to get me to stay. Instead, I had to give him credit for his rather unique response: he started taking off his clothes!

Okay, he only got as far as his shirt (my clothes were firmly buttoned up, though he'd tried unsuccessfully to creep up my skirt, inch-by-quick-inch).

The whole situation was becoming quite funny and it was hard to suppress my giggles.

"No, I really need to go now," I managed to declare between laughing and trying to find my jacket. Had something been lost in translation or did he think he'd win me over with his not-that-muscular, but thankfully not hairy, chest?

"Before you go, let's take some pictures," he suggested, jumping up for his camera.

"What kind of pictures?" I questioned, alarmed. The idea was a little out-of-the-blue and not exactly appropriate, seeing as he was shirtless, and I was flushed and trying to escape (wanting never to see him again, might I add).

"I just want a photo of you, *Guapa*."

"Not now! Look at the state we're in," I rebutted, patting down my disheveled hair.

"Come on, *ma Tigresse*, just one or two . . ." he insisted in

Je T'Aime, Me Neither

an especially puppy-dog-drooling way. Would he let me go only after surrendering to a few pictures? He didn't seem to be after any sexy, risqué images, so . . . what the heck? By this point, I was pretty sure that I wasn't going to return his calls, so I thought it better to appease him in the interest of pulling a quick disappearing act.

"*Queso!*" I struck a cheesy pose, putting on my best fake smile—it may have even looked genuine, thanks to thoughts of me being safe, sound and *alone* at home.

"Now you take one of me," he said.

"Well, if you insist." It would make a funny souvenir. I pulled out my phone and snapped a shot of the shirtless, seductive-less Spaniard (an anomaly indeed!).

"You're not really leaving, are you?" he whimpered, trying to tempt me to stay by smattering his little kisses up and down my arm. That was the wrong type of temptation; a triple vodka on the rocks or strongly spiked sangria might have worked, but I wasn't about to give him any useful pointers.

"Yes, I have to go, but maybe we could get a drink next week?" Famous last words, but somehow they still worked.

"Okay, I hope to see you soon."

"Sure, *hasta la vista!*" Or *not!* With that *adios*, I escaped from the sketchy streets of the 19th back to my safe abode in Montmartre.

BOBBIE [06/01/05 7:26 PM]

Hola Guapa! How about getting
that drink you suggested?

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Okay, perhaps I didn't really want a Latin lover. They were actually a bit intense and way too . . . *picanté!* Or at least Bobbie was. Maybe that was a little too much *je t'aime/ti amo* for me. Where was my quest taking me? For the time being, I hadn't been heading down the right *calle* or the right *rue* for that matter. After this second blunder, it seemed this wasn't going to be as easy as I'd thought. Maybe making some new resolutions would help? In any case, I wasn't going to give up looking for my *aventure*; I really did want my pick-me-up fling and the summer was officially about to begin. There had to be other reasonable catches out there.

So I recast my fishing line . . .



ENRICO [06/02/05 9:51 PM]

Have I told you lately that you're
beautiful? Can't wait to see
you, my dear! xoxo



DAVE [06/06/05 7:43 PM]

How about a drink?

“What’s wrong with a little affection?”

“He was suffocating me!”

“He was just a passionate guy, and you deprived him, the poor thing,” teased Dave.

“The ‘poor thing’? If he’d had his way, I’d probably be locked up in his apartment right now as his love-slave/personal chef! He certainly needed some help in that latter domain—definitely not the former.” How could he actually be defending Bobbie?

“You could have really helped him out. You’re cruel.”

“So now I’m the mean one! It was Bobbie who practically starved me!”

“I thought you were looking for a little summer loving?”

“Yes, the key word there being: little.”

“I know where you can get a little loving . . .” he said slyly as he set his hand on the table, not far from mine.

Yikes! I flung my hand into the air, frantically flagging down the waiter for our bill—it was time to get out of there . . . while I still could!

Summer Fling Resolutions - June

- Stay away from bar boys (!)
- Or bars (especially ~~Canadian~~ foreign-themed bars—i.e. Salsa bars)
- Be wary of Spanish-speaking boys (both from Spain and any ex-colonies)
- Don’t accept car rides home/to work (even if the invitation comes from the owner of a Mercedes, Porsche, Ferrari . . . welllll . . . would have to reconsider this resolution should the ‘luxury car’ occasion arise)
- Don’t accept invitations to dinner at **his** place on the first date (no matter which district he lives in!)
- Suss out dinner preparation skills (again, not for the first date, but for an eventual third or fourth date)
- Don’t give a guy you think you’re not into a second chance! . . . May end up as kidnapped love slave next time!
- Try to gauge level of passion . . . not too much, not too little

AND: Be wary of Dave’s advice!