

*Excerpt from Rooftop Soliloquy*

## *Chasing the virgin Daphné in the Bois de Boulogne; and the rooftop banquet.*

(10<sup>h</sup> Soliloquy)

Daphné and I had met just days before that time in Montparnasse, at a luncheon on the grass on an island in the Bois de Boulogne. I was in a large group of a dozen or so friends and strangers, drinking iced wine and eating gentle bread. Someone in my group, a gushing fawn, was telling the rest of us how a certain kind of grape, which she was now eating, tasted just like those grapes she ate when she was a little girl. All the while she was piling seeds on the blanket and giving them names. As I found such stories about childhood to be vulgar and in poor taste, I decided to leave the group and take a solitary walk through the gardens and woods in the heat of the day.

I crossed the spots of sun, burnishing the green lawns, and traversed the cool shadows shed by leafy bowers. Then, I came to a lake; rather, a pond. There by the pond was a girl dressed in all white, dipping a silk net into the clouded water. She was trying to catch the silver minnows swimming in the pond. Yet every time she dipped the silk mesh of her net into the water to swipe at them, the fish scattered, and she would gasp and exclaim: “Stupid fish!” and then say, “Oh!” and sigh, and wait till they gathered again near the edge in their school so she could try again—only to repeat the failure.

I approached the white-gowned girl, my eyes fixed on where her summer flesh met the hem of her cotton summer wear. I scanned her with the stealth of a hunter-beast who, in a mere glance, can tell where the meaty parts are on the limbs of prey and sees whether or not it is worth the chase. I admired her round fleshy breasts. Ripe like August fruit pressed against the seam of a carefully sewed robe. Her legs, calves pressed to thighs where she kneeled on the edge of the pond to dip her net in the water. Her knees bare, as she had pulled up her white robe to ensure no grass stains would splotch her knees. She looked at me with

the widest eyes possible when she saw me approach, as a baby rabbit looks upon a lean hound who has found it tramping in the grass. I laughed at her tiny silk net and told her she would be lucky to catch a pond snail with such a net. She frowned and said she knew. I then told her—not in words, mind you, but in the clever look that manhood bestows on one lucky enough to overcome boyhood—that she should start to run and I would chase her.

“Go on through the woods, little girl!” I called, “*Vas-y, petite fille!* ...I will give you a head start!”

Thus she dropped her net and started off. She ran and I pursued her. Her sandaled feet kicked up tiny pebbles. My sandaled feet tore up limbs and stones. She looked behind her with fright as I pursued her across planted berms and fertile lanes, through the thinly planted woods. And then, when I finally overcame her and leapt upon her shoulders, she laughed and fell down in a clump on the grass. I fell upon her and kissed her neck. I took her lips to mine and she gave them willingly and easily, and no longer was I a predator, but just a soft child of a summer garden. And her hands coursed my limbs the way the wind courses the sturdy limbs of trees. That was all one year ago.

Now, in her new apartment near the Place Vendôme, we have been making love in the daytime on a little quilt spread over the floor. Afterwards, heaped-up tired in a hot sweat, Daphné fell asleep against me, but I was not tired, and the heat was so stifling. I wanted to go to the window so as to open it to let in a draft. Slowly, to keep her from waking, I pried sweet clinging Daphné from my body and slithered off the quilt until I could stand and go to the window. Once the window was open, I looked outside to see what kind of view could be had from Daphné’s new place. ‘Perhaps I can see the Colonne in the center of the square,’ I thought. From the window, I noticed there was a thin railing in full sunlight. Looking to the left, I saw some metal steps that led from the railing to the summit of the roof. I could hear people up there talking, laughing. It seemed a merry afternoon party was underway on Daphné’s rooftop. I peered up and saw a man sitting at a banquet table on the roof. He was dressed in a bright yellow suit, and had a violin case

on his lap and looked as though he were about to play. Leaving the window, I went back by the quilt to find my clothes. I then returned to the window and, dressed more or less, I stepped out the window and onto the railing. Then thinking that any violin playing might wake sleeping Daphné, I closed the window behind me, careful not to latch it. I then started up the welded stairs to reach the summit of the roof.

All the people were happy and laughing at the banquet table set up on this place. They greeted me warmly as a welcome stranger and bid me sit down so as to share with their food and games.

“Nagel was just about to play us something on the violin,” the well-dressed people said, pointing to their friend in the bright yellow suit. He laughed and told the other guests that he would love to play the violin if he could, but he didn’t know how; and anyhow, there was no violin in the case. He said he just used the case to carry his dirty laundry. We laughed at Nagel’s wit, as he opened the case that housed no dirty laundry, but a well-carved fiddle. He then played a cheering song. His fingers skipped over the strings like stones skip over water. After he finished and had set the violin down, we set about eating the mighty bread and lavish plates to stay our appetites. There were tender gourds filled with sweet relishes glazed in spicy creams. There were waxed beans spotted with the dust of charred red peppers. There were bubbling brebis creams, fragrant cheeses of all sorts, flakey breads spread with lemon zests and salty olive pastes, and the broiled skins of sweet zucchinis and violet aubergines. This, and there was plenty of cool wine to drink.

After we stayed desire for food and drink I felt full from everything, from the merry songs, and the pleasure of making new friends, and so I said farewell to the rooftop symposium.

“So long!” I called, “Perhaps will come another day!”

“We hope so! It’s been a pleasure!”

One of the ladies at the table said she was getting married in a month, and asked me to attend the service. Another, an older gentleman, asked me to join him on his stately yacht should I be near the Mediterranean that season. I shook all the men’s hands and kissed the

ladies and hurried back down the stairs to the railing to return to Daphné's apartment.

Pushing Daphné's window open, I entered quietly into the apartment. I closed and latched the window behind me, as was my custom when entering through strange windows from rooftop railings. I surveyed the pretty body of Daphné, which was still sleeping gently as a child does, her soft hair flung about. Ridding myself of clothing, I climbed nude onto the quilt and wrapped the tender girl in my mighty arms. Daphné was sweating from the heat of the afternoon and her skin was white and moist and tasted sugary on my lips—lips that sucked on her small shoulder as I fell asleep.

“What is that boiling sound?”

“Aleksandre, you're awake!”

“Was I asleep?” I sat up on the quilt of the floor and rubbed my eyes. I looked to the kitchenette where Daphné was tending a stove. Red flames were leaping around a Bialetti pot.

“I'm making coffee, do you want some?”

“Good girl, yes!”

“And something to eat? I have yoghurt.”

“Yoghurt? But I'll tell you fair Daphné, I couldn't eat a thing. I'm stuffed! While you were sleeping, I attended a banquet out on your rooftop. I had an excellent meal...” And I begun to tell her all about the plates of cheeses and the iced wine, and the man in the yellow suit who played the violin; and I didn't leave out a word but told all and even said to Daphné that should we be in Cannes or Saint Tropez, the two of us, we could take a ride on a stately yacht. And after I'd finished my story, and all was said, Daphné tossed back her head and laughed hysterically.

“Dear child, what are you laughing at?”

“At you!”

“Why so?”

“You couldn't have gone outside on my roof while I was sleeping! It is shut tight and wrapped with this chain and bolt.” And saying this,

she abandoned the stove and walked over to the window to demonstrate her speech and I saw that what she was saying was true. The window was sealed, keeping in all of the heat, the free-flowing wind outside could only be imagined. "...You see, Aleksandre, it's locked up! . . . and the key for the lock is hidden in my closet. And anyway you couldn't have gone outside because you fell asleep before me. We made love and then you had a happy smile and said that I wore you out more than anyone has with what you called my 'large magnificent lips,' and then you rolled over and fell asleep!"

"I see it is true! But why do you keep that chain around your window?"

"Because I've only lived here a week, and there's a strange man who lives next door. I've only seen him a couple of times. Each time I look out of that window, I look left and see him peeking right. What perverted eyes! His is the window just next to mine. I was afraid he would come in through my window one day and steal me, so I bought this chain and shut up the window and hid the key in the closet..." Daphné paused and kissed my chin... "But now you are here and I do not feel afraid, and I'll give you the key and you can go open the window." So she spoke as she came from the tidy closet with a slender key in her hand, and bid me unchain the lock. I took from the latch the hefty chain and opened the shutters to look outside. I expected to right-away see such a wild place as was displayed in my memory, but outside there was no sloping path up to a rooftop feast, there was no man in a yellow suit with a violin. There was just a thin metal railing near a steep climb to nothing. A high peek of nothing! Below, the streets buzzed with afternoon traffic. To the left, I saw the neighbor's window where a strange head tufted with oily black hair was poking out, eyes peering right.

"Your neighbor is interested in us," I said to the sweet girl who sat naked and voluptuous on a quilt on the floor. "How does one know what is merely a dream?"