



# **A fictional narrative of Real-life Paris:**

*Lily's Tale*

**Ritgerð til B.A.-prófs**

**Júlíana Björnsdóttir**

**Janúar 2010**

Sarah Moss  
ENS301G

Júlíana Björnsdóttir  
070480-4259

Háskóli Íslands

Hugvísindasvið

**Enskar bókmenntir**

# **A fictional narrative of Real-life Paris**

*Lily's Tale*

**Ritgerð til B.A.-prófs**

**Júlíana Björnsdóttir**

**Kt.: 070480-4259**

**Leiðbeinandi: Sarah Moss**

**Janúar 2010**

Sarah Moss  
ENS301G

Júlíana Björnsdóttir  
070480-4259

## Index

1. Lily.....	1
2. Past & present.....	2
a. La vie	
Française.....	2
i. Caen & Mont St. Michel.....	9
ii. Family & Starbucks in Paris.....	12
iii. Summer Love & heartbreak.....	13
iv. Family time.....	15
b. Seasons.....	15
i. Spring.....	15
ii. Summer, autumn & Winter.....	16
3. Motherhood	
a. Family.....	19
b. The Birth.....	19
c. Pauline.....	20

Lily's Tale is a fictional short story intended to portray the local life of ordinary Parisians. Instead of relying heavily on other sources, I wrote the story from my own point of view. As a former resident of Paris I wanted to tell the various stories of people I encountered mixed with my own experiences of life in Paris. The omnipotent narrator tells the story of a woman in her mid-thirties embarking on a journey of a lifetime, motherhood. Her relationship with Paris began at a very young age, when the visual senses were open to the magic of a city full of hidden illusions. Her young adulthood began in Paris, where she lived away from family and friends for a period of two years. The flashbacks of her past are glimpses of a girl, forced to face the challenges of womanhood without a support system. She grows into a self-sufficient woman from challenges encountered along the way to adulthood. The stories are to portray the experiences behind the growth. Almost a decade later, she returns to Paris having found her place in life. In Paris, she again takes the next big step in life as she prepares for Motherhood. The story, through fictional narrative, is a realistic image of Parisian life as portrayed through the eyes of a foreigner living in Paris. The only sources I used to aid with my writing was a Via Michelin map of Paris from their website when my own memory failed me; and Shakespeare & Company's website, as I included its owner, George Whitman in my tale. The stream of consciousness narrative is a reflection of the chaotic mindset of late stages of pregnancy. It is worthwhile mentioning the index is an informal breakdown of the story's plot.

From an isolated corner of the world, a little nine years old girl embarked to the distant shores of France. She was a happy child and loved nothing more than to hide away in the sunny corner of her parents' living room sofa while reading Enid Blyton's Adventure series. Before she knew how to read for herself, her parents had spent hours upon hours reading to her one book after another. Enid Blyton had painted a picture of the world beyond her native land of ice. Visions of four children her own age, braving invasions into mysterious castles, riding the rough seas in a row boat in aim of thwarting callous and criminal activity, had awoken the adventurer inside her. From her visit to France, the images of never-ending sunflower fields and golden cityscapes rising in the horizon had been permanently etched in her mind. The city of Paris became her fairy tale land. Her name was Lily.

Thirteen years passed until Lily would embark upon a second encounter with the city of Paris. Another ten passed until the domestic dream she had envisioned took on a tranquil shape. In those years Lily's mind expanded beyond the expectations of her youth; She travelled all over the globe familiarizing herself with chaotic woodlands of cityscapes, and the penetrating green of Mother Nature's paradise. She had turned her passion into a success by painting pictures with words of the world seen through her eyes. Now at the age of thirty-five she restlessly stroke her growing belly while looking through a photo album her sisters had brought with them during their last visit. The first photo in the album was one of Lily and her younger sister in the late eighties standing side by side on a hot day in July by the sorbet shop on the corner of Rue Saint- Louis en l'Île and Quai d'Orléans. It was their first Italian sorbet and the infusion of hard chocolate chips in rich minty flavour sank into her memory of this first trip to France. Still in adulthood, she would make her way to that same corner shop for a scoop of the perfect remedy on a hot summer day, still the electric sweetness of the green peppermint rushed through her veins with the same force it had before. Her husband, Charlie had been amazed to see how little the striking features of young Lily had changed with passage of time. Her hair had never lost that auburn shade of her youth and her dark almond eyes were still there, sparkling ever so much in the glow of her first pregnancy. There was the miracle of life growing inside her, an infusion of her and Charlie's DNA. During the first three months she had mostly

eaten fruits and vegetables, especially carrots, raspberries, cherries and mangos. Everything else was either tasteless or nauseated her. After the first trimester though she could eat just about anything, even eggs which she had decided she did not like at the age of five. She avoided coffee and soft drinks up to her best abilities but occasionally fell into temptation. Everything was ready for their daughter's arrival and her whole family was coming to welcome the baby girl due in a mere fortnight. There was plenty to do in preparation of their arrival but Lily's fatigue made it near impossible to do much about it. Nor did she worry herself too much. She had reached a stage of complacency in her pregnancy; her husband Charlie did all the thinking for her, he had even packed her hospital bag. Lily and Charlie had been very fortunate in finding an apartment upon their move to Paris three years ago. Their fourth floor apartment on Quai d'Orléans rose above the river Seine, over viewing the historical beauty of Paris's left bank. White corner carving sealed in the yellow walls and the rustic mahogany floors. Lily and Charlie had been to a furniture store on Avenue Daumesnil Lily had found herself admiring over a decade ago, purchasing a scarlet double-seater, and two identical chairs to go with the heavy living room table she had inherited from her grandmother, after whom she was named. An antique IKEA bookcase, matching the floorboards, was stuffed with the works of literary canons such as Joyce, contemporary love stories by Nora Roberts, and philosophical works of Socrates. They had also fitted a small stereo among the many covers, one that Lily had bought when she was twenty at the Duty Free, while returning from a weekend in London. Fifteen years later it was as good as new and blended in with the simple decor of their cosy nest. Around the corner, Ile Saint-Louis connected with Ile de la Cité where the white washed Notre Dame had taken on a stained shade of gray in the wintery November gloom. Lily had always felt at home in the fourth, fifth and sixth arrondissement. In her early twenties she had worked in several bars in the area after finishing photography school, and since then always dreamed of becoming a full-time residence of L'Ile Saint-Louis.

On this particular Sunday morning, while the rain outside flooded Paris, her little girl had been kicking her in the sides, and Charlie's snoring had kept her awake half the morning. Charlie was looking forward to the arrival of his baby girl and lived in constant fear of Lily's going into labour with him not around. Lily had

ordered him to go out with his mates for one last time, and last night had been his last night out. Charlie had been out until the wee hours of the morning, returning pleasantly inebriated to his heavily pregnant wife with her latest craving, a buttery croissant and Milo chocolate milk. His morning cuddles had been gentle and protective, and the sweet breath of minty liquor brought back an image of her kid sister's sorbet-masked face. It was not until late in the afternoon Charlie got up at last. Lily felt protected with his arm wrapped tightly around her shoulder as he pulled her in for a kiss knowing the stubble on his face would tickle her. As they walked past a group of young women, she they glanced upon her short frame of bloated feet and bulking tummy next to his rugged handsome face. He was broad-shouldered and underneath his white t-shirt and black cotton v-neck his manliness was completed with a dark growth of black hair on a firm chest. His thigh muscles alone had made Lily quiver from longing throughout the pregnancy thanks to the river of hormones running through her veins. She wanted to jump him right there and then. His thick biceps and the luscious growth of black and red hair on his forearm gave her a rush every time he put his arm around her. When they met he had been a shadow of his current physique and his long hair had done little to complement a boyish shape. But he had been handsome, and his beautiful eyes changed from a shade of greenish gray to a more yellowish green in a mere day; a trait of which she had envied her older sister as a child. What Lily loved the most about him was his confidence in himself and his values. He was her world. On this misty Sunday eve Charlie had promised Lily a lemon chicken at Cheap Chinese, another craving that had reached its height in her third trimester. Afterwards, instead of going straight home, Charlie suggested they go to Shakespeare & Company<sup>1</sup>, Lily's favourite bookstore, to purchase Ulysses by James Joyce. Now that Lily was pregnant she felt she finally had the opportunity to re-read it at her own leisurely pace, and Charlie, fully aware of her fatigue wanted to keep her occupied. They walked along the narrow alleys of the Latin Quarter along with the tourists capturing the illuminated Notre Dame as seen from the quays of the Left Bank. The evening breeze gently stroked the tourists as well as the locals enjoying the wet November air. Along the bank of Seine a lover

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.shakespeareandcompany.com/>



kneeled in front of his beloved proposing a life of love together in a language unknown to both Charlie and Lily. As one love began another faded nearby. The angry screams of an American blonde, whose broken French barely made sense to the shady curly-haired Frenchman, lit up his red Marlboro and walked away. Outside Shakespeare and Company a group of international students huddled over a map of Europe, contemplating on their summer destination, a familiar scene to Lily, who had been seated on the same wall with her best friend Lizzie over a decade ago. The two had been planning ahead for their March spring break to get the best deal on the trains. Charles and Lily were greeted as always by the young man who had arrived a year ago to work for George Whitman, the legendary owner of this establishment of great literature. His name was Franck and twice a week he tended the bar at Le Cavern on Rue Dauphine. He had become a great companion to Lily in recent weeks of growing exhaustion, often taking the liberty to drop off books for her to read in order to pass the time. He had called that same day to tell a used copy of Joyce's Ulysses had been donated to the store by the family of a respectable literature professor who had recently passed away. As usual he asked about their wellbeing and if they had decided on a name, he himself had suggested a few quirky names such as Dash and Lavender, neither name having been applauded by the parents-to-be. Towards the end of the month they often invited him over for dinner, as they knew he was often low on funds, like most struggling musicians. To Lily he resembled an overgrown Indiana Jones. Over six feet tall, dressed in a sleeveless vest over an art deco shirt, he greeted his customers with a big smile. Every other weekend he would steal a ride with a pilot friend of his, jumping out at ten thousand feet in his rainbow parachute landing wherever the wind blew him, and hitching a ride back into town. On Monday morning he would always be standing behind the till on no matter whether he had slept or not. He reminded Lily of her younger self. When she first came to Paris it had been on a hunch alone. She had developed an interest in photography and could think of no place better to pursue her passion than in Paris. She had spent her summer working 12-15 hours a day, six times a week, to save up the money to pay her tuitions, while convincing the heads of the student loan funds to grant her a loan for a year diploma program. Her first home in Paris had been a room the size of a prison cell with a single bed squeaking loudly every time she moved. The

desk was held up by a piece of brown paper sheet and a chair on which she only managed to sit for short periods of time. The wardrobe she could only open on one side as the handle kept falling off. The only thing worth the 400 Euro she paid, including the meals, was the magnificent view overlooking the monumental Eiffel tower and the Sacre Coeur in the North. The walls came in two shades, a faded white and base. The bleak isolation of the room dimmed the otherwise elegant lifestyle to which young Lily inspired to lead. The nunnery was the nickname for this domesticated institution on Boulevard Diderot; only female residents were admitted and no males permitted to cross the iron gates. It was only through blue-eyed innocence that Lily had managed to last her first four months there. The dormitory had been located some twenty minutes on foot from Lily's current domestic haven on Île Saint-Louie.

On her very first day in Paris she had walked the distance to the Eiffel tower, going towards the Bastille and then along the river Seine. It had been a mild autumn day and Avenue Daumesnil, where she began her long walk, caught her fancy with its selection of chic boutiques; a world far beyond Lily's status as an impoverished student of the arts. Above the streets of Avenue Daumesnil a narrow park hid away from the bustling street traffic of Parisian life. Bushes of red roses lined up along the bottom tranches of a white pine fence and a gateway entwined with cherry blossoms, and pink Hibiscus offered a much needed illusion of natural landscape to joggers and the more leisurely inclined. It was a place to where Lily would escape more and more often as her tolerance for the nunnery grew weary. Above Rue de Lyon's tranquil ensemble of narrow alleyways rose enclosed archways connecting one side to the other. The gray demure of the brick walls revealing an offside to the glamorous world of upper class Paris a mere block away, and the hustle and bustle of the midday traffic of the Bastille square. The towering needle in the middle of the Bastille took on the centre role of the square: during protests young Marxists would climb over the sharp edges of the metallic iron fence. On this cloudless autumn day, busy body locals, running their daily errands encased in dark leather-clad BMW's and rusty old Saabs, only encircled the monument. On the steps of the Opera Bastille an elderly couple read over the winter program while an impatient grandchild attempted to escape into Fnac to buy the latest Lady GaGa album. The phone booth entrance to metro line 1, on the

corner of Rue du Faubourg and Rue du la Roquette , filed out arrays of camera-hungry tourists; easy prey to the romantic imagery of Parisian life as portrayed at the 24 hour café, with flawlessly dressed waiters serving overpriced espressos and glasses of cheap wine. The boisterous laughter erupting from a group of drunken American college students, celebrating the start of their year abroad, caught the attention of a war-time Frenchman, shaking his head at the sight of young women finishing a pint in one go, and young men looking upon them with admiration. “Quelle horreur!”<sup>2</sup> Beneath the dark of the evening sky, one of the youths might very well find his Blackberry lifted by a deft hand belonging to one of the homeless ‘locals’ of BNP’s ATM, on the corner of Boulevard Richard Lenoir and Boulevard Beaumarchais. Lily was immediately drawn to the vivid scene of the boat life in Canal Saint-Martin below the Place de la Bastille. The houseboats were inhabited by nomad travellers whose idea of a vacation was to untie the ropes binding them to the banks of the Paris Arsenal, and head into the freedom of mobile living. A single boat had caught Lily’s attention; its surface treated mahogany shimmered in the blinding rays of the midday autumn sun. The red roof and the white window- and door framing billowed joyously among the rusted shade of its neighbours’ neglected bodies. The rest of her first day in Paris was spent walking along the quays of the right bank, past the Pont du Carrousel where Harrison Ford found Julia Ormond’s Sabrina in the re-make of Sabrina. Tourist couples would attempt to recreate the romantic atmosphere of the film under the mocking eyes of a swearing local trying to get past the flashing cameras. On this Sunday evening, had Lily not been so far gone in her pregnancy she would have suggested a walk further along the quays, to the deserted lawns of Champs du Mars. But instead, she and Charlie crossed the Pont Saint-Michel as they headed home with their copy of Ulysses.

Shakespeare and Company had been one of the very first landmarks Lily introduced to Charlie. It had been her temple of worship from the minute she walked through the narrow entrance. She had discovered Shakespeare as a young girl in her early teens. Emma Thompson and Kenneth Branagh’s lyrical

---

<sup>2</sup> English translation: How awful!

pronunciation of Shakespearian English, along with their interpretation of Beatrice and Benedick, evoked an intense passion for the splendours of the English language and its glory in theatrical performances. Thus upon seeing the word Shakespeare above the dark wooden frame of the entrance, she hurriedly rushed to its door. Within she had not only found the works of Shakespeare but a diachronic collection of many of the greatest writing ever written in the English language. "Welcome!" George Whitman himself had said, as she passed the counter positioned next to a shelf dedicated to the Lonely Planet. Her excavation had come to a sudden halt as she found herself squashed among the numerous Anglophones in search of contemporary leisure reading by the likes of Nora Roberts and Dan Brown. She coughed softly as she walked beyond the dust-free collection of contemporary writings, into the claustrophobic backroom where a roofed shelter had been built in which children of all ages could seat themselves while reading a book of their choice. Once a week Franck would read to them from a favourite book from his childhood. Beyond was a labyrinth of dusty bookshelves overcrowded with philosophical works written in German, French, Italian, and Spanish. Whitman's ceiling-high oak shelves were dark as the night, and the intense nature of writing was intimidating beyond comprehension to Lily. Lily's vision of heaven awaited her above. This was George Whitman's private collection, which he graciously opened up to other book lovers. Bookshelves lined up along the walls, stood tall above a leathery sepia bench where Lily would sit on many occasions reading from the same book written by a deceased American. His description of wartime Paris had become endearing to her, the stories of survival captured her heart and even brought tears to her eyes. Upon returning to Paris with Charlie she had tried to find the book among the many titles but to without succeeding. She could only describe to him the texture of the dusty pages that contained the stories of the Paris of days gone by. Charlie had found his own favourite book, a book he would browse through after one of their silly fights. Lily knew where to find him after she had allowed her hormones get the best of her - sitting at the windowsill petting the raven cat that guarded the second floor library. Since falling pregnant Lily would find him browse through an old-fashion manual on how to raise children. Understanding she had returned to usual self, he would rise from his seat to vocal dissatisfaction of the slumbering cat, and take her in his

arms. These days, instead of expressing her regret of yet another hormonal outcry she would simply send a text with a smiley face to let him know she had come to her senses. They would find a book of names from the early twentieth century England and laugh their way through the conservative connotations of names like Edmund and Eugenia. Edmund had been the oldest of the group in the Narnia stories, and the name brought up the vivid image of stern conservatism, an image she had painted of him from her childhood reading of *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C.S Lewis. It was a story she looked forward to reading to her baby girl. In fact, the wardrobe in their bedroom was a replica of the Narnian wardrobe, and perhaps their little girl would try and find a Narnia of her own in the back of the closet when she got older. Like mother like daughter. Once their daughter would be old enough, she would introduce her to Whitman's impressive library. At present, climbing the narrow staircase with her bloated feet and a belly just waiting to explode had become an impossible task with only a week to go.

Lily's dream was to have a family portrait taken in the windowsill of Whitman's library. She wanted the raindrops to pound upon the thick layer of glass as the dusty collection sheltered them from the outpour of cold winter days. Well into her seventh month of pregnancy, Lily's camera was her constant companion. She and Charlie had purchased an EOS-1D digital SLR Canon with a 50mm lens, which was now resting in her old camera backpack, given to her by her parents before starting her diploma studies in Photography. She had carried it around with her everywhere for as long as she physically could. During her year in photography school her old camera had travelled with her everywhere. It had been the last model of a non-digital Canon, and she carried it around in the same black backpack along with her selection of lenses. Even as a child, Lily had taken pictures of places and items of which no one else ever made sense. A broken branch, or leaves floating in a pool of water after a rainstorm, was enough to make her forget her original destination. In her Criticism class she had discovered her particular field of fascination was not highly praised among the specialised eyes of fashion photographers or photojournalist; even the arty-farties saw no purpose to her peculiar art. In fashion photography the extremes disturbed her. She preferred the detailed imagery of an obscure shape or an intimate portrait of ordinary people. Sometimes she would be drawn to a person for no other reason

than a fascination of their simplistic being, at other times she would be pulled towards people whose je-ne-sais-pas attraction awoke her curiosity to discover their secrets. An old acquaintance of hers, that she had met as she drank away her sorrows, after yet another dreaded session of Criticism class, had been her latest study of extraordinary powers. His name was Paul and he had been diagnosed with prostate cancer some five years ago. After numerous treatments he had chosen to let life and death take its course. His partner Alain's brave demeanour was inspirational and Lily felt compelled to portray their strength together for one last time. Paul had been one of the very first Parisians to welcome Lily into the Coolin's family; Coolin's was an Irish bar with French infusion. It was a place where the air was filtered with the broken French of native English speakers, and the broken English of native speakers of French. At the age of twenty-two Lily had spent plenty of weekends eyeing the pale Irishman tending the bar, along with Jess, an American friend who felt equally at home among the dark oak of the bar. "A pint of Guinness for dinner I presume!" had been the first thing a healthy Paul said to them when they would arrive on a Saturday afternoon. After every couple of pints he had brought them a bowl of chips to make sure they would still be standing on their feet at closing hour. Lily had been devastated to find out Paul was terminally ill. She had lost contact with him while she made her mark on the world but the bonds of friendship had been renewed when she returned to Paris with Charlie. Paul had passed away several months ago. Understanding the man with the reaper rapidly approached his door he had taken Lily aside, to ask her privately if she would discreetly photograph the last days, weeks and months of his life with his partner, Alain and the Coolin's family. Lily had spent days at their white mahogany houseboat, moored off the Pont des Invalides. She had fulfilled her mission of capturing intimate moments of their life together. Along the walls of Coolin's, Paul lived on in a series of photographs, standing among dear friends and family. Months after his passing, she still expected him to walk through the front door to start his shift. The young Irishman so attractive to the twenty-two years old Lily was now a father to a three years old boy, whose first question was "where's Uncle Paul?" Every time a tear would secretly slip from the corner of Alain's right eye, wiped away quick enough to avoid the attention of the innocent boy posing the question. Lily would then squeeze

Alain's hand, or pick up the young boy to let him touch her growing belly. "You should not be eating so much Auntie Lily," was all he could say.

Alain had taken Lily and Charlie to the portal city of Caen, his hometown, declaring with a smile: "one last journey before your sleepless nights". It had been on September 2<sup>nd</sup>, a day of great historical and personal importance to Alain. In 1945, it had been the day when all the other boys in his street had gotten their fathers, brothers, and uncles back from the horrid battlefields. His father had not been among those returning soldiers, but instead a stranger; speaking a language he had only heard his mother speak with the uniformed men passing back and forth. The frail figure of manhood standing before his mother had apologized over and over as he held tightly onto her comforting hands. The young man had been the terrified youth whose wounds were attended to by a brave medic on the battlefields of Normandy. The young soldier's physical wounds had healed, but the painful memory of his saviour's bloody body warming his frozen limbs with his lifeless body, still kept him awake every night. He had come back to Caen on the 2nd of September in 1945 to meet the family of the man who had saved his life. On the day they passed through the city they were introduced to the aging figure of the same soldier, now introduced to them as Alain's brother-in-law. Every year the family would gather at their old family home, a small studio apartment on Rue Caponiere just off the Place de l'ancienne Boucherie. The small courtyard was still as it was in their youth; a scooter had replaced the blue bicycle once ridden by his father but the red tiled roof still tilted the same way enabling the neighbour's cat to escape the smoky cloud coming out of its owner's nasal cavities. Small patches of grass still attempted to grow taller than the stone paddles making up the courtyard floor without any sign of success. The bricked walls of the courtyard still surrounded the dwarf-size wooden door hiding in the corner. It seemed to be waiting for the next storm to rip them out of the doorframe. "Every Christmas my Nana used to tell us the door would be blown away once the cold draft came in from the English Channel," explained Alain as Lily pulled out a splinter from her thumb. All along the walls of the courtyard, a memorial of the war still hovered around the courtyard. Unrepaired bullet holes had been left to remind future generations of the atrocities of the World War II. Both men and women had lost their lives when finding themselves closed in by the walls of the courtyard in a

failed attempt of seeking shelter from the enemy. Lily, Charlie and Alain shared a minute of silence to commemorate the memory of not only Alain's father but of Charlie's grandfather who also had fought in the World War II. He had fought the war on the Northern coast of the African continent and survived, but like so many young men had been scarred upon witnessing first hand man's ability of pure evil. To raise their spirit from the gloomy past they organized a trip to Mont St. Michel in the region of Brittany, some two or three hours away from Caen. None of them knew much about the history of what must have been a fortress as spectacular as King Arthur's Camelot, "without the damn parking zone, of course!" added Charlie. "So this is where they filmed A Knight's Tale eh?" was Alain's first comment. Lily agreed. Her only way of reconciling the modern infrastructure was to use her imagination: "Imagine this restaurant is a dingy tavern filled with peasants and knights drinking ale and licking their greasy fingers," she said loudly enough for the waiter to hear. The waiter's derisive gaze refocused their attention on a tiny space now occupied by a souvenir shop. Lily's mind rushed ahead painting an image of a slightly overweight mother, most likely so after having eight children one after another. Charlie envisioned a blacksmith beating away in the darkness after everyone else had gone to sleep. "While you two make up stories I am going to buy my brother-in-law a postcard for his collection, not that he needs any more of them..." Alain declared as he left them standing in the middle of the narrow pathway under the hot midday sun. "These black roof tiles are traditionally from Normandy, made out of a material called Ardoise," Alain replied when Charlie had asked. "That's the material used in making blackboards, is it not?" asked Lily receiving an affirmative reply from Charlie. "Look! We can walk to that forestry island off the coast," an excited Lily pointed out as they looked over the damp cream-coloured field of sand reaching out as far as the eye could see. "And what will we do when we are flooded in at that island?" Charlie asked in reply, annoyed by her carelessness. "Once the girl is born we should come back and include her if conditions allow," Alain suggested observing the tension building up between them. "Excellent! If it makes you feel any better we can call beforehand to make sure it is safe my love," Lily whispered into Charlie's ear as she kissed him gently on the cheek. The storm had passed. As they drove back towards Paris they could not help being touched by the view slowly fading away into the horizon, with



the lurking tower gradually becoming a mere statue on a shelf. Back in Paris, Lily had spent the next two days with her ballooned legs planted horizontally. When her mum had called to check up on her she had declined being fatigued from all the walking: “how silly of me to ask,” had been her mother’s agreeable reply. Today was the day her whole family was coming over. Instead of taking the usual RER B train to the airport, Charlie had borrowed Alain’s mini-van to pick them all up. “You cannot expect your parents to carry their entire luggage through that dreadful train!” Had been Alain’s last words on the matter. He had even taken Lily’s place and was accompanying Charlie to Charles de Gaulle. As they drove up the E19, Lily looked through her patio window at yet another tourist boat heading towards the Eiffel tower. The tourists were dressed from head to toe, some having had to borrow the colourful raincoats kept on stock for rainy days. No matter how horrible the weather was, her cosy living room window would discreetly feature in a photo or two. The two islands, Île Saint Louis and Ile de la Cité were among the most photographed locations within the city, a fact that amused both her and Charlie a great deal. Across the river Seine, hiding behind one of the many doors of Rue Saint-André des Arts, was her favourite Starbucks café. It had been months since she had had her last tall skinny latte. “You should not be drinking coffee in your condition, or any condition for that matter,” the skeleton frame of a girl addressed her, in a grammatically incorrect French. Lily was stunned into silence. Moments later the girl handed her some herbal injunction. “Je veux parler avec Laurence, s’il te plait,”<sup>3</sup> finally escaped Lily’s lips, emphasizing the informal *te*<sup>4</sup>. Laurence was a friend of Lily’s and had been from the day she became a regular. “I used to feel the same way about Starbucks but then while I lived in London I became a regular,” Laurence had explained to her once. “I never thought I’d buy a starbucks in Paris myself but London got me hooked,” Lily had replied in his defence when a nationalistic friend of a client had commented upon the unnecessary arrival of the chain. The slamming of the door won them no votes but it was the beginning of a beautiful friendship. The girl behind the counter had been an American raw-food eater, which on its own was

---

<sup>3</sup> English translation: I would like to speak to Laurence, please

<sup>4</sup> An informal pronoun in French: You

fine by Lily. “I am not telling her to eat a steak am I!” Lily had said to Charlie when telling him about her surprise attack. Months later the girl still worked there but upon the condition that she kept her opinions to herself. The incident had occurred in the scorching summer heat, or so the 25 degrees felt for pregnant Lily. She had wanted an ice-cold Frappuchino but had been handed an herbal injunction instead. When Charlie got home from work he had taken her back for her fix of caffeine, but not before calling Laurence to make sure the offender had finished her shift. Lily’s last caffeinated memory was of Charlie, Laurence and herself sipping on Frappuchinos, enjoying the evening breeze of the Parisian summer along the banks of the Seine.

Every Friday evening during summer, beneath a shinier Notre Dame, people would bring their own refreshments and listen to the struggling musicians of Paris playing to an audience of all ages and nationalities. Every session during the summer the clear sky was royal blue and the streetlights sparkled in the summer eve. On that particular evening Franck sat on the brick stairs leading down from the Pont Saint-Michel, playing Crying Shame by Jack Johnson on his acoustic guitar surrounded by his usual crowd. A young Salma Hayek, as Charlie and Lily referred to her, sat beside him singing along with him. Franck had introduced them to her in a dinner party they had hosted in honour of his twenty-first birthday. Her name was Linda and she was his new sky diving partner. As he played his guitar, his averted eyes met with the deep cleavage of her floral dress, then returning to her sparkling blue eyes. Linda felt his eyes on her but like Lily had done in the beginning of her friendship with Charlie, she kept herself in a safe distance from a full-blown romance. Lily had met Charlie in London almost a whole decade ago. A mutual friend introduced them at his birthday party and a new friendship was immediately born. Over time she became aware of his growing affection for her, but was kept back from exploring her own curiosity by a recent heartbreak. After weeks of convincing her friends of them being ‘just friends’ she got invited to a night-out with their matchmaker. “Have you told Charlie about tonight? I think you should give him a call given that it has been so long since you last spoke,” she had suggested, as she began to type in her own invite. That night Charlie had arrived free of his long locks wearing a white t-shirt and light blue jeans, immediately drawing attention to himself. A tall blond with her d-size cup seemed to magnetite herself

to him. As Lily looked upon the Amazonian queen in her hunt, Charlie came up to her asking, “are you okay?” “Yes, I’m fine,” she replied stiffly. “She is very pretty,” she heard herself say without daring to look into his eyes. “That may very well be so, but I want to talk to you, not her,” was Charlie’s final answer. Lily took his hand at last and six months later she sealed his ring finger with a wedding band. That was nine years ago.

Lily had observed Linda on the few occasions she had seen them together. “He’s playing so well tonight, don’t you think?” Linda carefully asked Lily and Charlie as they offered her a seat next to them. “Yes, he is. He seems quite distracted by his fan though,” Lily had pointed out to her. “I know,” she said clenching her fists together. Once Franck had finished his song Charlie called him over to their circle, carefully planting a kiss on Lily as Franck placed himself next to Linda. Lily and Charlie were invisible to the young couple by the time they left them sitting in silence splashing each other with the warm river water. Even the foul odour rising from the sewer seemed to go unnoticed. Their romance lasted for a brief second of a moment much to their matchmakers’ disappointment. Linda’s impulsive nature took her from Paris to the Namibian desert, leaving Franck behind with a broken heart. Franck was still working for George but seemed defeated by the city’s many hardships getting in his way. In the gray of the winter he now worked every night to make enough money to leave the city for greener valleys. Once upon a time, Lily had worn the shattered image of the city she loved so dearly on her sleeve. The city had defeated her using the same weaponry now attacking a broken Franck. The city had broken his spirit for now, leaving him no other choice than a temporary abandonment. Lily had made her peace with Paris long time ago, and was now about to embark on a fruitful journey of bringing a new life into the enthralling Parisian life.

Less than a week away from her due day, Lily rested by herself in the apartment while waiting for Charlie and Alain to return from the airport with her parents and two sisters. She could not help but wondering how on earth a simple half-day visit to Paris, in the first decade of her life, had literally taken over her whole being. The spectacular power of the city and its sheer force to change a course of a lifetime bewildered her. Outside her window the sun shone brightly fooling the inside observer to think it was beautiful day, as the cold wind slapped the hell out of the

tourists huddling on deck of yet another tour boat. As her phone went off a bad knockout of Edith Piaf's *La Vie en Rose* almost burnt her ear off. It was Charlie telling her there had been a slight delay of the flight but not to worry, they would keep her informed. "How is our little girl doing?" He asked before hanging up. "Probably running another marathon" was Lily's reply. She was exhausted after a long day of being kicked in the sides. She rested her exhausted pregnant body on her red sofa as she listened to a collection of Orff's best works. She closed her eyes as *Pavane* came on, and for a moment her unborn child seized the kicking. For some reason *Pavane* always made her think of spring. Next spring she would be pushing a pram down Rue Saint-André des Arts on her way to fetch a tall, skinny Latte. She would be able to have that glass of her favourite wine she had skipped on her first picnic with Charlie last March at Champs du Mars; Charlie had brought a 2005 vintage of Saint Emilion to celebrate his promotion at work and her recent publication. She had been five days late and she felt like her nipples could fall off at any second. She had not taken a pregnancy test, as she wanted to take it with Charlie present. She knew Charlie had noticed the new C-cup she then boasted but said nothing. "We will leave the wine for now, I think. We will use it to celebrate when the time comes," Charlie had said as he put it back into their picnic basket. Her swelling breasts were only the beginning of their suspicion. On their way back from the picnic they purchased a home pregnancy test and to their surprise the result was negative. "How can you not be pregnant?" Charlie had said to her as he pointed out the honey on her Flap Jacks now replacing the usual pile of raw sugar. At work he got a name for a good obstetric physician and immediately booked an appointment for Lily. A week later they had received the good news: "Your due date is on the 4th of December" declared a smiling Dr. Braud. Charlie's intense grip was released and replaced as a wide smile spread across his face. On their way home they sat by themselves on the twirling side of the metro, all along Charlie's hand resting up against Lily's then toned tummy. "I wish every other season were spring," she declared as they walked past yet another gallery on Rue Saint-Louis en l'Île. Like never before, Lily felt like an active participant in the crescendo of *Pavane's* spring. Paris at spring was like a deprived flower bud, gradually crawling out of its shelter to embrace the first warm rays of the arriving spring. Its slow awakening in the very early spring would peak

as the sun reached its summer heights. In all her years in Paris, spring had sneaked upon her every single time. Before she knew, instead of wearing her Karen Millen winter coat she was carrying it around in her oversize handbag. She was choosing to walk home along the Pont Neuf, through the triangular yard hiding behind the Metropolitan police station, past the Bird market by Ile de la Cité through the crowds of tourists. On a good day she would stop at her local café for her virginal Wine Spritzer, as the waiter referred to her order of soda and fruit juice. In between warm days, winter reminded the city of its presence but same as Orff's Pavane reaches the height of its crescendo, the cold winter days eventually fled and the city embraced the soft shade of blue in the summer sky.

During summer Edith Piaf's La Vie en Rose was played on every corner for the tourists and impressionistic locals alike. Like all the other foreigners living in Paris, La Vie en Rose represented an alternative universe of Paris. It was an illusion of its own but at the same time a realistic portrayal of the sheer power of visual magic imposed upon outsiders through cinematic blockbusters such as Audrey Hepburn's Sabrina. More contemporary ideals were those of the alluring powers of Chanel No.5 featuring an elegant Nicole Kidman. Lily and Charlie had not been born into the city thus La Vie en Rose could still overflow them with emotions. On a beautiful night when dressed in the short black dress as worn by Audrey Hepburn in Breakfast at Tiffany's, Lily felt just as beautiful as she walked along the lit up streets of the city she now called home. Like Nicole Kidman she had a man by her side lusting for her alone. Last summer had been a different experience altogether. For the very first time in her life, she felt hot and bothered when the temperature got above 28°degrees Celsius. Instead of being harassed the small bump growing in her front served as her protection from the usual harassment for which Parisian women had to brace themselves. Seen from behind it was near impossible to guess the state of her thus the occasional whistle was inevitable. As it turned out, the mere sight of her little bump was enough to silence the perpetrators into silence. Instead they would offer to give up their seat in the metro to keep her off her feet, some even offered their apologies. As an attractive young woman in her early twenties summertime in Paris had been the worst of all the seasons. Pervertive stares from youths, and men twice her age had been the least of her problems. On several occasions she had been inappropriately groped in

unspeakable places. When objecting to the harassment a young man had once slapped her, and she had asked for help more than once. A memorable event took place over ten years ago, when she had found herself being chased from Belleville all the way to Boulevard Saint-Germain. The thought of riding pervert-infested line 11, which décor came straight out of a badly furnished seventies set, appalled her. It seemed almost criminal to take the metro when the evening sky was painted in Mediterranean blue. Instead she had let her short frame grace past the crowds of Rue de Temple, where sombre memories of the Second World War were safeguarded in the Holocaust museum. Along the way she past a low-ceiling studio painted in the sunny shade of yellow. She imagined the skinny frame of manhood, whose pale as a pastry complexion was that of a struggling artist. Holding a used cigarette stub he contemplated on a work just completed, while his concubines slept after hours of passionate lovemaking. With her mind drifting in all directions she was unaware of the shadow following her every step along the narrow streets. As she passed the Hotel du Ville she became increasingly nervous as the follower was never far behind. As she reached Boulevard Saint-Germain an observant gray-haired Frenchman in his late fifties approached Lily enquiring of her safety. Lily explained to him in flawed French that the young man in her shadow had been following her for more than half an hour now, and she could use his escort to Place Saint-Michel. He introduced himself as Jacques, and standing between Lily and her stalker, he firmly ordered the young man to leave Lily alone or he would take appropriate action. He had offered her to join him and his wife for dinner but Lily had declined as she rushed to find her boyfriend at the time to tell him her tale. Sipping on her Virgin Spritzer with her feet firmly planted on her grandmother's table, while waiting for Charlie to return from the airport, she could not help being amused when looking back to her early days in the city. While all the hardship had seemed so unfair at the time, she could not help but being grateful for having been thrown into the muddy deep end of city life at the start of her adulthood. In the past summer she had reaped her rewards. Precious moments spent on the banks of the Seine in company of good friends, and evenings spent reading to their unborn child from the works of Enid Blyton, Shakespeare's sonnets and Wordsworthian poetry, while the light summer breeze cooled them down after a hot day. Lily would play the music her mother had played to her as a child while leisurely

reading a book or two. During the soaring summer months their child grew within her womb, and before she knew autumn had arrived with shorter and shorter days. Lily's pregnancy was as evident as the day was bright. The weather had remained calm throughout September but with Lily's growing discomfort, she began to wish for the cold rainy days of a previous autumn. The falling autumn leaves were her only pleasure as she could see the wind blow the decayed leaves in all directions. For rest of Paris, the warm days were a blessing. All of Lily's friends were taking sick days to enjoy the last rays of the warm sun; Lily herself had plenty of her own sick days when fatigue simply had the upper hand. As the cold of winter finally arrived Lily was only a month away from giving birth, a day she was beginning to dread. With each day she became more panicky about her inferior knowledge of infants. She had never been the type to babysit like the other girls in her class. Rather she had been running around in the backyard doing back flips or writing a short story in one of her many notebooks. She would call Charlie up to ask him if he knew how to change a diaper, whether he knew when the bottle was too hot, or what the crying meant. "How am I suppose to know how to breastfeed?" She became more and more frustrated with mothers she met who intently told her to avoid epidural for her child's wellbeing. "It will hurt enough as it is with the epidural. And our little girl will be grateful enough to come into the light slightly sedated. It will be less of a shock to her." She was not quite sure if she was going to be able to do all the things she usually did in December. She was pretty sure she was not going to make it to the Christmas market in Bruges, like she had planned to do a year ago. Nor would she be able to buy much from Miss Sixty in La Fayette. Her Karen Millen winter coat would just not fit her enlarged belly anymore. But like she had suffered in the scorching summer heat, she had embraced the cold winter days. Her body had its own heating system, and it would take a lot for her to be cold. All the changes in her life were occurring at the speed of light and she would simply have to surrender to life.

"We are here!" came from the doors as her whole family invaded the not so large apartment with their entire luggage. Nonetheless she was relieved to see her mother and older sister, as they would be able to prepare her for the dreaded birth looming over her shoulders. Her father was there to spoil his little girl and to prepare for his part of the birth; he was going to be present alongside Charlie. Her

younger sister was not with them as she had run to the sorbet shop to fetch the chocolate chip peppermint for them both. She was there to make her forget. Alain's soothing presence somehow calmed the parents-to-be; he was their guardian angel, there to keep them safe and to remind them of just how precious life is.

"Oh God..." Lily very nearly screamed as her Pepper Steak with gravy and chips arrived. She was seated at a local Brasserie in which her family always dined when visiting. Charlie's relaxed shoulders stiffened up; it was time. The waiter packed up their dinner to go, while a teary-eyed hostess gave them all coupons for free desserts upon their next visits, and a hungry Lily was taken to an ambulance parked down at Boulevard Saint-Michel. A nervous Charlie ran along her bed on wheels as she tried to disguise the unspeakable pain thrusting through her whole being. "Everything is going to be fine, don't worry," her father whispered into Charlie's ear. As Lily was taken into the ambulance along with her father and husband, Alain called for a taxi. He would join Lily's mother and two sisters to take them to the right hospital, making a quick stop along the way to pick up the hospital bag. Dr. Braud had been alerted and spoke briefly to one of the medics to get Lily's stats, and then in rapid succession explained to Charlie what he could do for Lily. The ambulance and the taxi disappeared into the heavy Parisian traffic towards the little hospital where Lily would begin the journey of lifetime.

Hours later, a little girl who would go by the name Pauline arrived into this world, greeted by an exhausted Lily, a stunned Charlie and a proud grandfather. As Pauline was laid in Lily's arms, a new journey altogether began for both mother and daughter.



## Bibliography

### Websites:

<http://www.shakespeareandcompany.com/index.php?categories=33:1>

<http://www.viamichelin.com/web/Cartes?layers=0001&strLocid=32NDJ2dGg1NzUwMTIxMGNORGd1T0RRreE1ERT1jTWk0ek9EZzVOZz09&empriseW=650&empriseH=450>