

The City of Lights

by Jack Swenson

I love the smell of love in the morning. It smells like Clorox. I roust my lady friend out of bed; we get dressed and hike downstairs to the lobby. L'ascenseur is broken again.

We argue on the way down. We bicker on the walk to the bistro. I get coffee and croissants at the bar and bring them back to our table, and she is still talking, proving me wrong, when I return.

We do this every morning. We don't get along, but what are we supposed to do? We are Americans, and we are in Paris, and it is April.

We go to the zoo, have a fight, skip lunch while she pouts, then rent a rowboat and go out on a tiny lake choked with other rowboats and drink cheap red wine.

That evening we go to a movie. It is a French movie with no subtitles. I can't understand a word of what is said. My friend speaks French, but she won't tell what is happening. Afterward, she claims the movie was superb.

"Leave it to the French," I comment. "They sure can make movies!" She gives me a dirty look, knowing I am being sarcastic.

With that, I shoot myself in the foot. She makes me take her back to her room, which is clear across town from mine, and sends me packing.

It is too late for the Metro, so I have to walk. I don't mind. It's a nice night, and Paris is a beautiful city. All those fountains. And it really is the City of Lights.

My hotel is near the city center, and as I pass the Opera, I see a man and two women on the sidewalk ahead of me. They are moving slowly. The man is limping. He is a short, big-shouldered man, as wide as he is tall. The girls are pretty and slim, and they are both about a foot taller than he is.

I overtake the man and his escorts, and as I go by, I look back at them. Good grief, it is Gene Kelly, the famous American dancer! Kelly is grinning. He looks very pleased with himself.

The next day I tell my friend about the encounter. "No pain," I tell her. "He was feeling no pain." She is miffed because she knows my story is true. I showed her the article in the *Herald Tribune* that reported the dancer's injury.

