

Claudine

by Tina Barry

Lawrence is heavy and I'm soft. Our bodies aren't as pretty as they were 30 years ago. Ee-ah, ee-ah the bed squeaks.

Our evening begins: ee-ah, ee-ah; Brie and bread, a fitting snack for our time in this French village; a post-coital chat on the window seat.

Shutters open, the aromas of warm sidewalks and dogs, a woman's perfume. We sip wine. Below us, across a narrow lane, is the terrace of Madame Claudine's café. She bends over and wipes a table with slow, distracted strokes. "She's as tiny as a tart," Lawrence said. He's got the "tart" part right. Kohl-rimmed eyes crinkle in the corners, and her wide smile of delight "Bon Jour!" is reserved for male customers.

Claudine disappears into the café then emerges with a gold lame bag slung over a shoulder. A huge padlock sits heavily in her hand. She slams down the eatery's front gate, pushes the lock closed and looks up.

"Ah! Monsieur Lah-ree," she yells. "You are the king of all the land!" as if our perch is his throne.

"And you, Madame Claudine," Lawrence calls, "are my enchanting subject."

"Ah," she says, patting her frizz of bleached yellow hair.

"Bonne Nuit, Madame." I'm the interloper ruining her fun.

She lifts her head, nose heavenward. There's a wet spot on my dress from our lovemaking, its aroma as heady as Claudine's bouillabaisse. I hope she smells it.

