

*Alexandra Isacson*

**Paris Porn**

Upstairs in her art studio, the sweet smell of melting beeswax wafted through the room, mingling with lavender essential oil. The morning sun broke through a beveled glass window and streaked violet and neon green across an antique chair and concrete floor. Crystal and Al listened to a Billie Holiday singing “Ain’t Nobody’s Business,” from the first Monterrey Jazz festival, recorded fifty years earlier. She could hear an airplane flying overhead, interrupting the concert on the CD. Billie sung her words slurred. All kinds of people had problems with opiates Crystal thought.

They didn’t bother to get dressed. He hadn’t shaved, and she thought he looked sexy with his dark stubble. She was twenty years younger, and they liked it that way. Wearing her pink bathrobe and heels, Crystal reached into her pocket for a clip and twisted her curly blonde hair up.

Al wore her estranged husband’s pajama bottoms and a wife- beater. He sat in a chair and she stood over him. She rubbed oil into his shoulders and neck underneath his dyed black slicked- back hair that he grew out for her. Rubbing his shoulders with her thumbs and palms, she closed her eyes, releasing her desires and emotions into him. She silently prayed over him. She thought doing art together would be healing for both of them.

“I like the look of the wax in your collages,” he said.

“It’s encaustic, like Renaissance artists used,” she said, rubbing his neck. “So have you thought about going back to Malibu?”

“I’m a functioning addict, Crystal. I help people everyday. There are a lot of us making a lot of money.”

“You’re amazing, but I don’t want you to burn out.”

“I’ll think about it,” he said.

“The last time you were able to do therapy.”

“You’re the only therapy I need.”

“Yeah,” she said. “You could rest up and get massages.”

“You’re hands are good, honey,” he said. “None of those bodyworkers are as good as you.”

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“You’re sweet.”

“God, I’ve been tired and achy.”

“You wouldn’t have to do it alone.”

“I was miserable the last time.”

An altered art collage laid on a table she was assembling for his Scottsdale cosmetic surgery office. Tubes of watercolors, various elements in containers, and jars full of different lengths and sizes of brushes were scattered around the canvas. Antique Tarot cards that she bought from a psychic shuffled around the table. Crystal picked up the nine of cups.

“The nine of cups is the wish card,” she said.

“Make a wish,” he said.

She closed her eyes, kissing the card and flashing it.

“Pink,” he said.

She slipped the card in her pocket.

Her Paris porn collages hung in all the examining rooms at Al’s Scottsdale surgery center and his various offices around the valley. The dancers that she met at the clubs and gave his business cards to admired her art the most of any of the female patients.

Crystal pulled out a drawer from an antique end table, set it beside the collage, rummaged around photo reproductions of French women, looking for the right ones.

“Either the copyrights ran out on some of these, or they were never copyrighted because of social stigmatization,” she said.

“Yeah,” Al said, looking at the photos.

“Lucky for us, not them,” she said. “The dancers that come in can really identify with these women.”

She held a plastic reproduction up to the light; it had the ghostly look of a negative.

“The sex industry was built on the backs of these women,” Crystal said, holding

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a vivid picture of woman of with a python wrapped around her neck. “Artists used these pictures; they were passed around at the barber and cigar shops, and into the collective consciousness of the world.”

“Jesus, Crystal, if you weren’t my nurse, there’d be a place for you in academia.”

She looked through the photos. Some were of Lautrec’s models with unshaven armpits and saggy breasts. Some she thought that someone in the 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> century had definitely touched them up. Too much symmetry. Mata Hari. In another, a group of prostitutes posed together, not glamorous whatsoever, but candid. Crystal wondered if the women she collaged could read or write or if they died of syphilis. These women were dust now.

“I wonder if they died alone like Monroe?”

“She died alone?”

“DiMaggio took care of everything.”

She tore some handmade paper she had made with her garden roses in the blender, arranging it on the collage. Crystal grabbed some buttons, small enough for embellishing a baby’s dress, gluing them around a black and white photo of a nude woman’s head. She carefully picked up a Painted Lady butterfly from a box, used a straight edge to cut it in half, and placed the wings around the photo. She placed a small blue Rosella feather in the woman’s hand. She gleaned her wings and feathers from her back pasture butterfly sanctuary and aviary.

“What do you think?” she asked him.

“Nice,” he said. “She looks like an angel. Like you. Where’d you get your butterflies?”

“Cali.”

“Jesus, I feel like I’m looking at my grandfather’s pornography,” Al said, holding a photo of a pair of women posing together in 19<sup>th</sup> century undergarments on a French settee.

“It probably was,” she said.

Al and Crystal went between stroking paint and dipping paintbrushes in melted hot beeswax and painted over their elements. Dipping her paintbrush into water, blue color swirled, and she thought of the ocean in Italy and Malibu. She felt the collage needed more texture.

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“If you’re going to go to Malibu, tomorrow might be good,” she said, slipping her hand inside her pocket, touching the Tarot card.

“You could get everyone to cover for me?”

“You’ve got enough externs,” she said. “Dr. Horn and Silverman can supervise. And I can reschedule the patients that don’t need to see you right away.”

“They can handle it.”

“I’ll tell them you’re at a conference.”

“I need something for a headache.”

They spiraled down her ornamental iron staircase; he slipped into her bedroom, while she started lunch. He came up behind her and slid his hands down her shoulders.

“After lunch, you can call Malibu,” he said, reaching inside his wallet, handing her his black card and license.

She tucked them in her robe pocket with the Tarot card and kissed him. She was surprised; it had been easier than she had thought.

“You wanna come up after and go to the beach and The Getty?”

“Love to.”

After eating lunch, she scheduled him Sunday evening for the rehab clinic and booked him for a first class flight. They drove to his house to pack and spent the night.

In the morning, she burned amber incense. They dressed and an aura clung to them as she drove him in his black Benz to Sky Harbor. She put her hand on his leg as she popped in the Billie Holiday CD. She could hear an airplane flying overhead. She thought about going to downtown Phoenix and picking up some black fishnets for their collage.

*– Alexandra Isacson has published prose and poetry in current issues of Slow Trains, Dogzplot, and The Fickle Muse; and will have forthcoming pieces in Eclectica and Dogzplot. She is an Arizona State University graduate with degrees in English Literature and Religious/Cultural Studies and she has taught high school English Humanities.*