

Shannon O'Connor
A Nurse in Paris

She had always wanted to go to Paris with her husband, but she never managed the trip. There was always something to do: take care of the kids, work endless hours, pay the bills. She dreamed of Paris sometimes, the buildings, the cafes, and the lovely slant of light. She never made it there until after she was divorced, and the kids were in college, when she had endless free time.

Paying for the kids' college was expensive, but she didn't care, she wanted to escape the dreary endless work of being a nurse in the Cardiology ward, the elderly patients who had heart attacks and were on their way to possible death or a transformed life. It was sad; she had always thought working with patients was pleasant, but the whole situation got tiresome after a while. She thought of becoming an outpatient nurse, and talking to patients about medication over the phone, but she thought she would get bored not seeing anyone.

So she went to Paris. By herself. She stayed at a little hotel near the Louvre that was too expensive, but she didn't care. She went to a café for breakfast, and ate a brioche and a café au lait, and looked at the working men standing drinking their coffee. She didn't understand why they didn't take a load off and sit down. She liked to sit down whenever she could because she spent so much time on her feet at the hospital.

After she went to the café, she walked down the Seine. Her plan was to go to the Musee D'Orsay, a little bit down the river. She wandered down the street, looking at the buildings and the bridges she walked over. She thought everything was heavenly, from motorcycles, to little stands selling books and magazines by the river, to people walking around eating whole baguettes with scowling faces.

When she crossed the bridge, she saw a man on the ground.

"Aidez moi," he said.

"What?" she said.

"Speak English? Help me," he said.

"What do you want me to do?"

"Take me to the hospital," he said.

"I can't, I don't have a car. Do you want me to call an ambulance?"

"No afford ambulance. Help me."

She didn't know what to do. She wanted to help him, but she didn't want to take him to the hospital. She was on vacation.

"Let me see if I can get you a cab," she said.

"Come with me?"

"I can't, I have somewhere to be."

"Please. Help me."

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The man was on the ground, and looked like he was doubled over in pain. She thought it might be a stomach problem.

She leaned over him. "Is there something wrong with your stomach?"

"The pain, is everywhere."

When she leaned over to touch his head, he reached out, grabbed her purse and ripped it off her body.

"I have so much pain," he said, laughing. When he had her purse, he ran away.

"Oh my God, stop that thief!" she said.

People around simply looked at her.

She ran after the man.

"Stop him! *Arret!*" she screamed.

The man tripped and fell on a bump on a cobblestone on the sidewalk.

She caught up to him.

"You dirty bastard, give me my purse." She tore it out of his hands.

She kicked him on the ground.

"You're a terrible person!" she screamed. "You don't play with people's sympathies like that! I'm a nurse. It's my job to take care of people."

She clutched her purse to her chest.

He slithered away.

"I'm on vacation. And God damnit, I'm going to have a good time."

She started to cry.

A woman came up to her and put her arm on her shoulder.

"Don't touch me," she said to the woman.

"Are you okay?" the woman said.

"Yes, I'm on vacation, and I'm going to the Musee D'Orsay, and it's going to be a beautiful day."

She walked away, aware of everyone around her. She hung her purse strap across her body, and strode forward, intent on enjoying her vacation in Paris, and she would not let anyone or anything ruin it for her.