

## The French Touch

The first French male Sara ever met was sitting at a small bar in the living room of the gentleman who lived on the first floor of the Brownstone on Elk Street. It had been the elegant Albany residence of FDR when he was NY State Senator. She and her two roommates were seniors in college, and they rented the not at all elegant 4<sup>th</sup> floor, one bedroom, walkup. The roommates slept in the tiny bedroom while Sara slept on a daybed in the living room, often in the company of some stray male one of the roommates had rescued, usually from the drama department.

"I can't tell you because I don't remember what this male looked like, except, perhaps he had dark hair," she told me. Nor does she remember why she was invited into her neighbor's very elegant first floor apartment. The neighbor and his French guest were graduated from college and employed, the neighbor at the state capital, and the French gentleman at the Harvard bookstore in Boston. Sara was immediately attracted to the French accent, so she sat on a bar stool next to him and carried on a delightful conversation. Just before the men were about to leave for the train station, the French gentleman put his hand on Sara's forearm. She does not remember why, maybe to stop her from leaving without my pocketbook, or to get her attention. No matter; his touch was something she had never experienced before – a physical sensation - soft as a feather, with an electric tingling that flowed up her arm, across her breasts, and down to her thighs, leaving warmth that radiated up into her neck and down into her legs. She was stunned. How many seconds or minutes had she sat perfectly still, hoping he would never take his hand away? No way of knowing. When he did take his hand away, he appeared not to notice that she was frozen in space. He said goodbye and how lovely it was to meet her. She thinks she said goodbye before stumbling up the four flights to her apartment, not certain her feet ever touched the stairs. She never saw him again, but 50 years later, she can still feel that touch.

That wasn't the only time Sara felt energy flowing through her body. Especially dramatic was one Reiki session when the energy from the Reiki Master's hands, which, of course were held over her body, not touching her, shot down one leg and out through her toes like a bolt of electricity -- removing the pain in her knee on its way.

Then a couple decades after college graduation, there was another French male, this time sitting in the window seat in the very last row of a Swiss Air airbus 300 on a flight from Paris to San Francisco. Sara's seat was next to his on the aisle. He was engrossed in working on his computer; It was going to be a long flight and she had a book to read: *Goddesses in Everywoman*. We all know what fun it is to peruse the bookshelves of a new acquaintance and guess what the books say about that individual's life and personality. But Sara did not think about the possibility that the cover of her book might attract the interest of the person sitting next to her while she was catching an occasional glimpse of his computer: in French.

Sara did not make it a practice of making acquaintances on planes, but he initiated a conversation: asking about the book, and then her profession, and then the not so subtle personal questions: kids -yes, what does the husband do – don't have one. The man in the window seat was a Professor at a University in France, well published, and headed to give a presentation at a conference in San Francisco, and Sara was distracting him from his preparation – not her fault, but who could back away from a conversation with a French accent? He was slight of frame, wiry she would say, so it was no surprise that he participated in bicycle racing. He was probably 3 inches taller than Sara, but she had 30 unwanted lbs. on him. He was no Sidney Poitier, her heart throb, or Clark Gable or Michael Douglas reasonable substitutes, , but he did have chiseled features not unlike Emmanuel Macron. Sara knew she was nobody's heart throb. "Which Goddess are you?" he asked. "I haven't finished the book," she said, reluctant to tell him that she was pretty sure she was not the vulnerable wife/mother; certainly not the virgin goddess; which left the sexually independent goddess.

In the close proximity of airplane seats, there was a pleasant energy between them, more familiar than with the Frenchman in college days. After the dinner dishes were cleared, they were well above any clouds. He invited her to lean over to look at the sky out the window. When she did, he put his arm around her. There it was: the French touch, strong, gentle, soft, electric. Two out of Two, except this one was not going to get up to leave for several hours, and Sara was not going to pull away. They watched the sky and talked about the plane's flight path over Greenland, and he put his hand on her thigh. She pulled her blanket up over her lap, then both their laps, and they sat together occasionally talking, mostly touching and snuggling, much to the chagrin of the buttoned up Swiss stewardesses. They weren't bothering anyone; their activity, was not visible or audible; no moaning, no trip to the restroom for a quicky, only gentle touching. It was doubtful the energy passing between them could be detected by anyone outside their aura.

He was going through a separation leading to divorce, but he was being faithful to his wife. Sara was a free agent. Based on the American stereotype of French men, she figured she had found the one and only faithful French male. Oh, well. Her own divorce had left her with a "you win some; you lose some" approach to life. It never occurred to her that he might have made up an excuse because of not being attracted to her or being afraid of her. (A colleague had once told her that several men in the office wanted to go out with her, but were afraid she would cut them off at the knees or higher.) They left the plane exchanging phone #s and email addresses.

A few days later, Sara got a call. He was at an airport hotel for a few hours before his plane back to France. Would she be willing to spend a little time with him before he left: "No expectations." She replied "No expectations." Sara enjoyed sex and was glad she was free mentally and physically to dip into the Whitman sampler from time to time, but she did not see men as pieces of meat to be carefully selected from behind the glass case in the butcher shop, the way she had felt in her younger days at a singles bar, being examined like a cow at auction.

For Sara, a sexual encounter comes from between your ears, not between your legs. And, quite honestly, the powerful energy she shared with this man came from her heart. In Sara's world, there is no such thing as "just sex," slam bam thank you mam. A lot of women will only screw someone they love, and for them, love demands exclusivity. Sara believes in fidelity in a committed relationship as long as it applies to both parties. She doesn't need to be "in love," whatever that is, to enjoy being with a man, but she needs to share intimacy and caring with someone with whom she shares her body.

If truth be known, Sara has rarely had a great experience in a one night stand. She heard an interview one time with a male gay couple. The interviewer asked if they talked to each other about sex. Gay guys have to, they replied. If you don't know ahead of time what variations your partner expects and is willing to participate in, it just doesn't work very well. And there are so many other issues: privately gay or publicly gay for example, and then there are health issues. Sara was impressed with that discussion because her experience with heterosexual men was that most of them expected sex to just happen magically; no discussion needed; blow job expected. Not so much in her mind.

She dressed carefully to be sure there was nothing provocative in her demeanor. There was nothing she would like better than to discover how that electric touch converted to a sexual encounter, but if there was one thing she would not do, it was to jump some guy, especially one who was grappling with fidelity. Well maybe not never, there was that one night she got drunk and lured a gorgeous young widower into her bedroom. But in all fairness, he did not come out any the worse for wear.

They hugged when she walked in; the electricity was still there. He backed away and they talked partly about his guilt over a failing marriage; how painful it was for his wife, who he clearly cared about; what it would do to the children, and how much all of them would lose. He was still living with his wife in a beautiful home on a hillside. Sara was compassionate: here is this human being who has delivered a high powered academic presentation in a second language, while in huge psychic pain. How could she not care for him. For readers who might be cynical and think gaining a woman's sympathy is a time worn way to get her into bed, keep in mind that in this case, his conflict was distracting from her desire to get laid.

Hugs led to kisses, and touching and undressing, and one of the few first encounters Sara ever found magical.

He finalized his divorce, and they met every couple of years when there was a conference. They talked about their encounters before and after and shared work and very personal experience including romantic encounters. Sara especially loved the times she met him in Europe. They came together – no pun intended - for their enjoyment of sex, and they enhanced their encounters with some experimentation. He bought her a picture book of sexual positions they could try, and she met him dressed so he could slip his hand under a wrap around skirt to discover bare flesh. It was not until a decade or so later that Sara read Kama Sutra and

discovered that a match maker looked for anatomical compatibility for marriage partners. He was possibly her most anatomically compatible lover.

In many other respects, they were not so compatible. He was athletic, she was not; they were both high power people, perhaps a chance for conflict if they had to negotiate life on a daily basis. And they were both firmly ensconced in their separate worlds: his university, her corporate life; neither of them was seeking a committed relationship with the other. A decade or so after their first encounter, Sara was in a committed relationship and he was married.

They continued to correspond by email. She loved hearing about his athletic feats; he invited her to visit him and his wife in France. In one email, he commented that he found their relationship strange, and that he very much enjoyed hearing from her. Sara responded:

Yes, our relationship is unusual, and culturally strange. I think we began a relationship with curiosity and adventure and a lot of caring, and mutual respect. You were going through some difficult times. I think we are more open and honest with one another than most Americans are, and we have never had unreasonable expectations of one another. We shared emotional, physical, and intellectual intensity, but I don't think either of us expected or wanted anything more or different from what we were able to share. That relationship between any two people, in my experience is very rare, and I treasure my relationship with you.