

The Affair

Sample

Scott became early evening and he saw stars begin to pierce the fabric of night time sky.

A few more emails and an update to his diary saw him shuffling his feet, pacing his room and gazing again and again out the window to the street below.

Before long it became clear what he needed and he thrust his feet into a pair of running socks, quickly joined by some trainers. After throwing a thin hoodie over the jogging bottoms, Scott was ready to go, leaving his room with the key card tucked into the back of his boxers.

He trotted down the stairs, across the glittering, golden foyer and out into the night, at once enlivened by the sweetness of the air and the bustle of busy city life all around him.

He began to jog; a light pace at first, that quickly edged up as he realised that his body craved the exercise.

Two hours on the train. Another in the car. Half an hour in the departure lounge. Another hour on the train.

Scott sighed as he felt the stiffness of a heavy day of travelling rapidly flood out of his body. His muscles loosened, draining fatigue like water until his mind was full with the rhythmic pounding of his own feet and the steady thump of his heartbeat.

He ran east along the Champs-Élysées, aiming towards the sharp spike of the Obélisque de Louxor, in the middle of the grounds of Place de la Concorde. Even Scott knew enough of the tourism history to recognise the giant spike of red granite as one gifted to the French from Egypt in 1833.

His jogging route took him around the obelisk, as close as he was allowed; tilting his head back to gaze at the massive 75ft of painstakingly crafted stone.

The giant shadow fell down over him, dwarfing his tiny human body and bringing to mind memories of the sky scrapers in New York. He remembered how small he had felt, how insignificant in their shadow.

“Not a bad thing... to be humbled by something so much older than me.” He mused, huffing a sweaty lock of hair out of his eyes.

Satisfied with the exercise, Scott began the run back.

He moved faster this time, aiming to escalate his heart rate to the point that his body would start working through some of the pate he'd consumed earlier.

The cool night sent sheets of welcome breeze down the street towards him, but, by the time he reached the hotel again it was not enough to stop sheets of sweat coursing down his body like rain.

A fresh valet greeted him as he entered the doors, nodding politely, though not without an expression of acute interest.

“Jogging,” Scott exclaimed, miming the motion. “Good for the heart.”

Another polite nod and then the man pointedly turned away.

The other man fought back a chuckle, walking slowly across the foyer towards the lifts, meaning to take the easy route back up to his room as his heart rate returned to normal.

He had just reached the elegant sliding gates when a soft lilting laughter floated through one of the large arches leading off the foyer on the right hand side.

The sound made him pause, almost on his toes, as his skin crawled suddenly with a remembered heat. Scott closed his eyes, trying to place the sound in his memory.

The lift pinged into life before him, the doors swinging open, but Scott walked away as curiosity got the better of him. Instead, he followed the sound as it rang out a second time, letting it lead him through to the hotel bar.

At the entrance a waiter held out one arm. “I’m sorry, Monsieur,” the man shook his head, “but you are not adequately dressed for this facility. We do have a gym, or if you would prefer to join us in the bar, I must ask that you change.”

Scott snapped out of his daze, glancing down at the sweaty clothes and the massive damp patches beneath his arms. He ducked his chin. “Sorry... I just thought- I mean I thought I heard a friend of mine in there.”

The waiter nodded. “Perhaps, Monsieur. If you would like I can tell this friend of yours that you are here?”

“No. No, please, don’t worry about it. I’m being silly. She couldn’t possibly be here; that would be weird.” He turned to head back towards the lifts, aware, even as he did so, that someone was walking across the bar towards him.

He stopped. Looked. Felt his lips draw up into a massive smile. “It is you!”

“Il est avec moi. Ne vous inquiétez pas¹.”

The waiter gave a discreet nod of the head and turned away, leaving behind a slim, short woman in an elegant black dress.

“Mr Kennedy, how nice to see you.”

Scott dragged a hand back through his hair. “Marie? What are you doing here?” He dragged his eyes over her, drinking in the delicate smoothness of bare skin about the chest and shoulders, exposed by the daring neckline of the dress. It plunged into a devastating V-cut, held up by sheer will alone that hugged her ribs and hips before flowing loosely to the ground. A leg, slender and shiny in skin tone tights peeped from a slit that reached as far as her waist.

“I have a meeting here. With a friend. It does not happen often, but he likes this hotel; he likes the bar.”

Several loud swallows helped Scott clear the lump from his throat, but it still took additional effort to get the next words passed his lips. “You... well you look...”

Marie gave a sudden grin, twirling on her toes in a way that gave her more height than that provided by the spiked stiletto heels. “This? Oh it is old. I have had this dress for many years. You like it, do you?”

Scott nodded. It was the most he could manage.

“You are very kind.” She ran appraising eyes over him. “Enjoying the sights of the city?”

Another nod. And then; “I saw the obelisk.” The words rasped in his throat.

“Ah... it is a beautiful piece of work, isn't it?”

He shrugged.

The woman took another small step forward, moving until she was close enough to let the hems of her dress brush against Scott's ankles. “Funny that France should take such pride in a piece of work not native to their home. Or those that are merely gifts.”

“The Tower?”

“An exhibition that did not stick.” Marie tilted her head, causing a lock of shiny brown hair to slither down the side of her neck. “But who am I to complain.” She turned abruptly, glancing back over her shoulder towards another figure approaching from across the bar.

¹ He's with me. Don't worry.

With swift, subtle movements, she took a giant step back, turning to face him with one hand outstretched. “Jean-Claude, this is Mr Scott Kennedy. Scott, please meet Jean-Claude.”

The other man arrived beside them with all the force of a whirlwind. His massive shoulders and six foot frame, though not overly close seemed suddenly to crowd Scott.

He took a step back, breathing deeply through his mouth as a sense of suffocation and discomfort began to tighten his chest. Just the same he managed to hold out his hand, feeling more than a little twinge of relief when he saw that it wasn't shaking. “Pleased to meet you.”

Jean-Claude shook himself; a strange little body ripple that began at his head and travelled all the way down. His eyes narrowed, sweeping over Scott from top to bottom. That done he promptly turned towards Marie. “We need to leave.”