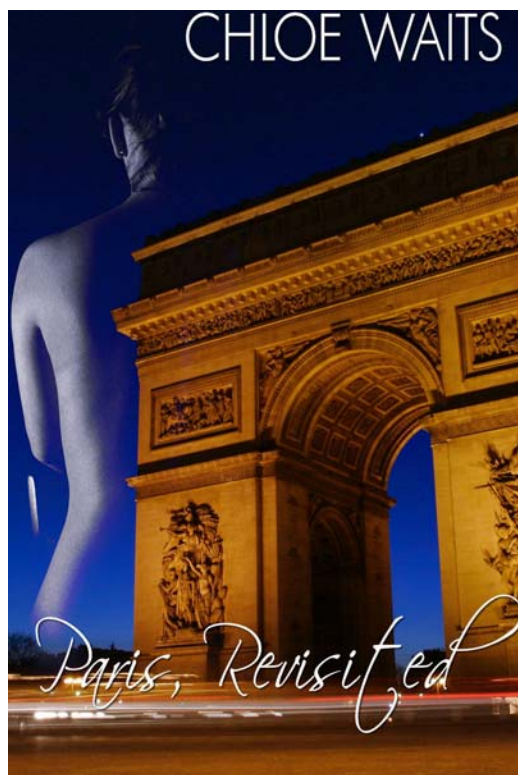


CHLOE WAITS



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Paris, Revisited

CHLOE WAITS

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Emma is trying to recapture what she lost here years ago. It's been ten years ago, to the day.

The memory of this place is both familiar and visceral. Paint is peeling, floorboards slope and lift, but nostalgia has remade this small room a castle. He is still sitting here in the light of the window, smoke from his cigarette curling past his lips as a quick hand runs through coarse brown curls. The image is sharp, not blurred by time. She has a picture of him, after all, in that pose; one that turns up at the edges and is hidden deep in a drawer back at her home across the sea.

Emma's clothes are carefully unpacked from a suitcase, not a knapsack this time. Silence folds in on her as she sits on the same bed they once shared years ago. The hostel isn't quiet for long though, with voices coming up from the street below, beckoning.

Closing her eyes, she remembers the sounds of the city outside from long ago. A small pure voice singing 'The Rose' by Bette Midler, dissolving in self conscious giggles at the end. Too young to know the meaning of the song, and yet it's this version by an unseen singer she remembers more than others. The one that plays in her mind when she thinks of him.

Emma had met him with only a few days left of her trip. Another traveler. Exotic, bearded, with heavy lidded eyes. Jewish eyes. That was how she thought of them anyway. As though the history of a people's suffering could be seen in them—shining through even in his smiles—moist irises almost black.

It had only taken him only a day to seduce her.

Maybe, it was because it was Paris. Maybe it was the freedom of having no constraints, no one to tell her not to get hurt, to be careful. Or even how a good girl behaves.

God, she was so young then. To think in such terms!

All she knew was he suddenly kissed her in this darkened room, and life had changed.

They had circled each other all day, like animals, almost

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warily, unsure how to get closer. Trying to bridge language and culture, talking in fits and starts as they drank cheap merlot. Then, he kissed her. She could taste the ashes on his tongue from his cigarette. There was still time to stop as his hands moved up to her hair. Wasn't that what you did with a stranger? And yet stopping was the furthest thing from her mind. Emma realized this almost with wonder. There were only the twins of need and want. No judgment, no disapproving girlfriends to roll their eyes, no worrying about waiting by the phone for calls that may not come...

He is taking down her ponytail, fingers threaded through tendrils. She has never felt more beautiful or alive. Seeing herself with his eyes. He whispers words she doesn't understand, doesn't even want to understand. His hands are large enough to cradle her, calluses scrape bare skin. The kiss deepens, demands more of her than she has given before, more than he has a right to ask for. Yet she gives it freely, perhaps for the first time. Lips find nipples already budded with desire, notches of rib and hip in the swell of flesh. His hair is wiry and strong, all over him, springing up under her seeking hands. The whorl of his thumb is on her tight wet folds as she trembles. Words are more frenzied now for him, while she can form no syllables at all, communication only a low moan in her throat. This is a new language, which only they understand. His hardness is at the tight mouth of her, urgent and supplicant for entry. Joined, they move in age old rhythms, somehow new.

And by morning he is gone. A scribbled note on a postcard, and a photo was all she had left of a stranger, who by rights, was the most important man in her life. Her throat burns and eyes water.

What did she hope for by coming back?

Emma cannot get back what she lost here years ago. She has tried to resurrect his memory by being in the country—the place of its birth—but the timing is all wrong. Like tendrils of smoke she cannot recapture it if she looks for him. She has the where, but not the who, not the how or the why. And it's not enough.

Perhaps, though, she is mistaken in this memory of what is actually gone. *The who.* Maybe it is not the man she misses, but the girl. *The how.* The one that allowed herself not to fear. To

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give, to love. *The why*. The one who stopped listening to the expectations of others. Who put on a knapsack and traveled to different lands. And took her own path. One that simply led here.

Maybe this is the secret, and what's been missing all along.

Maybe it's time she once again, learnt a new language.

About the Author

Chloe Waits is the alter ego of a Toronto-based author who is a true believer of romance without inhibitions. A writer of erotic romance, chick lit, and the occasional poem, it's really all about relationships.

Memories of thumbing through romance books to get to the 'good stuff' are noted as an early influence. She also draws real life inspiration for her romantic heroes from her very own at home.

After years of doing what she thought she was 'supposed' to do—including a more conservative job—her inner romantic sex kitten has finally been allowed out to play, even if it's only after dark...

Meow! Er (cough cough)...sorry, hairball.

Chloe loves to hear from her readers. You can visit her at her webpage, www.chloewaits.com.