

Amy Savage

### Rive Gauche

Christine's dog, Rosco, had been a nice dog to everyone but Steve. The heavy yellow lab wasn't mean to Steve, he was just indifferent. He would smell everyone else's crotch, but not Steve's. One time Christine teased him about it, something about his crotch being scentless, and he was somehow offended. "What? Is it better to have a stinky crotch?" she asked, amused. He wasn't sure of the answer, and he wasn't amused, so he answered with silence.

That was before she told him she was going to study abroad in France.

"All the guys in France stink, I bet," he had said cruelly after a few minutes of uncomfortable brooding. He didn't want to say it, but he had to say something. The silence was unbearable. Of course it was the dumbest, most stereotypical, culturally inappropriate, jealous thing to say, he thought later. And in Rosco's opinion the French stench would be like glorious pheromone-soaked ambrosia. He realized the flaw in his criticism but knew it was too late. She gave him a look like, *What an idiot; thank god I'm going to France*. At least that's what he thought it meant. *Rosco. What a cliché name for a dog*, he thought. *Going to France was such a cliché place for study abroad*. Then he hated the word *cliché* for being French.

When she left he took her to the airport in his mom's Civic and tried not to cry. *He's not even crying*, she thought, and was angry enough that she didn't cry either until she got on the plane.

She called two days later.

"What's it like?" he asked.

"You can't describe Paris," she said, pausing. "I don't know— there are lots of beautiful buildings that have been here forever. The subway smells like piss but the murals are fantastic. There are cafés with terraces and fresh croissants and everyone is wearing a *chic* scarf, even the men."

"Okay," he said, staring out into the backyard at the garage. A squirrel was tearing holes in the garbage bags.

“There are people whose families have lived in the same *arrondissement* for centuries!” She sounded indignant. She sounded pretentious. Steve’s family had moved a few times. So had hers. *What makes them better than us?* he thought.

All of Steve’s friends asked him if they were going to stay together while she was in France. *It’s only the summer, man. Yeab, but she’s hot, don’t let go of that. She’s gonna get laid in France, bro!* Steve tried not to think too hard about what Christine was doing in France.

“I might stay here,” she said flippantly a month into her trip. “I mean, everything is so *sophistiqué*, so *avant garde*. Today I went to where Ernest lived. Hemingway, that is.”

Christine liked the way the men said her name, so precise and feminine, with an extra syllable at the end: “Krees-tee-nuh.” She was smart enough not to tell Steve this.

That night Steve stayed up late in the basement at his father’s desk, drinking a whole bottle of pinot noir he stole from his parents’ liquor cabinet and writing very short, anglo-saxon sentences, trying to be Ernest. He fell asleep at the desk and in the morning he didn’t have much to show but a few incoherent pages about drinking pinot noir with a pregnant nurse in the Alps.

The longer the summer droned on, flies buzzing on sidewalk shit smears, little kids drooling chocolate ice cream with brown crust forming around their lips, the less sure Steve was of Christine. The one thing he knew was that the longer she was gone, the less she seemed like freckles and laughter and summer-in-the-air Christine.

“Remember,” his mother said after overhearing his end of one of their later phone conversations. “Everything is *new* for her there.”

“Thanks,” he choked, knowing then that soon it would all be over.