



In the Footsteps of the Parisian Poet

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Dutifully, he trails high heels clicking up rickety stairs, treads so worn they could have been climbed by Baudelaire on nightly forays a hundred years before, howling after one or more of his favorite whores.

The room is square, cracked ceiling, paint peeling, washbasin at the wall, single bed centered on the floor. His tutor, Piaf-like, perhaps forty, orders him to drop his trousers and drawers. With a flick of her tongue, he's quickly undone. Wet washcloth tossed in the sink, she remains standing, still fully clothed.

In his best college French he asks, "*C'est tous finis?*" As she turns away, he exclaims, "*Vous m'avez trompé!*" Mocking murmurs and laughter of the other Rue Pigalle *putains* rise through the window, cracked open to the perfumed Parisian twilight.

That evening he hears a French couple across the room undressing, caressing. He listens to their rhythmic bedspring song, stares at the ceiling above his hostel bed.