

## INELEGANT MOMENTS IN PARIS

by Nancy Martz

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Eager to be out on my own in the world, I thought my Dad's pleading to find what I was looking for in my own back yard absurd, and set out solo anyway for Europe, planning to travel through the winter months. To counter his certainty that, not only would I be murdered, but I'd catch pneumonia over there, I had given in enough to pack for cold weather. After chilly weeks in Germany where I fit in with my drab, chunky wardrobe, I took an exquisite white glove train to Paris. I spent one expensive night in a dazzling hotel room on the Left Bank and had my introduction to a bidet-- which I used as a foot bath, pleased to have figured out this French appliance on my own. The next day I set out for Montmartre and, using my French/English pocket dictionary, ordered tea at an outdoor cafe. When the waiter brought me a platter of scrambled eggs in whipping cream instead, I'm sure my eyes widened, but I acted as if it were exactly what I expected.

It wasn't a crisis after all. I've never had a bad vacation, then or since, just inelegant moments along the way. I was fortunate to meet a Brazilian travel agent in Paris, and the two of us did lots of sightseeing together. When Dora suggested we go to a dinner show at the Moulin Rouge on a cold Saturday night, I had only my sturdy brown hiking boots and my lumpish green parka with fake fur hood chosen by my Dad as defense against pneumonia abroad. As a kid, I had dreamed of being a bon vivant in Paris, but now that I was there, my only wrap gave me the elegance of a giant tufted titmouse. Dora met me at the club in a stunning black velvet cape and diamond earrings, but she reacted with grace as she saw me. All other guests at the world's most famous cabaret wore formal evening attire, and the glances my way were of the aghast type. Still, the show was memorable, and Dora looked appropriate even though sitting next to me.

I had been in Paris only a week when my eyes sealed shut. Dora led me through a maze of The Underground and buses to the American Hospital. The doctor administered drops that eventually cleared my eyes sufficient for sight. However, I had to further distinguish myself in the world's city of chic and

haute couture by wearing rubber rimmed goggles against the air pollution in addition to my tacky parka and boots.

In spite of my appearance, and mostly due to Dora's, we mingled with French college students and their families and were invited to several private homes for dinners. At that time, I didn't know the names of half of the U.S. cabinet members, most of those in Congress nor some of the major political issues. After one extremely embarrassing dinner during which the conversation was all about the U.S. and even the French children knew more than I, my goggles and fake fur hood couldn't hide the egg on my face. I think I had given that particular family evidence for assuming French superiority.

After France, I gave my parka away to a girl on a London street and bought myself a fashionable, long wool cape, too little, too late for Paris, and not really auspicious for the daily London rains. And, as my Dad had anticipated, I caught one of the worst colds of my life.