

# Petite Confessions

A HUMOROUS MEMOIRETTE  
with SASSY DRINK RECIPES



“A funny, quirky  
look at the life  
of an American  
in Paris.”

- Kristin Louise  
Duncombe,  
*Trailing: A Memoir*

VICKI LESAGE

# **Petite Confessions**

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with SASSY DRINK RECIPES

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## Introduction

There comes a time in every girl's life when she needs to confess to the world just how many times she's passed out on a bathroom floor. How many times she drank too many glasses of Bordeaux and stumbled home. How many times...

Oh wait, scratch that. That would be très embarrassing.

What if instead she just shared a few of her less-than-proud moments? Times when she tried to pull off cool dance moves but found out that not only was The Shopping Cart out, but it had never been in. Times when she tried to speak French with the locals, only to call people virgins and end up eating a finger.

Intrigued?

In this collection of petites confessions, I share times I slipped up, tripped up, and flipped out on my journey to establish a new life in Paris. It hasn't been easy (and in fact got exponentially harder once I had kids!), but 10 years down the road I'm still living, loving, and surviving in the City of Light. If you like what you see, I embarrass myself further in my full-length memoirs, *Confessions of a Paris Party Girl*, *Confessions of a Paris Potty Trainer*, and *Christmas Confessions & Cocktails*.

Oh, that reminds me: cocktails! Each story in this collection is paired with a delicious drink recipe, perfectly tailored to the story. Or at least kinda sorta related to the story.

I hope you'll laugh (at me or with me, I'm not picky), cry, and then have a fab time taste-testing these mouth-watering libations.

Happy reading!

Vicki Lesage  
Paris, 2015

P.S. Here's the part where I tell you to please drink responsibly so I don't get sued. PLEASE DRINK RESPONSIBLY SO I DON'T

GET SUED. We don't want to take all the fun out of it. Cheers!



## **Petite Sips**

“Parenting is like a glass of wine. It’s... wait, did someone say wine?”



## Keg Party Class

In college, I was one classy chick.

After a long day of playing teacher's pet in World Geography and Differential Equations, I'd head out with the gang to one of the numerous keg parties in my small university town of Columbia, Missouri. While my fellow co-eds handed over \$5 in exchange for a red plastic cup and all the beer they could drink, I brought my own wine.

And wine glass.

Told you I was classy.

Drunken students surrounded me, slamming lukewarm beers while I sipped daintily from my black-stemmed glassware, made out of actual, breakable glass.

I suppose I should specify that this fancy glass came from Walmart and my fancy wine came from a box.

Further adding to the class factor, I mixed the wine with Fanta into order to be able to chug it alongside my beer-drinking companions during drinking games. They'd make trips to the keg, I'd pull my two-liter bottle of mixed deliciousness from my oversized purse and fill 'er up.

Round after round of Drinking Jenga, Kings, Golf, or Quarters, my lips and teeth would grow more and more stained with the syrupy concoction, drawing even more attention to my bizarre choice of drink.

"Ooh, you're drinking red wine?" an intrigued beer drinker would ask.

"How could you tell?" I would respond with a burgundy-tinted grin.

"Um... no reason. Could I have a taste?"

"Sure," I'd say, proffering my glass. "But just to warn you, it's carbonated. With Fanta."

At this, the partygoer would instantly retreat and I'd be left in peace with what remained of my two liters of weirdness.

So you can imagine the culture shock when I moved from the Midwest to Paris. As in France. Where the naked ladies dance.

I enjoyed a good French wine, sure, but I secretly enjoyed

my low-class wine cocktails, too.

How would I survive life in the City of Light? I would never blend in if I insisted on blending my vin with soda.

During college I could explain away my drink preferences as a budget issue—mixing the wine made it last longer and didn't cost as much. But as a 20-something girl on her way to Paris, I'd had to leave the mixed wine concoctions at home.

Sniff.

I poured a little boxed-wine-mixed-with-soda out for my homeys before packing my bags and heading overseas.

Turns out, I was able to get over my unusual cocktail preference pretty quickly.

As soon as I arrived in France, Parisians welcomed me with open arms. Arms holding bottles of delicious Syrahs and Cabernets and Pinot Noirs that didn't need to be mixed or chugged or made to suffer any other horrible treatment.

Notice I said "bottles." Because of course there wasn't a box in sight.

I drank plenty of amazing French wines over the years. Which led to its own set of problems (that's a whole other story—a whole other book, actually), but at least no one ever had to know about my boxed-wine-soda-drinking past.

Until now.

## **Sangria Spritzer**

Don't worry, this recipe isn't wine mixed with Fanta. Because clearly after reading the story, you already know how to make that fabulous cocktail (not that you ever, cough, would). No, this recipe is for a socially acceptable form of blending wine and carbonated beverages: sangria!

1/4 cup water

1/3 cup sugar

1 bottle red wine

1 pineapple, cut into chunks

2 oranges, cut into chunks

2 limes, cut into chunks

12 oz. lemon-lime or orange soda

1. Pour water into a large pitcher. Add sugar and stir.
2. Add red wine and fruit chunks.
3. If possible, chill before serving (even overnight).
4. To serve, pour over a glass of ice, then top with soda.  
College drinking games optional.

Makes 8 servings

## Deux Pieds Gauche

As a self-proclaimed Party Girl, you'd think I'd have some killer dance moves. After all, drinking and dancing pretty much go together, right?

Well, in my case, drinking and thinking-I-can-dance is more like it. In all my wild nights in the City of Light, I've managed to bomb on the dance floor nearly every time.

First, you've got nightclubs. Those are so not my scene. I'll stand on the sidelines, sipping champagne, watching everyone else cut loose on the dance floor. They make it look so easy!

After a few flutes of bubbly, I'm convinced I can do the same. Yet once on the floor I'm stiff and robotic. So much so, in fact, that I literally do The Robot as a way to laugh it off. Like, "Hey, I totally meant to only move my joints at right angles."

Then back to the sidelines I go, sipping champagne, hoping nobody witnessed my nerdiness.

Much more suited to my style are bars and pubs. I like to start the night out socializing at the bar, chatting with the bartender and getting an ill-advised number of drinks in my system to prepare me for dancing.

Then, once the lights are dimmed and the music is turned up, I head out to the dance floor and get my groove on, "American Girl" style. You know what I'm talking about—throwing my arms in the air and shaking my booty. No rhythm whatsoever but it's fun as hell.

Depending on how many beverages I've consumed, I may or may not end up dancing on tables. The only thing that's guaranteed is embarrassing myself in front of the entire bar.

Less annoying than clubs, but equally easy to look like a fool in, are salsa bars. No, not the kind with chips and dip, although, mmm, nachos sounds so good right now. I'm talking about the Latin-inspired venues that serve mojitos on the menu and spicy moves on the dance floor.

Even as a beginner (which it seems I'm destined to be for the rest of my life), it's fun, and there are plenty of Rico Suaves happy to teach me the moves. More than happy, really. In fact, I

usually have to bat them away with a stick after a few songs. But after several mojitos, I can usually find my groove.

Or at least think I did.

I've even gotten really fancy and attended a few charity galas. Nothing makes a girl feel like a princess more than dancing at a ball in Paris. My dress twirling, the room swirling—it's magical.

Until I sprain an ankle.

The day I married the love of my life—Mika—was the exception to my dancing disasters. Our first dance went off without a hitch, partly because we didn't try any slick moves, partly because I intentionally held back on drinking, and partly because I was so darn happy I didn't care how smooth I was on the dance floor.

But even better than that first dance was the re-creation of the "lift scene" from Dirty Dancing. "I've Had the Time of My Life" blared from the speakers, as I shouted to my brother, Stephen, across the room that we were gonna do this thing (no way would I even try to get hubby on board for this maneuver).

Stephen tried to talk me out of this absolutely horrible idea, but he couldn't turn down his big sister on her wedding day.

We finished our drinks and did The Rooster (you know, bobbing your head in time to the music without moving the rest of your body) until the crucial part of the song. I took a few steps back, getting the just right distance, then ran toward him.

One of two things was going to happen: Either Stephen would successfully lift me up and I would be the coolest person in the world, or we would both crash into the pyramid of champagne glasses behind him.

Believe it or not, we succeeded in doing the lift. It was amazing. We didn't knock anything over. I soared high above my smiling guests. It made the best day ever even better. I had, you guessed it, the time of my life. (Here's a basket of tomatoes you can throw at me. That pun was awful.)

For someone with two left feet, I certainly gave dancing in Paris my all. But for the most part, dancing and me are just not

meant to be.

So if you need me, I'll be over by the nachos, doing The Rooster.

## **Rockin' Mojito**

If you're dancing all night, you'll need to keep cool. Alternate mojitos with bottled water and you'll be the life of the party, rock star.

8 mint leaves

4 lime wedges

1 tbsp. sugar

2 oz. white rum

3 oz. club soda

1. Crush mint leaves and one lime wedge with a muddler in a sturdy glass.
2. Add two more lime wedges, muddle. Add the sugar, muddle. Pause and take a sip of another drink because, man, this is a lot of work.
3. Fill glass almost to the top with ice.
4. Add rum, then club soda.
5. Garnish with the last lime wedge, then dive in for your much-deserved treat!

Makes 1 serving



## **Total Eclipse of Good Judgment**

“Forever’s gonna start tonight!”

And the hangover’s gonna start tomorrow.

There’s a direct correlation between how loud I sing (scream, if we’re being honest) “Total Eclipse of the Heart” into whatever microphone-like object I find at the bar and how crappy I’m going to feel the next morning.

If my singing is pitch-perfect, I’ll be feeling pitch-perfect. (Of course, neither of those has ever happened to me.)

Using a twisty straw as an earpiece microphone? I can count on a bitchin’ headache.

Turning around at each “Turn around, bright eyes”? Yeah, my head will be buried in a plate of greasy breakfast food.

If I’m wildly flailing my arms, “giving off sparks,” my head will instead be buried in the toilet.

And if I’m standing on the bar doing all of the above, well, I can count on suffering through all of the above.

Yet somehow, for some reason (Vodka shots. It’s vodka shots, dummy.) I do this EVERY. TIME. And pay for it so dearly the next day.

Before kids, I could sleep it off, down a pot of coffee, and slide burgers down the hatch until I felt like a human, usually by 10 pm the following day.

With kids, I’m forced out of bed just as the beer buzz wears off and the hangover sets in. This happens at precisely 5:54 am, the exact moment my two-year-old son, Leo, bangs the railings on his crib and my newborn daughter, Stella, decides she’s starving.

Though I normally work full-time, I’d been home with my children the summer after my daughter was born. Some of the longest, sweetest weeks of my life. I enjoyed playing with the kids, hearing my French-American son master more and more words in English, and strolling around the lovely urine-saturated city of Paris.

But it was also a load of work. Days blurred together into

hazy, sleep-deprived, pseudo memories.

I do remember one Friday in particular, though. That never ending day was the result of combining my passion for Bonnie Tyler and booze with the fact that, doh, I still had kids to care for in the morning. I partied way too late and got up way too early.

“Good luck,” Mika said as he left for work in the morning. His nuanced tone managed to convey both sincerity and a much-deserved I-told-you-so-ness. He would never say I had partied too hard, but his look said it all.

Ugh, just the thought of partying made my stomach turn.

I mean, c’mon. Five beers? You’re not in college anymore!

Pounding headache. “Mama! Garbage truck! Mama!!” Leo wanted me to play with all 42 of his garbage trucks.

Don’t forget that shot of Stoli, playa. What were you thinking?

Rumbling belly. I’d be revisiting last night’s mistake. “Mama! Caca! Mama!!” Leo provided play-by-play commentary as I inelegantly ejected the contents of my tummy. “Bye-bye, caca!” he said as I flushed.

One year without drinking and the minute you’re out on the town it’s balls-to-the-wall, drink-it-all. Tsk, tsk.

I needed some air. I took the kids on the world’s longest walk (around the block) under the summer’s hottest sun (a balmy 82 turned into 110 with Stella in the baby carrier and, hello, did I mention my hangover?).

I would NEVER party like that again.

I waited in the world’s longest line for a sandwich (one dude in front of me) and ate it painstakingly slowly, so as not to vomit on my baby’s head as she innocently slept against my chest.

No, seriously. I would NEVER drink that much again. Especially not when I had to take care of my two little angels the next day.

Naptime finally arrived. The three of us slept like babies.

When we woke up, it was time to play with garbage trucks and feed Stella all over again. But by now I had returned to

about 90% capacity. The light shone from the end of a dizzying tunnel.

I'd survived.

"Every now and then I get a little bit restless and I dream of something wild."

Let's be honest. We all know I'll do it again. Who's free Friday night a year from now?

## **Vanilla Vodka Shot**

When afforded that rare night out, either because you have a babysitter or your other half sees that you could really use a little you-time, make the most of it. Make new friends. Sing at the top of your lungs. Take one too many shots. Vow never to do it again. Do it again.

1 oz. vanilla vodka

1 oz. coffee liqueur

1. Pour alcohol into martini shaker filled with ice.
2. Strain into shot glass.
3. Shoot quickly, playa, it's almost your bedtime!

Makes 1 serving

## **Drinking Hall of Fame**

Pre-pregnancy, I partied it up in the City of Light. Parisian bars could hear me coming a mile away and scrambled to stock up on wine and shots.

I was a force to be reckoned with.

My liver is much happier these days, and of course I'm thrilled to have two adorable kids with the most pinchable cheeks in the world.

I rarely go out any more (other than work, blech) and only get to spend a few brief moments playing with the kids before the dinner-bath-bedtime frenzy. I am often in bed myself by a tame ten o'clock.

Goodbye Party Girl, hello nice, soft pillow.

But, man, sometimes wouldn't it be fun to clean out a bar? To drink ALL the drinks?

Shh, liver. No one's asking you.

In honor of the good ol' days (if passing out on bathroom floors is considered "good"), let's raise a glass to my Drinking Hall of Fame:

### **Grossest Drink**

Bloody Mary with too much Worcestershire sauce. It tasted like barbecue-flavored mouthwash. And in case you're thinking, "Actually, that doesn't sound half bad," let me tell you—it's 100% bad.

### **Grossest Shot**

Jaeger Bomb with champagne instead of Red Bull. You'll burp tiny Jaeger-bomb-covered bubbles all night, a continual reminder of your mistake.

### **Craziest Drink**

Three glasses of absinthe, including melting the sugar in a spoon like a drug addict. Considering each drink is as strong as five glasses of wine, I shouldn't be surprised I ended up booty shaking while dancing on the bar to "Baby Got Back." What can I say, I like big butts and I cannot lie.

### Priciest Drink

A caipirinha at Hemingway Bar at The Ritz Paris set me back a mere €25 (\$32 at the time). Do you know how many cases of Milwaukee's Best I could buy with that? (I'm gonna be a dork and answer my own rhetorical question. Then I'm gonna be a bigger dork and go all math-nerd on you. But just so you know, for the same price, you could score about three cases of The Beast. That's 72 beers. That means each sip of my Hemingway caipirinha cost more than an entire—albeit disgusting—beer.)

### Latest Night

10 o'clock. In the morning. So, like, the exact opposite of my life now.

I'm getting queasy remembering all those soirées. At the same time, I'm kind of in the mood for a drink now. Maybe just one. Or two. Or... crap. One of the kids just woke up. Maybe next time!

## **Pretty Good Bloody Mary**

Loads of bartenders fight over the title for Best Bloody Mary. I think mine is a Pretty Good Bloody Mary, as long as you don't overdo the Worcestershire sauce. Can't argue with that! And if you spend less time arguing, you have more time to enjoy the drink.

2 oz. vodka

3 oz. tomato juice

dash Tabasco

dash Worcestershire sauce

lemon juice

pinch salt

pinch pepper

green veggies for garnish

1. Add vodka, tomato juice, Tabasco, Worcestershire sauce (control yourself! just a dash!), a squirt of lemon juice, a pinch of salt, and a pinch of pepper to a martini shaker (no ice).
2. Shake twice.
3. Pour into a highball glass filled with ice.

4. Garnish with celery stalk, or go crazy with asparagus or green peppers or pickles or olives. Or all of the above. They're all Pretty Good.

Makes 1 serving





## **Petite Enfants**

I say to my two-year-old: "Ready to brush your teeth?"  
He hears: "Want to eat some toothpaste?"

## Virgins & Baby Fleas

“Caca vroom-vroom!”

Leo shouts his favorite word to Grandma, across an ocean, over the interwebs, as we FaceTime from our tiny apartment in Paris to my mom’s St. Louis home. It’s our Saturday afternoon ritual, a time for grandma and grandson to bond.

Well, assuming they understand each other.

“What’s he saying?” my mom asks, surprised at my two-year-old son’s language. “What are you teaching that boy?”

“Don’t worry, Mom,” I say. “It’s his word for garbage truck.”

See, in French “caca” means, well, “caca” but for some reason it sounds better in my French-American son’s accent. “Vroom-vroom” is his word for car or truck, since that’s the sound it makes. Pretty logical, actually.

The kid is obsessed with garbage trucks, so it’s “caca vroom-vroom” 24/7 around our house. Our apartment overlooks a busy street and we have the good fortune of watching the garbage men come by EVERY day. Leo never misses it. For someone who doesn’t ever seem to hear me when I say “No!” he sure can hear the distinct sound of the garbage truck pulling up in front of our building.

It doesn’t end there. If we’re out running an errand and see the garbage men, we have to pull the stroller over (not an easy feat among piles of dog poop and hordes of harried pedestrians) so he can admire his favorite workers doing his favorite job. You get a new appreciation for these dedicated employees once you’ve spent 10 minutes whiffing trash-truck air.

Yet Leo is oblivious to the embarrassment, the stench; he couldn’t be happier as the odor of rotten bananas and dirty diapers smacks him in his smiling face. We’ve done this so often the garbage men know us, waving as they pass.

“Grandma! Look at my camion poubelle!”

The smelly days have blurred into one another and before I know it, Leo is now calling the garbage truck by its correct

name. Side note: How can the French make something so gross sound so beautiful?

“Be careful, honey,” my mom says to me on FaceTime, as Leo waves his toy garbage truck in front of the screen. “He’ll be better at French than you before long.”

“I think he already is!”

At that point, I’d lived in France for nearly 10 years and my son could probably hold a more coherent business meeting than me. Well, as long as the meeting was at the Annual Garbage Truck Convention.

“Why don’t we put the garbage truck away and read a book, sweetie?” I suggest. “Let’s show Grandma all your new words.”

As we read a book about baby animals, I’m reminded of an embarrassing slip-up I made when I first started dating Mika.

“Je t’aime, ma puce,” he had said. I love you, my flea, is what it meant. Surprisingly, this is a common term of endearment in the French language.

“Je t’aime aussi, mon puceau,” I replied. I love you too, my little flea. Or, that’s what I thought I’d said.

You see, many baby animal names in French are simply the adult name (e.g. éléphant) with an “eau” added to the end (e.g. éléphanteau). So I’d added the “eau” sound, thinking I’d called him a baby flea. Hey, it’s no weirder than a full-grown flea!

He burst out laughing. “Honey, that means ‘virgin’ not ‘baby flea’.”

Oh. Ahem.

“And what’s a baby seal called?” Grandma asks Leo from the iPad screen.

I cringe as I wait for the response. “Seal” is the unfortunately-pronounced “phoque,” so I can only imagine what a baby seal is called. Phoqueau? I really hope my son doesn’t say FU to my mom.

“Blanchon!” he shouts.

Whew. That was way better than I’d thought it would be.

One day, probably well after Leo does, I’ll learn the French words for all the baby animals. In the meantime, I’ll giggle about the ones I do know.

## **Virgin Banana Daiquiri**

What do you get when you mix a virgin-name-calling mishap and the odor of bananas coming from the back of a garbage truck? Ew, actually I'm not sure I want to know! Oh wait, it's this cocktail. Whew.

1 banana, frozen

2 oz. orange juice

3 oz. lime juice

1/2 oz. simple syrup

1 cup ice

1. Slice banana.
2. Add all ingredients to blender and blend until smooth.
3. Serve immediately, preferably before the garbage man arrives.

Makes 1 serving

## **Please and Thank You**

“Would you like some more charcuterie?” Sebastien asked me.

“Why yes, thank you, that would be lovely,” I replied to my five-year-old French host.

Mika and I were dining at a friend’s house, where the two children—this perfectly well-behaved Sebastien and his older sister, Marine—were proving the merits of French parenting.

The meal was raclette. In case you’ve never had the good fortune of enjoying this amazing dish, let me explain: You melt cheese on a heated contraption in the middle of the table, then pour the gooey cheese over potatoes on your plate. You eat cold cuts on the side (ham, saucisson, salami, and every other way they’ve found to prepare pork) and sour pickles. With copious amounts of wine.

Please, you had me at cheese.

The meal requires a bit of work for the guest, because you have to slice your own potatoes, melt your own cheese, and dish out your own cold cuts. Plenty of adults bump elbows and come dangerously close to setting the house on fire. It’s not a meal I’d recommend for kids, certainly not the American munchkins you often see running around restaurants in the U.S.

Yet here was a kindergartener who could not only melt cheese without burning the tablecloth, he served his guests and ensured the entire night ran smoothly. He even drank his juice from a wine glass.

This entire episode happened before I had kids. I remember thinking to myself something along the pretentious lines of: “Americans just don’t know how to raise their kids. My children will be half-French by blood, and by virtue of being born in France, they will be naturally well-behaved. Not to mention I will never indulge their ridiculous whims or cave in just because they throw a tantrum. Honestly, parenting is only hard if you let it be.”

Oh how I wish I could smack my smug, younger self. Admit it, don't YOU want to smack my smug, younger self?

I mean, how judgy could I be?

In case you feel the urge to slap me now, though, trust me—I've outgrown this naïveté. You are hereby cordially invited to stop by my house any time, any day, and you will see that my kids are not the well-behaved angels I was certain my A+ parenting would ensure.

You'll be greeted with screaming children, barbecue sauce handprints on the wall, and dried up hot dog slices stuffed behind the couch cushions.

At least my kids will always say "s'il te plaît" before asking for more food to throw across the room, and "merci" after you foolishly give it to them. It'll be a madhouse, I promise.

But we'll have some wine for you!

As long as you don't mind smudgy glasses and the unending chorus of the same kiddie song sung over and over again.

In fact, I've grown to quite like it.

## Spiced Mulled Wine

A wintry dish like raclette pairs best with red wine. But after the meal, prolong that cozy feeling with some spiced mulled wine. Sitting in front of the fireplace is optional, but strongly recommended.

2 bottles red wine

2 cups water

6 cloves

2 cinnamon sticks

2 oranges, cut into chunks

1. Combine all ingredients in a pot and bring almost to a boil. Let simmer.
2. Serve with a slotted spoon to avoid clove and cinnamon sticks getting into the glasses (but keep them in the pot for flavor).
3. Best served in slightly warmed mugs to keep the chill of winter far away.

Makes 8-10 servings

## Oh Là Là, Compression Stockings

Looking down the barrel of three months on strict bed rest, I was dejected. This hadn't been in my pregnancy plans.

Saying *au revoir* to work was the easy part. The stress of office politics was part of the reason I was in this predicament in the first place. (Unfortunately the stereotype of French offices being lax and lazy didn't apply in my case.)

Keeping my butt glued to the couch for 14 weeks straight, however, would be much harder. But that was my doctor's condition in order to release me from the hospital after going into preterm labor with Stella at 25 weeks and 3 days.

"This is *sérieux*, Madame Lesage," the obstetrician had said. "No moving around or your baby could be born early. No walking, no lifting, no housework. Nothing."

I thought about my sweet 18-month-old son who was back at home with Papa. Leo had been a preemie, so I knew from experience that I needed to take the doctor's warning seriously, lest my baby fall out while picking up a baguette from the neighborhood boulangerie.

And speaking of Leo (and picking things up), I wouldn't be allowed to carry him until I was off bed rest. Papa would have to take over the majority of his care. That broke my hormonal, sensitive heart. But what choice did I have? Stella needed to cook a little longer and the best guarantee of that happening was for me to park my booty on the sofa and chill. Something this energetic workaholic was not known for.

"Welcome home, Maman!" my French husband shouted when I returned from the hospital.

"Maman, Maman!" Leo chanted as he cheered at my much-anticipated arrival.

I settled in on the couch as Leo came over to investigate the situation. He patted my tummy, which had gotten noticeably larger during the four days I'd been in the hospital. He poked my protruding belly button and said "Boop, boop." All was normal, just bigger.



Then he noticed that my legs and feet were covered with some weird, black stretchy material. Compression stockings. Since I wouldn't be moving much over the next few months, I needed these contraptions to reduce the risk of blood clots.

To their credit, the French at least offer the stockings in a thigh-high, lacy-at-the-top, midnight black variety, as opposed to the nude pantyhose my grandma wears. As if I could possibly feel sexy with my huge belly and fat butt firmly planted on the couch. But I appreciated the notion.

Leo poked and prodded at the stockings, giving them a puzzled look. He tickled my toes and pinched the fabric at the arches of my feet. There was some correlation between these stockings, Mommy's belly, and her absence the past few days. His young mind couldn't quite figure it out (hey, I was still wrapping my head around the news myself), so he settled for resting his head on my lap, facing my belly.

All the better to keep his eye on it.

Fast forward 13+ weeks and my beautiful baby girl was born at 38 weeks and 5 days with no complications. Looks like Maman was better at putting her feet up than she realized!

Bed rest had been bearable, Leo and I had found activities we could do together (like reading the same book 100 times), and my compression stockings reminded me I would one day feel sexy again.

In the meantime, I guess I'd have to settle (geez, twist my arm) for time spent with my two healthy babies, followed by relaxing foot rubs from my sweet husband.

## **Aperol Spritz**

Goodbye frumpiness, hello sexiness! An Aperol Spritz is the perfect cocktail to have your significant other (or that sexy someone checking you out from across the party) saying oh là là!

3 oz. Prosecco

2 oz. Aperol orange liqueur

1 oz. soda water

orange slice for garnish

1. Fill a large wine glass 1/3 full with ice.
2. Pour in Prosecco, then Aperol, then soda water.
3. Garnish with an orange, and show a little leg. Just a little.

Makes 1 serving

## Five Glorious Minutes

Five minutes.

Five glorious minutes.

It's how long I get to sleep in this Saturday morning. My adorable little noisemakers wake me up at 6:05 instead of 6:00 and it makes all the difference.

They immediately start chirping for food like baby birds, so Papa and I drag ourselves out of bed to prepare it for them.

The two-year-old reaches into the silverware drawer and steals a spoon, then proceeds to bang it against the cabinet in a four-beat staccato that echoes my thoughts:

Go-ing-cra-zy  
When-will-it-end  
Way-too-much-noise  
For-six-a-m

Then his one-year-old sister copies, because she copies everything her big brother does:

This-is-so-fun  
Do-what-he-does  
Drive-Mom-cra-zy  
Don't-ev-er-stop

We finish breakfast and head to the living room. Leo spots his wooden crane, one that you can pull with a string, and drags it around the apartment with the most innocent expression. "La-de-da, I'm just playing with my toy and I have ABSOLUTELY NO IDEA that its wooden wheels are breaking the sound barrier as they roll along the hardwood floor. La-de-da."

Stella has brought her spoon with her and is now pounding on a toy pot, which is unfairly made of the same material as a real pot and therefore makes just as much noise. She's like the

street performers we see in the subways in our lively city of Paris, hammering out a tune and hoping for spare change. If I thought a few coins would get her to stop, I'd gladly pay.

The Deafening Duo moves on to Legos. Playing with Legos is fun, sure. But dumping the whole tub of them onto the hardwood floor is infinity times more fun. The sound of each little piece of plastic hitting every other little piece of plastic is the sound of my sanity being buried under the pile of colorful blocks.

If my son walks past a fan, he'll turn it on. To Thunder-Level High Speed, of course.

When my daughter wants to read a book, she'll first knock all of them off the shelf in one clamorous swoop, then select one from the mound on the floor. Usually the one on the bottom.

BANG, BANG! On the bathroom door as I'm trying to pee.

SPLATT, SPLATT! As they rip open the shower curtain mid-shampoo, splashing water all over the bathroom.

WHOOSH, WHOOSH! As they flush the toilet while I'm in the shower, sending a cold chill up my spine.

HA, HA! As they laugh at all the trouble they're causing.

Five minutes. I just need five minutes without all the noise. The cacophony is splitting my ears, and my nerves along with it.

Then naptime rolls around. The baby goes down to sleep. The toddler dozes off soon after. Papa snoozes on the couch in front of the TV.

I find myself with a few minutes of alone time. Me time. Quiet time. I sprawl out on my bed and dive in to the book I've been meaning to read for months. The window is open and I hear kids laughing and playing outside—other people's kids, the neighbors' kids, kids I don't have to worry about—and I try to relax.

I look up every five minutes, amazed I have this much time to myself. And I realize that I kind of, almost, a little tiny bit, miss the noise.

A loud fart. My son, waking up from his nap.

I needn't have worried. I can count on my little noisemakers

to snap me out of my reverie before I get too comfortable.

I made it to page 14. I'll pick up where I left off the next time all three of my angels are quiet at the same time, even if it's just for five minutes.

Five glorious minutes.

## **Iced Coffee Delight**

When you only have five minutes to sit down with a good book, you might grab a cup of coffee. When you only have five minutes because you've been running around the past few years after your kids, you deserve this decadent coffee cocktail instead.

2 oz. espresso

1 oz. hazelnut liqueur

1 oz. Irish cream liqueur

3 oz. milk

1 cup ice

1. Add all ingredients to a martini shaker.
2. Shake a few times, then pour into a highball glass (with ice).
3. Drink it before the kids find you.

Makes 1 serving



## **Petite Eats**

Daycare: Would you like to stay for the nutrition meeting?

Me: Sorry, we're in a hurry (to get to McDonald's before it gets crowded).

## **Warning: May Contain Fingers**

“We’re doing a joint Christmas party and going away party for Brigitte,” my office’s busybody informed me. “So don’t forget to bring something special!”

Are potato chips and hummus special enough? Because that’s what you’re getting, lady! I was pregnant with Baby #2 and perpetually exhausted from chasing my toddler around, so I was in no mood to make something fancy.

Being in the “I eat everything I see” stage of my pregnancy (that stage lasts about nine months), I showed up early to the party.

My coworkers have this annoying habit of not letting anyone nibble until it’s all prepared. I have this annoying habit of not caring and eating anyway. Sorry, but a potluck for 40 people takes way too long to set up. You think I can resist dipping potato chips into hummus? Show me the person who can. SHOW ME.

My friend Fanny popped in with homemade pizza squares and asked me to heat them up while she finished something for work. No problem! If by “heat them up” she meant “eat them up.” (See what I did there?)

A nanosecond after the microwave dinged, I shoved a pizza slice in my mouth and carried the rest over to the couch, where I parked my ever-growing butt and dug in.

“Attention, il y a un doigt dedans!” My co-worker Camille’s warning—“Watch out, there’s a finger in there!”—made no sense. I shrugged off her comment and continued stuffing my face.

What had she meant “there’s a finger in there”? Was it a French expression? I often misunderstood those. Or maybe it’s like if you only want a little whiskey you say “just a finger.” So maybe she meant there weren’t that many pizza slices? As in, there wouldn’t be enough for me? Oh, maybe she meant not to eat them all because there weren’t that many and other people might want to eat them. I guess that was it. Still, a roundabout



way to say it.

And also, way too late, honey. I'd already made it more than halfway through the Tupperware container before I'd worked out what I thought she meant.

Colleagues trickled into the lunchroom as I avoided their gaze. I should have been embarrassed about how much pizza I'd hogged but I was more afraid they would take it away from me.

"Where's my pizza?" Fanny asked.

Busted.

"Over here, Fanny!" I said, licking my fingers after polishing off the last slice. "Sorry, I couldn't help myself."

"Ha, no problem. Glad they were so tasty! So, did you find my finger in there?"

"What's this everyone's saying about a finger? There wasn't actually a finger in there, was there?" I looked down at the empty container and then my pregnant belly. Was a severed digit floating around in there?

Then Fanny stuck out a bandaged finger. Oh my God. I felt the bile rise in my throat.

"I cut it last night making the pizzas. A huge piece came off, actually. Don't worry," she quickly added, noting my horrified expression. "It happened while I was chopping a pepper to put on top. I don't think the finger got in with the pizza slices. At least, I hope not. I brushed all the peppers in the trash without looking."

"Are you OK? And, more importantly, how could you not look?"

I would be way too curious to see what a no-longer-connected bit of my finger looked like to just brush it in the trash without a backward glance.

"Oh yeah, I'm fine."

"Can I see your finger?" I was concerned for my friend but I also had to see how much of her finger was missing. It couldn't be too bad if she hadn't gone to the hospital.

"Sure," she said, pulling the bandage off.

The amount missing was just enough to make me lose my

appetite. I tried not to show it, for fear of alerting her to the fact that she now only had 9 and 7/8ths fingers.

“That doesn’t look too bad,” I said. “I’m sure it will heal in no time.”

Yeah right! There was like a quarter of an inch missing! Which meant a quarter of an inch of finger was possibly cart-wheeling around my tummy.

On the bright side, at least there’s a lot of protein in it.

## Whiskey Nog

No matter how many fingers you have, this drink is sure to please, though it's best enjoyed during the holiday season.

1 oz. whiskey (also known as a "finger" of whiskey)

4 oz. store-bought eggnog\*

dash of vanilla syrup

nutmeg for garnish

1. Pour the whiskey and eggnog into a martini shaker filled with ice. Add a dash of vanilla syrup.
2. Give it two good shakes, then strain into the glass of your choice.
3. Dust with nutmeg to make it look fancy. Drink with your pinky out to look even fancier (and to show off the fact that you still have all your fingers).

\* What, you call that cheating? Trust me, you don't want to drink eggnog I've made from scratch!

Makes 1 serving

# 10

## Attitude Check, Please

I enjoy champagne but I also dine on the occasional McDonald's dinner. I like puttin' on the ritz but I like dive bars, too. However, I blanketly detest poncy posh places (of which there are zillions in Paris).

Unless someone else is paying.

One evening, I was invited to a business dinner at Costes. Here's the type of place Costes is: cocktails are €19, my friend once thought she saw Sienna Miller in the restroom, and the hostesses seat ugly people in the back of the restaurant. I'm not even kidding—there was a whole media storm about it.

I splurged (since I wasn't paying) on a Bellini. I was pregnant at the time, so I only allowed myself two miniscule peach-juice-diluted sips. Meaning each sip cost €9.50.

Yowza.

The service was OK, the food was fine. Our total bill for six people was over €3,000. And it would have been €4,000 if I'd been drinking like the good ol' days. A bottle of wine plus a bottle of champagne could easily cost that much, and in my pre-pregnant days I easily downed that much on my own.

By midnight, I was beat. My all-night-long partying days were behind me; my new pregnant-mama bedtime was 9:30. Add two sips of Bellini to the mix, and I was about to crash.

"Well, I'd better get going before I fall asleep in your lap," I awkwardly joked to our business partner. My absence from the social scene in recent months had clearly made me forget how to talk like a normal person. I quickly thanked him for the meal and said my goodbyes to the group before dashing out of there.

As I headed to the front of the restaurant, not one but two waiters bumped into me, sans apology.

Thanks, guys!

When I finally got to the front, I remembered I needed to retrieve my coat from the coat check.

"Bonsoir, I'd like to get my coat, please," I said to the hostess with a smile.

She looked up from the reservation book with a look of disgust on her snooty face and spat out her response. "You need a coat check ticket."

"Oh. Hrm. It's back at the table with my colleagues. Is it possible to get my coat without it? I'm kind of in a hurry to get home," I said, pointing to my pregnant belly. I peeked around the door, and among the sea of trendy black coats my green plaid number stuck out like an unfashionable sore thumb. "It's that green one back there."

"You need a ticket," she insisted.

Seriously? My coat had to be the cheapest one in there. Who would want to steal it? I know there's a policy and I needed the ticket and blah blah blah, but you'd think when someone pays €3,000 for dinner the hostess could be a little more accommodating. Like perhaps, just give me my cheapo coat? Or offer to go back to my table and get the ticket for me so I don't have to waddle my pregnant ass back there? I might expect this attitude at a fast food joint but not at a so-called high-class place like Costes.

"OK, fine, I'll get the damn ticket," I muttered, hefting my purse over my shoulder and hauling my pregnant booty back to the table.

Not one but two waiters bumped into me on the way. Sans apology, of course.

"Hey, it's me again," I said sheepishly as I arrived in front of the group. "Could I please get the coat check ticket?"

"Sure," one of my colleagues said. "I'll go with you. I need to stop off at the restroom, and that way I can take the ticket back when you're done."

We headed back to the lobby as—believe it or not—two waiters bumped into me again. Did they hire waiters for the sole purpose of walking down the hall and bumping into ugly people (which I clearly was, since I'd been seated in the back of the restaurant)?

My colleague headed to the restrooms as I geared up to retrieve my coat.

"Here's the ticket, you stupid cow," I said in my head. "Voilà,

mademoiselle," I said instead, a huge smile plastered on my face.

She rolled her eyes and got my coat. She held it out like a dirty diaper as I stuffed my arms into it and tried—in vain—to button it closed over my belly.

"Merci," I said. "Oh wait, I had a scarf too. It's green, like the coat."

"Are you sure it's not in the sleeve?" she asked as if I was totally stupid.

"Yes, I checked. Sorry." What was I sorry for? That she hadn't brought the scarf?

She rolled her eyes again and huffed off to get my scarf. When she returned, she thrust the horrible offending object at me. Just as I wrapped it around my horrible offensive neck, my colleague returned from the restroom.

"Here you go," I said, handing him the coat check ticket, and counting my lucky stars that I didn't have to go back to the table to give it to him (thus getting bumped four more times by the waiters).

I bounded down the restaurant's marbled front steps, vowing never to return.

Unless someone else was paying.

## Teeny Bellini

When I indulged in my \$25 Bellini, I was pregnant so I didn't actually get to indulge. More like "wet my lips and pretend." So in the spirit of going for the flavor but not the liquor, this drink is very light on the alcohol.

1 peach slice

3 oz. peach nectar

2 oz. Prosecco

1 cup ice

1. Place all ingredients in blender.
2. Pulse until smooth.
3. Serve in a champagne glass. Great for baby showers or brunches or other places where you want to feel like you're drinking, but don't actually want much alcohol. (Pregnant moms: Sorry, this still doesn't really mean you, but the cocktail still tastes delicious without the sparkling wine!)

Makes 1 serving





## **That's a Latte Ask**

One Sunday morning, Mika and I took Leo on a leisurely stroll and stopped into Gare de Lyon for a coffee at Starbucks. I know there are a million cafés in Paris and it's sacrilege to go to Starbucks, but there's something about the hustle and bustle of the train station that we like.

Plus I had to get my holiday latte before Starbucks took it off the menu.

Mika and Leo sat on a nearby bench while I waited in the long but quick-moving line. I could have pulled rank and pointed to my pregnant belly but I kept it hidden (well, as much as one can hide a five-month-pregnant belly) under my coat. We weren't in a rush and I don't like to butt in front of people, no matter how valid the excuse (and how raging my hormones).

Leo contentedly watched trains arrive and depart, eyes wide with love for his favorite mode of transportation.

Slowly but surely I reached the counter and placed my order. The friendly employees ran the operation like a well-oiled machine. I guess you have to be efficient if you work at a coffee shop in a busy train station, but in France—a country not known for its efficient service—that's absolutely no guarantee.

Then clear out of the blue, a woman in a long fur coat and stilettos as sharp as her attitude cut in front of me, literally knocking the credit card out of my hand as I was about to pay.

"I'll have an espresso and—" she started.

Um, what? Who did she think she was? Ooh, wait, maybe she was someone? Was this a French celebrity in my midst? Though, other than Gerard Depardieu (who I saw in a cheese shop once) and Sophie Marceau, I wasn't sure I'd actually be able to recognize a French celebrity if one was butting in line right in front of me.

"Excuse me, ma'am, but you'll need to get in line," the Starbucks employee said, indicating the line that was now snaking around the station.

Celebrity or not, she just got TOLD.

“But I have a train to catch!” the lady wailed.

“Ma’am, we’re in a train station. Everyone has a train to catch.”

Touché!

Actually, I didn’t have a train to catch and neither did my patient husband and son, who were waving at me from the bench, but we were probably the only ones at Gare de Lyon not waiting for a train.

If everyone else had to stand in line, why did this lady think it was her God-given right to have a latte—and pronto!—for the train ride?

The possibly famous, definitely annoying woman stormed off, her clicking heels echoing in the cavernous station, and I paid for my coffee. The cashier and I shared a knowing look. Order had been restored.

And that’s a rare thing in Paris.

## **Holiday Latte Cocktail**

Taking its inspiration from the Starbucks holiday menu, this cocktail will get you in the Christmas spirit without having to wait in the long line.

1 oz. hazelnut liqueur

1 oz. coffee liqueur

3 oz. Irish cream liqueur

1. Add ingredients to martini shaker filled with ice.
2. Shake, then strain into a martini glass. Enjoy at a relaxed pace, knowing you don't have a train to catch.

Makes 1 serving



## **Petite Makeovers**

Parenting [noun]: When you make sure everyone else has eaten, slept, and gone to the bathroom before you.

**12**

## Parisian Laser Hair Removal

Tank tops are kind of my thing. They show off my toned arms, one of the few features worth showing off (because, hello, you can't SEE how funny I am).

With sleeveless shirts, though, comes a responsibility to keep those pits shaved. Hence, the reason I opted for pricey laser hair removal. And why not throw in the bikini area while we're shooting laser beams at sensitive bits?

I had located a swanky place off the Champs Elysées that would happily take my euros in exchange for permanently burning hair off my body.

At the consultation, the doctor compared the color of my hair (relatively dark) to the color of my skin (relatively see-through) and determined I was a good candidate for the treatment. She wrote a prescription for topical anesthetic and told me to bring the numbing cream and my freshly-shaved goods to the next appointment.

At this next appointment, a quick-talking mademoiselle led me to the Special Room Where They Rub You Down With Anesthetic Cream.

"Blah blah le blah?" she asked.

"Pardon?" I eloquently replied. I was still working on my French and had missed class the day they taught laser hair removal lingo.

"Ah, you speak English. Please take off zee clothes."

Let the fun begin. I obliged, leaving only my bra between me and zees total stranger.

"I put cream, to show you how, then you do zee rest yourself, yeah?"

Got it.

"You want me to do your underlegs?" she asked.

What the flip was an underleg? I assumed it was a bad translation of "part of my body next to my hoo-hah" so I replied, "Oh, I'll do that myself." I would let her demonstrate on my armpits and then I'd do my "underlegs" on my own time.

Swipe. Pause. Swoosh.

Before I knew what had happened, she'd rubbed anesthetic cream down one side of my lady bits and back up the other.

"You see how it's done? Now you do underlegs."

The heck? I'd thought she was going to do my underarms and... oh. Ohhhhhhhh. I got it now. "Underlegs" had been a poor translation of "underarms." I'd unwittingly asked her to rub down my previously-private parts, leaving the pits for myself.

Naked, shaken from the recent fondling, and still generally confused, I somehow managed to spread the cream on my underarms as she watched.

"Now we wrap you in plastic."

This just got better and better. She bandaged a roll of saran wrap around each shoulder and armpit, then covered my bikini area, creating a chic transparent diaper.

"This keeps the cream moist," she said.

Gag, cough, blerk... She didn't know the word for "underarm" but she knew everyone's least favorite word, "moist"?

"Get dressed and wait in zee waiting room until you are called."

Excusez-moi, WHAT? I had to go in public like this?

I trudged down the hall, armpits and butt crack squeaking under my clothes, embarrassed to enter the waiting room looking (and sounding) like this.

I needn't have worried.

The room full of mummies barely looked up from their tattered copies of Vogue, embarrassed enough by their own saran-wrapped faces, necks, arms, and legs. We waited in mutual silence as if saying, "I won't look at what you're having lasered off if you won't look at mine. Weirdo."

Five sessions later, I was hair (and plastic wrap) free. If only they could laser off the embarrassment.



## Sparkling Caipirinha

Whether you've endured laser hair removal or Brazilian bikini waxes, each is painful in its own way. Reward yourself with this French-inspired Brazilian cocktail.

1 lime

3 tsp. sugar

2 oz. cachaça

3 oz. sparkling wine

1. Cut lime into 4 wedges.
2. Add lime and sugar to a sturdy glass and muddle until you can't muddle any more (i.e. the lime juice has been extracted from the lime.)
3. Add the cachaça, stir.
4. Top with sparkling wine. Enjoy the beauty of (a hair-free) life.

Makes 1 serving



## Face Mask Fail

One of the many joys of pregnancy—aside from reflux, fatigue, nausea, and perpetual discomfort—is acne. Some women get that beautiful healthy glow. Lucky them!

I got the teenage zit-face sheen instead. Thank you, hormones.

After trying nearly every pregnancy-safe product on the market, I turned to the internet. Surely there would be something to rid my skin of these horrible spots? Surely I wouldn't have to spend my entire pregnancy holding random objects in front of my chin so people wouldn't see my pimples? My arms were getting tired!

Then I stumbled across a do-it-yourself natural face mask on Pinterest, the land where everything looks easier than it is.

This was it! This was the solution to my crappy skin issues! And I (kind of) had all the ingredients on hand!

In all my excitement, I only briefly skimmed the directions and quickly got started. Looked easy enough.

And I'm sure for any normal, calm, patient person it would be easy. But I think you can tell where this is going.

Normal person:

1. Follows directions.
2. Uses honey and cinnamon, as the ingredient list states.
3. Measures 1 tsp of each, as the directions indicate.
4. Stirs the mixture in a bowl, for even distribution.
5. Applies gently and lets set for 5-10 minutes.
6. Scrubs while removing, to exfoliate.
7. Ends up with fresh, acne-free skin.

What I did:

1. Did not follow directions.
2. Used lite pancake syrup because it tastes gross and I had

a whole bottle to get rid of. Close enough to honey, right? Wrong. I did at least use cinnamon.

3. Did not measure the quantities, and instead eyeballed it. How hard could it be to gauge a teaspoon? Now I didn't have to wash a measuring spoon!

4. Put ingredients into my left palm, rubbed around with my right index finger. Now I didn't have to wash a bowl or spoon either!

5. Applied to my face, scrubbing as I went. On this step, I was not intentionally ignoring instructions, I just totally spaced out, dreaming of the beautiful skin awaiting me.

6. Tried to let it set for 5 minutes, but only lasted 30 seconds because of the burning. Oh my God the burning! Rinsed gently but quickly, trying to remove every last trace of the wicked concoction before my entire face melted off.

7. Ended up with a bright red face that throbbed for a good 10 minutes afterwards.

But... the acne had dried up!

Will I attempt this face mask again? Maybe. Will I remember to follow directions? Probably not.

## Mulled Gin

I'll give you one guess which ingredients this cocktail contains. Nope, not lite pancake syrup. I threw that stuff away as soon as my face stopped burning. Yep, you guessed it: Honey and cinnamon are this cocktail's featured ingredients.

1 bottle red wine

12 oz. gin

1 tsp. honey

1 oz. orange juice

1 oz. lemon juice

1 cinnamon stick

1. Add all ingredients to a pot. (Measure them! No shortcuts or substitutions!)
2. Stir, and simmer until the honey has dissolved.
3. Serve warm (but not burning!) and relax.

Makes 8 servings



## The First Wobbly Step

A bowl of ice cream has roughly the same amount of calories as I burn carrying my newborn daughter up and down the two flights of stairs to our Parisian apartment. If my toddler is in tow as well, that makes up for the hot fudge.

At least that's what I tell myself.

Oddly, and unfairly, I gained weight after Stella was born. I mean I guess it's not that unfair when you count the number of empty Ben & Jerry's containers in the trash. But other than my ice cream indulgence, I ate healthy, nursed round the clock, and walked nearly everywhere with my baby girl strapped to my chest in the baby carrier.

So why was I so jiggly and low-energy?

Each day I thought, "Today's the day I'll start exercising." But when your days blur into nights and you have no more than 10 minutes at a time to yourself, how are you supposed to work out? Or count calories? Or strike even one yoga pose?

Our apartment faces a maternity hospital. Sipping lukewarm coffee while feeding Stella, I glance out the window and see tiny bundles of joy leaving the hospital for the first time. As the father putzes around with the car seat (no one ever remembers to install it before the baby is born) and the mother stands there impatiently holding the baby, I spy on their little family.

I can't help but notice that the cliché is true—French women don't get fat, not even the ones who gave birth four days ago. I glance down at my spare tire. Sheesh. As if I didn't have enough post-baby concerns, now I'm comparing myself to stick-thin French women. I really am a glutton for punishment.

And ice cream.

Months tick by, my belly swaying with each step I take, until I catch a glimpse of my reflection in the window of a trendy French boutique. Stella's chubby legs dangle from the baby carrier and she looks much bigger than other four-month-old babies. Like mother, like daughter? Or maybe we're just normal Americans, destined to forever be larger than our French

compatriots.

I take another look. Underneath my daughter's legs, my stomach protrudes and I appear four months pregnant. The clothes in the store window look impossibly small and I feel impossibly frumpy.

Something needs to change.

That afternoon, I dig out our Wii and strap on the Zumba belt, shimmying and shaking like a fool as Stella smiles up at me from her swing. I ignore the stares of the people in the hospital windows across the street. I look silly. I look like I'm being attacked by a swarm of bees.

But I feel amazing.

It's not just about the weight. Yeah, I'll be happy when the baby belly is gone. But I'm happier taking charge of my body again. Moving, stretching, jumping, and what could charitably be called dancing. It's invigorating.

I finish the 20-minute beginner's session and score lower than I even thought possible. It threatens to demotivate me until I catch my daughter's eye. Her face breaks into a full smile as if saying, "We did it, Mommy!"

We can do this! I can do this. At least I took the first wobbly, out-of-practice step. The rest is cake.

Or ice cream.



## **Ice Cream Float-tail**

Sometimes you just have to not worry about calories and exercise and blah, blah, that's boring. Ice cream is much more fun. Treat yourself with this ice creamy cocktail!

2 oz. vanilla vodka

1 scoop vanilla ice cream

12 oz. root beer

1. Pour vodka into a frosty mug.
2. Top with a scoop of ice cream.
3. Pour root beer over the ice cream.
4. Sip with a straw and savor. Until you get brain freeze.

Makes 1 serving



## **My Business Is None of Your Business**

The French government subsidizes dildos. OK, not really, but the French healthcare system covers perineum re-education, and that includes the purchase of a “sonde” (probe, in much scarier-sounding English) to be used by your professional perineum re-educator in determining the quality of your vaginal muscle.

What happened to doing a few Kegels and calling it a day?

The French are preoccupied with a woman’s state of affairs after giving birth. Invasively so.

When my husband returned to work after his 11-day paternity leave (you won’t catch me complaining about that perk of the system), his co-workers asked the routine questions:

“The family is doing well? Baby is healthy?”

“Yes, we’re all doing great, thanks,” Mika replied.

“And your wife has started her perineum re-education sessions?”

Because apparently my hoo-hah and its elasticity are typical water cooler banter between colleagues and employee-whose-wife-just-had-a-baby.

After Leo was born, I went along with the state-sponsored plan to get my goods back in shape. I didn’t want to pee my pants every time I sneezed. I understood the importance of returning to business as usual. Or business as “usual” as you can get after giving birth to a 7 1/2-pound preemie.

I asked Mika to go to the pharmacy to buy the probe because I’m mature like that. I showed up to the consultation with the physical therapist, government subsidized sonde in hand, and answered all sorts of embarrassing questions that sounded only slightly better with a French accent.

“OK, now undress and hop up on the exam table,” the physical therapist said, as if she hadn’t just told me to get naked in the middle of the room.

I looked around for a changing room or even a thin, paper

gown. Nothing. She expected me to drop my drawers right there and shimmy over to the table? My American modesty paralyzed me.

"Is there a problem?" she asked.

"Um, no, um..." I glanced around and my eyes landed on the probe.

"Oh, don't worry. We won't be using la sonde today. I'll just evaluate your situation and make recommendations for improvement."

Like a face lift. Except not for your face.

I disrobed and managed to get through the appointment, squeezing out a few Kegels as she watched and took notes.

"Great job! I'll see you next week. Don't forget la sonde!"

In your dreams, lady. Between the demands of caring for a newborn and re-watching every episode of Scrubs, I decided to prioritize my remaining time off work and skip the supervised Kegel sessions. (And, still the mature one, I had Mika call to cancel my appointment.)

Two years later, after Stella was born, I didn't even contemplate perineal re-education classes. I didn't need a physical therapist to tell me you could throw a saucisse down my hallway. I would do my Kegels in the comfort of my own home, this time binge-watching House of Lies while cuddling with my second bundle of joy.

Thinking all the unpleasantness of labor, delivery, and vaginal exercises was behind me, I returned to work eager for conversation with other adults.

"Welcome back!" my boss's father said, kissing each cheek in the French custom. "We're glad you're here."

"Thanks, it's good to be back. Well, I better get to work!"

"Hold on. Do you have a second? I need to ask you something important."

"Of course," I replied, ready for whatever new project he would throw at me.

"Do you know what a perineum is?"

The clattering of keyboards in the open floor plan office screeched to a halt.

“Um, yes.” What did this have to do with work? Where was he going with this?

“And do you understand the importance of re-educating it after childbirth? Because it’s really important. My wife didn’t and...”

Tuning out was my only coping mechanism against this uncomfortable dialogue. This affront on my modesty. If only I could put a thin, paper gown between me and this conversation.

“... very important to do what your doctor says. Understand?”

I nodded numbly, then took me and my out-of-shape goods back to my desk. The keyboard clatter resumed, and the redness in my cheeks slowly drained away.

Welcome back to work, where your business is everyone’s business. Even the French government’s.

## Lemon Cake

What's sweet? Your new bundle of joy. What sours it all? Your boss's dad asking how your recovery down there is going. What better than a sweet and sour shot to take your mind off things (and quickly)!

1 oz. vanilla vodka

1 oz. sour mix

sugar

1. Wet the rim of a shot glass, then coat with sugar.
2. Pour vodka and sour mix into a martini shaker with ice. Shake well, then strain into the shot glass.
3. Shoot it, and put the awkward conversation out of your mind as quickly as possible.

Makes 1 serving



## **Petite Living**

I don't always take the trash out in my socks, but when I do, you can bet I'll run into all my neighbors.





## **Pick-Up Lines with the Most Fromage**

“That’s a hot outfit. It’d look better crumpled up at the foot of my bed.”

Barf! Fortunately, I haven’t been the recipient of too many cheesy pick-up lines, at least not stateside. Before moving to Paris, I didn’t spend much time single. I dated my college boyfriend for four years, and moved to France soon after our break-up.

French men, however, are an entirely different story.

They’re not crass like some of the American guys I’ve encountered, but they make me cringe all the same. I just don’t do typical romance. Poetry? Gag. Lengthy discourse about how beautiful my eyes are? There are only so many ways (I’m interested in hearing about) to say “green.” Can’t a girl just have a night out with her friends?

Maybe I’m being too harsh. You decide:

After kissing one dude (I blame the wine for even letting me get that far), he groped my butt then said, “My hand discovered a land I would love to explore.”

He wanted to explore my ass? No thanks!

Another time, after being duped into going back to a guy’s apartment for a “party” (again, I blame the wine for me not noticing that none of his friends were following us), this guy wrote a sappy note in a tattered copy of *Le Petit Prince*, signed it, then handed it over with strict instructions for me to read the book ASAP so we could discuss it on a future date.

Like homework? Not interested. Also, we were SO not going on any future dates. Any guy who tries to trick me to get me alone completely loses my trust (once I realize that’s what happened, of course).

Luckily, Guillaume Shakespeare had written his love note in pencil so I was able to erase it and donate the book to charity.

“Hey, you! Girl with a smile! Would you like to have a coffee with me?”

This was shouted to me one time in the pouring rain as I was

struggling with numerous shopping bags. Of course, this “gentleman” didn’t bother to help with my bags as he strode alongside me. He only offered to buy me a €1 espresso.

That was extremely kind of him (one whole euro!) but I had plenty of coffee at home.

“I’m so lonely,” one guy whined to me on a cold, rainy night. I could practically hear sad violins playing in the distance. “My girlfriend doesn’t pay attention to me anymore.”

Girlfriend? I was out of there before the crocodile tear rolled off his cheating cheek.

“I had a great time tonight but I have to head home so I can help my friend move early tomorrow morning. Can I take you out on a date tomorrow afternoon?”

Wait, what’s wrong with this one? Nothing! That’s what my future French husband said to me the night we met, in a bar nonetheless. No groping, no trying to get in my pants, no stubborn persistence. Just a nice, respectful end to a lively evening.

The rest, as they say, is history.

So what lesson did I learn?

The more wine you drink, the less cheesy the pick-up lines sound. And the harder it is to tell the sleazebags from the chivalrous knights. Oh, and usually the knights don’t need a pick-up line, and certainly not loaded with cheese. Their genuine smile will get them pretty damn far.

## **Mind Eraser**

After one too many sleazeballs hits on your badass self, you'll want to wash away all the icky memories. This is just the shot for you.

1 oz. vodka

1 oz. coffee liqueur

1 oz. tonic water

1. Pour all ingredients into martini shaker. Add ice and shake.
2. Strain into a large shot glass.
3. Shoot it quickly, and proceed to forget about every sleazy pick-up line you ever heard, leaving you open to meet the love of your life.

Makes 1 serving



## **10 Ways Living in Paris Is Like Dental Work**

Movies and books tend to paint Paris as a lovely tableau of historical monuments, aromatic wine, and romantic scenery. The City of Light is full of life and love. It's a dream come true.

Until those few snarky commentaries slip through and show us what it's really like to live in the French capital.

Overall, living in Paris is worth it, despite the infuriating government workers and the Métro smelling like urine.

I've lived in Paris for over 10 years. And I've had extensive dental work—pulled 13 baby teeth, replaced my two front teeth twice, suffered through root canals, and donned braces, appliances, and pretty much every other dental gadget that exists.

So if anyone can bring these two topics together into the world's weirdest list, it's me.

Without further ado, here is a comparison between real life in Paris and dental work:

### **1. It's Expensive**

**Paris:** A 30-square-meter (323 square feet) apartment will set us back at least €1,000 per month (\$1,350). We'll consider ourselves lucky if the bathroom is in the apartment (as opposed to the hallway of the building) and we have a functioning stove.

**Dental Work:** Routine check-ups are affordable, but as soon as we start filling cavities, making crowns, and having root canals, we're quickly in the thousands. And when we submit our insurance claims, we hear silence, except for a few crickets chirping in the distance.

### **2. It's Frustrating**

**Paris:** We arrive at our visa renewal appointment with all 10 items specified on the Official Visa Renewal Documentation

List, only to be met with “What about [item that wasn’t on the list]? Pfff. Come back when you’re prepared.” You mean, come back when we’ve learned how to read minds? So now we have to file for an extension and suffer through another appointment.

Dental Work: “So how was your vacation?” “Garg... fleurg.” “Please hold your mouth still while I’m doing this.” Then why did you ask, nimwit?

### 3. It Hurts

Paris: We attempt to pay for a €12 taxi ride with a €20 bill, only to have the cabbie launch into a tirade about how “you people” never have change and “you people” always expect him to make change. It’s not like “we people” flagged him down in the street and asked him for change for a vending machine. “We people” are paying for a service rendered and are rightfully expecting change. Why is he yelling at us?

Dental Work: Fewer drills were used to build the Eiffel Tower than the dentist has used on our mouths, and we’re only five minutes into the appointment. Not to mention the lingering pain we’ll feel after the appointment is over.

### 4. We Experience a Wide Array of Unusual Tastes

Paris: Escargots are better than we thought (mainly because they’re drowned in a butter garlic sauce) but some things will always seem a bit odd to the non-French taste-tester—like kidneys and cow tongue and bone marrow. Thankfully we can wash it all down with a delicious glass of wine.

Dental Work: The dentist thinks he sucked out all the saliva from our mouths so he gives us permission to swallow, and we are met with the taste of cement and blood. Yuck. But if we’re lucky he’ll give us cherry fluoride to rinse it out with!

## 5. We Experience a Wide Array of Unusual Smells

Paris: From the homeless man urinating in the Métro to a yappy poodle pooping in the street, our nostrils will be assaulted with many unpleasant smells. But we'll also enjoy the unique aroma of pungent Roquefort that's been aged in a regional French cave. And it will be paired with full-bodied red Bordeaux to bring out the best flavors of the cheese.

Dental Work: The drill whirrs and we convince ourselves this is a trained medical professional who knows what he's doing. But that slightly burnt odor is still unnerving. Why does dental work smell like something's on fire? Even the fruity rinse he provides afterward isn't strong enough to overtake the smoky aroma.

## 6. We Keep Putting It Off

Paris: It's been a lifelong dream to visit Paris, or maybe we even envision settling in for a prolonged stay. But we haven't quite gotten around to it yet. We need to take time off work. The flight is long and pricey. We want to finish x, y, and z first. There's always something getting in the way of us and our fairytale destination.

Dental Work: We go in for a check-up and after a routine exam the doctor delivers the verdict—we need to fill three cavities and have two root canals. Yikes. We need to take time off work. The procedure is long and pricey. We want to finish x, y, and z first. There's always something getting in the way of us and our torturous appointment.

## 7. We Have to Wait

Paris: Everywhere we go, there's a line. Which shouldn't come as a surprise since Paris hosts millions of visitors per year, and that's on top of the millions of residents populating the city.

From Notre-Dame to the local bakery, we're stuck behind slow-moving people who take forever to complete their transactions. At least we're likely to enjoy whatever is at the end of the line (world-famous view, world-famous pastries).

Dental Work: We'll be stuck in the drab waiting room, dreading what's about to happen on the other side of the door. We'll flip through the torn pages of old magazines, bored out of our minds. Part of us will just want to get this over with and part of us will be happy we can put it off a little longer. Nothing good waits for us at the dentist's office, except for the fact that this will all be over soon.

## 8. We Have to Fill out a Bunch of Forms

Paris: If we're visiting, sometimes we'll luck out and border control will give us quick stamps in our passports and wave us through. But if we're staying for an extended period of time (somehow I'm still here 10 years later, so watch out—it can happen!) we'll have to apply for a visa. Which involves a yearly renewal process of 848 pieces of paper (originals) plus 848 photocopies. The forests of the world weep as we prepare our dossier. We join a gym and lift weights religiously in order to be able to carry the two-ton folder to the appointment. Our hand cramps up from signing and dating so many forms. It's unbelievable how much information they're asking for. Why do they need a birth certificate that's less than six months old? The data on the certificate doesn't change! Next they're going to ask our kindergarten teacher for a sworn affidavit that we're decent human beings.

Dental Work: We sign waiver after waiver, wondering just how dangerous this procedure is if it requires signing a form first. They ask all sorts of seemingly irrelevant medical information (why do they need to know if we have heart murmurs?). Then we get to the stack of insurance forms, which seems pointless to fill out since the lame dental insurance plan will barely cover



the cost of a candy bar. Of course, eating too many candy bars is possibly what got us into this predicament in the first place.

## 9. Once Isn't Enough

Paris: Strolling along the Seine at sunset, hand in hand with that special someone, we feel like we could do this forever. Spending a day at the Louvre, we realize we've only covered 1/30th of what we'd planned to see. Working our way through the glass display case at the boulangerie we notice we've only tried croissants and pains au chocolat and madeleines—we still need to taste éclairs and macarons and mille-feuilles. Feet worn out after a week of walking around the City of Light, we would gladly run a marathon if it meant we could stay an extra week. Somehow we'll find the time and money to do so.

Dental Work: Rising from the dentist's chair with a numb jaw, dried spit in the corners of our mouth, and drool running down our chin, the kind doctor informs us that he only got through half of the work today. We'll have to come back for the crowns and a final polishing. Somehow we'll find the time and money to do so.

## 10. It's All Worth It in the End

Paris: Where else can we picnic in front of the Eiffel Tower, being treated to a sparkly light show on the hour every hour? Or view some of the world's finest art? Or drink some of the best wine on the planet? Or walk from the Arc de Triomphe down the Champs Élysées, passing luxury stores like Louis Vuitton? Every street, every sight is like a scene in a movie. Flipping through our photo album after we return home (assuming we don't make Paris our permanent home) we'll be amazed that we actually saw and did all those things in person.

Dental Work: I've literally had people stop me on the street and say what a nice smile I have. Clearly I must like Paris if I'm smiling like an idiot while walking down its cobbled roads.

## **The Fluoride Treatment**

Nothing like minty fresh breath to make you feel like you just came from the dentist!

1 oz. vodka

1 oz. blue curacao

3 oz. soda water

1 mint leaf

1. Pour vodka and blue curacao in a highball glass over ice.
2. Top with soda water.
3. Use a mint leaf for garnish, and to give you that dentist-clean feeling.

Makes 1 serving



## Venturing Past the Quartier

Seven years of living in Paris had been filled with wine, cheese, and late nights that turned into early mornings. Hopping into a cab after the night's partying had come to an end and the sun began to rise, I often didn't know whether to greet the driver with "Bonsoir" or "Bonjour." I lived city life to the fullest and never slowed down.

I could jet off to places like Marrakech or Ljubljana on a moment's notice, leaving behind freshly watered plants in my small one-bedroom apartment in favor of sheep's head stew and medieval castles. Adventure was just a heartbeat away.

The last few years have been a bit different. With two kids under two, the only thing in my life that hasn't changed is the fact I still live in a small one-bedroom apartment. My family dines on vegetable puree and builds castles out of Legos. Adventure has taken a different form.

My childhood vacations included trips to Yellowstone and Disney World, typical American destinations. We saw herds of antelope and hugged Mickey Mouse. My French husband's family ventured to Santa's Village in Finland and the Neuschwanstein Castle in Germany, typical European destinations. They saw herds of reindeer and the castle from which the Disney castle took its inspiration. Mika and I want our children to experience the same diversity in their vacations.

That is, if we can ever get out the front door.

Shortly after Leo was born, we managed quick jaunts to London and Brussels. With only one kid in tow, it was doable. We even took several longer trips to the U.S. Now I'm happy to make it to the boulangerie and back, struggling to strap a squirmy Leo in his stroller while Stella snuggles in the baby carrier against my chest. Forget leaving the country—I'm lucky to leave my neighborhood.

Not that I'm complaining. My French-American children see amazing sights on their daily stroll to the park, sights I didn't

lay eyes on until my first international trip at age 19. What is magical to me—buildings older than my home country, iconic monuments, decadent cuisine—will be commonplace to them as they grow up alongside wonders like Notre-Dame and the Eiffel Tower. And eat croissants every day.

When I moved to Paris, my mom wished me good luck in my new life, an entire world away. France was foreign to me, exotic. It's the norm for my children. Will they decide one day to move to the U.S., viewing it as an adventure, like I did when I moved to France? Or will they seek out a country even more exotic? Will I wish them luck in their new life, or will I secretly wish they stay close to home? Will I be able to let them go as easily as my mom let me? Or was my mom only pretending to be OK with it because she knew it was what I wanted?

I have years to ponder/worry/agonize over this before the kids leave the nest. Until then, Mika and I plan to travel the world with our children, giving them a taste of what's out there. Even if it means losing them to another country later on. It's what I did, and what I would do again. I have to be prepared that will happen and I should be supportive when it does.

In the meantime, we'll stick to the neighborhood park and the occasional trip to the world-renowned ice cream parlor down the street. There's enough adventure in our own quartier, with its winding roads and ancient structures.

We feel right at home.

## **Mixed Midori**

When my kids finally leave the nest, I'll be equal parts relieved (ah, peace and quiet!) and sad (my babies are all grown up!). But the familiarity of drinking my favorite cocktail should get me through.

1 oz. Midori  
1 oz. raspberry vodka  
2 oz. sour mix  
2 oz. cranberry juice

1. Mix all ingredients in a martini shaker with ice.
2. Pour into a tumbler (including ice) and drink in that comfortable feeling!

Makes 1 serving

## **Acknowledgements**

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And thanks to Jennie Goutet for the title inspiration!

Super big thanks to my ever-patient husband, who takes care of our totally impatient kids while I write. And merci to Leo and Stella, who give me so much material to write about that I'll be busy for life. Big sloppy kisses to all three of you.

## About the Author

Vicki Lesage lives in Paris and writes about the ups and downs of her life abroad. Thankfully, there are more ups than downs, and at least the downs make for great stories!

Vicki hopes you enjoyed the book! If you did, she'd love it if you left a review at [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com). For every review—even just a few sentences—Amazon sends Vicki a cocktail. OK, not really. But Amazon does help convince other people to buy Vicki's book, which is arguably even better. Depending on the cocktail.

Want more? Get Confessions & Cocktails for free! Simply join Vicki's mailing list: <http://bit.ly/lesage-news>.

Check out the other books in the Paris Confessions series:

[Confessions of a Paris Party Girl](#), Vicki's wild Paris debut. Wine, romance, and a new life in France—a laugh-out-loud memoir from an American in Paris.

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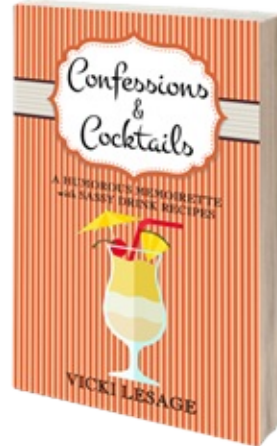
Confessions & Cocktails, five funny stories partnered with five fun cocktails for a quick taste of life in the City of Light.

For more stories, check out [VickiLesage.com](http://VickiLesage.com). And you can always drop Vicki a line at [vicki@vickilesage.com](mailto:vicki@vickilesage.com).

Read on for a sneak peek of [Confessions of a Paris Party Girl](#)...



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# **Confessions of a Paris Party Girl**

**A HUMOROUS TRAVEL MEMOIR**

# 1

## Sister Mary Keyholder

I would like to say that when I first stepped off the plane and embarked on my new life in France, something memorable happened. Or something funny or amazing or romantic or at least worth writing about. Truth is, I don't remember. I take that to be a good thing. Considering all the mishaps I've had since moving here, "uneventful" nearly equals "good" in my book.

Looking back all these years later, I see myself as a hopeful, naive girl full of energy stepping off that plane. Tired of running into my ex-boyfriend seemingly everywhere around my midwestern American hometown, and having been unceremoniously freed from my IT job, this fearless 25-year-old was ready for a change.

I had dipped my toes in the proverbial European pond over the course of several college backpacking trips and now wanted to experience living there. To wake up to the smell of fresh croissants, to drink copious amounts of wine straight from the source, and maybe meet a tall, dark and handsome Frenchman. Who was, of course, not a wienie.

Oh, to be back in the shoes (or flip-flops, as it were) of that intrepid girl, arriving in a new land, successfully commandeering the Métro and her luggage, triumphantly arriving on the doorstep of her destination.

The smooth sailing didn't last long.

I had sublet an apartment for the summer from an unseen Irish girl, Colleen, using Craigslist. The photos showed a charming, yet tiny, apartment that I already pictured myself living in. You'd think this was where the story starts to go wrong, but the girl and the apartment did exist! Making it probably the last apartment to be legitimately rented online before scammers cornered the market.

For me, the issue was getting in to the apartment.

First I had to get the key. Colleen had agreed to leave it next door at the convent (Me? Living next to a convent? This'll be good.) The Catholic schoolgirl in me had an overly romanticized notion of how a Parisian convent would look. I was expecting some sort of Gothic cathedral with nunny looking nuns. So I must have walked past the modern, imposing structure about twenty times, sure I'd been conned, before I noticed the sign. Ahem.

I retrieved the key using a combination of my shaky French and the logic that, c'mon ladies, how would anyone else have found out about this bizarre scenario and come knocking on your door?

"Bonjour, je m'appelle Vicki. Comment allez-vous?" I asked the group of navy-blue-clad, pious-looking women gathered inside the doorway.

The elderly (aren't they all?) nun closest to me cautiously replied, "Pas mal. Et vous?"

Ack! What did she say? I was so busy forming my question I didn't plan for her response! Just keep going, you can do it. "Je cherche une clef." I'm looking for a key.

"Une clef?"

"Oui, une clef." Now I know that's not much to go on, but let's be real. Do lost girls often come to their door? Hrm. Now that I think about it, maybe that's how girls become nuns? Better speed this up before I get stuck in the nunnery, never to be seen again. "Colleen leave key? It's for me."

"Oh yes, a key! For an American girl. That must be you." Was it that obvious? Was it my blonde hair? Wide, toothy smile? No, it was probably my command (or lack thereof) of the French language.

"You're friends with Colleen?" she asked.

I wasn't sure how to answer that since we weren't really friends, but then again I wasn't even sure that was the question. My French wasn't up to the task of explaining how I knew Colleen, and for sure if I said we weren't friends, Sister Mary Keyholder would never hand over the precious key.

"Yes," I said with a smile, then promptly got the heck out of

there.

Key and two heavy suitcases in hand, I headed to my new apartment building. The number on the front, 20, was written in the ornate curlicue script that most French buildings employ. The large windows of each apartment were fronted by black wrought-iron rails, providing the perfect vantage point from which to observe the goings-on of the street below. I eagerly punched the five-digit code into the digicode reader to the right of the door and was in.

Next issue: finding the actual apartment. You'd think this would be easy since Colleen had said it was on the third floor. Silly me, that seemed like enough information until I scoped out the situation.

Problem 1: Once inside the front door, I saw two buildings—one that faced the sidewalk (in which I was currently standing) and one past a quiet courtyard containing a few trees and a large, overflowing trash barrel. Which building was it?

Problem 2: Colleen had said the apartment was on the third floor but in France the ground floor is counted as the “0th” floor, so what an American calls the third floor, a French person calls the second floor. I didn't know if Colleen had adjusted for the American way or stuck to the French method or if Ireland had an entirely different technique<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> I've dedicated many a conversation to this topic because that's the kind of life I lead (if you understand that, you're going to love this book) and I still can't tell which system is better. I can see counting the ground floor as the first floor because it has a floor and it's the first one you walk on. But I can also see the logic in going up your first flight of stairs and then counting “1”, then another flight and saying “2” and so on. I mean, are you trying to get credit for making it to the ground floor when you haven't even gone anywhere? When you're not in a building do you say you're on the first floor? No, because you're just on the ground! So I guess we'll have to call it a wash. Sit back and relax – I'll take care of sending the memo to America and France so they know what I've decided on this important matter. And I still don't know how they do it in Ireland!

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Problem 3: Each floor had two apartments.

So I had a total of eight possible apartments to choose from, none of which had names on the door. I was afraid to leave my bags unattended so I schlepped up the first set of stairs, bags and all, and knocked on each door. On any door where I didn't get a response, I tried my key. No dice in any of the apartments in the first building, so I hauled my luggage down the stairs and through the courtyard to the second building. One person answered and had no idea who Colleen was (friendly neighbors!) and I tried my key in the other three doors. But again, no dice. Crap! After trying eight different apartments, one of them should have been the right one.

I sulked down to the courtyard and let out a few choice words of frustration. I thought back to when my mom and stepdad, Doug, were seeing me off at the airport. We had a tearful goodbye and I choked up when my mom said "Good luck in your new life, honey." She was sad to see me go but wanted me to be happy. And now here I was, trapped outside my new apartment, admittedly not doing so hot in this new life.

I wanted to call her and cry but I needed to get into the apartment to get the damn phone! Plus, I didn't want to give Mom a heart attack by waking her at 5:00 in the morning. No, better to sort everything out myself and call when I had good news to report.

I straightened up and reassessed the situation. I know I'm at the right address since the front door code worked. Colleen hadn't said anything about crossing the courtyard, so her apartment is probably in the first building. And since we're in France, she had probably used the French system of floor numbering.

Not giving a rat's ass about the suitcases anymore, and hating their guts for being so stubbornly heavy, I hauled my sweaty self up the first stairs once again and tried both apartments on the (French) third floor.

Funny thing, no matter how determined you are, if the key ain't right for the door, it ain't gonna open. And this key was a monster. At least twice as large as a standard door key, it

squirmed of its own volition, so determined was it to not fit in the door.

Now I was dejected. I went back to the sunny courtyard to throw insults at my luggage and half-seriously glanced around for a place to sleep. Behind the trash bin? Under the tree? Maybe with enough vin rouge I could make the courtyard comfortable. I turned to the sky for answers (why do people do that?) and that's when I noticed the burgundy curtains in an apartment on the third floor of the second building. I recognized the color from one of the Craigslist ad photos. At last! This could be it. So looking at the sky does provide answers.

Leaving the luggage once again, I climbed the stairs and tried the key in the door. It wasn't easy going, but I was more determined than ever. I shimmied and I shook. This key had to fit! I was NOT sleeping under a tree!

With vigorous jiggling, cursing, and promising my firstborn child, the door finally opened. I'd never been more proud of myself in my life. I might have even literally leapt for joy. "Hello, Paris! Vicki is here and watch out, she can OPEN DOORS!"

After touring my new digs, I mustered up the strength to retrieve my luggage. Me! And my bags! In my apartment! With a key that opens doors! Wheee! The possibilities in this new life are endless. If I can open a door, I can do anything!

Find out what happens next... buy [Confessions of a Paris Party Girl](#) today!