



CRAIG J. SATTERLEE

Readers Write

RAIN

WHEN I ARRIVED IN PARIS ON MY twenty-first birthday, I had \$125 in my pocket and hoped to stay for five months. I quickly found weekend work on a farm and a one-room apartment in a stately building across the street from the Louvre. I attended classes at the Alliance Française and spent my precious francs on expensive English paperbacks by Henry Miller, D.H. Lawrence, and Feodor Dostoyevsky. And every day I splurged on a *Herald Tribune* to follow the unfolding drama of Watergate and President Richard Nixon's impending impeachment.

Quite by accident I discovered that the gardens a five-minute walk from my apartment were a popular spot for late-night encounters between men. It was there one evening in early August that I met Philippe, a handsome electrician in his midthirties. He invited me to join him that weekend on his sailboat at the coast. Our plan was to sail overnight to a small island where Napoleon had stayed

before his final exile.

We motored out of the harbor as daylight faded. The first hour we made good time, thanks to a steady wind. I had sailed a few times before, but mostly I followed Philippe's instructions.

Before long the wind picked up, the waves became steep and choppy, and it began to rain. Philippe gave me a yellow slicker with a hood and asked me to take the helm while he went below to hook up his radio so we could listen to the weather report on deck. I had never sailed in such turbulent conditions before, and at first I was terrified. It took a lot of muscle to keep the boat on course. I had to pull with all my weight on the tiller.

Finally Philippe succeeded in getting the radio to work, and I heard a British voice reporting for the BBC that Richard Nixon had announced his resignation as president.

He's gone, I thought. He's finally gone! I whooped and hollered into the night, no

longer afraid of the storm or the ocean. Philippe emerged from below with two glasses of champagne, and we toasted the good news and laughed as we held on for dear life.

*Francis Collin Brown
Port Townsend, Washington*

THE SUMMER BEFORE MY SENIOR YEAR in high school, my great-aunt died and left me her cottage on Main Street. I decided to move in there for the summer. No one had touched the place in the months since my great-aunt's death, and, walking in, I half expected to find her playing cards at the table. I couldn't bring myself to sleep in the master bedroom and instead used the guest bedroom down the hall.

Late one night a storm moved in, knocking out the power. The aluminum awnings over the two porches vibrated with the beating rain, and the whole house seemed to sing: a low, tremulous, cello-like sound. I lay in the dark with

the covers pulled up to my chin, waiting for my great-aunt's ghost to appear in the doorway.

Giving up on sleep, I got out of bed, lit an oil lamp, and went downstairs to the living room to look for something to occupy me. I found a cabinet full of photo albums and sat in the middle of the floor to look at one. On the first page was a picture of my great-aunt as a young woman, sitting on a step with her husband-to-be. Turning the pages, I saw her getting married, posing in front of a school with her students, and receiving an award.

The rain continued, blocking out the rest of the world. I sat hour after hour by the light of the oil lamp. Through cracked and faded black-and-white photos, I became acquainted with a woman I had never really known.

*Kevin Collins
Piedmont, California*

MY FRIEND'S TWO CHILDREN AND I navigated the cracked and buckled sidewalk of Ogden Avenue toward Yankee Stadium's parking lot, where a traveling carnival had set up. In the ghetto you don't pile into your minivan and cruise off to Six Flags; you wait until the carnies come to your block, then push your way through the mob and pay money you can't afford to get on a ride you pray won't fall apart.

I'd just given birth a few months earlier and had begun working on what would become a seven-year plan to leave my abusive husband. My friend Sabrina's two kids were in my care that week while she was in the hospital with hypertension. Sabrina was my rock. She'd tilt her head, the sun shining through her blond afro, and look at me like I was the craziest white girl she'd ever met. I'd listen to her stories about the worst possible things you could imagine people doing or saying to each other. And somehow, by the end of it, we'd both be laughing. If we didn't laugh, we'd end up in the hospital from the stress. I guess Sabrina had forgotten to laugh that week.

My husband, in one of his rare benevolent moments, had said he'd watch the baby, and Sabrina's kids and I bounced down the block. For just this one summer night we were going to act like the

happy little scraped-together family we were. Then we saw the lightning over the Hudson and heard the thunder crash. Though the sun was still shining, fat raindrops splatted on our heads. I stopped in my tracks, grabbed the kids' hands, and told them to pray with me: "Dear God, we would really like to go to the carnival. Please make this rain stop now."

It was a childish, selfish prayer, the kind that gets answered only if you're Moses and the Egyptians have chased you to the banks of the Red Sea. But I swear that rain stopped. One or two more drops, then nothing. We walked to the parking-lot gate and paid our way in, and I spent all the money I had on tickets so those kids could go on every ride. I even joined them on the last one. Then we trudged back up Ogden Avenue, happy and tired and grateful that God had seen fit to grant our seemingly inconsequential request.

As we entered our building, the heavy bulletproof-glass door slammed shut with a bang, and thunder boomed as if in echo.

Rain came pounding down on the pavement. And we laughed.

*Paula S.
Beaver, Pennsylvania*

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Because of space limitations, we're unable to print all the submissions we receive. We edit pieces, often quite heavily, but contributors have the opportunity to approve or disapprove of editorial changes prior to publication. (If you don't want to be contacted regarding the editing of your work, please let us know.)

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Send your typed, double-spaced submissions to Readers Write, The Sun, 107 North Roberson Street, Chapel Hill, NC 27516. Please include your e-mail address and phone number. If you cannot type, please print clearly. We're sorry, but we can't respond to or return your work, so don't send your only copy unless you don't want it back. Because we must wait until the last minute to make our final selections, we are unable to answer questions regarding the status of submissions. If your work is going to appear, you'll hear from us prior to publication.

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Beauty	March 1	September 2010
Slowing Down	April 1	October 2010