

New York and Paris, and I sincerely hope they've seen the error of their ways by now but I doubt it. You probably still smoke, and you may be living with some chain-smoking, glamorous intellectual French woman twenty years your junior or maybe twenty years your senior, which is also fashionable I hear, a woman who is incapable of putting on weight. I'm glad I quit smoking even if I did plump up into a punching bag, and I wish Sam had never started smoking or reading Nietzsche. Genes are amazing things.

You must be curious about when and where. I'm sure when it was, and where. Of all those sticky afternoons in my nasty little narrow-walled oven of a maid's room with peeling paint and a slanting tin roof, or the nights at that even narrower place you rented over a bookstore, where I heard the toilets flush overhead all night, I'm certain it wasn't there and it wasn't then. It was the night after the Pont des Arts, the night I unstitched the butterfly from my underwear, and stabbed my thumb with the needle doing it.

We'd gone to the Louvre, but it was too late and the museum was closed. You said you wanted to show me I.M. Pei's pyramid. You claimed one day someone would come along and blow it up and return the Louvre to its original state, whatever that was. I thought the pyramid a successful conversion, and I told you so, but if the company sends me over now to check damages after a blast, in case you arrange one, we can discuss the aesthetics in person.

I expect you knew the park gates would be open at night, or maybe they're always open at night in summer, since the sun goes down so late in Paris. People were walking in the dusk under the trees, those long rows of trees aligned on the diagonal, with beds full of red and yellow and purple flowering shrubs that smelled so sweet. I think the trees were sycamores, but they might have been something else, horse chestnuts or lindens, maybe, hung with sweet blossoms. There was a pond full of mosquitoes that bit my bare legs, and a bench, a mossy stone bench that you straddled so you could look back at the pyramid and hold forth on how crass and stupid and American it was even though the designer was born Chinese. I straddled the bench facing you, and you stopped midsentence and leaned forward and brushed a long red bang off my pale forehead. And we kissed. Our lips brushed softly. Our tongues touched with a sparkling electric current. And

then somehow, I was in your lap and the tip of my nose met your ear lobe when you lifted my skirt. You must have used the technique before, on other girls, because you were so smooth I didn't know you'd done it, and it wouldn't have mattered if I'd known, because it was heaven on earth and that's not blasphemy. People walked by and no one seemed to care, like it was the most normal thing ever for a couple to make love in public, and when I thought you'd stop, you didn't, and I didn't. I can still feel how it felt, and remember the sunset through the leaves, and the lights in the cafés behind, and the laughter, and the feeling that I would never do this again, ever.

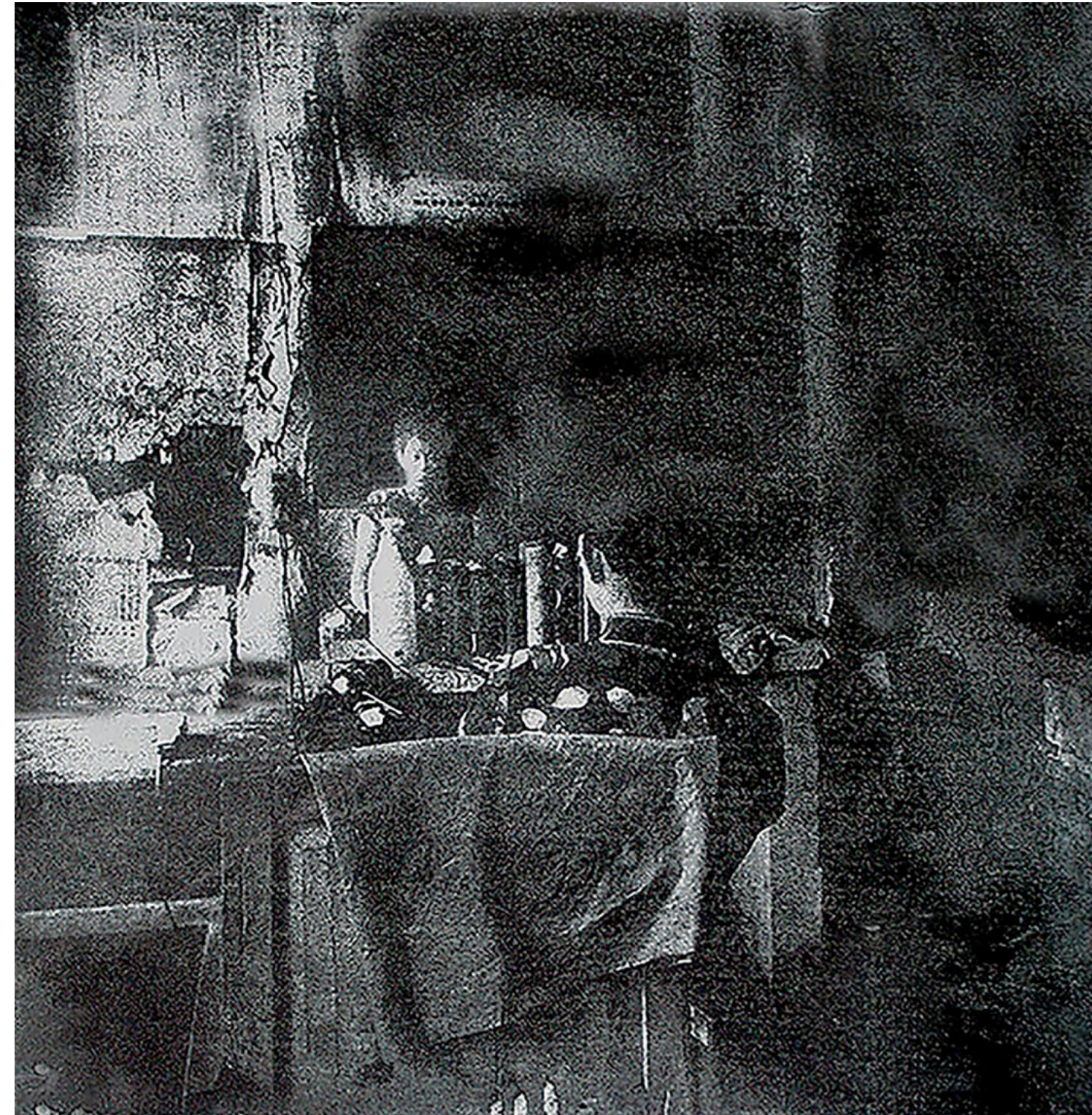
And the result is Samantha. For twenty-one years I have looked at your face in hers. Now you can look at mine again, at least once.

I will send you by Priority Mail the results from the lab tests, plus several strips from your underwear, if you wish, but the others I think I should keep. I do know a lot about corn by the way, in case you want to make another documentary, and wouldn't bother you in the guest room. If you do decide to come over, you'll have to smoke outside.

A native San Franciscan, **David Downie** moved to Paris in the mid-1980s, where he lives with his wife, photographer Alison Harris. His travel, food and arts features have been published worldwide. Downie is the author of *The Gardener of Eden* (to be published in January, 2019), two previous novels, and over a dozen nonfiction history, travel and food books, including the highly acclaimed *Paris, Paris, A Passion for Paris, Paris to the Pyrenees*, and *A Taste of Paris*.

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