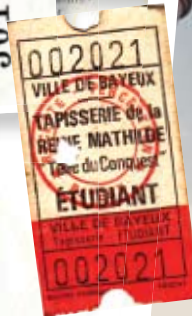




Frenching a Canadian in Switzerland



by Deborah Vaughn

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*To Cole,
my inspiration*

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Chapter 1

I should start by saying the trip started well because saying that pretty much foreshadows the inevitable doom to come. Just like the plotline in a bad B-movie, all is always fun and games until everything changes thanks to something or someone evil. Really. You know the movies: low budget, no celebrities, and the film quality looks like they shot it with a home movie camera. Then there is the over used movie plot consisting of people alone in a house, a spooky, dark forest, a bad storm and a creature of some kind that plucks them off one by one until few remain. A classic recipe very easy to follow.

Say you have two young girls, one blonde and one brunette so they, of course, can be stereotypical. Guess which one is the smart one? They're alone in the house and the sleepover is going well: food, talk of boys, scary stories, etc. On cue the storm starts, lightning cracks, thunder booms and, what do you know, the lights go out. B movie writers take every easy out they can. The girls fumble in the dark for a bit and then...wait for it...the phone rings! Of course, the victims break rule number 1: NEVER ANSWER THE PHONE. Naturally there is a heavy breather on the other end of the line. The girls nervously agree it was a prank but from there the evening goes downhill fast.

They make the most of the lack of light, but fear sets in quickly when they can't ignore that they both heard *THE* noise outside and, no surprise, the phone is dead and they can't call for help. Cue dark figure passing by the window. The Blonde figures it is the hunky football player trying to win her attention pulling the prank. Brunette has doubt and voices concern. But common sense is ignored when the Blonde pulls the unwilling Brunette outside to investigate, and calls out to Chuck, Joe or whatever common name the unimaginative writers come up with. Right, then the girls break rule number 2: NEVER LEAVE THE HOUSE. Because invariably out jumps a half man, half medical experiment

wearing a mask and the girls have to run into the forest in their little nighties (a little T&A is needed in every movie). Why don't they ever run back into the house? They always run in the wrong direction. You want to scream at them. It's like Hitchcock's *The Birds* and Tippi Hedren is about to open the door to the attic. It's obvious it will be full of birds ready to attack so you yell "No, don't do it!" but every time she does it anyway.

In the forest, huddled together, the girls listen to the sound of their own breathing, the sounds of the night and the crunching of the ground underneath the creature's feet. The right ambiance and mood music is everything. Blonde panics, runs, and disappears into the dark night. "Come back," shouts Brunette but finds herself alone. Separated, they have broken the most important rule of all, rule number 3: **STICK WITH YOUR BUDDY**. Obviously they didn't grow up around swimming pools.

The camera switches to Blonde running, hitting branches, sucking air, and stumbling. Guys probably find it a turn-on to see a large ugly creature chasing a half-naked girl. Long blonde hair and large boobs make every woman more attractive no matter how stupid she's been. But I digress.

So, the beast is closing in. Then the inevitable happens: Blonde TRIPS! Yes, trips and twists her ankle. Always the ankle twists. Do men write this crap? I can just see students at med school anatomy class listening to the teacher describing the bones of the foot. "And this is the ankle bone. As you can see, the bone in the female body is much different from that in a male body and is prone to twisting." Yeah right.

In reality, this mutant creature would be able to run much faster than a woman barefoot in a nightgown. I realize, with or without foot attire, it isn't very easy to run through thick foliage at night and you could feasibly trip but the bottom line is that it really isn't necessary. The chemically-altered beast would easily lap her and simply grab her by the hair and yank her to the ground. Maybe that is one of those questions like 'what books would you take with you on a deserted island?' Would you rather go down with the ankle twist or a hair pull? I would think the hair pull would be the much better way to go. You can still get up and fight or run. The ankle would make your chances of getting away pretty slim.

Anyway, Brunette hears Blonde scream, and then all is silent except for the wind in the trees. She meekly calls to Blonde but knows she will now remain alone for the rest of the movie and fight the beast by herself.

I know all about this because my life was a B-movie bonanza, ready for all to see at their rundown, neighborhood, midnight-movie-showing theater. My best friend Monica, the blonde, and I, the brunette, are those girls.

Chapter 2

The phone rang four months ago at my home in Phoenix. I broke rule number one, I answered it. My mom's brother in Germany was on the other end and invited Monica and I to visit. Don't get me wrong. I love my aunt and uncle but little did I know that answering that phone was going to create even more change in my life. And let me tell you, I've had my fill of change lately.

You see, after our trip, Monica would prepare for her senior year of high school with friends and a normal routine, safe and secure, while I would be moving 1,500 miles away to Seattle, due to my mom's new boyfriend. *He* got a job teaching at the University of Washington and was kind enough to get her a job there too. What a swell guy. While they are cozy starting their university jobs, I'll be starting a new school all by myself. How could mom do this to me? I don't belong in Washington. It rains all the time, I'm not very keen on plaid flannel and our new home won't have a swimming pool. Everything had changed since *he* arrived.

To be fair, everything technically changed when my dad left. *He's* just making it worse right now. Ten years ago my parents set me down and told me that their divorce was "for the best." I could see it in my mom's eyes that she didn't agree but went along with it anyway. So I went along with it too because it was clear no one was going to ask me what I wanted. What was being called 'the best' changed my secure, family unit forever. I'd say that's about as "best" as a bad case of malaria. I never wanted to hear those three little words again. The house was sold. My dad moved across town and mom and I moved to a small apartment.

It didn't help that after the big announcement I rarely saw my dad and my mom went a bit nuts. Not nuts as in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, straight jackets and padded rooms, but social diva nuts. She joined singles groups and went out a lot. Everything we did revolved around her social schedule. I was confused as to how she could be having so much fun with everything ruined. One night I lay in bed thinking about how much I missed our old life and that I wanted to spend more time with her, even simply sitting down and having normal meals. I crept down the hall to snuggle with my mom like we use to and talk to her. When I got to her door I heard her crying on the phone to her friend. Actually it was more like sobbing mixed with anger. She wasn't as happy as it had seemed. She cried about all of the responsibilities she had to deal with, how hard things were and how much she hated my dad for doing this to us. It scared me to see my mom so upset. I just couldn't bother her with my problems too. If she could put on a brave face, than so could I. I crept back to my room and never said anything. I didn't want to see my mom upset like that ever again. From then on I took care of myself. When I was old enough I got a job at a movie theatre at the mall Monica and I hung out at. I tried to be the best kid a mom could want.

Luckily, from the very beginning there was Monica to inject some sanity. Ever since that first day of kindergarten when she took me by the hand, pulled me from the corner I was hiding in and told me, "Just do what I do and you won't have any problems." I knew things would always be okay with her around. Post divorce, no matter how crazy things got, I always relied on going to her house on the weekend to watch movies and consume large bowls of popcorn. For those few hours the people in the movie handled everything and I could just sit back and relax next to Monica. Now everything is changing again and I won't have her in Seattle. Why can't things in life stay the same?

As for the trip, I knew my mom saw it as an apology for single-handedly destroying my entire life. To be honest, if given her apology and a dollar together, it all would be worth a dollar. Of course, she felt bad about moving us. The thing is though; I hadn't let on just how upset I really was. That's me, good daughter wearing the brave face. At least the trip was something good so I took it. The plan was to spend some time with my uncle and his wife Inge in Frankfurt, then do a quick tour around some of Europe with Monica. I was excited about the trip, but I hated that it signified the leaving of Phoenix.

When Monica and I arrived in Frankfurt on Monday after departing from Sky Harbor Airport on Sunday, we shuffled out of the plane and up the ramp like herded cattle tired from a long drive across the Plains. As we hit the open space of the concourse, leaving the tight, secure walls behind us, a surge of panic shot through me. I looked around for something, anything that would have caused it but I only saw people absorbed in their own stories: a mother trying to control her two fidgety boys, the group of elderly women who sat around us on the plane, and lots of business-looking people on the phone either making deals or letting their loved ones know they arrived. Yet still, I couldn't shake the feeling something was wrong.

"Keep up will ya." Monica said. I quickened my pace to match hers.

I kept turning back.

"What is it?" she asked me.

"It seems crazy but I feel like we're being followed."

"No, it isn't crazy." Monica did a quick look back and walked up close to me. She lowered her voice, "I think so too."

"Really?" I whispered back.

"Yes," she whispered and did a flip with her head to point behind us. "We're being followed by..." she paused, "200 cranky travelers who are going to trample us if you don't hurry up."

"Very funny." Once again I was glad to do what Monica said and focused on getting to customs.

We found our way to the line for non-German citizens and set down our bags.

"I don't feel so good," said Monica.

"It must've been all the turbulence," I said while taking another look around.

"Or maybe the boogeyman that is following us put a hex on me." She wiggled her fingers at me and made an *ooooh* sound.

"You're a regular laugh riot today."

"You've been watching too many movies."

We inched along in the customs line slowly. As we got closer to the front I turned my focus on finding my passport. I found it with my finger tips at the bottom of my stuffed daypack, managed to wrench it out and by the time it was our turn to step forward to the counter the dark feeling was gone.

“Name?” the sharply uniformed man asked.

“Jodi Werner.”

“Reason for visit?”

“Visiting my aunt and....”

Clomp went the stamp onto my passport.

“Name?” he asked Monica. After he stamped her passport we moved on quickly not wanting to upset him.

“Wow, his shorts are in a bunch,” said Monica.

“Good thing we don’t look like drug smugglers or national threats. I’d hate to think what he would do to us.”

“Good thing your airplane hair didn’t tip him off,” Monica teased.

“Gee, you don’t like my glow from the re-circulated air?” A couple in front turned toward us. My ears were plugged from the flight and I was talking a little louder than normal. I smiled and blushed.

We walked on down to baggage claim and there were Uncle John and Aunt Inge.

“Guten Tag!” Aunt Inge yelled as she gave me a big hug. “Welcome, welcome.”

Aunt Inge spoke in a sharp accented voice with a volume that surprised you like a jack-in-the-box because it didn’t fit her small petite body. Even with my raised volume due to high altitude air pressure, she still out did me.

“Aunt Inge, Uncle John, you remember my friend Monica.”

“Yes, of course I do. So glad you could join Jodi on this trip.”

“Nice to see you again” said Uncle John. “How was your flight?”

That was a lot of words for Uncle John. He is very quiet for being such a tall man.

“Long,” answered Monica. “I’m glad we’re finally here.”

Uncle John grabbed our bags and we headed out.

Maybe it was the airport noise, or maybe my plugged ears, or maybe even my naive excitement for the trip, but I never heard the voices screaming “No, don’t do it,” as I headed for the airport door. Had I heard them I would have never made the same mistake Tippi made. But in my deafness I stepped on the black pad that magically slid open the two glass panels and through I walked. On a good note, at least I wasn’t wearing Tippi’s wool suit and Aqua Net plastered hair do.

Chapter 3

We loaded up and hit the autobahn for their home in Schwanheim, a suburb of Frankfurt. *So this was the autobahn*, I thought. I expected something flashier since it was suppose to be a German engineering marvel. Looked like a regular highway to me, but what did I know.

Aunt Inge turned around to look at us. “You don’t look so good Monica. Let’s get you both home and after a little rest you will be ready to see the sights tomorrow,” she said. “Perhaps some food will do you some good.”

That’s my aunt. Food cures everything.

“I’m not actually that hungry,” answered Monica. She rolled her eyes to me. She doesn’t like being told she doesn’t look very good. She puts a lot into her appearance.

When we arrived at the house we were pretty wiped out. Aunt Inge explained we had to stay up until bedtime in order to get our internal clocks switched over, so we began to fill the time. First we called our parents to let them know we arrived safely.

The phone rang and *he* answered. I should have known. I’m not even gone 24 hours and *he* moves in.

“Mom home?” I asked.

“Yeah, just a minute,” he answered. We don’t talk a lot. He’s okay but if it weren’t for him we wouldn’t be moving to Seattle, so I can’t give him any slack.

“Hi honey. How was your flight?”

“Hi Mom. Okay,” I answered shortly, apparently not giving her any slack either. Technically we don’t talk a lot these days; which is good because it was getting hard to be the perfect daughter pretending to be happy when my whole existence was crumbling. I

found it easiest to keep conversations short. One day I almost slipped. She had had the nerve to use the “it’s for the best” statement regarding the move. That was salt in the wound. A few days later she asked me what was wrong and I quickly made up some teenage excuse, like school work hassles, to avoid talking about it.

Behind her back I asked my dad if I could move in with him so I could stay in Phoenix. They don’t talk so there was no way she’d find out. I’d have to commute a ways but it would be worth it. Seems he didn’t want me intruding on his new life with his younger wife. He actually said, “It’s for the best that you go with your mom.” By this point it was getting comical; comical, meaning creepy, like the Joker in the Batman movie. It was obvious everyone else knew what was best for me, or so they thought, and I would never have a say.

I snapped back to the moment and relaxed the tense pressure of the phone against my ear. But I still didn’t say anything.

“Well, you’re probably tired, so I won’t keep you. Thanks for calling and letting me know you’re okay.”

“Yeah. Bye.” No slack at all. As I took the phone completely from my ear I heard, “Have a good time. I love you.” I knew deep down she loved me but right now my anger spoke louder. So I pretended not to hear and pressed the button to end the call.

Monica and I went to the guest room to go over our itinerary again.

“I can’t believe we are here,” I said. “We’ll be like Thelma and Louise, only we don’t have to die in the end. Or at least I hope not.” It was starting to sink in just how much fun this trip could be. Move or no move, I was in Europe with my best friend and I was going to make the most of it.

“When we get to....” I started.

“Ya know you’re obsessed with movies, don’t you?” Monica said. “Ever since you got a crush on that chimney sweep guy in Mary Poppins.”

I blushed. “Nuh uh!”

“Great come back,” she said. “Have you, or have you not seen every movie ever nominated for Best Picture Academy Award?”

“So what? Lots of people have. Anyway, when we get to Munich I really want to see the Deutsches Museum.”

“Let’s do some shopping and then we’ll see if we have enough time.”

“Oh, okay. I’m sure we will.”

“Maybe.”

I pulled out the itinerary we made. Munich, Germany. Salzburg, Austria. Basel, Switzerland. Paris, France. London, England. Bruges, Belgium. Back to Frankfurt. Everything neatly planned out. Monica had traveled to Europe once with her dad. Being with her, I knew that everything would go okay.

Monica fell asleep even though she wasn’t supposed to while I organized all of our papers. After a while Inge came in and said dinner was ready. We tried waking up Monica but she was dead to the world. We decided to let her sleep.

Inge had put out quite a spread. Fresh tomatoes and basil, gravy covered spätzle (a squiggly egg noodle – delicious but looked a bit too much like maggots so I tried not to think about it), and some kind of meat wrapped around bacon. Of course, there were vegetables and home made rolls too. I made a pig of myself and thanked the heavens Monica slept through it. Monica has never held back opinions when it comes to someone not optimizing their health and beauty so I usually watched my intake around her. Her goal is to star in the movies. Not me, I’m happy watching them, so I enjoyed every bit of the food.

By 8:00 I had enough of the day and crept into bed so as to not wake Monica. I hadn’t been in bed that early since I was seven, but I was pretty beat on top of stuffed. I zonked and woke up the next morning feeling better.

I went down to help with breakfast the next morning, leaving Monica to sleep a bit longer. She must have been really tired. After one cup of coffee she still hadn’t come down so I went up to wake her.

“Wake up sleeping beauty,” I said. “Hungry?”

“Coffee,” she groaned. “And you don’t look so hot either, by the way.”

“Well, I look better than you. You really don’t look too good. You sure you’re okay?”

“Fine, princess. Now out of my way so I can pee. Then perhaps you can loan me your personal stylist. I forgot to bring mine,” Monica hissed.

“Ha, ha,” I said.

Monica really was the pretty one. Normally she even woke up pretty. I wish I had that ability. Everyone noticed her. Me, not so much.

Breakfast consisted of hard Kaiser rolls, cheese, sausage, and marmalade. When I cleared the dishes from the table I noticed Monica hadn't eaten anything. I brushed it off as jet lag and the fact that we were both excited to get our day started.

With breakfast over, we showered and dressed. Finally it was time for sight seeing. Once again I found myself going through a doorway into the unknown as we headed for the U-Bahn, Frankfurt's local train. Little did I know that things would be very different the next time I went through it.