



## A Very Small Suitcase

by Nick Parnell

We met in Paris in 1978. I was looking for my Hemingway and she was searching for herself. Maybe that's why she was drinking rum. I found her sitting at a pavement table outside Les Deux Magots.

She reminded me of someone but I couldn't remember who. It might have been the hollows above her collar bones or perhaps the backs of her knees and while she was not beautiful in the conventional sense, whatever that is, she possessed an elegance and simmering sensuality that could not be long ignored.

In July she, and a very small suitcase, moved into my apartment on Rue de Buci. The writing was going badly and she hadn't found what she was looking for so we spent our days in bed and the nights in bars. In August she switched from rum to wine, red at first, but smiled less. In September I had a piece accepted in London and started working more. She would take long walks along the Seine, sometimes coming back in the dark and then lie on the bed while I clattered away on the Remington. I felt good.

She left in October. I'd gone out in the morning to post some stuff and she was still in bed. I returned in an hour and what was left of her coffee was still warm. This was not so unusual, of course, but I noticed that the very small suitcase was no longer there. After a week she and her suitcase still had not returned so I asked around. People know people who know other people and the bar tenders know everybody. But nobody could tell me where she had gone.

I asked Albert at Le Chat Noir, her favourite bar with the zinc topped counter and all the mirrors, but he had not seen her since we both were there and knew nothing of where she might be. We chatted for a while, he'd liked her and had often not charged for that last glass. They say barmen like Albert are like priests; they take your confession and hold your secrets. As I was leaving he said: "But you know, she is the kind of person you lose easily." This much I know now, but I still look for her, especially when in Paris.