

SANDY DAYS, SALTY NIGHTS

Line spectator



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Growing up, I accumulated pick-up lines like most people collect fine wines. I gleaned them from R-rated movies and Stephen King novels, treasures filed away in my pubescent mind. I was thrilled when I finally came of an age to actually use these gems of sexual wisdom, pulling them from the cellars of my brain.

Several months shy of my 18th birthday, at a youth in government convention in Tallahassee, I found myself flirting with another member of the high-school aged court. We thrust and parried, trading innuendoed witticisms until he threw down a line that caused me to stumble.

"Your clothes would look great in a crumpled heap on my bedroom floor tomorrow morning." He raised his eyebrows and turned up the corners of his lips in a wet grin.

For a brief, inexplicable moment, I was thrilled. Here, finally, was one of the lines I'd been storing away. He had descended into the wine cellar of my heart and returned with a dusty Cha-

teau Lafite-Rothschild.

Unfortunately, though, the vintage had long since soured. Rather than sounding suave, like I had always imagined, the line was awkward and tawdry, too much verve and not enough class.

I rolled my eyes and stepped away. He suddenly seemed unsophisticated, standing there with the last syllables of the lame line dying on his tongue, and I felt my attraction for sleazy lines waver and slip away.

It would be almost five years before I returned to my fascination with great come-ons, this time an ocean and a continent away. Whereas I had been working on my repertoire for two decades, France - the country that brought us the ménage-à-trois and pio-

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neered the French kiss - had practically invented the pick-up line.

Less than a year out of college, optimistic and guileless in the way only young Americans can be, I moved to Paris with a suitcase full of Levis and a mind fueled by romanticism.

Within two months, I'd traded my denim for knee-high leather boots and heard every line in the French book.

"Quels beaux yeux" ("What beautiful eyes") they said on the subway, hot-blooded Frenchmen clasp my hands in their own. "Vous êtes charmante" ("You are charming") on side-walks as they matched their strides to

mine. "Je te paie à boire?" ("Can I buy you a drink?").

Being a line connoisseur for years, I knew exactly what those French men were up to. But, the words had a class to them, an old world charm that all of my collected English versions lacked. It was as though I had been drinking Napa Valley reds for years, content in my limited range, but now I had tasted a vintage Bordeaux.

I'll admit, I became something of a wino on those heavy, sultry French lines. And when it came time for me to return to the States, I experienced my own version of withdraw.

Recently, I visited France again, the first time since that year in Paris. At dinner, the gentlemen next to me poured wine as he slipped a note into my hand.

"You have the head of an empress," it read. "And beautiful eyes."

It was headily familiar and intoxicating. I smiled and raised my glass to him. "Vous êtes charmant." ■



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