

## A Princess in Paris

By Darshan Jain Goburdhone

**Synopsis:** In Nazi-occupied Paris, a teenager falls for a peculiar girl hailing from a mysterious kingdom threatened by the Germans.

### Characters:

- Albert Garnier
- The Girl
- Sandra Marceux
- Kathryn
- Camille
- Anna
- Albert's father and mother
- Celeste Garnier
- SS-Sturmmann Werner and Hinrich
- Michael

### Plot:

**June 3, 1968:** Albert Garnier waits for his train to Paris alone in the quasi-deserted Strasbourg-Ville station. He passes by a few newspaper stands where he glances at newspaper articles celebrating President Charles de Gaulle's escape to West Germany. He seems cautiously content that the May 1968 riots have finally ended but he lets off an air of sorrow and sadness due to his personal circumstances.

When his train finally arrives, he realizes his tickets are gone. A **man** he vaguely recognizes hands them to him after they had fallen from Albert's pockets. He thanks the man and enters the train. He sits forlornly at a window seat, cogitating over unknown matters. A woman, Sandra Marceux, sits next to him and tries to strike up a conversation with him but the lonesome Albert isn't the chatty kind. She takes out her book, *The Castle* by Frank Kafka, whilst Albert reads Marcel Proust's *La Fugitive*. Having read Proust's works, Sandra again tries to converse with Albert and he reluctantly caves in. Though initially awkward, Sandra's zestful vibe carries their conversation and Albert grows to enjoy her presence. He praises Proust's ability to connect loss and memory and Sandra accidentally spoils the book for him, much to his amusement. They talk about the recurrence of conflicts within Paris; first the Nazis, then the recent riots. Unlike Sandra, Albert disagrees with the CGT's communist ideologies. Their conversation shifts to a debate on the thin line between memory and fantasy and the malleable nature of memories.

Sandra reveals more about her: she's visiting her deceased husband's parents in Paris. She lost her husband during the 1961 Vitry-Le-François train bombing. When Sandra pries on Albert's personal life, Albert avoids the

subject. Suddenly, Albert notices Sandra's initially **brown** eyes have turned **green**. That provokes a resurgence of memories and he ends their conversation, feigning a headache to justify his sudden silence.

We then promptly flashback to **July 15, 1942**: In a scruffy apartment found at the impoverished 18th arrondissement in Paris, 17 years old Albert takes care of her 10 years old sister, Celeste. They share a strong bond and Celeste is his only friend in an otherwise lonely life. In the morning, Albert's mother asks his father to leave Paris with the whole family but he refuses, claiming he still has work to do for the French Resistance. She begs him to cut ties with the Resistance but he is too committed to his position. When she implies the father never cared for his family due to his frequent absences, infidelities and alcoholism, he slaps her and leaves. His parents' frequent fights take its toll on Albert's emotional wellbeing and he perceives his life as only becoming bleaker and bleaker. He contemplates suicide and brings with him a Luger pistol (which he has been hiding under his bed) as he leaves for work. His neighbor Anna, a lonely and retired school teacher, has overheard the ruckus and asks Albert if he's okay. Albert simply nods a yes.

Albert is a server at *Le Café Henriette*, a cozy café situated between the 9th and 18th arrondissement. With his father in the Resistance and his mother being a housewife, Albert is the family's sole source of income. The place, previously frequented by French gentlemen and gentlewomen, are now marred by the presence of Nazi officers. After failing to salute back "Heil Hitler" to SS-Sturmmann Werner and Hinrich, Hinrich kicks him for fun but Werner stops him as he has known Albert since the beginning of the occupation and considers him a friend. At the counter, Albert goes back to reading Marcel Proust's *Du côté de chez Swann*. A mysterious and angelic 17 years old Girl suddenly enters the café and sees Albert with the book, a book she readily recognises. She uses that to initiate a conversation with Albert. Albert takes note of her sui generis appearance as an indication she isn't from Paris. When Hinrich and Werner notice her, Hinrich harasses her. He inquires about her identity, ordering her to present her papers. Albert intervenes and claims she's his sister and Werner persuades Hinrich to leave her alone. For having protected her, she offers to pay her debt in any way Albert would like. Albert is very shy but through their interactions there's an immediate connection even though The Girl won't reveal her name and origin. Ergo, he asks to meet her after his shift so that they can get to know each other. When she leaves, Albert notices a **birthmark** on her right wrist.

In the afternoon, they reunite and Albert lets out that he would have wished to take her out for dinner if his favorite restaurant (*Chez Catherine*) hadn't been destroyed during a bombing raid years ago. She proposes they go to his place but Albert refuses. She then suggests going with the flow by wandering around Paris. At the 9th arrondissement next to the Palais Garnier, Albert despairs over how the opera is now blemished with swastika flags, hanging like ominous symbols of death. He talks about how the Nazi flags over the Eiffel Tower, Versailles and other renowned areas have destroyed the spirit of the French people.

He mentions the **hopelessness theory** and how it has affected him but The Girl retorts that the world still bears positive attributes. When Albert calls that fantasy, The Girl argues retreating to fantasy as an escape to a harsh reality can be therapeutic. Albert calls her delusional and adopts a **misanthropic** attitude, calling humans destructive and harmful to each other due to their greed and thirst for power (supported by **Nietzsche's Will to**

**Power** philosophy). Albert ponders on the **eternal return**, specifically past mistakes fated to repeat themselves across eternity. The Girl counters his pessimism through a strong belief in **hope, humanity** and **free-will**. She maintains that believing in the eternal return is believing in predeterminism which to her is nonsense and just a justification for one's own shortcomings. Albert is impressed by her uncompromising ideals.

The Girl is a hopeless romantic but Albert, young and immature, confounds love and obsession and affirms falling for someone only brings pain and suffering due to the insatiable desire to possess the one you love. Albert has formed a **complex** whereby all he associates with love are negative sentiments but The Girl tells him there's much more to romantic love than what he has experienced. The Girl affirms love is more about sacrifice, conquering your fears and insecurities as well as acceptance. Albert retorts that it's the longing that brings more pain and his impatience is demonstrated as he ponders on how long he's supposed to keep suffering before things take a turn for the better.

Suddenly, a man named Michael, who **looks exactly** like the man who returned Albert his train tickets in 1968 (**with no age difference**), bursts out of a corner with a stolen bag and warns Albert and The Girl that German soldiers are approaching. Not wanting to deal with any mischievous Nazis, the two run and follow Michael to a bakery where the baker accepts to hide Michael and the two teenagers in his secret basement. It's revealed The Girl has been carrying with her a pet in her coat: a beautiful white baby dove she lovingly calls Maxine. The baker sends the German soldiers on a wild goose chase by claiming he saw Michael dashing to another street. Albert suspects the bag contains stolen weapons but it instead contains booze. Michael has stolen alcohol from drunk German soldiers for a party at the 8th arrondissement and invites both Albert and The Girl, whom he jokingly refers to as Albert's girlfriend. Albert refuses to go due to his crippling social anxiety but The Girl convinces him to tag along, again mentioning he should overcome his fears.

To Michael, they keep the facade that they are brother and sister leading to funny interactions. Michael reveals he is a Citroen factory worker who is also part of the Resistance. Whilst wandering into the pristine 8th arrondissement where the richer used to live, Michael explains that the rich have long left Paris before the German invasion. Thus, there are ample opportunities for the working-class people to frequent areas normally reserved for the wealthier. This includes *La Grande Taverne de Louise Élisabeth*, where the party is taking place.

Once they reach the tavern, Michael vanishes amongst the crowd. It's a jovial scene. Men, women and children, some coming from distant arrondissements, all dancing to some energetic can-can music booming from the gramophone. For this brief moment in time, the war seems nonexistent. There, Albert and The Girl interact playfully and romantically. The Girl wants to dance and the shy Albert reluctantly accepts. It's awkward at first but they both begin to vibe to the music and dance elatedly.

Alberts begs to know more about who The Girl is and where she comes from, promising she can trust him. But The Girl promises she'll tell him more in due time. When she asks why Albert doesn't want her in his house, Albert elaborates on his parents' loveless marriage and the disturbing fights that pollute his household. The Girl says he is still young and shouldn't abandon his faith in love because of his parents; he has a lot more to experience. Albert reveals he's keeping a secret as well: he is a Jew who doesn't wear the yellow Star of David. His

family and himself aren't quite religious but Albert has always been fascinated by the values and ideals taught in the mythologies, especially by the archangel Saint Michael who always stood by the Jews. No one knows his family is Jewish.

Compelled by his honesty and trust in her, The Girl reveals she is a princess from a nation she won't specify and that after the death of her parents, the Nazis have been looking for her since she is the sole heir to the kingdom. Albert initially rebuffs her claims but she elaborates further on how her nation is a secret oasis where peace, harmony and acceptance reign. Albert's misanthropic side argues no such nation can exist because humans are inherently flawed but she asks him to trust in humanity's better side more. She argues there's good in everyone and that the world isn't so black and white. When he says he has seen no evidence of humanity's positive aspects, The Girl says he must let go of his myopic views and to just "Look at the light". As if on cue, a spotlight shines over the dance floor where an old couple in their 80s dance to Lucienne Boyer's *Parlez-Moi D'amour*. A symbol that love can last as long as life itself.

The Girl insists that magic exists in her country but Albert laughs it off. To prove her claims, she asks him to look at her shadow, who has left her body and has become sentient. "Bored", her shadow leaves the tavern into the streets of Paris. Albert and The Girl follow it, whilst avoiding Nazi patrols, and Albert's shadow becomes sentient as well. Maxine swings out of The Girl's coat and excitedly follows their shadows. Their shadows dance under the moonlight at *Pont Alexandre III* and kiss, much to the embarrassment of Albert and The Girl, who says, "Our shadows are always more daring than us". They discuss how their shadows represent the dichotomy between their desires and their rational side. Albert accepts to bring The Girl home with him and promises to protect her as long as he lives. The Girl posits that Albert is a **wounded healer** who tries to heal himself by healing others. But she warns him he'll have to heal himself first and foremost or he might cause more harm than good. Shortly later, the dove returns to The Girl's coat and the shadows return to their owners although there's a swap; The Girl's shadow becomes Albert's shadow (**anima**) and vice-versa.

With still 2 hours left before the Nazi-imposed curfew, The Girl wants to catch a movie. Albert explains he cannot escape reality in movies anymore but The Girl insists on going to the cinema. At their local theater, they watch Charlie Chaplin's *City Lights* alone. Looking straight into The Girl's **green** eyes, they both lean for a kiss and succumb to their desires for each other. They passionately make out. This moment is the apex of their romance; two scarred souls finally finding solace in one another.

Albert notices The Girl's green eyes are now **blue**. This reawakens a disturbing memory he had repressed. When The Girl notices something's preoccupying his mind and asks if he's okay, Albert breaks down in tears and says he doesn't deserve her. He reveals that his **shadow** isn't good and represents the darker sides of him. The shy, introverted and calm Albert The Girl has known so far was just his **persona**. The Girl squeezes him between her arms, hoping to comfort him but Albert insists she hears about something he has done in his past...

We flashback to **June 3, 1940**: A 15 years old Albert watches *City Lights* with his first love Kathryn, who has **blue** eyes. Albert loved the film but Kathryn is unimpressed and is eager to return home. There is no connection between the two but Albert is hopelessly infatuated with her. He clumsily confesses his love for her and she

bluntly rejects him, saying her and her family will soon leave France due to the Nazis' victories during the Battle of France. It's only a matter of time before they breach into Paris and Kathryn's family is rich enough to afford an escape. Albert tries to persuade her to stay, claiming she's the only one he can really connect to despite their non-existent chemistry. Kathryn calls Albert burdensome after he calls her selfish for abandoning him. He takes her departure very personally (**cognitive distortion**) and Albert cannot leave the city with her due to poverty, coupled with his father's stubbornness to remain in the city.

Albert begs Kathryn to wait for him after the war, so they can reunite and get married. Kathryn feels immensely guilty for Albert's sufferings and as much as Albert has been a great friend to her, she just doesn't have the same romantic feelings for him. Albert breaks down further saying he's been a mess lately with things at home getting worse. He says Kathryn is the only bright speck in his life and with her gone, there will only be despair. But she's done with Albert guilt-tripping her and emotionally tormenting her. When Albert asks if they'll ever meet again, she simply replies, "I don't know but I hope we don't".

Albert apologizes for his breakdown when suddenly, loud deflagrations echo through the city; it's a bombing raid. Luftwaffe bombers overwhelm the night sky whilst Albert and Kathryn try to make their way through the pandemonium. Like lightning shattering the skies, the anti-aircraft cannons burst through the night sky. Through crumbled buildings and dismembered corpses of men, women and children, the two try to make their way to the subway station to find refuge. They stumble on the remains of *Chez Catherine*, now a heap of broken glass and bricks laying under a downed Heinkel He-111 bomber. This sight sends Albert in a state of fiery rage and desperation. The Heinkel's pilot fires at the glass cockpit and escapes from the debris. He has lost both of his legs and crawls towards Albert begging for help. He is also partially on fire and suffering from severe third-degree burns. Albert seizes the pilot's Luger pistol and shoves it into the pilot's mouth. He then begs Kathryn to not leave him but she becomes traumatized by his inhumanity. He violently pushes the barrel further down the pilot's throat and seems to feel a sadistic satisfaction in doing so (**displacement**). Kathryn runs away and it's the last time they'll see each other. Albert pulls the trigger and obliterates the pilot's neck, almost decapitating him.

Back to the night of **July 15, 1942**: The Girl, eyes now **green**, is perturbed by his story but still tries to rationalize Albert's actions. She claims his remorsefulness is a sign that he has changed. Albert expands on his fears that whenever he tries to prevent the loss of someone in his life, he ends up doing things that provoke them to leave him thus continuing a vicious cycle of loss and loneliness. To The Girl, overcoming this fear is primordial but self-loathing will only worsen his condition. She elaborates on the **redemptive** power of love which can lead to personal growth and development. Albert reveals he wanted to end his life before midnight but the day he spent with The Girl convinced him to abandon his plans, now that he has seen there's still light in this world. He believes The Girl coming into his life is a fatalistic sign that he should keep on living. Albert acknowledges that at some point The Girl will have to leave for her kingdom once the war ends and thus, they promise to make the most of the time they have left. The Girl implores him to let go of his dreadful past so that they can both move on.

On their way to Albert's apartment, 20 minutes before curfew, they are approached by a drunken Werner and Hinrich. Hinrich pesters them and when Albert demonstrates resistance, things get violent. Hinrich pulls The Girl towards him and Maxine falls out of her coat. Albert tries to intervene but Hinrich kicks him in the face, breaking his nose. As he falls, the Luger pistol slips out of his jacket. Werner sees it and becomes infuriated. He questions Albert on where he got the gun. Maxine's wings are broken and Werner stomps on the dove, breaking its ribcage and killing it. Hinrich pulls down his pants and proceeds to rape The Girl. Albert snatches the pistol off Werner's hands and shoots at Hinrich but Hinrich uses The Girl to shield himself from the bullet. Blood pours out of The Girl's chest as Albert horrifyingly realizes he just accidentally shot her. Werner takes out his service pistol and aims it at Albert. Just as he's about to kill Albert, an SS-Sturmbannführer (SS-Major) comes to his rescue. The Major fires at Werner's face, obliterating it, and fires 3 shots at Hinrich, also killing him.

The SS Major looks **exactly** like Michael even though he has no knowledge of him. Traumatized, Albert holds the dying Girl in his arms and she utters her last words: "Look at the light." Albert howls in pain and despair whilst the SS Major tells Albert that they should bury The Girl as soon as possible. Albert picks up Maxine's lifeless body and the two bury The Girl in an abandoned construction site where they're sure no one will find her remains. Albert refuses to bury Maxine's body, affirming the dove's the only thing he has left of The Girl. He despairs over the fact that he never even knew her name.

Ravaged by guilt, misery and loss, he heads home in tears and desperation. On his way, he finds the dead body of his father after he had been shot multiple times. He breaks down further and dashes to his apartment, fearing for his mother and Celeste. However, he is stopped by Anna who tells him his father was killed when he went out looking for Albert and that his mother and Celeste were rounded-up at Vel' d'Hiv by the police to be sent to concentration camps. She reveals the Nazis were saying how Albert's father had ratted out Albert's family as being Jewish in a hopeless attempt to save his own life in exchange of information on hiding Jews. Anna shelters Albert for the night during the mass arrest of Jews by the French police at the behest of German authorities. Albert is inconsolable; he lost everything in the span of one night and it's all because of him. He sleeps in Anna's deceased son's bedroom. Her son had enlisted in the army and was killed at Dunkirk.

Albert places Maxine's lifeless body on the table. It twitches and by magic, Maxine somehow springs back to life. Nothing can describe the mixture of shock, mystification and wonderment felt by Albert. The dove wings out through the window into the Parisian night. Albert watches it fly away into the starry sky, with hopeful eyes. This symbolizes how The Girl will live on somewhere beyond this world and thus, Albert's hopelessness is momentarily palliated.

Back to **June 3, 1968** in the train: Albert finally breaks out of his trance and tells Sandra that she once loved a girl who died during the war. However, he fails to properly recollect how she died (**memory repression**) but still feels haunted by a crippling sense of guilt. He later learned his mother and sister both died at Auschwitz and their death sent him into a lifelong depression. He talks about the Pygmalion mythology; a lonely sculptor who built a statue representing his idea of someone he desperately needed in that period of his life. He fell in love with his own creation and for him, the statue was as real as a human being. Touched by his love for someone

who doesn't even exist, Venus brought the statue to life. Sandra doesn't understand the relevance of this story and Albert simply tells her that he feels like he is Pygmalion. Albert finally reveals why he is going to Paris: it's to discuss the final terms of his divorce with Camille, his wife who has gotten full custody of their children. He laments how guilty he feels for messing things up and losing the people he loves.

Sandra offers to keep in touch with him, saying they might find solace in each other. But Albert's **neurosis** prevents him from forming any emotional bond with someone due to the fear of loss and the lasting trauma of his younger years. He mentions the **Hedgehog's dilemma** and all the baggage he carries to justify his inability to form relationships. The thought of repeating his mistakes renders him emotionally distant and he accepts that he is too emotionally demanding, which scares off people. He says nothing good ever lasts but Sandra tells him it's high time he lets go of his past to allow himself to move on. Albert adds that he is working on improving himself to overcome his **dependency** on other people by focusing on himself. When the train reaches *La Gare de l'Est*, she gives him her business card and although he wants to be with her, Albert says he hopes they'll never meet again (**reaction formation**). When she leaves, her eyes are still **green** and he notices a **birthmark** on her right wrist, identical to The Girl's.

Albert walks forlornly amidst the detritus of the May 68 riots. He goes to The Girl's burial site where an immense ash tree now stands. It is green, exuberant and full of life, just like The Girl. He then contemplates throwing away Sandra's card into the river Seine at *Pont Alexandre III* but he doesn't. There's an internal conflict within him between hope and pessimism and deep inside, he feels like hope is winning.

He finally meets Camille and Albert apologizes for having been a bad husband. Camille ignores his words saying now isn't the time for apologies. They go to *La Grande Taverne de Louise Élisabeth* which is still standing, having survived the war. It is as lively and bustling as ever. Albert convinces the owner to play Lucienne Boyer's *Parlez-Moi D'amour* and he asks Camille for one last dance. Camille reluctantly accepts. A spotlight shines above them and just like the old couple, they share a sweet dance.

Throughout their marriage, Albert has rarely seen Claire so jaunty. This, in turn, makes him happy. Can their marriage be salvaged after all? But after the first minute, they both seem to recall why things didn't work out. The pain inflicted on each other. The constant fighting. Albert's possessiveness and anger issues. All these memories seem to come back. As the song nears its end, their cheerfulness has faded away, like their love for each other. They continue their dance though, for whoever's looking and by courteous obligation. Their dance becomes a nuanced acknowledgment of the individual paths they have walked. It becomes a silent understanding and an acceptance of who they are and their divergent paths from now on.

Albert remembers The Girl's death, Kathryn, the pilot, his parents, Celeste and all his mistakes. All these memories resurface and instead of letting his horrendous past haunt him, he redirects them towards a self-realization wherein he acknowledges his experiences which in turn catalyzes the development of the **Self**, the final step of his individuation and self-healing journey. The song ends and Albert heaves a sigh of relief.

**The End**