

# Confessions: Drenched in Paris

by Stanby Y. Cullass

"Je te pose la question, fraîchement, est-tu prête de te prostituer?"

My knuckles whitened as my grip on the chair seized like a vice. The only clear mental image I could form was that of Floretta Baylin, my cotillion teacher. Ms. Baylin was a matriarch from a bygone era, instructing us about decorum, politeness, and all the other minutiae required to be true Southern ladies and gentlemen. The night of our "graduation" and final ball, she had appeared in an angelic white gown, delicately embroidered with frosty, glittering sequins. She was a shining beacon of gentile propriety, gracious and serene.

I looked down at my legs, sheathed in tight, black, satiny fabric and demurely crossed at the ankles. "Oh Floretta," I thought. "How I wanted to make you proud," and took a generous swig of red wine.

"Under what conditions?"

Somewhere, thousands of miles away, Ms. Baylin was rolling in her grave.

The evening started normally enough; my friend and I decided to go to the Ritz for a classy drink, to be followed by dancing. The Ritz was as deliciously opulent and swank as I could have hoped. The Maitre D' took our coats, there was a man in a tuxedo behind a Steinway, and each drink was accompanied by a silver pedestal of mixed nuts, dried fruit, and chocolate.

As we were being seated I noticed three Middle Eastern men at the table next to ours. They were drinking Black Label Johnny Walker with Evian and smoking ample cigars. I thought nothing more of them as we ordered and savored the ambiance of the bar.

After sitting for about twenty minutes, one of