

EIFFEL IN LOVE

Just as I was walking under the Eiffel Tower to check on my workers, the thousands of light bulbs on it began sparkling. I felt almost warm, for maybe the sixth time since I'd arrived from Senegal.

My contentment vanished as soon as I turned the corner and saw my souvenir sellers. Ibou was loafing. Again. Hands in the pockets of his worn jeans, he gazed over the heads of the tourists streaming by. Not once did he pick up a toy tower from the blanket in front of him and wave it in front of the passing hordes.

I was there in three bounds. I grabbed the front of his hoodie and gave it a big twist. My voice was a quiet rasp.

"I give you the best location in the territory and you waste it!"

"Boss, I'm sorry!" He whined softly, so as not to attract the *flics*. Cops were a daily obstacle to our lucrative trade. "Don't move me somewhere else, I promise I'll do better for you. Oh please, boss!" His brown eyes filled with tears.

I eased my grip. How could I discipline the boy? He looked at me the way my son Léo used to when he came home late at night in Dakar, with alcohol on his breath. I beat him every time, screaming that he needed to make something of himself.

I wasn't going to make that mistake with this one.

I gave Ibou a soft pat on the arm. "Look at Barago and do what he does."