

PARISIAN WOODS

By Anne Swardson

Carmen was a dim figure in the fading moonlight as she clip-clopped down the dark road in her high heels. I padded about 30 feet behind her, far enough that she wouldn't sense me but close enough to act if needed. The trees on either side of the road leaned in menacingly.

Headlights appeared behind me; I faded into the forest. The car, a late-model Renault, pulled up to Carmen as the driver opened the window. She walked around to his side and leaned in. His hand emerged from the window and proffered two twenty-euro bills. She took them and beckoned him to get out and follow her.

So far so normal.

But then the supposed customer, a tall thug in a leather jacket, went off-script. He grabbed Carmen, snatched back the bills and pushed her up against a tree. Holding his hand over her mouth, he began fumbling with his zipper.

I was there in two seconds. An elbow around his neck and a kick to his knees and he was on the ground.

“That's not how it works, *mon gars*,” I growled as I pinned his neck to the ground with my foot—also clad in a high heel. Grabbing his wallet, I extracted not just the forty

euros but everything else in it. “Next time you better behave properly, or we’ll ban you from the park.” I let him go and enjoyed watching him race to his car.

“Oh Stefka,” Carmen wailed as she leaned into my embrace. “I sorry. I wish you no have to defend me. I know not how to see people like that.”

“You’ll learn, *ma cherie*,” I said, kissing the top of her head. At six feet, I towered above her. “It’s a tough business, and Boris doesn’t do anything to help us. We’ll talk more tomorrow about how you can protect yourself. Now get back to work and I will too.”

With that, I straightened my bra, unbuttoned my blouse another notch, applied a new coat of lipstick, hiked up my miniskirt and headed into the forest, to take the path to my spot. It was time to dangle my own attractions before the passing cars.