

Christine's Philosophical Journey to Paris describes a young woman seeking understanding but also fleeing a troubled past. Guilt drove Christine from Albuquerque, New Mexico, and love and death will cause her to leave San Diego for Paris, France, where she will continue her quest for the truth about herself and about the world she now feels a stranger in. The journey that began as a flight from disgrace has become an adventure of rediscovery.

Christine's Philosophical Journey to Paris: Book Two

by Frank Kyle

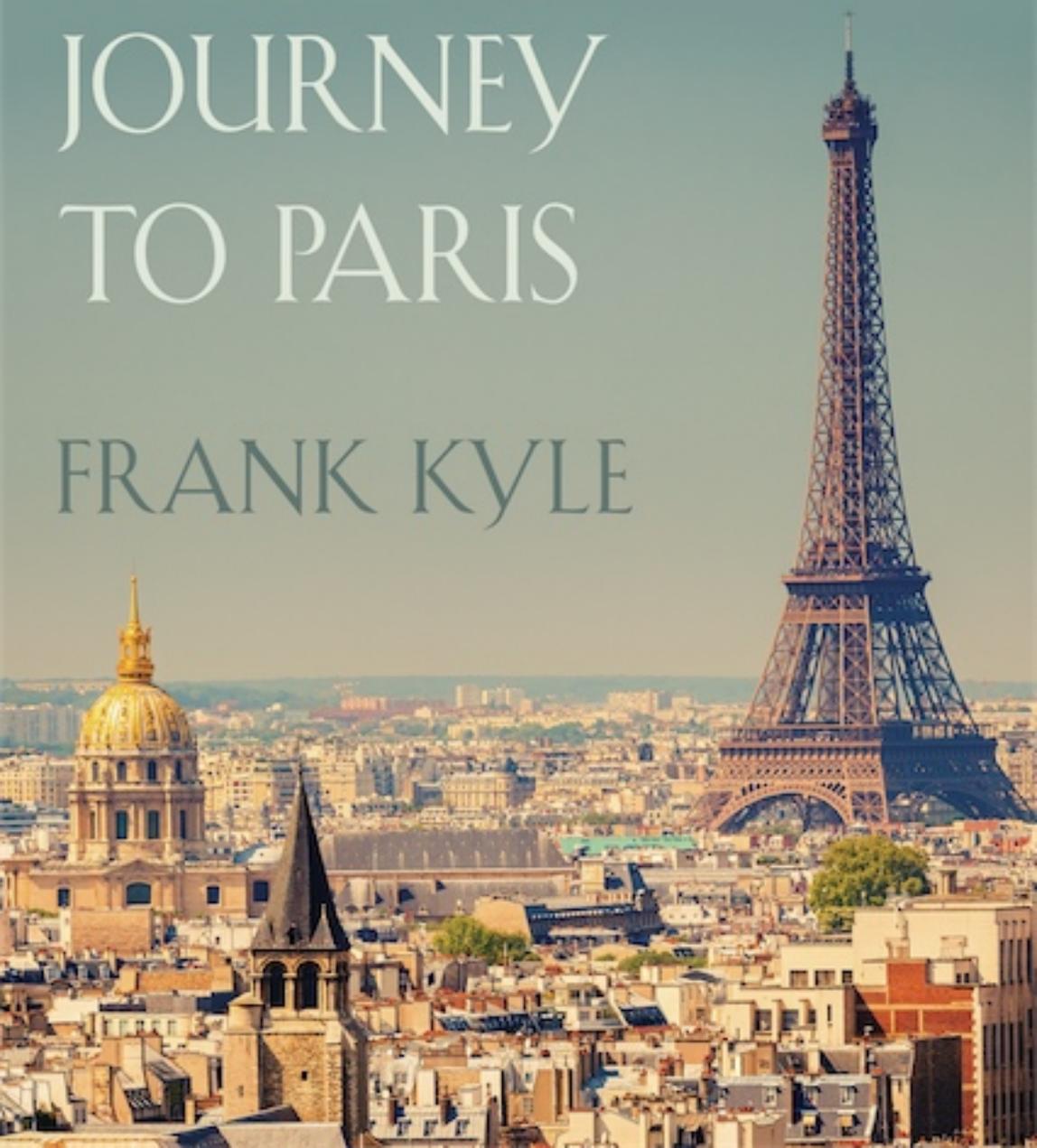
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CHRISTINE'S
PHILOSOPHICAL
JOURNEY
TO PARIS

FRANK KYLE



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October 15, 198-

Dear Ruth,

I sit at my window drinking coffee. The cool, gray, lifeless sky enshrouds my little beach city. The trees stand without a whisper of movement, their heads cast downward to the earth. They seem to be mourning the passing of summer, though most of them will not lose their leaves during the counterfeit California winter. My window is open. I like the feel of the cold morning air even though it makes me tremble. A bird hidden in the stillness chirps, twitters, squawks, and sings, mocking the near silence of the morning. As happens so often, I think I hear the sound of the wind rushing through the pines or a torrent splashing downward, helplessly drawn to the sea, but it is only the whispered lies of automobiles awakened from the night. Roofs, trees, driveways, streets, automobiles, power lines, telephone poles stand heaped before and about me, forming a claustrophobic maze that seems to have no exit. The houses, the apartments, the condominiums are filled with sleeping organic human matter. They are all strangers to me. Or more likely I have become the stranger who cannot call any of this home, but then I did not come here to find a home.

In a few hours I will take Robert to the hospital. For days now he has become so weak, so medicated, anesthetized, and so infinitely tired, that he can no longer do anything for himself. Mostly, he sleeps. I prepare his food, but often he cannot eat. So what he has dreaded most has finally arrived. And I think he has decided to go to the hospital because he realizes that his illness is becoming more than I can manage. He has seen his life reduced to almost nothing but the disease. Now it is difficult for him even to converse for any length of time.

He said, "My time has come and there is no use trying to hang on any longer. Besides, Christine, I no longer have the energy to fight this battle. I have held onto life like a sleeping baby holds onto its mother's finger. I do not want to see it end. You have helped me live during this time of dying, but now I am beyond the reach of even your helping hand. So I must go off to die, Christine."

I held his hand as he told me this. My eyes filled with tears. How has this strange man come into my life? I have known him only months, and during that time we have become friends, we have shared secrets, we even made love, and now we are sharing his dying. We both, it seems to me, have suddenly grown very old. He is my old friend, and I am about to lose him. Our lives have become a part of the same story, our pasts intermingle like two streams that converge to become a larger, different stream. I am amazed by the mystery of our closeness. He and I are no longer strangers. We have spoken, shared, wondered, and loved together. Our souls have touched, and in his dying he wants only that I remain with him. I told him that I would never abandon him. How did this happen to me, Ruth? I thought I would never again become so involved in another's life. I had sought to escape

involvement. But the Mother of us all, the one who has woven the threads of our hearts, is not so easily tricked or eluded. She makes her demands, and they will be met or else your heart will shrivel.

I took Robert to the hospital. As he got into the car I could see the pain on his face. On the way to the hospital, he sat silent, somber and dignified, ennobled by his acceptance of death. It seemed so strange he and I riding together for the last time in Renée faithful Datsun. Only when they took him from me did tears come to our eyes. I am so proud to know this unassuming yet wonderful man who, like me, seems a stranger in this world. Good night, Ruth. I hope you are well and happy. Oh Ruth, I fear I may lose you.

Love,

your Chrissie♥

♥ You know by now that I am the ghostly resident that inhabits the story and provides each letter with a commentary. The commentaries are unauthorized and commentator should not be considered a character or in any other way a part of the story itself. Nevertheless, the commentator does provide relevant background information not contained in the letters. Each commentary follows its letter and is identified by a roman numeral.

Your Faithful Commentator

I

October 15, 198-

I don't know about the reader, but for myself, I was caught off guard by Christine's closing sentence. Why should she fear that she may lose Ruth? I know the reader expects me to know everything, but really the reader knows as much about this as I do. It is clear that many things—people, ideas, places, memories, etc.—are beginning to weigh upon Christine's soul. And I find interesting this notion of life weighing upon the soul, as if the soul were a scale that measures emotionally and intellectually the value of existence. The embodied human being, not such a thing as myself, appears to be the center of valuation, that in some profound way, a world without Christines would lack value. To my way of thinking, this valuation is a gift of great uniqueness, given to the world by human beings at a grievous and devastating price to themselves—the price of grief, disappointment, despair. Certainly there is joy, the reward of valuation, but joy is tenuous and, like life itself, vulnerable, and the resulting unhappiness seems more than what thinking and feeling beings are capable of bearing, and, most tragically, the disappointment and resulting unhappiness cannot be avoided, because it is rooted in the very finitude of all things. It is a privilege to come into the world as a human being, but it is a heart-rending one.

Here the life of Jesus is revealing as it is misleading. By becoming human God experienced the painful burden of embodied awareness. That is why, as you shall soon discover, the seaman considers the Crucifixion a fitting symbol of the sacrifice that all human beings must endure in their role as empathetic revealers of the meaning and value of all of creation's creatures. But Jesus was able to avoid that greatest pain of all—having to face the final end of one's existence. If Jesus is God then he cannot die and he only plays at being human. He does show his compassion by offering to humans that which he is powerless to give—immortality. On that matter I must agree with the old seaman. The truth is the task of being human requires more courage than the gods possess, for what god would trade divine immortality for pitiful, frail human mortality, which is necessary if finitude is to be fully understood. That was Jesus' sleight of hand—to give the appearance of being mortal while retaining his immortality. The tragedy of humanity is the source of its unexcelled nobility, an exalted condition reserved for humans alone. Every human being is born upon the cross of mortal awareness. Their calling in life is to acknowledge the tragic finitude of all things. The gift of humanity is this unbearable awareness that conveys absolute value upon each and every existing thing. This no immortal God can do.

You are thinking it's outrageous that I would call Jesus an imposter who simply pretends to be mortal. Perhaps then he was mortal and only believed himself to be immortal. Another outrageous thought. But that is all we are doing—thinking, speculating. Then what of his perfection as a human being? I say consider the matter of just how great an accomplishment it is for a perfect divine being to be a perfect human being. And to speak the truth, how can God be noble when nobility requires challenge, resisting the temptation rooted in one's lower self, overcoming fear, and placing the welfare of others above one's own? Yes, what about Jesus? Certainly if he were a mere mortal aspiring to godliness, then he was a noble man, but if he is God incarnate then he was nothing more than a puppet whose every action was determined by the puppeteer, his divine father. Ask yourself, how could God ever act in an ungodly manner? To do so would be for God to contradict his nature and that is logically impossible, which means God, unlike humans, is totally determined by his nature, thus divinely unfree. You are skeptical. Well then ask yourself if it would be possible for God to choose to do evil? I do not think so. Even to consider doing evil would be ungodly. And as good a man as Jesus was, could he be perfect if he believed falsely that he was God? No. Jesus was either God masquerading as a human or a human masquerading as a God. Of course, there is a third option. Jesus never pretended to be God incarnate but was made to appear so by the writers of the New Testament. Perhaps it would be better if the gods kept to their own affairs and left humans alone to deal with and comprehend not only their tragic condition but that of all things.

Enough! I find discussing God's nature and behavior too tiring. I admit my bias. My attachment is to humans alone. If my dwelling place were a sacred text then I'm sure I would feel differently. But it is not, so let's return to the very human characters in Christine's story.

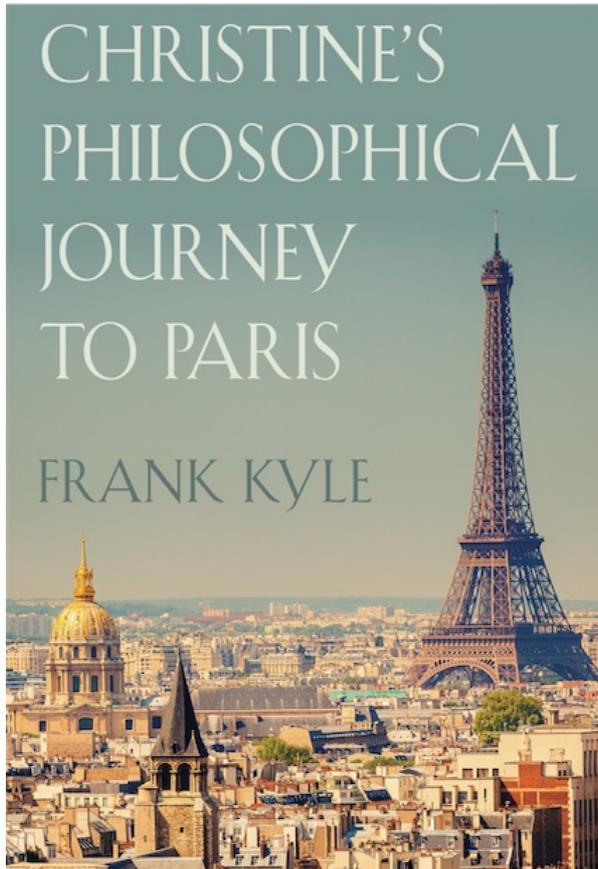
The underlying principle of human suffering seems to be separation. One can see the sorrow of separation everywhere in Christine's life, and now she fears that she is being drawn away from Ruth. She did not know at the time she had embarked on her journey that what appeared to be a road was really a river flowing away from her old life. At first the current seemed gentle enough, certainly nothing she could not manage, nothing to fear. But the gentle current suddenly became a torrent, and the torrent carried her out to sea. Now, more adrift than ever before, she finds herself being carried by the fascinating, mysterious, and unpredictable currents of the sea.

Take Robert as an example. Who would ever have thought that this good-natured but seemingly ordinary young man would come to play such an important role in Christine's life? Christine herself is as dumbfounded as we are. And where will he take her? Obviously, Christine must be thinking or feeling the same question, one that she cannot answer. When she left Albuquerque she knew where she was going, at least so she thought. But now she doesn't seem to be the one controlling the direction of her life. If Robert dies, will that be the end of his influence upon her

life? I do not think so. She has been pulled into the current of his life, and his death would only ensure that his life will continue to flow within hers. And then there is Mr. Rieneau, the gentle, eloquent old fisherman. Clearly he is a good man who would never intentionally do anything that would separate Christine from the source of her greatest happiness. Yet we know that his influence upon her has been no less than that of the sea itself. And finally there is her encounter with the affable Mr. Sage who confessed regretting not having lived a complete life and telling Christine that she is destined to return to Paris, suggesting if she does not that somehow her own life will be incomplete.

The currents have grown more varied and stronger, carrying Christine farther and farther away from the home she left behind but never thought to abandon. Is it too late for her to return? Should she return? I don't know. It is Christine who must decide, but the decision will not be without ambiguity, uncertainty, and regret, certainly no less painful than the one that took her away from the land of Ruth.

And then again, it may be the actions of Ruth that worry Christine. Perhaps she fears that one day Ruth will abandon forever her father's house and return permanently to her mother's people and their sacred land. Then perhaps there would be no returning to the land of enchantment for Christine, who, unlike her friend, has no ancient home or history that beckons, only those years spent in the untamed region where the pine and aspen look outward toward the rugged, vacant land of the mesas, years that must now seem like moments to Christine's confused, lonely, longing heart. But what of her family? you ask. For now, her family is a place of sorrow, not yet a place of homecoming.



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