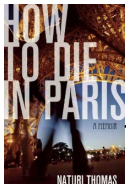


How to Die in Paris



The title intrigued me, so I pulled this book off the new shelf. How to Die in Paris .is

Thomas's first book, a memoir, about her trip of seven months to Italy and Paris. Like all good travel books, it's also autobiographical, not only detailing the author's present but also her past. Like many twenty-somethings, Naturi's had a difficult time in the recession finding steady work in NY City. Periodically, she lists how many times she's moved in the past few years, and how many nights she has spent couch-surfing, or staying with friends.

Before setting off for Europe, a friend takes her to see a fortune teller. Although Naturi pokes fun at the process, the fortune teller is adamant that the young woman will have an extremely tough time in Europe. Naturi scoffs it off, but...

The first two months go well in Italy. She finds a nanny job with a lovely young family, but her relationship with the mother turns sour when Naturi refuses to translate the woman's huge Ph D thesis from Italian to English. And though I said job, no money was exchanged; the American worked for room and board.

Apparently, Naturi was so desperate to change her life that she flew to Europe with very little spending money. In fact, by the time she reached Paris a few days later, she only had enough for one--yes one!--night's stay at a youth hostel plus some small change.

So instead of eating, drinking, and touring her way through Paris, she finds herself searching for free bathrooms (apparently not as easy as it sounds) and discarded food. The people that help her are usually men (she's told that she's pretty often) and mostly immigrants, many from African, all of whom are only marginally better off than she is.

Naturi describes walking through Paris for hours and always being cold. During this time she thinks of her childhood, and it becomes more and more important to the narrative. Her family was eccentric, and much worse, her mother abused her sexually. That's why she has refused to speak to either parent in several years.

Although this is not as happy-go-lucky as many travelogues are, it offers something deeper and more interesting, a young woman searching for her true self in a foreign land. Naturi's favorite landmark becomes the Eiffel Tower and though it's impossible to jump off, she found it beautiful, and more than worth the price of the trip.

Posted by Dory L. on February 20, 2012

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