

{COLUMNIST} DANIEL BARNES

Daniel Barnes has a day job as a philosopher and art critic, but his social life is a one-man mission to explore the depths and excesses of 21st-century gay life. This column offers a glimpse into his misadventures, such as **The Time I Was Famous...**



The first time I visited Paris was for the final of the Euros. I didn't have tickets to the match, but thought the atmosphere of watching it in a French pub would trump that of watching it in an English equivalent. The absurdity of this dawns on me as I sit in a café drinking a beer that – unbelievably – costs more than any beer I've ever had in London. Overall, Paris does not impress me much: I find it underwhelming and intolerably dirty. On the upside, it's probably the only place in the world where I am slightly famous for, of all things, this very column. I don't doubt the reach of *Winq*, but I am surprised to discover that people read my humble works in the French capital.

On my first night there, I consume an unholy amount of wine. I never drink wine, but it flows freely, and I think it right to do as the Parisians do. The next morning, I am more hungover than I have ever been in my life. I feel like I might be dead and the world is a cruel simulation of the French novels I read as a teenager. I can't even move until 2pm, and then only to be sick. Eventually, I am able to stagger outside for some mandatory sightseeing.

I wander around the Louvre in such a daze that I don't see anything at all, except the boys cruising in the bushes outside. My Instagram stills show the pained expression on my face moments before I throw up at the Arc de Triomphe. I am so fragile while walking the Champs Élysées that I have to stop every few metres to find respite from the 30-degree heat. The hairdresser, who has the patience of a saint, will remember this day for the rest of his life because in my pathetic state I have never loved him more. Paris is ruined for me and I vow never to drink again.

Of course, by the time the football starts, I am in a bar with a beer. As the

hairdresser is dancing with his friend, the bearded fashionista with whom we are staying, I am approached by a floppy-haired French boy who cuts straight to the sexy talk. "Are you top or bottom?" he asks.

With one eye on the game, I simply say, "I am the opposite of my boyfriend." This, I think, is a killer move, for I am here to watch the football, not to be chirped by boys. He falls silent. I fix my gaze on the TV to see Cristiano Ronaldo writhing around on the grass, and before I can figure out what's happening the boy is back.

"What job do you do?" he asks, obscuring my view of the TV. Curtly, I reply, "I'm an art critic." His face lights up and I think, 'Please God, no, not an artist.' "Architect?" he says.

"No. Art. Cri-tic," I say.

"Ah," he beams, "I am architect, too."

Suddenly, the fashionista appears. "Don't you know who he is?" he screeches as he wraps his hairy arm around my shoulder. "This is the guy who writes the stories in the English gay magazine." Everyone, including me, looks at him

blankly. "You know, it's the stories about how he's not-so-secretly in love with his hairdresser. This one time they go to the beach in the middle of winter and this guy here, the Casanova, is trying to impress the hairdresser so he gets his trainers wet from walking into the sea. But in the end they get a hotel and you can tell they're so in love." He pauses, and then, on reflection, "It's disgusting."

A crowd gathers to hear all about my greatest hits. At one point, the fashionista gets into a heated debate with another dude who reads the column (yes, I have two fans in Paris) about whether I really kissed the Greek boy and I'm amazed they even think that's the point of the story. He savagely mocks me for the awkward way I approach boys and insists that I'm really nothing like I appear in the column. Meanwhile, the hairdresser is sitting beside me, brimming with pride and basking in the glory of his starring role, as if he is the Victoria Beckham of the literary world and I am the equally-famous, but ultimately less important, husband. ■



Illustration: Paul Tuller