

CHAMPAGNE HAZE

Written by

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A story of the "Lost Generation" trying to find themselves. Set during an "Old Boys" rugby reunion in Paris. The same weekend Charles Lindbergh landed at Le Bourget Field.

FADE IN:

EXT. COURTYARD GARDEN - DAY

Sits MILO AMBORSKI, a top-shelf drunk who claims to be a writer, leans over his Remington portable typewriter.

MILO (V.O.)  
Where to begin? Hmm. F. Scott said  
it best, show me a hero and I will  
write you a tragedy.

SUPER: "SPRING 1927. PARIS."

Milo TYPES.

MILO (V.O.)  
On the third Friday in May, Paris  
is warm and in bloom. Everything  
shines. The river. The park. The  
surrounding buildings. However,  
atop the planks of a trusty old  
bench, a child-sized man picks at  
his well-manicured nails,  
unimpressed. His tiny legs dangle.

EXT. PONT ROYAL - BENCH - DAY

Waits VICTOR GREKOV. He's a former Russian intelligence officer now employed by the Poles. He sits on a bench that faces the glistening waters off the River Seine.

Victor stares down the Pont Royal, the bridge that leads to the Pavillon de Flore and the Louvre's waterside wing.

This morning's newspaper hangs over his knee. It's two inch byline reads: "NUNGRESSOR AND COLI FEARED DEAD."

MILO (V.O.)  
Victor, a few years shy of sixty,  
has the appearance of a short but  
prosperous banker on holiday. He  
looks prim and proper with his  
starched clean linens and fine-  
groomed beard. Though, on closer  
inspection, there is a sense of  
unevenness about him, as if his  
painted-on grin, and dark  
inquisitive eyes cloak a deep hurt,  
or perhaps a terrible pain.

Victor SIGHS as midday traffic crawls across the Seine.

MILO (V.O.)

Victor is an impatient man. To him,  
Paris is purgatory. An in-between  
place of action and inaction, where  
time stands still.

Grekov's attention moves from the bridge's walkway to the  
Seine, and back to his bench where...

GREKOV

Today, I feel old. Part of a system  
that no longer exists. Ahh!

A SEAGULL lands near his right shoulder.

GREKPV

A welcomed distraction.

(in Russian)

Hello. My new friend.

(back to English)

I'm curious. Do you miss the  
comforts of the sea, when you're  
here? Where's your home?

The seagull PECKS at a wood knot in the plank.

GREKOV

Well, my home no longer exists. Not  
by name. Sad, isn't it?

The bird paces, back and forth.

GREKOV (CONT'D)

After the Russian Revolution, the  
radicals renamed my home. My St.  
Petersburg to... Leningrad.

Approaches MAKSIM, an edgy, academic type, now Russia's  
cultural attaché in Paris. He wears a bright lemon-colored  
suit with matching hat as he strolls behind an oversized  
poodle. The Bolshevik possesses the same hippy swagger and  
big toothy grin of all self-serving liberals.

GREKOV (CONT'D)

Maksim, my old informant from the  
old days.

Grekov asks his newfound friend.

GREKOV (CONT'D)

So, what do you recommend, for  
those sappy fools who pass their  
days looking back, not forwards?

The bird COOS.

GREKOV (CONT'D)  
What you say?!? Steal it back!

Grekov reveals a most venomous grin.

GREKOV (CONT'D)  
Most brilliant!

Victor removes a small gun from a hidden holster. From another pocket, he grasps a silencer. With a smooth, singular motion, he screws it on.

GREKOV (CONT'D)  
Voilà!

Maksim walks closer without a care in the world.

Rises Victor from the bench with the gun hidden beside his thigh. He gives the bird a small bow.

GREKOV (CONT'D)  
(in French)  
Good-bye, my friend.  
(in English)  
If you're here to see the Mona  
Lisa, I must warn you... the  
Louvre's lunch crowd is murderous.

Maksim stops at the midway point of the Pont Royal Bridge.

His poodle refuses to budge, as if the dog senses the approaching danger.

Maksim yanks the leash hard but to no avail.

MAKSIM  
(in French)  
Move!

Victor now stands before Maksim.

GREKOV  
(in French)  
You're a long way from home.

A passing tour bus MUFFLES the exchange.

The midday sun blinds Maksim. He squints from the glare off the river. He attempts to recognize the face of the man who stands in his way.

MAKSIM  
(in French)  
Excuse me, do I know you?

Suddenly, the Russian diplomat recognizes Victor. His knees buckle and his face turns white.

MAKSIM (CONT'D)  
Grekov! No. Please!

GREKOV  
(in Russian)  
Greetings from St. Petersburg.

Grekov aims and FIRES.

Maksim jerks back as two slugs enter his chest. He bounces off the bridge's rails. Then, he drops to one knee. Blood pours out from his body.

Victor returns his gun to its holster. Then, he scoops up the poodle.

The pet SLOBBERS and LICKS Grekov's face.

GREKOV (CONT'D)  
Nice doggie.

To the complete surprise of the LUNCH CROWD.

Victor ties the leash to the side rail of the bridge.

Grekov drags the dead man back up to his feet.

The by-standers watch in awe. Yet, do nothing.

Grekov hoists Maksim over the rail and whispers.

GREKOV (CONT'D)  
Faith. Honor. Loyalty.

Victor tosses the attaché over the ledge and SPLASH!

GREKOV (CONT'D)  
You failed all three.

Maksim's lifeless body travels down the Seine.

Onlookers peer over the rail in disbelief.

Grekov walks with a swagger down the center of the bridge.

GREKOV (CONT'D)  
The arrogant are easy prey.

Victor struts north through the two streams of stopped traffic, he loudly HUMS and swirls to the climactic conclusion of Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture.

GREKOV (CONT'D)

Dade-dada-dade-da-da-da boom boom.  
Dade-dada-dade-da-da-da BOOM BOOM!

MILO (V.O.)

Victor Grekov is back. He and his cause are still very much alive.

INT./EXT. RITZ HOTEL - REVOLVING DOOR - DAY

Exits Grekov the Ritz.

MILO (V.O.)

Grekov strolls across the sprawling paved-stone grounds and pillared palaces of the Place Verdome, where sunshine rains down like diamonds.

Victor stops and watches a lone cloud float across the crisp blue sky.

MILO (V.O.)

Gorgeous. Yet, the high of completing his mission in Paris has faded. Now, he seeks the company of an old friend.

EXT. PARIS' SIXTH DISTRICT - SAME

Grevkov's travelogue through the district.

MILO (V.O.)

Grekov crosses the Seine and enters Paris' sixth district, Saint-Germain des Près. Amidst his travels, he stumbles upon the Boulevard Saint-Germain. Alive with people and traffic. Taking it, he turns and passes food markets, high-end boutiques, art galleries, and numerous restaurants and cafés: all alive with smells, smoke, and chatter. A few blocks later in his walk, he witnessed the white glistening waters of the Saint-Sulpice as couples embrace near the church's fountains. The fresh air and exercise revives him.

(MORE)

MILO (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
This is when Grekov stops. He has  
reached his destination.

EXT. NO. 13 RUE DE VAUGIRARD - SAME

Grekov stands before a gated residence.

From the third floor drapes a Russian Imperial flag: black  
double-headed eagle on a blanket of gold.

It flitters wildly in the wind.

MILO (V.O.)  
Before him, near the Luxembourg  
museum, sits Number Thirteen rue de  
Vaugirard, a gleaming white four-  
storied home of polished stone  
located in the very heart of the  
Quarter. The regal residence is  
sandwiched between the rues  
Guynemer and Madame, and is wrapped  
by an imposing black iron gate  
separating the home's main entrance  
from the local foot traffic.

The elegant entryway is a piece of art itself, made of wavy  
black wrought iron and heavy steel poles topped by gold-  
painted spikes, a worthy barrier to Prince Serge's stately  
Parisian estate.

Grekov finds the gate unlocked. He pushes it open and  
slithers in. Then, he pauses before the home's massive door.  
He BANGS hard on it.

GREKOV  
Misery loves company.

A minute later, the door CREAKS open.

In a dingy robe Milo stands in the door well.

MILO  
Well, if it isn't the Angel of  
Death. And we are fresh out of  
coffee.

GREKOV  
Milo Amborski, a top-shelf drunk,  
who claims to be a writer.

MILO  
Funny.

GREKOV  
May I pass?

MILO  
By all means.

Milo allows Victor in. As he does so, he lights a cigarette.

INT. NO. 13 RUE DE VAUGIRARD - SAME

Milo leads Victor across the marble foyer.

MILO  
May I take your cloak and sickle?

Grekov follows Milo through the smoke.

GREKOV  
I didn't realize your humor  
expanded beyond your wardrobe.

MILO  
I must've a word with my tailor.

Milo tightens the strings to his crumpled up robe.

GREKOV  
Milo, you appear self-conscious of  
your robe's frailty and condition.

MILO  
Touché. It, like the author, has  
seen better days.

The writer LAUGHS again at Grekov as he enters the...

SIDE PARLOR.

Milo plants himself behind a grand piano.

MILO (CONT'D)  
Serge is teaching me to play.

The Bohemian's bony fingers travel up and down the keyboard.

GREKOV  
Milo, what exactly do you do?

MILO  
Me? I write . . . death, danger,  
and utter despair.



GREKOV  
Despair indeed.

The CHOPPY NOISE Milo creates from the piano is not music to Grekov's ears.

MILO  
Sometimes, I add in hopeless love,  
like pinch of salt, for flavor.

GREKOV  
A writer?

MILO  
A writer...extraordinaire.

Milo POUNDS on the keys.

GREKOV  
I hope you're a better writer than  
musician.

MILO  
What's that?!?

Grekov stands besides the piano and gazes outwards. Outside, across the street, rows of great big blossoming trees dot the vibrant grounds of the Luxembourg Gardens.

GREKOV  
Where's Serge?

Milo points with his neck and head.

MILO  
Upstairs, in bed.

GREKOV  
Ha, then. I shall wake him up.

Victor turns, as he hears Milo's voice.

MILO  
He's not alone!

GREKOV  
Not another cigarette girl from the  
Moulin Rouge?

Grekov faces Milo again.

MILO  
No!

Milo smiles from at Grekov.

MILO (CONT'D)  
Your boy Serge has fallen to a new  
low.

GREKOV  
Oh, really?

MILO  
*Yep, the living are conscious that  
death will come to them, but...*

GREKOV/MILO  
*The dead are not conscious of  
anything.*

MILO  
Yep.

Milo ends his playing with DON! DON! DON! DON!

INT. NO. 13 RUE DE VAUGIRARD - SERGE'S BEDROOM - SAME

Ponders LADY GWENDOLYN. A young Englishwoman, lovely and  
irresistible to the eyes. She's from the right family with  
the right credentials and bloodline.

Gwen's fresh, short cut hair liberates her. It gives her a  
Jazz Age look: modern, sexy, bold.

MILO (V.O.)  
How could we not love Lady  
Gwendolyn? She beautiful, and like  
all flammable objects, she lights  
up the room. Yet, if you stand too  
close to her... she burns.

Bordering the street is a row of flowering trees. They  
resemble clouds of cotton candy.

Gwen INHALES.

MILO (V.O.)  
The scent of lilacs fills Lady  
Gwen's nostrils, as she stands  
naked, wholly herself, before a  
large pane window that overlooks  
the Luxembourg Gardens.

Gwen leans toward the window.

MILO (V.O.)

Here, at this place, Gwen sees her future life. It stretches out before her the park's lush green grounds. . . a big wedding full of loud family and drunk guests. Afterwards, an exotic, warm-watered honeymoon full of sun. A momentary bliss of two beings becoming one. Then comes children - too many children. All bright and beautiful, but crying and demanding every ounce of her limited attention. Next comes more weight and wrinkles. Then, lost youth, years of wasted reflection, and finally, yes finally, acts of idiotic jealousy. First, from her bored, neglected husband. He searches for attention elsewhere and surprisingly finds it. As well as her own fruitless pursuits of self-gratification and weak jabs of fighting back time. All the while she wonders where had that perky, twenty-two-year-old girl who reeked of so much passion and potential wander off to?

Gwen sees her reflection of the window's pane.

GWEN

Gwen.

MILO (V.O.)

Who truly knew? Not Gwen. However, this glimpse of her future life frightens her to her very core. The size and scope of it seems sad, small, and pathetic. Normally, she isn't given to such bouts of self-analysis, but of late she isn't acting quite herself. Gwen is in love, and when your heart is freshly set afire, lovers do, say, and think foolish things.

GWEN

What am I doing here?

PRINCE SERGE answers.

SERGE

Isn't it obvious?

The voice resonates from the lump in the bed behind her.

SERGE (CONT'D)  
Enjoying the better sights of  
Paris.

GWEN  
Not funny, Serge.

She turns to see him emerge from the blankets. Tan and dreamy-looking, Serge appears to be in his element.

GWEN (CONT'D)  
A week from tomorrow is my wedding  
day – and last time I checked, you  
are not my groom.

Gwen turns from him. Her attention, returns to the window.

GWEN (CONT'D)  
It's not supposed to be like this.

SERGE  
True.

Serge tosses the sheets aside and joins her by the window.

SERGE (CONT'D)  
But whose fault is that?

Serge's arms encircle her.

SERGE (CONT'D)  
Marry me.

GWEN  
I hate the power you possess over  
me.

SERGE  
Then, marry me. End this charade.

GWEN  
You know I can't.

SERGE  
Why?

Gwen moves from the window.

GWEN  
Because.

SERGE

Because? Why?

GWEN

Why?!? Because... Next week, I'm wearing white. And praying God doesn't strike me down dead.

SERGE

And our affair? It means nothing to you?

GWEN

Serge. Our affair... is just lust. Fun, unbinding sex.

Gwen scoops down and picks up her clothes.

SERGE

Gwen. True love is not complicated.

MILO (V.O)

Gwen has a terrible tendency to waver at the most crucial moments, like this. Two weeks ago in London, Serge and Gwen had a chance encounter at the Savoy Hotel. After too much talk. After too much Champagne, they took a room upstairs. Gwen felt adventurous. Later in life she will find out that there are two kinds of love in the world – one of the heart, and one of the mind. The love from the heart is intense, and burns with great desire. Her groom. Barnaby Jones represents a rational yet lasting love of the mind.

GWEN

Half of London is expecting me to marry Jones, and I'm not going to disappoint them.

SERGE

Is it the money?

GWEN

My dear father lives above his means, so Lady Gwendolyn must marry well. For his stake.

SERGE  
I'm rich too. For an exiled  
Russian. Very rich. But money,  
isn't the issue is it?

GWEN  
What a pair we are.

SERGE  
Yes, how incredibly sad.

GWEN  
If only I weren't a whore, and you  
not a self-loathing egoist.

Gwen looks to Serge to challenge her statement.

SERGE  
It's nearly two.

GWEN  
Great. Soon, I need to meet Barnaby  
at the station.

SERGE  
You're terrible at that.

Serge paces around a bit.

GWEN  
I almost made it. Almost.

SERGE  
I should head back to the Majestic.  
Perhaps the Stag weekend was a  
mistake.

Gwen digs for a hidden shoe under the bed.

GWEN  
You think?!?

Gwen liberates her shoe.

GWEN (CONT'D)  
Found it!

EXT. NO. 13 RUE DE VAUGIRARD - FOYER - SAME

Serge escorts Gwen down the steps to the door.

Milo PLAYS the piano to imperfection.

GWEN  
Why are we doing this?

SERGE  
Because we can.

Serge kisses Gwen hard. Then, he opens the door.

SERGE (CONT'D)  
See you at the Majestic.

GWEN  
I'm going to hell.

SERGE  
No, you are not. At the right  
opportunity, we will tell him.

Gwen kisses Serge again.

GWEN  
Okay.

Gwen leaves.

Serge enters the...

PARLOR.

Serge sees Milo.

SERGE  
Milo, are you strangling the cat?

Answers Milo from behind the piano.

MILO  
The music I create is for nobody  
else's enjoyment but my own.

Serge sees that Milo is not alone.

SERGE  
Victor!

Grekov stands before the fireplace. He eyes Serge father's sword perched high atop the mantelpiece.

SERGE (CONT'D)  
What are you doing in Paris?

Victor turns around, and looks uneasily at Milo behind the piano, still playing, then at Serge, standing behind a sprawling, leather sofa.

GREKOV  
Ah, Prince Sergei Platonovich, it  
has been too long.

SERGE  
It has, Victor. It has.

Victor glances around the home's fine furnishings until his  
eyes land again on the object about the fire.

SERGE (CONT'D)  
Welcome.

GREKOV  
I see you still have your father's  
sword. May I?

SERGE  
Of course!

Victor, with the utmost care, touches Samurai sword's cold  
steel casing. Then, he unsleaths it to examine it.

GREKOV  
A sad memento, no?

SERGE  
The sword is my legacy.

GREKOV  
Part of it, Serge. Part of it.

Victor returns the sword to its holder. He notices Serge's  
framed metal on the fireplace mantle's ledge.

GREKOV (CONT'D)  
The Saint George Cross.

SERGE  
For Valor.

GREKOV  
Imperial Russia's highest honor.

SERGE  
Imperial Russia no longer exists.

GREKOV  
Prince Serge, you're a Russian  
rarity.

SERGE  
Why?



GREKOV  
You still live in a glittering  
world, you have wealth, power.

SERGE  
Luckily for me. My father hated all  
things British, except their banks.

GREKOV  
Yes. Lucky.

Victor paces back and forth in front of the fire.

GREKOV (CONT'D)  
This lavish lifestyle of yours.  
This existence of parties and paint  
was financed by his hard work.

SERGE  
To my defense, Victor. His dying  
wish was for me to live my life.

GREKOV  
It was. Hmm. But I believe he had  
more in store for you than this.

Victor moves to the artwork Serge created on the walls.

GREKOV (CONT'D)  
What's this? Bad Bohemian art, fit  
to hang where? Above a urinal,  
perhaps, in some cellar bar?

SERGE  
Wow! High praise, indeed.

GREKOV  
Not worthy to hang in the  
Hermitage.

SERGE  
What have I done now to piss you  
off?

GREKOV  
Your Excellency, you are a Romanov!  
For God's sake, you're meant for  
more than this.

SERGE  
More. More. More. Who needs that?  
Less. Less. Less. I'm quite content  
with that.

GREKOV

You are a Russian aristocrat living  
in exile. What the hell do you have  
to be content about?!?

Serge takes a seat and gazes upon one of his works that hang  
over the parlor's walls.

SERGE

St. Petersburg is gone. Dead. It's  
buried with the bones of all my kin  
and cousins. Through my paintings,  
the ghosts of them visit me.

GREKOV

Snap out of it, Serge. For you lack  
the artist's eye, and skill.

SERGE

So, failure and I are dear friends.  
Why should that trouble you so?

Awkwardness fills the room.

Serge forgets Milo is even in the room until he hears him.

Milo SIGHS.

MILO

Well, I shall let the two of you  
catch up.

Milo pops up from the piano and flees the room.

SERGE

Coward!

MILO

I'm a writer! Of course, I am.

SERGE

Victor would make an ideal  
character in one of your books!  
He's a real-life Professor  
Moriarty.

MILO (O.S.)

Sorry, Serge. I don't write murder  
mysteries. *Ciao*, Victor!

Victor shakes his head towards the door through which Milo  
has vanished.

GREKOV  
What's he still doing here?

SERGE  
He hasn't finished his book yet.

GREKOV  
And he never shall.

SERGE  
I hope he does, Victor. His first  
one broke my heart.

GREKOV  
Serge, you break my heart. Wasting  
your days.

Victor gazes up at the amateurish art.

GREKOV (CONT'D)  
These oil paintings look like  
landscapes of caked-on blood.

SERGE  
That one is called the Dead  
Marshes.

GREKOV  
Serge.

SERGE  
Old age has made you overly  
emotional, my friend.

GREKOV  
I'm not old.

Serge LAUGHS.

SERGE  
You worry to much about failure.  
Failure generates great momentum in  
art, or in life.

GREKOV  
If that's the case, you should be a  
painter of great masterpieces, a  
true Rembrandt.

Grekov stops before another colorful yet odd painting.

GREKOV (CONT'D)  
What's this? More trash?

SERGE  
That's not mine. That's Pablo's.

GREKOV  
Pablo's?

SERGE  
Picasso.

GREKOV  
Trash!

SERGE  
Victor, did you come here for a reason? Or was it just to insult me?

GREKOV  
Sergei. You have been in Paris too long.

SERGE  
Where else do I have to go?

GREKOV  
The woman who just left... who is she?

Guilt enters Serge's voice, as he looks over his shoulder and answers the unexpected question.

SERGE  
No one of importance.

GREKOV  
Really? I wonder if your friend Jones has the same opinion on that subject matter.

Serge stares to the doorway Milo left by.

SERGE  
Whatever do you mean?

Victor gathers his things.

GREKOV  
I'm staying at the Ritz this weekend.

SERGE  
You could have stayed here.

GREKOV

No. I would just be in the way.

SERGE

Victor, you are family to me.

GREKOV

Perhaps... Serge, you were meant  
for greater things.

SERGE

Who wasn't, Victor? Who wasn't?

EXT. CAFÉ FORQUET - DAY

Sits YURI SMIRNOV. The Russian is a stout, sharply groomed man in a finely crafted suit.

The Cafe's bright red canopy banner wraps the elegant four-story building of cut stone like a flared skirt.

Yuri has been in the intelligence-gathering business for some time now. Always one to have others do his dirty work. He pulls the strings of power from the shadows.

MILO (V.O.)

The trendy Forquet's is a place to see and to be seen, and its cuisine is fit for kings and queens. The surrounding square houses some of Paris' finest fashion boutiques and stores in vogue.

Yuri holds an espresso cup, a cigarette in the other.

The terrace is crowded with old, fashionable MEN draped by elegant LADIES wearing bright, colorful floral dresses.

MILO (V.O.)

A Russian named Yuri finishes an article about a semi-famous ballerina who had pirouetted off a metro platform the previous night. She was instantly struck by a passing train. A modern-day Anna Karenina.

Yuri notices BORIS, one of his most promising protégés appears around the corner. He wears an iron-clad stare as waves the young man over to his table.

YURI

What is it, Boris?