

# **BENNY AND THE QUEEN OF PARIS – Treatment**

**By Ira Israel**

**Based on the novel by Leonard Leokum**

**Monday, May 27, 2002**

**1971, New York City. Relentlessly suave and charming BENNY (25) lives on the Upper West Side and is completing his fourth year as a copywriter in an advertising firm in New York City. He has everything going for him and has in fact “conquered” New York - or at least a good portion of the women in it. He is the first to admit that he is so romantic that he has a tendency to confuse sex with love. Currently in his life are Jennifer, Missy, Catherine, Sandra, and Georgette plus whatever sundry pick-ups he can squeeze in between those steady lays. Out of all of his lovers, Georgette is head over heels in love with Benny and will do anything to possess him exclusively forever. Benny does not reciprocate her feelings – he’s going for quantity, not quality.**

**Benny is unchallenged professionally and lives in the intellectual shadow of his father who is revered as a great romantic writer. One night at a party for his father’s latest book, Benny pitches a book idea to his father’s publisher, Elizabeth Wendell, who counters that she needs a ghostwriter to write a G-rated “Charlotte’s Web” type of book from a treatment of an author who has taken ill. “That’s exactly how I got my start,” adds Benny’s father. Benny desperately wants to rise to the challenge so he meets with Elizabeth and convinces her (more like “seduces” her) that he is the man for the job. Benny’s father is proud of him.**

**Benny decides to quit his McJob and move to Paris to write the book. If he lives frugally, he estimates that his advance will cover exactly one year of living abroad which should be enough time for him to write the book. Benny doesn’t want any strings**

attached when he moves to Paris so he slowly but surely ends all of his sexual relationships in NY while he prepares to move.

Benny's doorman tells him about an American woman who lives in Paris but is currently visiting her aunt in the building; Benny categorically refuses to meet her. Benny bumps into the woman, Sally (28), and they decide to lunch at P.J. Clark's in order to discuss Benny's upcoming life in Paris. Although Benny tries to resist his own temptations, Sally and Benny end up egregiously flirting with each other. After lunch Sally seduces Benny and they spend the next twenty-four hours together making love. By the time they pass out from exhaustion, Benny is 100% sure that this is the woman of his dreams and that all of his previous lovers were just batting practice to get him ready for Sally, the true love of his life. Soon after, Sally leaves for Paris where Benny will join her in a week.

Armed with his typewriter and suitcase, Benny arrives in Paris expecting to become a great writer like his father and live happily ever after in Sally's arms. Instead of staying in an hotel, Sally has arranged for Benny to stay with her in her beautiful apartment until he gets settled. After Benny and Sally rekindle their relationship, Sally informs Benny that she's going away for a modeling job in St. Tropez; he should use that time to get set-up, check out Paris, and begin working on his book.

Sally leaves and Benny is profoundly miserable; he is so lovesick that he does little but sit in cafes, drink heavily, and scribble misanthropic lonelyheart passages in his journal. He becomes even more miserable when he tries to check up on Sally and a man answers the phone. Like the passion junkie that he is, upon Sally's return Benny immediately forgets the week of pain once he is inside of her again.

Sally has a fashion shoot in Paris and Benny accompanies her. The shoot is so painfully boring that Benny cannot understand how Sally can waste her time performing such an absurd task. Benny and Sally joke around so much that the photographer becomes infuriated and throws them out of his studio. But that's OK because Sally has taken the liberty of filching one of

the photographer's cameras which they sell for dinner money after taking a series of romantic shots by the Seine.

Sally and Benny begin an extremely decadent libertine lovers tour of Paris, drinking heavily and engaging in illicit acts together and with other women and couples. They are always looking for the next sexual peak to climb. Benny is so mystified by and obsessed with Sally that every time he starts to write his paying book he ends up writing in his journal about their dalliances and his ensuing curiosity about Sally's motives and motivations.

It soon becomes apparent to Benny that Sally has many lovers in her life – not unlike Benny did in New York. However, it also becomes apparent that Sally could never afford her luxurious home, her maid, and profligate lifestyle on her measly income from modeling. In fact, Sally spends so much that after Benny's first month in Paris he has gone through his entire book advance just keeping up with her. Now he can no longer afford to get his own apartment (not that he ever really wanted to).

Benny is so broke that he ends up posing as Sally's brother and tagging along on her "dates" with her eccentric aristocratic "friend" Serge. Serge is never suspicious of Benny and even finds him to be very charming and amusing – he even offers to set Benny up with young French girls but Benny refuses telling him that he's gay. We learn from Benny's journal entries (read V.O. as he writes them in various cafes instead of writing his book) that he is so in love with Sally that he doesn't mind that she may in fact be some sort of high-class call girl having sex with wealthy men such as Serge.

However, jealousy eventually gets the better of Benny who begins spying on Sally to confirm his suspicions; she catches him and becomes infuriated but agrees to let him continue to live with her on one condition: Benny must go to London to score some coke for her and Serge. Benny realizes that his privileged upbringing on the Upper West Side did not prepare him to be a mule running drugs over international borders but

he has little choice since he's out of money and this run will refill his coffers.

Benny arrives in London but is so depressed that he ends up snorting half of the stash soon after scoring it. He roams through the underbelly of London solemnly spending all the money he should make on the drugs. When he returns Sally and Serge are nowhere to be found so Benny finishes the rest of the coke with Aimee, one of Sally's model friends who Benny ends up sleeping with.

Finally Sally returns looking more like a strung-out street whore than a high-class call girl. She has developed a taste for the pharmaceutical grade coke that Bernard her dentist "friend" has been feeding her and that she has been mixing with the super heroin Serge brought back from the Far East. She is furious that Benny has returned empty-handed from London and decides that Benny must now make a heroin run to Positano, Italy in order to stay in her life. Benny is reluctant but Sally seduces him into agreeing.

Because of a railroad strike Benny gets stuck in Positano and in an effort to fend off depression and boredom ends up doing most of the heroin. A Cholera epidemic breaks out and Benny is about to be quarantined in the country but manages to hitch a ride with an old woman who doesn't speak any English but makes him have sex with her – something Benny is able to do only after finishing off the rest of the heroin. Benny makes it back to Paris once again penniless and without any drugs.

Sally and Benny get into a huge fight about drugs, money, sex and love but Benny is able to allay Sally's financial fears with news that his father's best friend Nigel is coming to Paris to shoot a television commercial for a new romantic toothpaste. Benny informs Sally that Nigel will hook them up with easy jobs on the shoot for big bucks.

Nigel arrives and barely recognizes Benny because Benny's lifestyle adjustment has taken its toll on his health – Benny is now gaunt, thin, and slightly jaundiced which he conveniently

blames on the bad weather and pollution. Nigel offers to help Benny and Sally by giving them jobs on the shoot – Sally as a model and Benny as a grip. However, Sally's teeth are not terribly white from all the heroin smoking she has been doing so Nigel just wants her in the background. Sally then offers to see her dentist Bernard but Benny rejects that idea seeing as Sally pays for her dental work in flesh. In the end, everything goes terribly awry when Sally and Benny – out of sheer mischievous boredom - lace the crew's food with hash. Nigel's crew ends up roaming around Paris stoned out of their heads; the shoot is all but ruined.

After Nigel leaves, Sally's parents from Ohio arrive and Sally decides that they should have all their teeth fixed – since Bernard is such a fantastic dentist. Benny, however, doesn't appreciate all the time that Sally must spend with Bernard in order to pay off the dental work. Nor does Benny appreciate posing as Sally's fiancé so that her parents don't find that she is a prostitute.

After Sally's parents leave, Benny's best friend Howard arrives and Benny is brought to his wit's end when Sally seduces wealthy Howard, taking him to the same hotel where she took Benny, and spending exorbitant amounts of money to get Howard and her high. Benny no longer feels special and he finally does what he should have done all along: he confronts Sally and asks her what the fuck she is doing and why the fuck she is doing it? This leads to another huge fight wherein nothing is resolved because Benny has also been sleeping around.

However, thanks to Benny's journal entries we know that he is genuinely hurt. Although Benny could have possessed any of his lovers in New York, the only woman that continuously stokes his proverbial fire is Sally, who remains emotionally unavailable due to her vocation. Benny finally realizes that Sally is a very romantic prostitute and she will never be the love of his life or his wife or the panacea for all of his issues, problems, and delusions (in fact, she's probably the *cause* of many of them).

Once again Sally and Benny are out of money so they decide to go down to the George V hotel and have Benny pimp for Sally at the bar. This leads to a terrible fiasco in which both Sally and Benny are almost arrested as Benny jealously gets into a fight with a potential client who doesn't think that Sally is worth the price that Benny is asking for her services. The hotel asks Sally and Benny never to set foot on their premises again. Sally is so furious at Benny that she finally asks him to move out.

Benny returns in order to apologize for being an immature hypocritical possessive male but when he arrives finds Serge – an immature hypocritical possessive male - high on heroin and furious that Sally has been sleeping with Howard. Benny tries to intervene but Sally tells him that she can handle it. She turns to Serge and informs him that she is not a sofa or vase that he can possess. “Yes, I can,” Serge replies as he takes out a pistol and shoots her dead. He thinks for a second about shooting Benny – just for fun – but then simply apologizes for shooting Benny’s “sister.” Serge turns the gun on himself and blows his brains out.

Benny goes to a café, orders a few whiskies, and writes in his journal about the realizations he has had regarding sex and true love as well as men and women. Benny is now able to return to New York as a compassionate mature man instead of an overgrown adolescent.

Back in New York, Benny meets with Elizabeth Wendell and tells her that he doesn't even have page 1 of the G-rated book he was supposed to write. Instead all he has are his salaciously juicy coming-of-age memoirs of his decadent life in Paris with Sally the Queen. Elizabeth is furious and threatens to sue Benny for breach of contract but finally agrees to read what he did write, his journal. In the end she finds his musings on sex and love brilliant and a strong rival for his father's romantic writings. She decides to publish them under the title “Benny and Queen of Paris.”

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