And a Year to Grow On
Bizarre things happen when you agree to go out to dinner with your good friend Selene on your anniversaire. We wanted to try a restaurant we had had our eye on in Porto Novo—a place that had ice cream and hamburgers painted on the outside—so, naturally, the Americans had to go.

We arrived and sat down outside and began to browse the menu to find the standard (and egregiously spelled) Haumbeurers and Chezbeurers. The Lebanese owner greets us and Selene proceeds to tell him that it’s my birthday. He responds by telling us he has a cake for me in his “special room” right across the courtyard. Not unaccustomed to sleazy expatriates, we laugh his “special room” right across the courtyard. Not wanting any problems, we didn’t order the salad and settled for a chicken wrap that, in Benin, we refer to as schwarma. We were disappointed to not be able to drink wine to top off the night because of the owner’s religion, but sooner than we knew it we were getting free sodas from a table of teenage Beninese men. Oh la la.

Towards the end of our meal, the owner comes out with a small white cake with four lit candles, on it written “En Amerique.” We laugh and take photos with the teenagers, but very quickly the wind begins to pick up—it’s going to rain. And often with storms of this nature, you never know for how long or how hard the rains will come.

Worried about the prospect of getting trapped in another part of town, Selene begins furiously packing up our things to go. We needed to leave, tout de suite. We manage to hail one moto-taxi, but as the rain picked up, we couldn’t seem to find another. Panicked as the rain started to fall harder, Selene begins wildly waving down passing cars. Two stop, but they’re not going our way. The third, driven by a young Beninese man named Maxwell, agrees to take us to our location: Carrefour le Destin. “You were the girls in the restaurant, n’est pas?” He was one of the boys in the group who ordered us drinks. We laugh. Quelle chance.

---

Scoreboard
Sick Days: 2 out of 485
Marriage Proposals: 18
Babies Named After Me: 1

---

Reading List
Read
“The Sweet Life in Paris” by David Lebovitz
“The Opposite of Loneliness” by Marina Keegan
“The Power of Habit” by Charles Duhigg
“Congratulations, By the Way” by George Saunders
“The Four Fold Way” by Angeles Arrien
Death of a Salesman by Arthur Miller
“How to Win Friends...” by Dale Carnegie
“Love Poems” by Pablo Neruda
“Price of Fame” by Sylvia Jukes Morgan
“Shadows of the Sun” by Wade Davis
“Tiny Beautiful Things” by Cheryl Strayed
“A Walk in the Woods” by Bill Bryson
“Bossypants” by Tina Fey
“How to Grow More Vegetables” by John Jeavons
“Cooked” by Michael Pollen
“Night of the Gun” by David Carr
“Wild Fermentation” by Sandor Katz
“Third Plate” by Dan Barber
“What Now?” by Ann Patchett
“Where Men Win Glory” by Jon Krakauer
“The Language of Food” by Dan Jurafsky
“When Rice Shakes the World” by Milo Hamilton
“The Great Beanie Baby Bubble” by Zac Bissonnette
“Rejection Proof” by Jia Jiang
“Talk Like TED” by Carmine Gallo
“The Most Good You Can Do” by Peter Singer
“The Dorito Effect” by Mark Schatzker
“Liar’s Poker” by Michael Lewis
“My Paris Dream” by Kate Betts
“The Chain” by Ted Genoways
“Mrs. Dalloway” by Virginia Woolf
“Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland” & “Through the Looking-Glass” by Lewis Carroll

Reading
“I am Malala” by Malala Yousafzai
“Galapagos” by Kurt Vonnegut

---

In a Wonderland they lie,
Dreaming as the days go by,
Dreaming as the summers die.

Ever drifting down the stream—
Linger in the golden gleam—
Life, what is it but a dream?
-Lewis Carroll
En Amerique

Taylor, Selene, and myself

Morning after egg sandwiches

Breaking in the newbies—my new post-mate Megan teaching accounting to my farm’s apprentices

Teaching the importance of eggs for children at Houeda’s kindergarten

On est en train – building the water tower at Pascal’s

New additions to ma maison—a dining table and a radio!

Anne-Marie Mitchell, PCV
Corps de la Paix Americain
01 B.P. 971
Cotonou, Benin
Afrique de l'Ouest (West Africa)