

August
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La Parée

KIES



**MONTE CARLO
WIDOW**

By
Jean Martel

Missing Ad

La Paree

STORIES

CONTENTS for August, 1936

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TETE-A-TETE

NOTICE:—No letter will be published unless the writer gives permission to print his or her full name and address.—*The Editor.*

Dear Editor:

One of the definitions of "Tete-a-Tete" is expressed thusly; "a confidential conversation", and that is what I seek with any co-readers of "La Paree". "La Paree" has succeeded in adapting the exotic French atmosphere to all its stories, expressing in continental intimacy stories of "le grande" passion in a manner to quicken the blood of any normal mortal, unless he or she possessed the animation of a "wooden Indian". We like "La Paree" and usually come back for more.

Keep up the good work, Editor of "La Paree", as one of your most loyal devotees I congratulate you and your entire staff of co-workers.

And to my co-readers, "P.O. Box 286", is a large one. Much space for scads of letters, the writer has a large supply of writing paper, plenty of postage, my fountain pen is primed, itching to get busy—I like to write long confidential letters, so come one, come all.

F. I. Walker

P.O. Box 286, Waukegan, Ill.

* * *

Dear Editor:

I am a regular reader of all your books. I don't think they could be better. I am a lonesome man in my thirties, with blond hair and blue eyes, 5 ft. 6 in. tall, weigh 148 lbs., and would like to see this printed in your "La Paree" at an early date. I will answer all letters and have some very interesting stories to relate.

I remain a regular reader and booster in every way.

C. L. Trimble

Box 1435, Mountain Home, Tenn.

Dear Editor:

Your grand magazines, especially "La Paree", mean a lot to a lonely office-widow in the oh! so big city of New York.

Would you like to publish this letter in your Pen Pal's column?

Here I am: Born a Southerner, just 26 years ago, married in New York four years ago; height 5 ft. 4 in., weight 119 lbs. with nothing but my panties on; wear a 36 brassiere (well, part of the time); am a redhead; love dancing—in fact I teach it a little; trying hard to be an authoress; read letters and answer them as soon as I get them; and that's a promise!

Are there any dashing young heroes who want to write their way into one of my crazy little short stories by the pen-pal route? I'm challenging them.

Yours,

(Mrs.) Jean R. Weller

146 East 44th St., N.Y.C.

* * *

Dear Editor:

I like the readings of "La Paree" and have been a steady customer and thanks to the editor.

I have been traveling in many countries, seen life from different views.

Now I feel lonesome and would be delighted to hear from or correspond with some readers. Hope the editor will print this in the paper.

I'll be looking for answers, with photos. I am 35, 5 ft. 8 in., 150 lb. Dark, fair complexion.

Sverre Erickson

Box 2541, Sta. A., Minneapolis, Minn.

Monte Carlo Widow

By

JEAN MARTEL



The exotic woman in black sat close to the roulette wheel.

THROUGH the shaded lights of the Casino at Monte Carlo, Chester Dunham stared at the woman in black. She sat close to the spinning roulette wheel, a heap of markers before her. She consistently played the first black dozen and number 26 in the red. A cigarette smoked in her long jade holder. Whenever she stretched out a white, rounded arm to place a bet her antique gold bracelets glimmered. She paid no attention to anyone or anything except the chattering marble in the wheel.

Dunham, on his first vacation in years, drew a breath. He had never seen a woman so glamorous as the lady in black. Her exotic

beauty, her dark, elongated eyes, polished hair and alabaster-like skin made him forget the fact he was married and that home, in New Jersey, Cora was probably at this same minute thinking and dreaming about him. He touched her letter in his pocket. Then he frowned. Somehow thinking about Cora seemed out of place in the gilded gambling establishment of the Prince of Monaco.

Dunham spoke to one of the attendants.

"Who's the lady over there, the one in black, third seat from the end of the table?"

The man he addressed shrugged.

"I am sorry, *monsieur*. I do not know. Here they call her merely the Monte Carlo Widow."

For a minute Dunham thought that over. Widow. That must be the reason why she was in black. He squinted at the closely clinging folds of her ravishing evening gown. Slender jeweled straps spanned her marble shoulders. The gown was cut low in front so the ripe, luscious maturity of her statuesque figure was very evident. Somehow, as he looked at her, Dunham felt an inner stirring—the kind of stealthy, secret emotion that had not disturbed him since the first time he and Cora had gone on that never-to-be-forgotten hayride.

As if the tug of his eyes had some magnetic power, the woman suddenly lifted her gaze. She glanced at Dunham, her beautiful face expressionless, the red bow of her mouth immobile. Then she tapped the long ash from her cigarette and with a gesture placed all her markers on the faithful red 26.

There was a stir among the spectators. The croupier looked at the board.

"*Rien ne va plus!*"

The wheel spun. The marble raced around the numbered slots. Finally it dropped into one groove and stayed there.

"Number seven, in the black."

THE WOMAN AROSE. With a little shrug she turned and made her way to the door that opened on a terrace. When she reached it she glanced back over her shoulder. Dunham felt something spark and flare up within him. As her eyes held his for a brief second, her scarlet lips curved provocatively in a faint, shadowy smile of invitation.

Dunham suddenly grew warm all over. A woman hadn't smiled at him that way for a long time. He found himself in motion, hardly aware that he was walking toward the same door through which she had disappeared.

He stepped out on a glazed tile promontory. An abundance of plants gave the night their drowsy perfume. The moonlight laid a silver path across the blue Mediterranean. From in the distance mandolins and guitars were playing a romantic serenade. The breeze was soft, sweet as the blossoms the Riviera grew.

It took Dunham a minute to locate her. She stood facing the sea, motionless. He went awkwardly across the tiles. She turned her head and he saw the flash of her sombre eyes.

"I was wondering," she murmured, in a low, fascinating voice, "if you knew I wanted to talk with you?"

Dunham swallowed. She wanted to talk with him! The heat inside him increased. He ran a finger around his dress collar.

"Something I can do?" he said clumsily. She leaned against a stone balustrade.

"I am very unhappy, *monsieur*."

"That's too bad. What's the trouble?" Dunham asked sympathetically.

She lifted a slender hand in a gesture.

"I am lonesome. Always, at this time of the year, my thoughts return to Monte Carlo, to someone who has gone—"

Dunham coughed uncomfortably.

"Your—your husband?"

HER HAND GRIPPED his arm.

"Tell me, *monsieur*. Have you ever loved with madness and passion? Have you ever known ecstatic heights, depressing depths? Have you ever given your soul, your all and laid it on the altar of love?"

Dunham didn't know just what to say. He had been pretty well steamed up during his honeymoon. The first night they had been married he had quivered with rapture, but that was a long time ago. Almost unconsciously he and Cora had slipped into that comfortable state of matrimony that comes with the sixth anniversary.

"Well, yes and no," he said carefully.

She threw her cigarette out into the darkness.

"*Monsieur*, take me to the American Bar. Buy me a highball."

Dunham drew a deep breath.

"With the greatest of pleasure."

In the lights of the cafe she was lovelier than he had first imagined. The beauty of her face and form was almost startling. She sat on one of the high stools, arranging her dress to give her alluring legs freedom. When Dunham's eyes wandered to them he caught a glimpse of her rounded knees, the hint of embroidered garters and just the suggestion of the alabaster skin above their tops.

"Won't you tell me your name?" he asked, after introducing himself.

"I am *Madame* Lola Fevrier. My poor husband was Marcel Fevrier of the International Bank. He was killed up there in the mountains, two years ago. A motor car accident near *Gorges du Loup*."

Dunham kept glancing at the thin black hosiery, at the legs beneath the shimmering sheen. He began to feel queerly excited. Then he tried to check the ideas that fired his imagination. If she were still bereaved by the death of her husband, she wouldn't be interested in anyone else. It was hardly possible that she would be open to any amorous interludes.

down beside. The conveyance moved off. Dunham's inner emotion urged him to indiscretion. He couldn't check the hand that fell on hers. He felt her start a little, but she made no move



The blonde stenographer had not been in the place an hour before she was on his lap.

"You are staying at the Grand Hotel de la Mer?"

Dunham nodded.

"Room seven-o-three."

HER DARK, MYSTERIOUS eyes were screened by the long lashes she dropped over them. She finished her drink.

"I, too, am staying there. You may order a *fiacre*, take me back. I am tired.

Obediently, Dunham arranged for a horse drawn vehicle and handed her into it. He sat

to shake off his fingers.

"If I were you," he said, "I'd lock those bracelets up. I suppose you've heard about the clever English crook, Bernard Fuller. They were talking about him in the hotel lobby the other day. They say he was seen at Nice, that all the women who own jewels have put them in safe deposit boxes."

She shrugged under her velvet wrap.

"I am not nervous, *monieur*. What are jewels—baubles. It is love that counts."

Dunham thought she was certainly strange.

Her brooding air of tragedy. The cool feel of her skin and the cryptic perfume of her hair.

He wondered how he could arouse her interest, if it were possible. Six years ago he might have been able. He doubted it now. Too long married, too long the slave of conventions. He shook himself impatiently. That was not exactly true. He was still able to know passion, feel the flame of it.

They reached the sprawling hotel.

"Would you care to have *liqueur* with me—in my suite?" she asked in her low, vibrant voice.

"I'd love to," Dunham answered promptly.

Her rooms were on the seventh floor, his floor. The door of the drawing room opened out on the same balcony his door did. She switched on a lamp, dropped her wrap on a brocaded sofa and slid the palms of her hands over her raven hair.

A HOTEL SERVANT brought *liqueurs* and cigarettes. Dunham's blood stirred. He wondered what Cora would have said if she could have seen him. He sat beside a gloriously beautiful woman, his eyes lingered on the front of the low cut gown, on that spot that rose and fell with her even breathing. He stopped thinking about Cora. All at once Dunham told himself that he wanted a night of love. He wanted it as he had never wanted anything before. It made his heart beat faster, started his pulses throbbing, filled him with yearning and desire.

But how to go about it?

Lola Fevrier might have been a statue. She seemed coolly aloof, distant as the stars hanging over the purple sea. Dunham didn't know what technique to employ. He was badly out of practice. A couple of years previous there had been the episode of the blonde stenographer who came to work in his insurance office. But that had been rather crude, the girl was too easy to make.

She hadn't been in the place an hour before she was on his lap, was kissing him back, giving him two for every one. She had cuddled to him like a purring kitten, only too glad to be caressed and loved. She was nothing at all like the sombre, imperious woman whose delicately tinted fingertips held the crystal stem of the small *liqueur* glass.

Yet, Dunham assured himself, most women were in love with love. Lola had told him she was lonesome. That was significant. And her eyes and smile had invited him to join her on the terrace. That also, was significant. She had singled him out, made overtures. Per-

haps she was waiting expectantly for his first move.

Dunham frowned. He had never met anyone like her. He wasn't going to be a fool and ruin everything by amateurish, clumsy bungling. She wasn't the kind whose silken legs could be touched, felt. To arouse her would require an artistic advance. You couldn't grab her, smother her with kisses and expect her to yield. That might work with Cora, but here it would spoil everything. What was needed, Dunham told himself, was to find the hidden spring that released the flood tide of her passion.

HE LIGHTED A Russian cigarette for her with an unsteady match. His temples were pounding and his blood was hot. He stared into the eyes she made level with his. He searched their clear, limpid depths for some suggestion of a responding emotion. She looked at him passively, frank and friendly but with no sign of any intrigue.

"You can say good night whenever you wish, *monsieur*."

"And if I don't wish?"

She smiled.

"What do you mean?"

"Suppose," he said huskily, "I don't want to go—for hours."

"You are married?" When Dunham nodded, she went on slowly. "You have been always true to your wife? Perhaps you have slipped once or twice. Men do, I am told. But it was nothing of importance or consequence. A passing fancy. Is that right?"

"Absolutely," Dunham murmured.

"Then why spoil it with another passing fancy?"

He turned to her.

"Because you're the most beautiful woman I've ever met. Because I'm leaving here in a couple of days for Paris. I sail next Tuesday for home from Cherbourg. I'd like to take a memory away with me, something I'll never forget."

She shook her black head.

"But I would not like to be a memory." She sighed. "I have too many of them myself."

"Give me an hour," Dunham begged. "Just sixty minutes. If I can't make you want me to stay then I'll go and I won't bother you further. Is that a bargain?"

FOR THE FIRST time she laughed.

"You interest me. What will you do in your sixty minutes? What will you do first?"

"Take you in my arms—"

She made a grimace.

"Too much like the movies."

"I'll kiss those red lips of yours until you feel what I feel."

"I doubt it."

Dunham leaned eagerly forward.

"Let me try."

She moved closer to him.

"If you wish."

He put his arms around her. She sat unresisting. His mouth closed over hers. He tried to make the kiss passionately perfect, but he knew he had failed. It was like kissing stone. Dunham's lips moved to the little hollow under her ear. Cora always got excited when he kissed her there. Lola gave no hint of any ardent stirring. His lips wandered down the round column of her throat. He kissed her perfumed skin, stopping when he reached the soft silken opening at the low cut front of the gown. Still no tremulous movements, no quick breathing, no rapturous sighs.

"You see? I am not easily awakened, *monsieur*."

In what was a final, despairing attempt, Dunham's hand dropped to her knee. Under the thin material of her frock he could sense the warmth of her body. She didn't interfere or try to stop him when his hand moved an inch higher. But when he came to the garter ridge her hand tightened over his arm.

"It is late. I think you had better say good night and go."

Dunham got up. No use, he was beaten, licked. He moistened his hot, dry mouth with his tongue, poked up his hat and laughed under his breath.

"You and the Sphinx! Believe me, I know when my number's up. Good night, *Madame*. Sweet dreams!"

HER SMILE WAS enigmatic.

"For you—the same."

In his own room, Dunham took off his dinner clothes and stuffed his starched shirt in the bureau drawer. He put on his lavender pajamas—the ones Cora thought looked Hollywood and therefore slightly immoral—turned off the lights and opened the balcony door to the mistral coming down from the flower-crowned mountains. He knew he couldn't sleep. He was too excited, upset. His vanity had suffered a cruel blow. He had tried everything and failed to awaken the widow. That hurt, added fuel to the fire of his indignation and annoyance. He guessed he was getting old, had lost his punch. The kisses and love making might do for Cora but not for the gorgeous, sophisticated Lola.

After a long time Dunham sat looking out

at the stars. At length he shook off his slippers, climbed into bed, punched the pillow to fit his head and endeavored to compose himself. Every few minutes his eyes opened to the moonlight. The vast hotel had quieted, slumbered. There wasn't a sound except the sigh of the breeze in the ivy on the balcony, the far-away rumble of a passing motor car.

A light footstep jerked Dunham's head up. He sat erect, tense, wondering. A shape of shadow passed through the moonlight and stopped at his open door. He saw Lola, peered at her unbelievably, caught in the spell of agitated amazement. She wore nothing but a flowing, gossamer *robe de nuit*. With the moonlight behind her every curve and contour of her full, ripe charms was outlined. Dunham feasted his eyes on them, hardly breathing when she crossed the threshold and moved slowly into the room.

She walked so hesitantly, so warily that he thought he understood. She was asleep, was a somnambulist!

Dunham slipped out of bed. In front of the bureau she came to a stop. He took her into his arms, tried to be gentle, knowing that a rude awakening might be harmful. But what shook him from head to foot made him rough, hasty. He drew her to him, hearing her gasp, feeling her convulsive movement.

"*Monsieur!* Where am I?"

"Take it easy," Dunham advised. "Don't be frightened. You've been sleep-walking and you are in my room."

"*Monsieur!* In my nightgown!"

DUNHAM FELT HER breath on his face.

"There's nothing wrong with it as far as I can see. Lola! I thought I was beaten, but I must have made some impression—enough to bring you here—to me!"

She shook her head.

"I will tell you something. This is room seven-o-three. It was here, within these walls, that I spent my wedding night with Marcel! Always, I remember it. In my dreams it must have called to me!"

Still Dunham kept his arms around her.

"Listen, why can't you imagine that I'm Marcel?"

"*Monsieur!*"

Dunham put everything he had into his eager pleading.

"Please! For tonight—this one night!"

Whether it was his tremulous tone or his tightening arms, he never knew, but finally he felt an answering spark. At last he had aroused something! He felt her body flex to his, the

(Please turn to page 64)

Million Dollar Kiss

By
KEN COOPER

IT wasn't that Jack Margate enjoyed the accommodations offered by the second class hotel. Certainly the bare, scarcely furnished room could not compare with the sumptuous suites at some of the more exclusive and more expensive Paris hostelrys. But when you were carrying a million dollars' worth of cut diamonds you had to avoid attracting attention.

Paris was a Mecca for gem thieves from all over the Continent. They congregated in the French capital, watched the incoming passenger lists like hawks, managed somehow to see the registers of all the better hotels. They knew the names of every diamond purchaser, waited until he had made his selection before pouncing on him in an effort at stealing the stones. The police were helpless and could do nothing. Therefore, Jack's temporary residence in a small, secluded hotel the harpies were liable to miss.

Carefully testing the room door to see whether it was securely locked against midnight intruders, Jack undressed, donned pajamas and a robe and smoked a final cigarette. He jerked the window blind up, walked to one of his suitcases, removed a rolled blue plush gem kit, placed it on the table, untied the satin bands.

A burst of rainbow colors glittered from the background of plush. Large stones and small ones, all brilliantly faceted. Jack rolled the kit up again, shoved it under the mattress at the foot of the bed. He opened the window from the top, turned out the light, crawled into bed.

He had just about dozed off after tossing uncomfortably on the none too comfortable mattress for more than an hour, when he heard the soft padding of bare feet across the floor. He lay still, listening. Yes, the sound was unmistakable. Someone was approaching the bed. The moments were interminably long. Jack was a graven image on the bed. He breathed evenly, regularly to simulate deep slumber. It was amazing to him that, considering all his caution, the harpies had found him.

NOW A HAND was reaching under the mattress, searching for the jewel kit he had secret-

ed. The bed shook gently and the hand drew back. Once again it tried to insinuate itself between the mattress and the spring. Jack counted ten to himself, tensed his body, shot up and forward. His fingers clamped tight about a narrow wrist. He leaped out of bed, jerked hard.

A muted scream broke the silence. Jack drew his arm back, was about to smash his fist in the general direction he imagined the thief's face to be when something happened. The body attached to the wrist he held swayed forward against him. He felt two soft hills of flesh pressing upon his chest. There was no question as to what they were. His captive was a girl!

For a moment Jack was too dazed to do anything but thrill to the pressure of that soft girl-flesh. Then he snapped out of it, dragged the girl across the room to the light switch, clicked it on. The second shock was even greater than the first. He blinked in amazement. There, down on her knees before him, was the prettiest dark-haired French *gamin* he had ever seen!

Her eyes, black as coal, looked up at him pleadingly. Her ripe, red lips trembled. Her nostrils flared like those of a high-strung thoroughbred.

"*Pardon, Monsieur!*" she gasped. "*Pardon!*"

Jack released her arm, stepped to the window, drew the shade. She was standing when he faced her again. Facially, she might only have been a child of fifteen. She looked innocent and madonna-like. But her body belied the immaturity of her features. A cheap, tattered cotton dress was her only covering. It failed utterly to conceal the ripe, jutting curves of her lush breasts, the sweep of her hips or the mature columns of her thighs. She was certainly no child.

FOR LONG MOMENTS Jack watched her round bottom rise and fall beneath her torn bodice. His blood bubbled and ran riot through his veins.

"What are you doing here?" he questioned sternly.

Again the girl dropped to her knees, crawled

to his feet. "*Pardon, Monsieur!*" she whimpered.

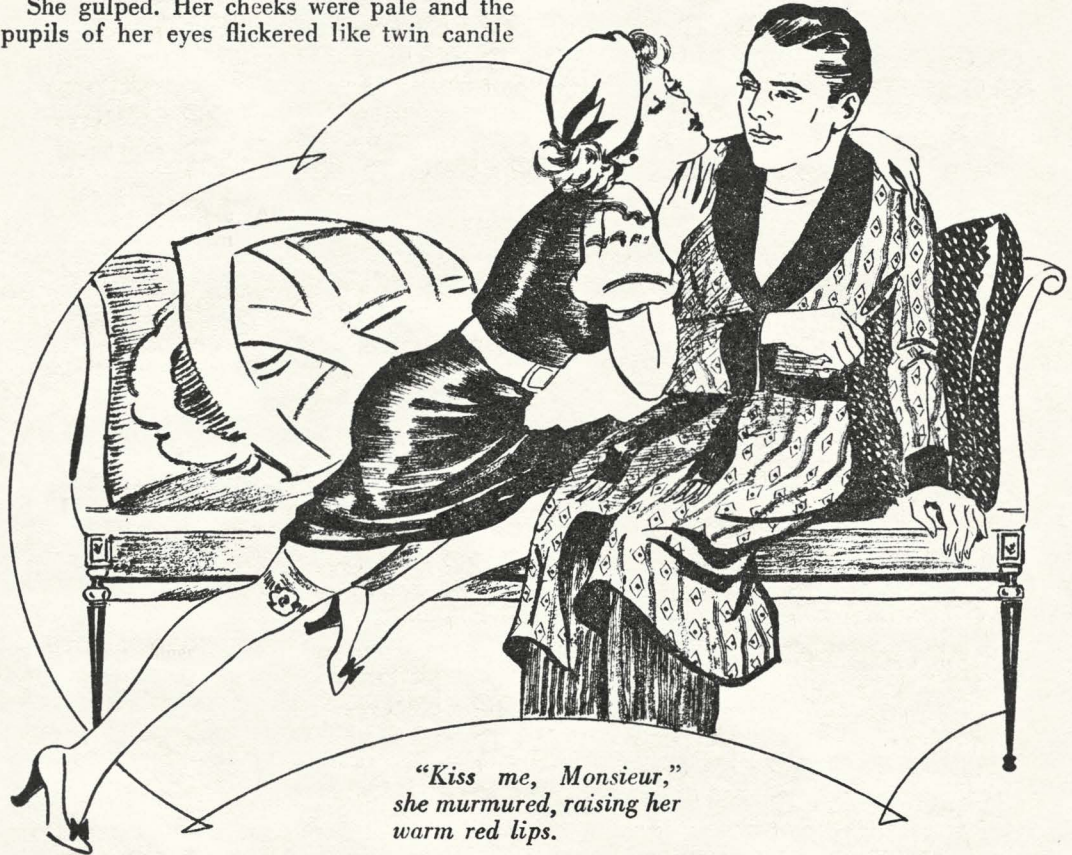
Looking down at her, Jack's fingers itched to bury themselves in all that voluptuous softness.

He leaned over and pulled her up, holding both her arms. "You haven't answered my question. What do you want?"

She gulped. Her cheeks were pale and the pupils of her eyes flickered like twin candle

voking charms. He found it becoming increasingly difficult to draw an even breath. His temples pounded.

MARIE TRIED TO twine her arms about his neck, urged her voluptuously contoured body close. Her cotton dress was scant covering for the jiggling charms it hid.



"Kiss me, Monsieur," she murmured, raising her warm red lips.

flames. "Nossing, *Monsieur!* It is zee mistake!"

"A mistake, was it? Who sent you here? Who told you to climb in the window and search beneath the mattress?"

"*Non, Monsieur!* I have not been told! *Mon Dieu*, I swear it!"

Jack increased the pressure of his fingers on her bare arms. He drew her close.

"You're lying! What's your name?"

Two iridescent tears rolled down the girl's cheeks. She was frightened to death. "Marie," she answered.

"I'm going to turn you over to the police unless you tell me who sent you here!"

"*Non, Monsieur!* Please do not! I will do anything! Do not call zee *gendarmes!*"

The nearness of her made Jack forget himself. He thought less about the gem kit under his mattress than he did about her caress-

"Kiss me, *Monsieur,*" she murmured, raising her moist red lips.

Jack was only human. Nothing could be accomplished by playing the pure and righteous hero. He slipped an arm about her slim waist, mashed his mouth down on her lips.

If there had been any doubt in his mind as to whether she was a child or a woman, that first kiss dispelled it. Never had he been treated to so expert a caress.

The lure of her voluptuous form urged his arms to embrace her. It was no trick to slip eager, searching fingers around her yielding waistline and draw her tightly to him. A sigh escaped her parted lips and her body quivered in his arms.

He closed his eyes, drifted off into a paradise whose very existence he had dreamed about but never approached.

The awakening was rude. A harsh, guttural voice broke the panting quiet. Marie jerked out of his arms. Dazed, Jack looked around and saw a sour-faced little Frenchman in the traditional long-peaked cap and high-necked wool sweater of the Apaches. A revolver gleamed in the intruder's right hand. He muttered an order to the girl. She hesitated momentarily, then dropped on her knees at the foot of the bed, fumbled under the mattress, removed the jewel kit.

Jack sat there like one transfixed. He knew what had happened. The Apache, a henchman of the girl's, had climbed in the window while he was blinded and deafened by her beauty and response.

Another order snaked from the Apache's thin lips. Marie, moving like a mountain cat, vanished out the window. Her partner stepped to the light switch, plunged the room into darkness. A beam of moonlight fell across his evil, twisted face.

"You will make no noise, *Monsieur*," he warned. "*Au revoir*."

He was gone, disappearing like a wraith. Jack waited a full minute before moving. His mind was a jumble of strange thoughts, none of which concerned the diamonds. He could still feel the heat of Marie's body close to him, the pressure of her lips beneath his mouth. Why hadn't the Apache waited just a few moments longer?

He rose, switched on the light, stepped to the window. Something caught his eye. It was a ragged piece of cloth caught on a nail sticking up from the window sill. Jack reached for the all-important clue. It was a strip torn from Marie's tattered dress. He folded it gently, slipped it into his wallet.

Back in bed he lay awake thinking of the dark-eyed, lush-breasted girl.

BY EVENING OF the following day Jack was dog-tired. He had personally visited every dress shop in Montmartre trying to match his bit of material with some garment the shopkeepers sold. They regarded him queerly when he presented the dirty strip of cloth. In all cases the answer was a shrug and a "*Non, Monsieur*, I have not sold zee dress of zis cloth."

Ready to give up, Jack strolled down to the bank of the Seine to rest on the greensward. He was sitting there, looking out across the river when something familiar crossed his range of vision. He blinked, stared straight ahead. The familiar object was a dress. The material matched the piece he had in his wallet!

He shot up, started towards the strolling owner of the dress, drew up short when he saw it wasn't Marie. In fact, the tall, blonde girl was as far removed from Marie as the North Pole is from the South Pole. She was equally as good looking in her way, but completely different in face, figure and bearing.

The thrill of discovery turned sour in Jack's mouth. He was about to resume his seat on the grass when a brilliant thought occurred to him. Since that particular dress material was so scarce, couldn't there exist the possibility that this blonde knew where it had been purchased?

Jack followed the girl as she walked along the river bank. He could see her slim hips swaying from side to side under the cotton dress. Small, tip-tilted mounds bounced with each step she took.

THE OPPORTUNITY CAME to approach the meandering blonde. Where the river took a graceful bend and was hidden from the footpath by a grove of chestnut trees, Jack drew a deep breath and stepped abreast of his fair quarry.

"*Mon pardon, Mademoiselle*," he said. "I—I wonder could you tell me where you bought that dress?"

The girl's blue eyes widened. She looked down at the simple cotton frock, fingered the bodice. "*Zis dress?*" she echoed.

"*Oui, Mademoiselle*. I would like to buy one similar."

Puzzled bewilderment was the girl's only response. As though to convince her of his honorable intentions, Jack reached into his pocket and extracted a roll of bills. "You see I am not fooling," he said.

She looked at the money. Her eyes brightened. "I—I can take you to zee place, *Monsieur*," she murmured.

Jack's heart leaped. "Good! I will pay you well for it."

Ten minutes of walking brought them to a rather shoddy section of the *Latin Quartier*. The girl entered the dank, dim-lit hallway of a frame house hemmed in between other frame houses.

"*Zis way, Monsieur*," she said.

Jack followed up a flight of rickety steps. The blonde knocked at a door. Feet shuffled within and a harsh, grating voice queried as to who was knocking.

"*Antoinette*," the girl replied, following it with something in French that Jack failed to understand.

THERE WAS A momentary pause, then the door swung open. Jack looked into the muzzle of a revolver held by as vicious an Apache as the one who had entered his hotel room.

"*Entrez, Monsieur,*" he invited. It was more a command than an invitation. Jack stepped into the room. The blonde closed the door behind him.

"You will raise your hands, *Monsieur,*" the Apache said.

bodice, only this view was not as thrilling as the one Marie had offered. After Marie, this girl's beauty failed to attract.

"I've heard that story before," he muttered. "This time I'm calling the *gendarmes!*"

A harsh, guttural voice broke the panting quiet.



Jack raised his hands. He raised one foot at the same time. It caught the would-be holdup man in the stomach, doubled him up on the floor. Jack was on him, snatching the gun from his hand. He clubbed it, cracked the heavy butt down on the Apache's head. One blow was enough.

Back on his feet, Jack faced the girl. She was cringing against the wall, whimpering for mercy. It hadn't been so long ago that a lush brunette had been doing the same thing. This time Jack decided to take no chances. No more million dollar kisses. He frowned.

"So, you were going to rob me! A very pretty business! You'll look nice in jail!"

The girl dropped to her knees, crawled across the floor, clutched his legs. "*De grace, Monsieur!*" she whined. "It was not for myself zat I wanted zee money! *De grace!*"

Jack looked down at her. For the second time he enjoyed the view offered by a billowing

SHE RUBBED HER cheek against his knee. Tears poured from her blue eyes. In a burst of sobbing hysteria she collapsed.

Jack lifted her up, carried her to a couch. Much as he tried to regard this experience objectively, he could not help being affected by the warmth of her body beneath her dress. Even though she wasn't Marie, her slim, firm curves were nothing to discard casually.

For a minute she moaned out a threnody of grief. Then her eyes opened. They were melting with appeal.

"Please, *Monsieur,*" she whispered. "You must believe me. Zee money I did not want for myself. It is for my sister. She is sick."

JACK WAS BETWEEN the devil and the deep blue sea. Either she was an accomplished liar or as innocent as a lamb. He couldn't decide which.



Even though she wasn't Marie, her slim curves were nothing to discard casually.

It sounded like a typical American sob story with Parisian variations. Instead of a sick mother it was a sick sister.

Jack leaned over her. "Why don't you tell me the truth?" he questioned.

She clutched his shoulders. "It is zee truth, *Monsieur*. My sister needs ten thousand francs or else her heart will be broken."

"What for?"

Her eyes avoided his. "I cannot tell you, *Monsieur*. Do not ask me to tell you. It is too horrible."

"That man," he said, pointing to the prostrate Apache. "Who is he?"

"*Mon frere*—my brother."

The story was getting fishier and fishier by the moment. "And you can't tell me why your sister needs 10,000 francs, can you? Is she in trouble?"

"*Oui, Monsieur.*"

"With a man?"

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DETAINED IN PARIS

By
LEE LOWELL

ROXANNE MILLEA felt the gaze of the handsome young American at the next table. Her heart hammered her soft round breast into fluttering excitement. But she was going through with it, Roxanne told herself! Then, without taking her own cinnamon-brown eyes from the floor show, she called: "Garçon! Garçon!"

Her silky voice lifted just enough to be heard above the saxophones—and at the next table. Responding to her summons, a tuxedoed waiter loomed from the smoky dimness.

"Oui, mademoiselle?" he solicited, bowing above her.

"Bring me *un journal*," Roxanne ordered, loudly enough to be overheard. "*Le Temps*," she added.

"Certement, mademoiselle."

The waiter vanished as he had come—into the blue-grey gloom which hovered above the maze of crowded tables.

Outwardly Roxanne was interested only in the trim-bodied girls performing a can-can on the small polished floor. Inwardly she was completely absorbed with some important reassurances. Surely she would succeed! Surely the young American would find her attractive!

Roxanne knew he was already giving plenty of attention to her attractions. His eyes seemed unable to get enough of her. For Roxanne, always offering the male vision a thousand thrills was lovelier than ever tonight. Her raven hair waved back and fell into inky curls upon a flaming shoulder scarf. Above this bit of scarlet Roxanne's face gleamed like a vision from fire, her enormous brown eyes reflecting a slumbrous light, her swollen lips glowing like embers.

IN BLINDING CONTRAST to her flaming neck-piece, Roxanne wore a gown of chalk-white. It revealed her as something to drive mannikens to suicide. It had no sleeves—only threads of shoulder straps—and exposed an appetizing expanse of sweet creamy flesh. Its neck, on first notice, sliced all the way to Roxanne's small slippers.

On closer observation, it stopped in a daring V just below the scented valley formed by Roxanne's high thrust bosom. The gown ad-

hered to her charms like a coating of white enamel, then flowed down her smooth figure until it gripped her hips into delicious prominence and flared about her delightful tapering thighs.

The waiter put the newspaper before her. "Merci," she said.

The blond stranger's blue-steel eyes upon her, she opened the paper, turning its pages leisurely. When she came to the photographs she spread this page slowly before her for thorough perusal. Suddenly she stopped being casual, fixed intently upon one photo. She glanced from it to the American, started. A moment later she again shot her gaze back to him and daintily squealed.

"Mon dieu!"

She almost tipped over her chair in a scramble to arise. In three winks she stood at the American's table, a menu card thrust forward with trembling hands.

"Votre autographe?" she burst.

The American was on his feet.

"You are *M'sieur* Randy Wilson!" she said. "The next one hundred metre champion of the world!"

"Well, I am Randy Wilson," he smiled. "How'd you guess it, *mademoiselle*?"

"*Les journals*, they are full of it, *m'sieur*." She pushed the menu to him, shakily. "*S'il vous plait . . . votre autographe!*"

HE TOOK THE card and scrawled upon it. "With pleasure, *mademoiselle*. Randy Wilson always tries to please the *femmes!*"

For a moment Roxanne glowed over his signature, then folded the heavy paper with great reverence and put it into her purse.

"Thank you . . . *mille remerciements*," she said ecstatically. "I now have a remembrance from ze fastest runner in ze world—ze next Olympic champion!"

Roxanne thought he blushed. But his next remark indicated that the flush of his face came from the excitement his eyes had been having upon journeying over the dips and firm mounds of her gorgeous white person.

"Please sit down, *mademoiselle*. You look interesting!"

He helped her into a chair. She saw his eyes

The blond stranger's eyes were upon her as she opened the paper.



the Englishman, will take the field," he added modestly.

HIS EYES WERE sweeping over her without missing a facial expression, an ebony curl of her hair, or tempting mound.

"But you must be confident," cooed Roxanne, "or you would not have come to Paris tonight!"

fall over her shoulders and into the dull-ivory vale of her bosom.

"And you are interesting, *mademoiselle!*"

"*M'sieur Wilson,*" she trilled, "you must make compliments as fast as you run!"

He dropped beside her. "Aw, *mademoiselle,* please! Let's omit everything about me!"

"*C'est impossible, m'sieur!*" She leaned toward him in the dim light. "I am too excite! Tomorrow you beat ze Englishman, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"I hope to," he said very slowly. "Of course, most people are betting two to one that Hector,

"A very important matter," he shrugged. "I had a deuce of a time though in getting away from the American Olympic officials. They're always so afraid something will happen to the athletes—"

"Especially ze stars!" she said awesomely. "And did you fly?" The American nodded. "Then they must have worried that you might crash!" Roxanne looked horror-stricken.

"Well, you see, *mademoiselle,* I sneaked away—but now the newspapers, everyone, knows it."

"For which I am thankful, *M'sieur Wilson,*" she said, snuggling her white loveliness to him. His hand lay on the table and she pressed her pulsing bosom gently to it. "For now I have met ze charming American athlete!"

"And I have met the most beautiful girl in all Paris," he whispered. His hand learned the warm perfection of smoothly rounded curves. "By the way," he smiled, "just what is your name?"

"Roxanne. Roxanne Du Fae."

"I am happy to know you, Roxanne!"

They saw the floor show had ended. Couples

were being enticed from their tables by violins and muted brass.

"Shall we dance, Roxanne?"

"*Avec plaisir, M'sieur Wil—*"

"Randy," he corrected.

"Rand-ee," she breathed obediently.

SHE MELTED INTO his arms and let the soft insinuating rhythm carry them about the floor as one body. Her smooth cheek muzzled to his neck. She felt her velvety hair rustle under his warm breathing. Her complete diminutive person was locked against him by the pressure of his hand upon the eggshell expanse of flesh which he had access to by reason of her low-backed gown. Judging from the movement of that hand, and the tenseness of his body, Roxanne knew she was being found plenty attractive!

"Roxanne," he purred in low baritone. "To me, this is heaven!"

"A heaven to end very soon, *M'sieur Rand-ee*, You fly back to Berlin tonight?"

"At twelve, Roxanne. By sleeper plane. So I have just two hours for the loveliest thing which has happened to me . . . ever!"

"*Merci!*" she said softly.

Her heart was again pumping madly. Not just from her plans this time. This American was getting into her blood and doing things to her. Cuddling closer, she rested her damp red mouth upon his cheek, and said:

"When you are in ze clouds tonight, Rand-ee, dream of me no matter what you come to think of me in ze meantime! Dream of *la fille* who keeps your *autographe* . . . who remembers always!"

He squeezed her to him until she seemed to lose her breath.

"I shall, Roxanne," he pledged. "What is more, I'll be dreaming of you tomorrow!" He buried a kiss in the ebony glory of her hair. "Tomorrow," he continued softly, "when I drive down the cinders toward the finish, I'll see a vision of your loveliness in front of me. I'll race to you and win! Beat Hector!"

"You flatter so nicely, *mon ami*." She patted his face. "Rand-ee!" she suddenly exclaimed. "You do not have to just see a vision of me tomorrow! You can see me . . . how you say it . . . in ze real . . . in ze person!"

THEY STOPPED DANCING. The American looked bewildered.

"You mean—"

"*Voilà!* I fly with you!"

"Magnificent, Roxanne!" His bewilderment faded. "For that, I think I'll kiss you!"

He started to do that very thing. Gently Roxanne warded him off.

"Not here, Rand-ee. People are watching. Wait until we reach ze park as we go to my room. . . . You see, *m'sieur*, you must help me pack," she explained.

She jerked him from the night club and onto the boulevard.

"*Allons, Rand-ee!*"

Passing through the park, Roxanne saw her escort get a multitude of ideas. A moon hung over Paris like a silver watch, putting Parisians in Parisian frames of mind. Every park bench, every shadow, held couples who were locked in the arms of love. Occasional giggles and chuckles suggested just how much influence the moon was actually wielding.

Against her own will as well as her companion's, Roxanne kept them moving until their path neared the opposite boulevard.

"I live just down there on the *Rue Dubin*," Roxanne indicated.

The American took this as his cue.

"Now for our kiss, Roxanne!"

He took her into his arms. They closed about her as though she were a fire to be smothered. So she was! The moonlight and his handsomeness had been working on her. Now, when his engulfing embrace crushed her to his warm pulsing frame, she felt a torch pass up and down her body.

"Roxanne, you're divine!"

His lips burned down upon her dewy mouth.

"This is a night for remembrance!"

"*Oui, mon cher Rand-ee!*"

SHE NOW KISSED him, ardently, passionately. She gripped her bare arms about his neck, tiptoed to his ready mouth. She felt a thousand remarkable sensations play over her. When her ruby lips clamped upon his strong firm mouth, she felt her toes curl within her dainty slippers.

"We'll begin our honeymoon in Berlin, Roxanne!"

His hand went sliding down the precious smoothness of her back.

"Oh, Rand-ee. Come to my room—before I scream!"

"O.K., *mademoiselle*. I can be patient sometimes—even if I am a sprint man!"

After two flights of rickety musty stairs they passed down a hallway, blurred by arsenic-colored light. Roxanne went to a dilapidated door and rattled its lock. It yawned open into pit blackness. Roxanne, a vision in white, entered. Once inside she called back:

"Be careful, Rand-ee. I cannot get light for a moment."

The American followed. When he stepped into the gloom, the door banged shut behind him. There were scuffling, scraping sounds. Then a loud swack! Roxanne screamed. Dim lights went up. Horror-stricken, Roxanne saw her escort crumpled on the floor, a trickle of blood at his forehead. Two sleekly dressed men crouched over him. They turned to where Roxanne shrank against the wall.

"Nice work, sister," said the one in the plaid shirt.

"You're a great little fixer, *mademoiselle*," said the man with the big jaws. "Now, Joe, let's get this *hombre* over against the couch."

ROXANNE STARED wide-eyed as they tugged the young man along the dirty carpet. They stretched his feet to one end of a heavy couch, his hands to the other. Quickly they lashed him to the couch legs, gagged him.

"Guess that makes our Hector money a sure thing," laughed Joe. He turned to Roxanne. "Say, *mademoiselle*," he exclaimed. "What's eatin' yuh?"

"You're pale around the gills!" Big Jaws said.

"Nothing is wrong, *m'sieurs*," Roxanne said quickly. "I merely thought you would not knock him unconscious . . . as you promised, *m'sieurs*!"

"Never mind, *mademoiselle*," laughed Big Jaws. "We hadda do it. You'll get used to it in this game."

Joe was peeling several bills from a green roll.

"Here, *mademoiselle*, is yer thousand. Much obliged. When the boss cables from New York for another job like this, we'll know where to find you."

Roxanne's chin set firmly. "*Absolument!*" she declared.

They clattered down to the street. Joe sidled toward Roxanne, fumbled at her low cut neck, and made propositions.

"Better come along with us tonight, *mademoiselle*. We'll let you show us the town—we'll foot the bill!"

Politely, Roxanne backed away, hailed an approaching taxi.

"*Non, merci*. I have big things of my own to do with zis money! *Au revoir*," she called, climbing into the cab.

At eleven thirty Roxanne mounted the same dingy stairs. A tweed suit now hugged her exciting contours and she carried a black bag. When she reached the door, she opened it. Hearing only heavy breathing, she entered.

"Rand-ee!" she whispered, smoothing his forehead, and at the same time tugging his

bonds. "Rand-ee, I've come to set you free, *mon cher!*"

JUST THEN SHADOWY forms lunged from both sides. Vice-like hands seized her.

"So you'd double-cross us, eh, *mademoiselle*?" sneered Joe's voice. "We sorta expected it!"

Roxanne kicked, tried to scream. A hand mashed down upon her mouth.

"You're goin' to take a little nap, right alongside your buddy!"

A wetness slapped her face, bearing a suffocating odor. Chloroform! Roxanne sank into blackness. . . .

Roxanne awoke, squinting her eyes to keep out a steady pale light. She blinked. Daylight sifted through the room. She rolled slightly to see why she was so warm. Under her was a human mattress—Randy. She started to sit up but groaned and lay still, held by heavy cord about her hands and feet.

"Rand-ee," she called to the sleeping figure. There were ropes still about his arms and legs also. She snuggled along his full comfortable length, repeating: "Rand-ee!"

He made no move. Large tears tumbled from the brown depths of her eyes. She wriggled her head to his cheek.

"What have I done to you, what have I done to you?" she sobbed.

She frantically kissed his lips, his eyelids, his wounded forehead, wailing: "*Mon cher . . . mon coeur! Je t'aime . . .* and I have caused you to lose ze world championship! All because I needed money so badly! But I never meant it to be this way," she wailed. "I had planned to free you in time to catch your plane!"

She flattened herself limply against him, sobbing hysterically.

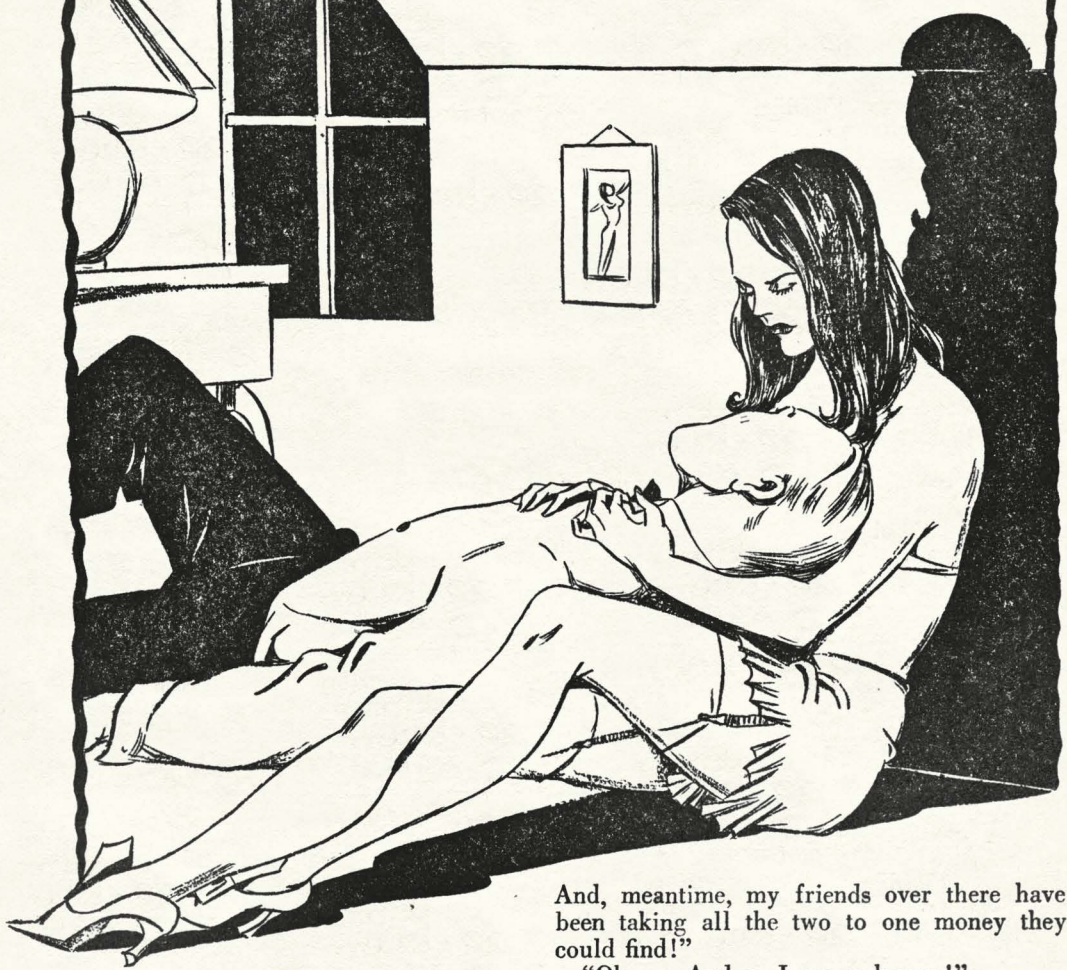
"Rand-ee, *mon coeur*. You will never forgive me!"

He chuckled. His blue-steel eyes darted open. "I've already forgiven you, Roxanne!"

AND BEFORE SHE could gasp, he sat up. The ropes fell away from his hands as if by miracle. His arms wrapped about her. He planted a vigorous kiss upon her astonished scarlet mouth.

"I've forgiven you for love—and for fifty thousand dollars. I was going to awaken you and tell you sooner but waited until I got free. Of course," he added, a deep light burning in his eyes, "I had another reason for not awakening you. I seemed so all important to you as I formed your mattress that I just hated to interrupt it all."

"Rande!" she whispered,
smoothing his forehead. "I've
come to set you free!"



Roxanne clutched him. At the same time, he cradled her into his arms, his one hand taking possession of a ring of warm flesh.

"The race!" Roxanne sobbed.

He laughed. "Randy Wilson will win it easy—we'll just see if he doesn't!"

Roxanne stared crazily.

"Let me introduce myself properly," he said. An errant hand, however, had introduced itself quite properly to her trim waist. "I am Andy Wilson—Randy's obscure twin. And I'm a gambler of sorts. So when I got a tip from a friend that this New York gambling outfit would kidnap Randy so the Britisher could win, I framed this thing. I sneaked to Europe and to Paris while Randy lay low in Berlin.

And, meantime, my friends over there have been taking all the two to one money they could find!"

"Oh . . . And-ee, I am so happy!"

"Do you mind falling out of love with an amateur athlete and falling in love with an amateur gambler?"

"Non," she fluttered. "Non, un mille non!" She endeavored without success to get her bound arms about Andy. "Since I've been helping you to get two to one bets, Andy, take off my bonds so we can make zis love of ours . . . how you say . . . even money!"

BETWEEN KISSES, ANDY released her, drew her sweet curving body deep into his embrace. Roxanne felt the pleasurable shock of having his hands pay homage to her loveliness. Her

(Please turn to page 62)

TOO MANY COOKS

By GASTON DEVEREAUX

"Your figure is just as youthful as mine."



THE dapper little Frenchman with the waxed moustache pleaded eloquently. His eyes, his lips, his hands and his shoulders joined in the entreaty, not to mention the babbling brook of speech that rolled off his tongue.

"Ah, but, *Mademoiselle*, you do not know zee boon you will confer if you attend zee *Bal Musette*. Can you think of it? America's most wealthy heiress zee guest at zee *Bal*

Musette! Mon Dieu, it is stupendous! You will be zee Queen of Honor!" His eyes twinkled meaningfully. His moustache danced on his upper lip, "And zee Duc de Nemours will be zee King. Ah, he is so handsome, *Mademoiselle!* So, so handsome!"

Lola Cartwright sighed audibly. "But I tell you I didn't come to Paris to be lionized, *Monsieur Masset*. I'm in France for a rest. I'd like to forget my millions. Back home I'm remind-

ed of it every minute of the day. Can't you let me be an ordinary individual? I'm certain the *Bal Musette* will be just as successful without me."

Monsieur Masset, chairman of the *Bal* committee, hopped up and down like a Jack-in-the-box. "Non, *Mademoiselle*, it is not so! *Zee Bal* it will be what you call *zee flop* if you are not zere. Already we have ordered *zee Queen's* costume. It is of satin and lace. For your figure, *Mademoiselle*, it will be perfect! And *zee Duc de Nemours*! Ah, he will be dressed in purple velvet and ermine."

There was no stopping the babbling Frenchman. Lola knew a lost cause when she saw one. "All right, *Monsieur* Masset, you win. I'll be there."

THE LITTLE FRENCHMAN wobbled over and grasped Lola's hand. He kissed it fervently. "*Merci, Mademoiselle! Merci!*" His dark eyes danced excitedly over her figure. "*Merci!*" he gasped again, evidently anxious to prolong the moment of thanks so that he might feast his vision on Lola's stunning beauty.

"You're quite welcome, *Monsieur*," she said, disengaging her hand. "*Au revoir.*"

He bowed his way out. Lola breathed a sigh of relief when the door closed behind him.

"Rita!" she called.

A pert, dark-eyed young girl dressed in a maid's uniform emerged from the adjoining room of the hotel suite.

"Yes, Miss Lola."

"You heard everything, Rita?"

"Yes, Miss Lola."

Lola walked over to the girl, placed her hands on her shoulders. "Look, Rita. You and I are alone in Paris. Mr. Wallingford, like all legal guardians, thought it inadvisable for me to travel alone. That was my only reason for bringing you. While we're on the Continent I want you to be as un-maid-like as possible. Let's drop the formalities. The only difference between us is that you were born with a plated spoon in your mouth and I was born with a solid gold one tickling my tonsils. You're just as pretty and your figure is equally as youthful."

Rita flushed crimson. "Thank you," she said softly.

LOLA WENT ON. "You're lucky you weren't out here when *Monsieur* Masset wore me down and out. He would have gone pop-eyed looking at your cute little body. Why is it Frenchmen's eyes always go to a woman's bosom? Remember when we stepped off the boat at

Havre? Every man under sixty eyed our twin beauties."

Rita smiled. "I can't blame them for looking at yours."

"And yours either. But let's not worry about it now. I won't mind so long as they restrain themselves and keep looking. You heard me promise *Monsieur* Masset to be Queen at the *Bal Musette*."

"Yes, I did. I—I think it might be thrilling."

"Or else boring. You'll have to come with me—in costume. You'd look stunning in nothing at all. I understand it's permissible. Or possibly just flimsy lingerie. Would you have sufficient courage?"

"I—I'm afraid not. The—the Frenchmen—might not confine themselves to looking."

The phone in the front room rang. Rita hurried to answer it. Lola followed. "A *Monsieur* Plaisant to see you," Rita transmitted.

"What does he want?"

Rita repeated the query into the mouthpiece. "He says it's very personal."

"Have him come up."

TWO MINUTES LATER there was a knock at the door. Rita answered, admitting a tall, broad shouldered young Frenchman. Her heart tripped under her breast. He was the handsomest man she had seen during their week in Paris. Dark hair, dark eyes and firm lips. He smiled, doffed his hat.

"*Mademoiselle* Cartwright?" he queried.

Rita ushered him into the drawing room. Lola had stretched herself out on a brocaded *chaise longue*. Her long limbs were crossed, the negligee drawn away from her chiffon-clad legs. Graceful fingers held the garment together at the throat, low enough to bare the upper curves of her plumply mature breasts.

The young man stopped short, stared at the blonde vision on the *longue*. His cheeks pinked and sparkling lights darted from his dark pupils. Lola smiled ingratiatingly, held out her hand.

"*Monsieur* Plaisant, *bon jour.*"

He walked over, raised her hand, brushed the back of it with his lips. At the moment Lola half wished he would continue on up her bare arm. She shivered at the thought of being kissed gently by him.

"*Mademoiselle*," he whispered.

"Be seated, *Monsieur.*"

He drew up a chair. For a long moment his eyes glowed as they met hers. She became slightly impatient.

"You wished to see me about something, *Monsieur*?" Lola prompted.

THE SPELL WAS broken. He leaned forward eagerly. "*Oui, Mademoiselle*. I have come to ask you not to be zee Queen at zee *Bal Musette!*"

"But—but how do you know I intend to be?"

"Oh, *Mademoiselle*, it is all over Paris. Zee advertising and zee announcements. It says zat zee Duc de Nemours will be zee King."

Lola's brow wrinkled. "And—and may I ask your objections, *Monsieur?*"

"Only zat I object to zee exploitation of wealth and position. You know why zey are asking you to be zee Queen, do you not? It is because you are rich and important, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"But what has that to do with you?" Lola was beginning to enjoy this handsome young man's fervor. Just a bare half hour ago another Frenchman had begged her to attend the *Bal*. Now one was begging her not to attend. Paris was a mad city!

He shrugged. "Wiz me it has nothing to do, *Mademoiselle*. Only zat I object to zee system of exploitation." Out of a clear sky his hand dropped on Lola's limb, above the knee. "You will say you will not go, *Mademoiselle?*"

Something queer happened to Lola's emotional balance. Other men had touched her. But somehow the pressure of his palm did things to her. Her body tingled.

"This—this is rather sudden, *Monsieur*," she replied. "You see, I have already given my word that I would attend the *Bal Musette*. What can I do?"

HIS HAND SLID HIGHER. Lola wondered whether it was her place to stop its ascent. Good breeding said "yes" but desire said "no". It was pleasant and warming to have him touch her. The fire in his eyes added to her internal conflagration.

"You can send someone in your place, *Mademoiselle*. Zat girl who opened zee door when I came in. Zey will never know zee difference. It is a *bal masque*."

Quite unconsciously Lola dropped her hand from the front of her negligee. It fell apart slightly. The pair of rising hills of pink-peaked beauty partly uncovered drew *Monsieur Plaisant's* eyes like a magnet draws steel filings.

Lola had no objections to his passionate appraisal of her charms.

"You will do as I ask, *cherie?*" he breathed.

Lola leaned her head back. She knew she was taunting him with a frank display of dazzling white throat. But she hardly expected what happened next.

The impetuous Frenchman, without a warning or a by-your-leave, swept her into his arms and passionately kissed her lips. Lola was taken completely by surprise. The shock and the pressure of his mouth swept away all power of resistance. She tensed momentarily, then went limp against him. His mouth left hers, darted down to her throat, but suddenly reason returned to Lola. Much as his fervent caresses were thrilling her, one didn't become so intimate with a perfect stranger—even in Paris!

"*Monsieur!*" she cried. "Release me! At once!"

HE COMPLIED. His head dropped. "I am sorry, *Mademoiselle*," he murmured. "I—I ask your pardon."

Lola sat up, straightened her negligee. His embrace had played havoc with it. "You certainly do not expect me to grant your request now, do you?" she snapped, trying hard to be indignant.

"*Non, Mademoiselle.*"

Lola smiled. "But supposing I do? What will I have to take the place of the *Bal Musette?*"

His head jerked up, face beaming. "Ah, *cherie*, I will entertain you zat night! I will show you zee real Paris! I will—"

"Yes, you will probably do what you have just done!"

"*Non, Mademoiselle!* You have my promise!"

Lola felt particularly devilish. This handsome young Gaul was bright and effervescent. She had been cloistered with dull, uninteresting people all her life. Why not throw off the shackles just once? Why not sip the honey from the flower of pleasure? She could still feel the blinding pressure of his mouth on her lips.

She rose. "If you will wait a moment, *Monsieur*, I will be back."

He bowed low.

In the adjoining room Lola, breathing heavily, drew Rita into a corner. "He's marvelous, Rita!" she gasped. "Can you imagine? He embraced me! He kissed me, Rita!"

The maid blinked wonderingly. "They—they work fast, don't they?"

"Thrillingly fast! Look, Rita, would you do something for me? Would you take my place at the *Bal Musette* tomorrow night. Nobody need know. You'll be a Queen to the Duc de Nemours' King!"

"But your hair! It's blonde and mine is dark!"

"We'll get you a henna rinse. I'm thrilled with the idea of going out with him. He's so

—so daring! Heaven only knows what will happen, but it's about time something happened to me. You'll do it?"

"Yes, of course."

Lola embraced her. "You're sweet, darling. Maybe you and the Duc can get together. The sky's the limit in *Paree!*"

IT WAS THE night of the *Bal Musette*. Lola had personally supervised Rita's dressing. The maid looked stunning in the regal costume of the Queen. Her blondined hair was close enough to Lola's to escape detection. With a black domino over her eyes there could be no question.

No sooner had the carriage sent by the Committee driven off with Rita, than Rene Plaisant, in top-hat and tails, made his appearance. He waited in the drawing room of the suite while Lola donned a daring evening gown. Her slim fingers trembled as she hooked the bodice up the side.



Lola obeyed her heart. "I'm gloriously happy!" she sighed.

His eyes gleamed lustroously as she entered the drawing room. "Ah, *cherie*, you are *tres charmante!*" he rhapsodized, helping her with her velvet wrap, letting his hands linger on her bare shoulders.

A taxicab was waiting outside the hotel. Rene instructed the driver, leaned back in the rear seat. "I am taking you to a very strange place, *cherie*. It is a *rendezvous* on zee outskirts of Paris. I have arranged private entertainment."

Lola's heart pattered. "I'm sure I'll enjoy it, *Monsieur.*"

He leaned close to her. She could feel his warm breath on her throat. "I have to make up for zee *Bal*, do I not?"

"Yes, you do," she gasped excitedly.
"I promise zat I will," he breathed.

AN HOUR'S RIDE brought the taxi to a huge stone mansion surrounded by terraced gardens. Rene led Lola up the granite steps, sounded the heavy knocker on the door. A liveried footman answered, bowed low.

Lola was amazed at the sumptuousness of the place. She followed Rene and the butler through a great hall into a dimly lit room made soft by luxurious hangings and thick rugs on the floor. Rene escorted her to a low, silk-covered couch. She felt like Cleopatra as she sat down upon it. Surrounding the couch were tables bearing all manner of sweetmeats, wine and delicacies.

It was like a page from *Arabian Nights*. Soft music filled the air. The heady, intoxicating scent of violet perfume was wafted across Lola's nostrils. She leaned back, closed her eyes in dreamy contentment.

Rene, seated beside her on the couch, touched her hand gently. "Zee entertainment," he said. "It is beginning."

Now the illusion of Oriental splendor was heightened. Egyptian dancing girls floated out of nowhere, weaved and dipped in exotic steps, their honey-colored breasts bobbing under metal plates. A gorgeous Diana vaulted out of the shadows when the dancing girls had gone. She executed a daring routine.

From start to finish the entertainment was sensual in its very essence. That, and the sipping of pungent *liqueur* created emotional havoc in Lola. Tremors shot up and down her spine.

THE LIGHTS DIMMED and the entertainment came to an end. From some hidden grotto soft music played. Rene hovered over Lola, smiling down into her eyes.

"You are not missing zee *Bal, cherie?*" he whispered. Softly, gently his fingers moved up her bare arm, across her shoulder.

Lola sucked in a breath of air. No man had ever touched her that way. In America they were rough with their caresses. Rene's fingers were light and airy.

"No, not at all," she gasped. "This—this is lovely."

His voice was low . . . throbbing. "And you

are lovely also, *cherie.*" He came down beside her, crossed one arm over her shoulder.

Lola shivered with the delight of it all. The movement of his fingers over her body made her feel languorous and lethargic.

Speech was unnecessary. The only sound breaking the intense stillness was the haunting music. Rene touched his lips to the hollow of her throat.

It was like the weaving of a spell. Moment by moment the ecstasy became more intense. Quivering thrill tendrils embraced her, teased her.

Finally she twined her arms about Rene's neck. His mouth joined her lips, welded them insolubly.

TIME HAD NO meaning. Lola had no idea what time it was. It might have been midnight or dawn. It didn't matter. She was blissfully content. For once in her lifetime she had obeyed the dictates of her heart.

Rene's voice broke the silence. "You are not unhappy, *cherie?*"

Lola sighed. "Unhappy? I am gloriously happy!"

"Then you will not be mad if I tell you zat I have fooled you?"

Lola sat up. "Fooled me? What do you mean?"

He smiled. "You see, zee word *Plaisant*, it means a *jester*, one who plays jokes. Zat is not my name. I have played a joke on you."

Lola blinked. Joke? Joke? What was he talking about?

He waved his arm. "Zis castle, it is mine. I am zee Duc de Nemours!"

Lola gasped. She gasped again. "I—I don't understand!"

"I have been mad for you for a long time," he explained. "Just from your pictures in zee papers. I knew if I met you at zee *Bal Musette* zee atmosphere would not be proper, so I sent my valet instead, just as you sent your maid."

"And—and you brought me here!"

"*Oui, cherie.* At zee *Bal* zere are so many people and too many cooks spoil the broth, *n'est-ce pas?*"

Lola snuggled up to him. "You're right, darling." She kissed his cheek. "I like being a Duchess," she murmured.





Invitation To Desire

By PIERRE MONTE

CONSCIOUS of Gaston's bold eyes boring through the scantiness of her attire, Marthe Renault ineffectually attempted to draw the diaphanous negligee more closely around her lissome figure. Coldly, she asked, "Then tell me, Gaston; what is the way to win a man?"

Gaston Martier, a swarthy little Parisian, touched a finger to the tip of his waxed mustache but he didn't take his eyes away from Marthe. "The sure way," he smirked, "and the only sure way is to make him want you more than anything else in the world! Precisely as you have done to me."

He stepped forward, sought to take her in his arms, his hands clutching greedily at the scant folds of her transparent wrap. "*Je vous adore,*" he uttered hoarsely. "With you, I could forget everything else."

Marthe broke free from his grasp. "By that," she replied sarcastically, "I suppose you mean the notes of mine which you hold."

"A hundred thousand francs! Is it so little?"

Marthe didn't answer. She wasn't thinking of money, but only of the fact that his avid eyes mentally caressing the voluptuously accentuated curves of her scantily clad figure were distinctly odious to her. "*M'sieur* presumes far too much," she said at last. "Perhaps it is because I am not dressed, but you know the reason for that."

A few moments ago Marthe had been interrupted in her *boudoir* by the sound of an argument in the hall. Gaston had presented himself to the maid who had attempted to deny him entrance. Gaston had insisted. To end the quarrel, Marthe had been forced to come as quickly as possible. Having had her bath but shortly before, it was quite understandable that now she was attired in no more than the briefest of chemises beneath the filmy robe.

This lacy and exotic garment would have inspired one far more phlegmatic than Gaston

Marthe didn't mind the frank appraisal in his gaze as his eyes took in every detail of her figure.

to torrid ideas. Clinging to Marthe's willowy figure, it gave a most vivid picture of the ultimate in Parisian loveliness, covering but scarcely concealing the round and delectably firm globes of her breasts. Ending abruptly at her hips, it permitted a rapturous glimpse of supple thighs, twin ivory columns glistening beneath the transparent negligee.

GASTON HAD NEEDED no more. In a sudden burst of eloquence he had declared his undying passion for Marthe. In the very next breath, he had threatened to foreclose on the notes of hers which he held—unless she gave in. More businesslike now, but still enchanted with thoughts of the future, he continued. "We should be partners in running your shop. You to design the gowns; I to take care of the office."

"You have forgotten but one thing, *M'sieur*," Marthe reminded him. "My notes are not due for five days. Until then, I bid you *au'voir!*"

"*Mais, mon chere*—" Gaston stammered as she retreated toward the boudoir. "What else can you do?"

"Perhaps," she smiled, "I shall follow your advice; but I shall try it on someone else!"

She vanished into her boudoir and slammed shut the door. Paulette was awaiting her, still trembling with rage. "*Cochon!*" she muttered angrily. "Eef he does not go, I summon zee *gendarmes, non?*"

"I think he'll go all right," Marthe replied. "The question is, will the American arrive? I must finish dressing at once."

"*Oui, Madame*," Paulette dutifully assisted Marthe in removing the negligee, a murmur of approval on her lips as she appraised the alluring charms of her mistress' nearly nude figure. "*Zee Americain*," she whispered shyly, "is he handsome?"

Marthe laughed, "I wish I knew. To me he is just another of my creditors. His mother loaned me some money years ago to start my shop. She was one of my customers, but she's died and the son has inherited her estate."

AS SHE DRESSED, she considered Gaston's words. To win a man, make him want you more than anything else in the world. Marthe didn't want a man, least of all one she'd never seen, but neither did she want to be forced into bankruptcy. If the American was handsome, perhaps everything might work out all right after all.

At thirty-two, Marthe had known the thrill of achieving success by hard work and skilful planning, but this popularity seemed even more difficult to hold than it had been to at-

tain. Her shop was still one of the smartest on the *Rue de la Paix*; her gowns still the most luxuriously designed and the most costly; but the ledgers were being written in red ink rather than black.

For no apparent reason business had fallen to almost nothing. She was finding it difficult to collect on the bills owed her, while her own creditors were becoming more insistent. In making enlargements she had borrowed heavily and most of this money had come from Gaston. The latter had become increasingly impatient, but only today had he revealed the actual motive. He wanted her, not the money.

Marthe shuddered as she thought of his suave oily manners, his greedy eyes and grasping hands. Bankruptcy would be better than that.

Jared Stover's recent arrival in Paris was but another straw in the wind. He had written a brief note, asking if he might call and Marthe had set this hour. She had no idea how insistent he might be about the twenty thousand owed to his mother's estate but she was anxious to find out: He couldn't be any worse than Gaston.

HE WASN'T. MARTHE knew by the way Paulette came fluttering excitedly into her boudoir to announce his arrival.

"*Il est plus grand!*" she whispered. "You are ready, *Madame?*"

"*Oui, Paulette*. You may bring in the cock-tails in a few minutes."

Paulette smiled, "I have already given him one. I knew he would need it before seeing you."

Stover was just finishing it when Marthe entered the room. He sprang to his feet, came toward her. "*Bon jour*," he grinned, "but that is as far as I'll go—in French."

Somehow Marthe didn't mind the frank appraisal in his gaze as his eyes took in every detail of her figure, of those delectably rounded curves superbly enhanced by the closely cut gown. It was high necked and most respectably long, but being form fitting, it gave a decidedly piquant accent to the voluptuous rise of her bosom and the svelte contours of her hips.

"Please sit down," Marthe invited, and motioned him to a place beside her on the divan. "I suppose you're wondering about the money I owe you." She smiled as if it were the most inconsequential thing in the world.

"I wonder why you owe it to me," he answered.

"Because your mother was good enough to loan it to me years ago when I was getting

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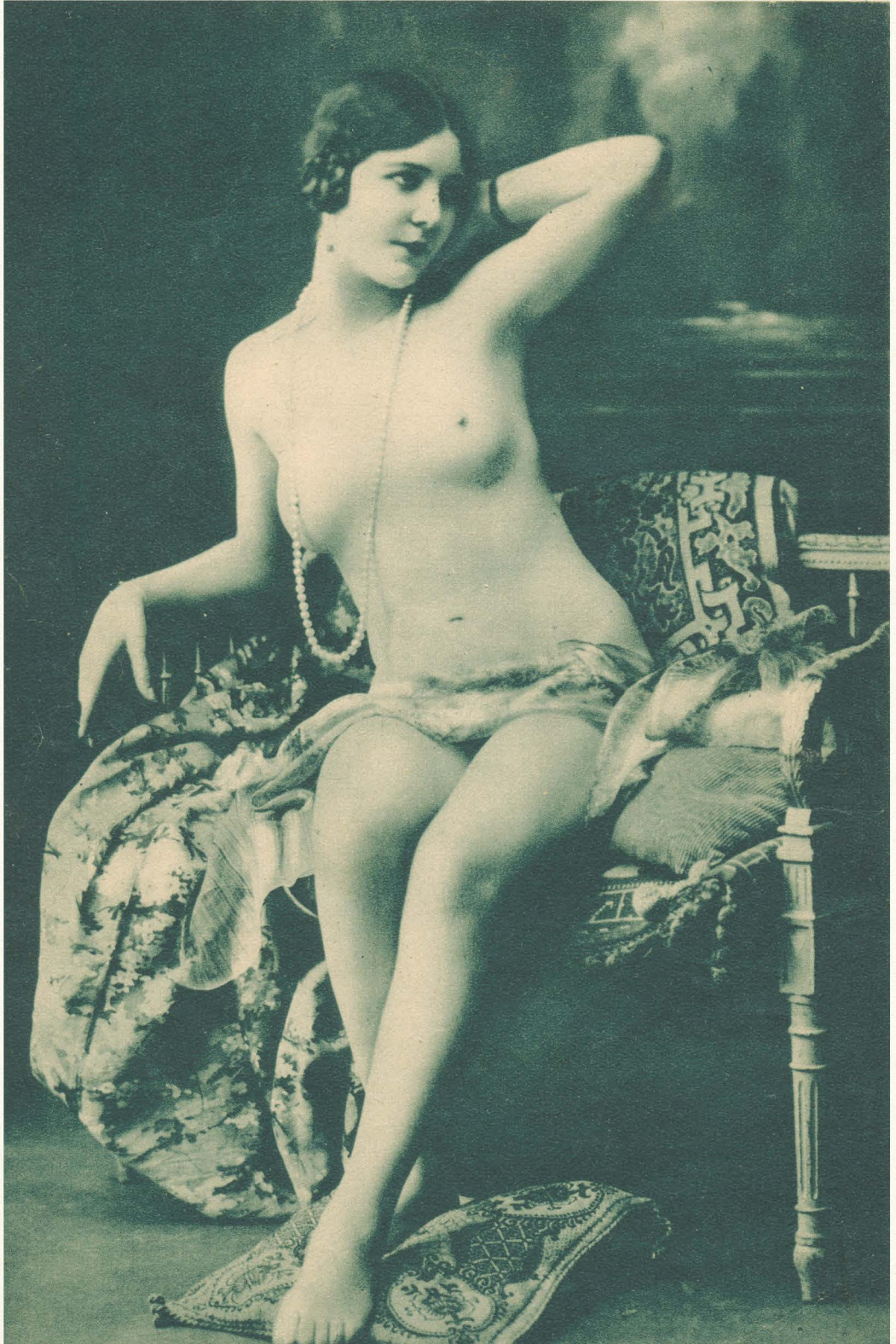


























MANASSE
WIEN







(Continued from page 24)

started. I wanted to pay it back before this but she refused. She said she considered it a good investment."

"It was," Stover agreed. "Otherwise I might never have had a chance to meet you."

"Compliments are fine, *M'sieur*, but they are not businesslike."

"I can't be businesslike with a woman," he laughed. "Especially one like you. Seriously, I understand you're not doing the business you should. I'd like to help you."

"And have you had some experience?"

"Not with dresses, but with women. Please don't misunderstand," he added hastily.

"*Mais non!*" Marthe smiled. "Let me ring for another cocktail and we shall discuss this further."

AT THE END of half an hour, this particular rendezvous was ended, but Marthe had arranged for it to begin again on the following day. Jared Stover, at her invitation, was coming to spend the weekend at Marthe's villa in the country. As he took his departure, Marthe found herself the possessor of more conflicting emotions than she had ever believed existed. Wellsprings of desires long buried came frothing to the surface, demanding that she fling caution to the winds and take what she wanted. It was most puzzling of all to find that she didn't know just what she really did want!

His eyes, even impersonally upon her, had stirred her pulses and had sent the blood rushing recklessly through her veins. His gaze upon the luscious firmness beneath the thin fabric of her gown, had caused her to quiver restlessly with unfilled longing. That night as she disrobed, she was surprised to find herself standing before the mirror, as she slowly slipped off her chemise. It clung for an instant to the pliant curve of her hips, revealing her nearly nude, the jutting mounds of her bosom unconfined by anything at all, sentinels of desire only too ready to yield to a lover's caress.

Paulette's arrival with the *robe de nuit* brought an end to this reverie and Marthe, suddenly jarred back to reality went to bed chiding herself for being a fool. Love was something you found in novels. The feeling she had was no more than an infatuation, a passing desire; but she had no intention of letting it pass unnoticed!

Jared called for her at the shop the next afternoon and they set out in Marthe's car for the little villa she rented during the summer, some thirty kilos from town. It was far off the main highway, secluded from all neighboring places and chaperoned only by an aged

caretaker and his wife who occupied one wing the year round.

IT WAS TWILIGHT when they arrived and quite dark when they rejoined each other on the terrace for a cocktail as a prelude to the dinner cooked and served by the housekeeper.

"So far," Jared smiled, "our jaunt has been a big success. We haven't mentioned business at all. Cigarette?"

Over the flame of the match he held for her, Marthe saw a look in his eyes that sent a little shiver down her spine. She stirred restlessly as he allowed his arm to lightly encircle her waist. "*M'sieur* is not so headstrong on business as most Americans," she answered.

He laughed, "It all depends on the sort of business you mean."

As they dined opposite each other she was quite conscious of his frank gaze upon the revealed loveliness of her bosom, scarcely covered by the low cut of her evening gown. It gave a bold hint as to what was coming, though Marthe knew she had no one but herself to blame. The desire in his eyes was there at her invitation. In the beginning, that was what she had wanted; now, a score of little doubts were assailing her.

Leaving the dining room for the drawing room, Jared suddenly caught her hand and drew her to him. "You have misjudged me, *mademoiselle*. I am not so stolid as you think."

Marthe felt herself being drawn swiftly into his ardent embrace, felt his lips bruising hers in a tempestuous kiss, while his hands traveled the delectable curves of her figure.

"*M'sieur!*" she cried out sharply, although the wild throbbing of her heart belied the tone of her voice. "If you are not careful, you will prove more than that."

Jared released her, a puzzled expression on his face. "Sorry, Marthe," he murmured apologetically. "I didn't mean anything."

MARTHE REGAINED HER composure and smiled forgivingly. "*Voilà!* To me, *M'sieur*, a kiss must mean something to be enjoyed." And to herself she wondered why, if it had not meant anything, it was so difficult to calm the mad racing of her pulse and the tingling sensation she had felt in her breasts under his impulsive caress.

"Perhaps," Jared went on evenly, "it would be best if we discussed the receivership."

"Receivership?" Marthe replied weakly. "What is that?"

"Very simple," he explained. "You owe a lot more than you can pay. Your creditors

take over the business. If they make a go of it, then they're paid off and the shop is returned to you. If not—" He shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"Run the shop without me? *C'est impossible, M'sieur!*"

"What other way is there?" Jared asked bluntly. "Of course if you could persuade a few of the people you owe to give you a little more time, bankruptcy might not be necessary."

Marthe began to get the idea and chided herself for not having gotten it long before this. Stover was no different than the rest. He knew what he wanted. Marthe knew, too, what she wanted. If it could be avoided in any way at all, she had no intention of losing her shop.

It was not by accident that one shoulder strap of her gown fell askew as she leaned closer to Jared and piquantly drew her legs up beneath her, Turkish fashion, on the divan. She was quite aware that the strap of her gown, falling off one shoulder permitted his interested eyes a devastating glimpse of gleaming white skin that for a moment dazzled him.

"Ah, *M'sieur*," Marthe murmured, "it is all so clear when you explain it. If you were looking after my business, I might really enjoy myself."

"I have always thought that there were other pursuits than business for women," Jared said. His hand in hers dropped casually to her knee, that her carelessly crossed legs revealed. Rolled stockings and the absence of garters gave free access to this entrancing area of satin smooth skin, and Marthe sensed a strange new thrill as Jared's caresses became bolder.

"*M'sieur* has an answer for everything, *n'est-ce pas?*"

JARED DREW HER into his arms. "Isn't it easier," he replied, his lips seeking hers, "to sometimes take things for granted?"

Marthe was prepared for anything but the warm and delightfully dizzy sensation which enveloped her as she yielded her tenuous lips to his passionate embrace. Her heart nearly stopped dead still, then raced on more wildly than ever as his caresses explored tenderly.

"I love you, Marthe," he uttered hoarsely. "I'd do anything in the world if I could only make you feel the same way toward me."

"*Mon cher*," she whispered, "why not take your own advice and take a little for granted?"

Jared needed no second command. Impatient fingers became busy suddenly and passionate kisses burned hot and cold on the voluptuously firm contours of Marthe's entrancing beauty, while desirous arms drew her into a tempestu-

ously torrid embrace. Marthe's eyes were closed when Jared picked her up and started for the other room.

IT WAS SHORTLY before noon the next day when she slowly ascended the stairway of her apartment building in town and let herself into her rooms. Despair clouded her eyes and lines of worry furrowed her brow.

"*Madame!*" Paulette cried out, instantly aware that something was wrong. "What has happened? *Dites-mois!*"

Marthe smiled wanly. "Nothing serious. We must pack at once; we're taking the first boat for New York."

"*Mon Dieu!*" Paulette gasped. "But the shop?"

Marthe shrugged her shoulders, "At least that's one thing I don't have to worry about. I don't own it any more. We're taking what money we have and leaving town. In New York, I'll make a new start."

"*Mais Madame, je ne comprends pas. Certainement, l'Americain,—*"

"Never mind him," Marthe broke in severely. "Start packing at once. *Vite!*"

"*Oui, Madame,*" the maid replied hesitantly and slowly departed.

Marthe walked languidly into her boudoir and dejectedly began to shed her clothes. The smartly tailored suit fell in a crumpled mass to the floor; an intriguing slip was kicked into one corner, a pair of shoes into another. Unsnapping her garters, she was brought to a halt by an insistent pounding at the outer door to the apartment. She waited, motionless, and heard Paulette going to answer it.

"*Non, M'sieur*; it is not possible to see *Madame* now. *Non, non! Restez la—*"

"Sorry lady," came a grim masculine voice, "but I can't be stopped. Out of my way!"

And Jared wasn't stopped until he rushed into Marthe's boudoir and was suddenly confronted by the vision of her statuesque figure nearly *au naturel* before him.

"Marthe!" he gasped, then added, "you little fool!"

She nodded, "I am calling myself a big one if it gives you much pleasure. Why are you here?"

"Because I got your note, the letter you left for me when you skipped out this morning."

"I told you that the business was yours. That I could never pay the notes," Marthe protested.

"I don't want the darned shop," Jared exploded. "I want you. I didn't know how much I loved you until this morning when I found

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A Very Honest Man

THE tent was square, of brilliantly striped canvas, and it was firmly anchored to the white sand with taut guy-ropes. The flaps in front were folded back, and since the beach was, for the moment, deserted, and the front of the tent faced the English Channel, only a few wheeling sea gulls knew what was going on inside the tent. And they seemed far more interested in fish.

Lizette, tall, dark and slender, reclined full length on a wicker couch. Her hands were folded behind her dark, curly head and the swimming suit she was wearing made no pretense at covering her adequately.

It was of white silk, and it showed to per-

"You have the loveliest body I have ever seen," he whispered.

fection the full curves of her vibrant body and brought out the depth of her golden tan. There was no back to the swimming suit, and the neckline was low enough to permit an unobstructed view of the upper part of her large, firm breasts. Max Voison, in trunks and nothing else, was duly impressed. He was sitting on the edge of the couch and he was gazing longingly into Lizette's brown eyes.

"*Ma foi,*" he said for the tenth time that morning and with the same reverence, "you have the loveliest body I've ever seen, *petite.*"

Lizette smiled languidly. "Have you seen so many?" she asked.

Max shrugged his wide, leather-colored shoulders. "I am a man of the world," he answered simply. He leaned forward. "If you will only say yes," he continued, "those days will have gone forever."

"I have said yes," Lizette said. "Quite often."

Max shook his head. "I want more than you have given me," he said. "I want you to marry me."



By
FRANC
ARNETTE

Lizette gazed at him. "I can't make up my mind," she said.

MAX SEPARATED HER hands and raised one of them to his lips. Then he allowed it to drop. He said, "Is it because you're rich and I'm only a Coast Guard officer? Is that the reason?"

"You know that has nothing to do with it,

cheri," Lizette said. "You know," she resumed, "I thought that after I'd let you make love to me, that would tell the story. But it didn't. I still don't know how much I care about you."

"Am I not a good lover?" Max wanted to know.

"I know of no better one," Lizette said. She raised herself on the couch and came a little closer to Max. He dropped a brawny arm to her naked shoulders and drew her to him. A series of wild thrills coursed through Lizette's body and she wished she could make up her mind how she felt about him.

Certainly, his physical appeal was greater than that of any other man she had ever known. Every time he touched her she commenced to tremble and when he kissed her . . .

Max held her close to him, and when she dropped her dark little head to his shoulder, he ran his fingers through the thick, curly hair and Lizette purred. Max ran a hand along her smooth upper arm and onto her bare shoulder. He could feel the quivering of her figure and he wondered if she could hear the hammering of his heart.

"Max," whispered Lizette, "in moments like this . . . then I know I love you. Afterwards, well I . . ."

"Too bad all our moments can't be like this," Max sighed. "But one is only human, after all."

Nothing was said after that. All was still save the gentle splash of the small waves on the white French sand. In the distance, they could hear the laughter of some playing children; but the sounds might have been coming from another world.

Max kissed her. Lizette stiffened as his lips made their contact; then her brown and naked arms stole about his neck and she held him close against her. He could feel the outline of her bosom against him, and Lizette groaned a little when he dropped one of his hands to her bare knee. As his fingers trailed a scorching course up silky skin, she dug her pointed fingernails into the back of his neck and held on. Gently Max pushed her back among the pillows.

Her hands fell limply to her sides, and her eyes drooped shut. Lizette's lips parted and she showed her white, regular teeth.

"Ah!" said Max softly, and Lizette sighed a little.

The sea gulls still seemed interested in fish.

TWO HOURS LATER, Lizette gave Max the slip. That was the funny part of the whole thing. When she was in the mood for love, nobody filled the bill better than Max. But

when the mood had passed, he rather bored her. That was why she had sent him to one of the small stores lining the cliffs behind the tent to get beer. No sooner had Max left the tent, than Lizette was on her feet. She had dashed into the water. A dozen strong strokes had taken her far out of the surf. And now she was in trouble.

She had forgotten all about it until it was too late. She had swum too far out and had been caught in the center of the most vicious tide on the coast. In vain, getting a little panicky, she had tried to swim out of it. Useless. She had tried to swim against it. Worse than useless. So here she was, just floating, being carried at about six miles an hour towards the forbidding headland in the distance.

It was a good thing for Lizette that the water was warm. She had nothing to do but keep afloat. The tide carried her much faster than she could have swum. Even so, it seemed an age before she was carried round the headland. Finally, however, it rolled away behind her, and Lizette noticed a decided slackening in the pull of the water. She took a few tentative strokes toward the shore and found the going easy.

Ten minutes later, breathless and very much frightened, Lizette dropped her bare feet to the gleaming sand of a small cove. She waded out of the water and looked about her.

On both sides and before her she was confronted by high slippery cliffs. Apparently, the only way out of the cove was via the sea route and she did not care for any more of that, thank you very much. Wringing the water out of her abbreviated pants as she went, she started up the beach.

DOUBTFULLY, HER WET head on one side, she appraised the face of the cliff. A monkey might have been able to scale it; but not she. Hopefully, she walked along the beach, still looking for some way of escape. And that was how she found it.

A cave. Deep, and with a large, jagged entrance. Not without trepidation, Lizette entered the cave. It was deeper than she had thought, and it looked very dark at the far end. Lizette plucked up her courage and walked towards the gloomy end of the cave.

It got darker the further she went, and the further she went, the more frightened she became. However, it might lead to some means of escape, so she trudged bravely on.

The passage turned and twisted, and Lizette realized with a shock that she was rapidly getting lost. She turned a sudden corner and came

face to face with a scene which took her breath away.

She had stepped into a large, high-roofed cave. Beneath her feet was packed sand as hard as stone. The cave was softly lighted with discreet electric lamps, there were a few good rugs on the floor, and it was beautifully furnished. Sitting in an armchair, clad in slacks and a white shirt, sat a young man. He was reading and had not noticed Lizette.

She stood there. Spellbound. Gazing at him. He was tall and broad shouldered, his hair was blond and straight and he had a fine, sensitive face.

"*Pardonnez-moi . . .*" began Lizette weakly. The young man jumped to his feet and Lizette found herself looking into the yawning barrel of a Luger automatic.

"What're you doing here?" snapped the young man.

"What're you doing here?" snapped the young man.

"I . . . I . . . oh, for goodness' sake put that gun away! I'm nervous enough as it is."

THE YOUNG MAN continued to hold the gun in the general direction of Lizette's delightful little tummy. "Are you a spy?" he demanded.

"Spy? *Mon Dieu! Regardez.* I went swimming from the beach adjoining this and got caught in the tide. The tide brought me here. I didn't want to come."

The gun wavered for a moment. The man's eyes flickered; then he retrained the gun on Lizette's attractive anatomy.

"What's your name?" the young man demanded.

"Lizette Limon. I'm spending my vacation on the next beach. My father's very rich."



"I don't give a damn how rich your father is," said the young man. He eyed her narrowly. "Listen," he said, "I don't want to hold this gun on you forever. Answer me, on your word of honor. Are you or are you not an agent for the customs people?"

"I give you my word of honor that I'm not," Lizette said.

The young man dropped the gun into his hip pocket and came towards her. He towered above her, staring fiercely into her eyes. "If I find that you've lied to me, I'll go from one end of the earth to the other to find you. When I do" He left the sentence unfinished. He continued to glare at her.

Lizette said. "You're too nice looking to be a dangerous character. Do you live here?" With a wave of her bare arm, she indicated the cave.

"At times."

Lizette said, "I suppose you haven't anything I could put on, have you? This bathing suit's very wet, and it's none too warm in here."

"I'll see if I can find you something." He sounded a little more cordial. Lizette watched him as he rummaged in an old trunk in a corner. After a while, he brought to light a pair of rather tattered white duck trousers and a shirt. He brought them to her. "They're clean," he said. Lizette took them and glanced round.

"Where shall I get into them?" she asked.

"This is the only room in the establishment," said the man. "I won't promise not to look either. I'd only cheat and break my word."

LIZETTE SMILED. SHE liked his frankness. She was not a prude, and she could see no reason why a good looking young man should not look at her good looking young body if he felt like it. She walked to a dim corner and turned her back. The young man lighted a cigarette and leaned against the rocky wall.

Lizette untied the halter round her neck and slipped down the top of the bathing suit. Then she slid the wet panties down over her sweeping hips and stepped out of them. The young man's eyes glittered.

"Turn round," he ordered.

Lizette laughed. "I scarcely know you," she said.

"Nevertheless"

"Don't be idiotic," Lizette said. "Of course I won't turn around."

She slipped into the shirt and it fell almost to her knees. The young man shook his head disappointedly. He did not move any closer to her as she drew the trousers over her legs and adjusted them. They had to be turned up

about six inches at the cuff. Then she faced him.

"How you like?" she demanded, her dark little head pertly on one side.

"You're the prettiest girl I've ever seen," said the young man.

Lizette came towards him slowly. In front of him, she stopped and gazed up at him. "What's your name?" she asked.

"Egon Arle."

"Why do you live here?"

Egon did not answer at once; but he continued to gaze at her. He seemed to make up his mind. "If you're fooling me, you know already, and if you're not, you're honest and won't give me away. I'm the agent for a band of smugglers."

LIZETTE'S EYES WIDENED. "Smugglers! *Mon Dieu!* I thought they went out in the nineteenth century."

Egon laughed. "*Pas du tout.* We're more active than ever."

"What do you smuggle and where do you smuggle it to?"

"To England. To escape the customs. Perfume, silk, brandy . . . all sorts of things."

"Stored here?"

"Right under your feet."

Lizette commenced to walk about the large cave. "You would have to be a crook, wouldn't you?" she said, thoughtfully. "And I was getting to like you so damned much."

"I don't do it from choice," Egon said. "I'm trying to finance something I've invented without being robbed. In a few months, I'll have enough money."

Lizette faced him. "How can I get out of here?" she asked.

"You can't," Egon said simply. "The only way out is by the sea. Tomorrow, the boys are arriving to load a cargo for England. You can go with them. I'll come along and you'll have to be dressed as a man. They're a tough bunch."

"You mean . . . I'll have to stay all night?"

"I mean just that. And if you think I'm going to take advantage of the situation, you flatter yourself. After all . . . I would have to be a crook. Now, suppose you start being a cook?"

Lizette came to him again. She looked very pretty in the odd outfit, and Egon wanted to kiss her. In a soft voice, she said, "I'm sorry I said you were a crook."

"That's perfectly all right," Egon said generously. "Over there," he pointed, "you'll find everything you want. There's an electric range

behind that screen. That humming you hear's the generator. I have a radio, too. Let's eat."

Lizette turned out to be a very good cook and they ate in style. The meal was washed down with ice-cold champagne, and by the time they had finished, both were feeling in fine fettle and well disposed towards each other. The electric clock told them that eve-

use that money, believe me. Get me out of this game."

Then they noticed that, although not dancing, they were still clinging to each other. There seemed about one thing to do in such a situation and, both being opportunists, they did it. They kissed, and the thrill that raced

The young man's eyes glittered. "Turn around," he said.



ning was well advanced when they finally left the table. Egon turned on the radio.

THEY DANCED. CLOSE together, Lizette's head resting comfortably on Egon's broad chest. He could feel the outline of firm curves against him, and she was deliberately pressing close to him. They enjoyed the dance.

The music was interrupted to bring them a bulletin. It told of the mysterious disappearance of *Mlle. Lizette Limon* and about the offer of a substantial reward for anyone knowing her whereabouts.

Egon grinned bitterly. "Too bad," he said. "If I were an honest man, I could turn you in and there'd be no questions asked. I could

through each was something neither had ever experienced before. They broke apart and gazed a little guiltily at each other.

"Spending the night together isn't going to be so easy," Egon said.

"I was thinking the same thing," Lizette admitted. They sat down and Egon helped them both to brandy. They sipped in silence.

"Well," Egon said presently. He got up and switched off the radio. There were two

large couches and onto these he put sheets, pillow cases and blankets. He turned to Lizette. "Just take off your shoes," he said.

Lizette obeyed and padded across the hard sand. She got into the improvised bed and allowed Egon to tuck her in. "Good night," she whispered.

Egon bent over her. "One of these days, if I ever become an honest man, I'm going to ask you an important question. Good night." He kissed her lightly and turned out the lights. Removing only his own shoes, he got into bed and lay still.

EGON WAS ASLEEP, when he felt his shoulder being tugged. He opened his eyes. In the gleam of the one burning lamp, he saw Lizette bending over him.

"I'm scared," she said. "The wind, the water . . . it's all so strange."

Egon laughed. "Go back to bed," he said. "You'll get used to it."

"I don't want to," Lizette said.

She sat down and leaned towards him. She looked lovely in the soft light. Lovely, young and desirable. Egon sat up and put his arms about her. Lizette slipped her soft, bare-to-the-elbow arms about his neck and pressed her lips to his.

"I don't want to be so far away from you," she whispered. "I love you. You might as well know it."

Egon's grip on her tightened. "I love you," he said.

She pressed her quivering lips against his, and her hold on his neck tightened convulsively. They strained against each other, and Lizette only sighed a little when she felt the gentle encroachment of Egon's hands. Her covered flesh thrilled at the touch of his hands. Lizette went limp in his arms and trembled.

It was deadly still in the cave. Nothing was

heard but the sound of breathing. Egon had become "an honest man" very quickly.

THE FOLLOWING NIGHT was well advanced when the raking cruiser put to sea from the little cove. It was loaded to the gunwales and Lizette was on board. Dressed in oilskins and sou'wester, nobody would have known her. She stood up forward with Egon, not touching him, the wind in her face.

It happened like lightning. A brilliant flash of light and the cruiser was impaled on the powerful beam of a probing searchlight. A red flash, a high whine and the roar of an exploding shell. The cruiser hove-to.

C'est le fin," said Egon philosophically. "Customs men."

It was, and they were headed by Max Voisin. The smugglers were rounded up and stood guard over. Lizette looked very small but not at all frightened. Max started to make his little speech. Lizette stepped out of line and pulled off her sou'wester. Her dark hair gleamed in the torchlight. Max staggered back as though struck.

"What is the meaning of this?" he asked.

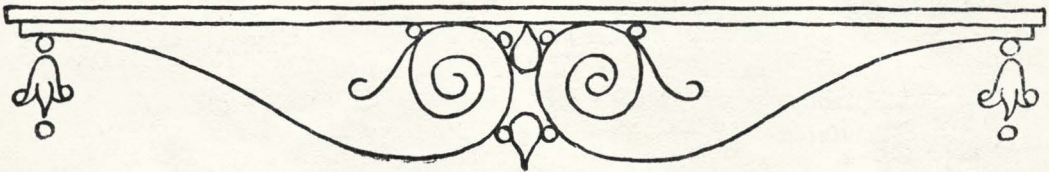
"It means this," Lizette said. "I don't know about the rest of these men; but this one," she pulled the puzzled Egon from the ranks, "saved my life. I went swimming yesterday when you went for the beer, got caught in the tide and was drifting helplessly out to sea, when this brave young man rescued me. We were finally taken from a sea-locked cove by these men."

"Are you telling me the truth?"

Lizette faced the hardbitten smugglers. "Have you men ever seen either of us before?" she asked.

They were sportsmen. "*Jamais!*" they answered in one voice.

Lizette turned triumphantly back to Max. "M. Arle," she said, and there was a wicked little twinkle in her eye, "is a very honest man."



ALL ALIKE

By CARY MORAN

STRANGELY enough Gary Frainne went to Paris determined to be different. There was to be no foolishness during the twelve months he had allotted himself, nothing but work, work, work! Instead of renting a studio in the Montparnasse or even on the Left Bank below Pont Royal, he kept bravely away from his devil-may-care young compatriots and settled on the top floor of an old building near

Frainne who drank Broadway dry, the play-boy of the western world! I ask him where to go to see night life and he says he doesn't know! Think of it! Gary Frainne!"

Gary Frainne smiled and worked on at his easel. The nude figure on the canvas was shaped cunningly, alluringly, made for the fascination of man. He winked at Mignon who posed atop the dais.



He was conscious of wonder—and something else—in her eyes.

the Pantheon, tucked away in the Place de la Contrescarpe.

The cafes knew him little after dark, the gaudy night clubs not at all. All day, as long as the north light streamed into his studio he worked and painted and painted and worked. When Eve Jennings and her carefree brother Bob dug him up on their first trip to Paris they could hardly believe their eyes.

"And this," said Eve sadly, "is the Gary

Bob Jennings grunted. His little eyes were wide, his lips pursed as he, too, watched the model. He smacked his lips in approval, nodded his head wisely and inwardly gloated over the array of curves, the bold pointed breasts, the small waist, the flaring hips.

"And I don't blame him," he grinned. "No wonder he's wrapped up in his work." He winked.

And it was only after they were gone the

next day, headed on a motor tour of Brittany that Gary Frainne knew that he hadn't been so different after all! For Frainne realized with a little pang of fear that he was in love with his model, that he wanted her for his own, worse than he had ever wanted anything in his life!

HE COULD HARDLY wait for her arrival in the mornings when she stormed up the narrow stairs and into the study to fling a saucy hat to a chair, to pat his cheek and trot for the screen in the corner. Then as she chattered merrily, garments would appear one at a time atop the screen, first the dress, then the wispy panties, then stockings one at a time. Then would come the thump-thump of her little shoes on the floor and she would patter out, a thin scarf about her shoulders, to mount the dais and assume the customary pose.

Morning after morning he tried to work, and morning after morning, failed. The north light limned her clear features, flowing smoothly over the shapely bosom so motionless, across the slim waist, the tapering thighs, the finely chiseled ankles. Blood throbbled hotly in his veins. He thought of Charlie Moran up on Montparnasse, whose model lived with him, of Art Melchor farther down on the Left Bank who boasted of his exploits with the *demimondaines* of the boulevards.

He cleared his throat, put the easel aside and walked to her. Her eyes widened, her brows went up. "*Cherie*," he began, fumbling at the folds of the drape to cover his embarrassment, "do you live alone?"

He was conscious of puzzled wonder in her eyes—wonder and something else. He was conscious of a warmth, conscious of pink tinted breasts, now suddenly rising and falling deeply. Before she could answer his hand inadvertently touched the smooth skin of her leg and the rest happened too fast for words. She was in his arms, pressing her sweet softness close to him, her eyes smouldering as her lips raised for his kiss.

There was no more painting that day. A robber of a taximan hauled them laughing and kissing unashamed to the Bois de Boulogne where they ate a hamper lunch beneath a hoary chestnut tree and drank from the same chilled bottle of *Pouilly Fume!* Afterward he laid his head in her lap and slept the enchanted sleep of a man in love while she brushed his hair from his face and kissed him softly from time to time.

LATE THAT NIGHT their cab drew up before the tumbledown *maison* where she lived. He

kissed her and said, "Should I come up and help you pack or shall I wait?"

She was still for a moment and her voice was strained when she answered. "*Non, non, cheri*, do not ask that of me! You see—I cannot!"

And she ran into the dark courtyard before he could stop her. Hurt and disappointed he drove back to his studio to toss through a night of dreams.

The next morning she greeted him as if nothing at all had happened, her eyes demure and downcast. He made up his palette, glared at her as she mounted the dais and set savagely to work. But everything went wrong. The gamboge was a sickly saffron, the sepia a speckled cinnamon. It was no use. He turned grimly away from the easel, walked purposefully toward her. Just as purposefully he took her in his arms, pressed his lips against her awaiting ones and found them as passionate, as freely given as they were the day before!

Presently, when he was able, he spoke. "I love you, Mignon, you know I love you!"

She strained closer to him. "And I love you, *cheri!*"

More kisses, more embraces, wild, passionate. "Then you'll move in with me, Mignon? We'll live together like all the rest and we'll be happy, just you and I!"

She shook her head slowly. "*Non*, Garee, I cannot! Do not ask me that!"

"Then," his voice was hurt as he drew away. "there's someone else? Another man?"

Again that slow shake of her raven head. She pushed him away as if unsatisfied or afraid of herself. Blind with disappointment and anger he seized his hat, stopped at the door long enough to tell her she was through for the day.

THE REST OF THE afternoon he sat on a terrace at a little marble topped table and drank *pernod* until the waiter hovered in alarm at the great and growing stack of saucers before the young American.

There after much search Eve Jennings and her hapless brother, the fat Bob, found him, weeping into his drink and trying to tell a gold-toothed woman about his blighted romance. They got rid of her with some little trouble and listened sympathetically to his tale of thwarted love.

It was Eve with the shrewd eyes and calculating brain who made the suggestion. Jealousy, she told him, was the proper keynote.

So it was Eve, clad in a clinging, scanty negligee that opened the studio door for the surprised Mignon the next morning. As the little

model entered her eyes grew wide at the sight of the American girl with her white, white skin, so much of which was plainly revealed by the transparent garment.

All morning long while Gary splashed at his easel Eve moved softly about, patting him on the arm as she passed, kissing him lightly on the cheek as she handed him drinks. Mignon's eyes grew narrower, her lips more compressed.

She kissed him and laughed. "Men are all alike," she said.



Bob showed up after lunch, drunkenly noisy. When Eve and Mignon disappeared into the next room he swaggered to Gary and said, "My friend, the trouble with you is your technique. You are now looking at a man who

has never failed with a French dame! Be aggressive! Be masterful!"

GARY, DESPONDENT, and with a head like a kite answered. "Nuts! I suppose you could get over with her!"

"I suppose I could," said Bob quite calmly

and dug in his pocket. "There, my friend, is one C note in American money that says so. Give me time and an opportunity, that's all. French dames are all alike!"

Angrily Gary covered the bet. Just as angrily he burst into the adjoining room and told Mignon coldly that he wanted to speak to Eve. After the model left he sank down on a

divan and buried his face in his hands.

"Jealousy is no good," he said moodily and reached for the bottle. "I'll never get her to listen to me."

Eve patted his shoulder, her voice low and caressing. "What of it, Gary? Why don't you give up this foolishness? French girls are all alike! She's simply playing you along. You need someone of your own kind, someone who understands you. Like—well, like me!"

Shrewd Eve. For a long time she had had her eye on the well known Frainne fortune! Gary looked at her in amazement. The negligee gaped open exposing the inner slopes of generous mounds of trembling flesh, white skin revealed nearly to her slim waist. As she sank down beside him she doubled one long leg beneath her, the folds of the negligee falling aside to half expose the long curve from hip to ankle.

Gary gulped. She leaned toward him, lips tremulous. The wine warmed his blood, the nearness of her was intoxicating. He forgot the bet, forgot his love for Mignon. Her lips were possessive, her body even more so. He failed to hear the door open, failed to see the bleak, brown eyes, overfilled with pain and anguish that peered in. Then the door closed softly.

AFTERWARD, GARY stalked slowly from the room, ashamed of Eve, more ashamed of himself. His startled eyes encompassed a flurry of chiffon topping the fat lap of a cherubic Bob Jennings who sat in a leather chair near the window.

Coldly Gary spoke. "That will be all for today, Mignon. Please go."

Head held high, Mignon arose, donned her little *beret* without looking at Gary. As she opened the door Bob stumbled to his feet. "Just a moment, *cherie*; I'll see you home."

"She'll get there all right," Gary said bitterly.

Her voice broke in as she smiled at Bob. "*Mais oui, certainement, mon ami!*"

Grinning mockingly Bob picked up the money from the table and followed her.

From the bedroom door, Eve, all radiant, said softly. "French girls are all alike, Gary. You're much better off now."

He turned to glare at her, saw the light behind her accenting every soft curve of her rounded body. The challenge in her eyes, the allure of her matured figure, the mockery in her words. He walked purposefully toward her.

THAT EVENING HE sat alone in his darkened studio and cursed himself. About him on the

floor lay crumpled tubes of paint, the remains of two palettes, broken brushes, slashed canvases. In the corner his bags, packed and all ready.

"How," he groaned, "did I ever get myself into this mess? Engaged to Eve Jennings, giving up art—and Mignon!" Surely it couldn't be! He cursed himself, cursed Eve, cursed Bob, cursed art and Mignon. If she had only been good to him, if she had shared his studio, this wouldn't have happened! Damn all French girls!

Later he paced the narrow, twisting streets, still bitter and vindictive. He contrasted the slim, olive beauty of Mignon with the cool white maturity of Eve and Eve suffered by the comparison. One thing he was sure of; it was all Mignon's fault. If she had been human—

Before a tiny *auberge* in the Rue Thouin he found a vacant table and sat down to drown his sorrows. Steadily the stack of saucers grew in front of him and steadily his inward grief piled up—exactly like the saucers.

Suddenly he started. There on the sidewalk, not twenty feet away was Mignon! She was walking slowly, shoulders stooped, eyes on the sidewalk, and walking beside her, arm about those drooping shoulders was a man! They spoke no word but passed on into the shadows soundlessly.

So! She was like all French girls after all! This was the reason she couldn't share his studio, and she had sworn there was no other man! He sprang to his feet, called loudly for *l'addition* and set off stealthily after the two. Rage burned in his heart like a beacon. He followed them while they turned into the familiar street where crouched Mignon's tumble-down *maison*. The two entered.

FOR A LONG time he stood in the shadows and watched. He saw the light come upstairs, raged jealously as the shade was half drawn.

Blindly, mad with jealousy he tramped up the stairs, hammered on the door. Mignon opened it. He brushed her aside, rushed in. Seated in a chair near the window was the man. He stared bleakly at Gary Frainne.

"I'm going to kill you," said Frainne slowly and started forward.

Mignon screamed. "No! No! You do not understand!"

"Who is it?" asked the man gently, softly and Gary paused. Those eyes that stared at him were bleak, almost colorless. The man was blind!

"This is my brother, Jacques," said Mignon. "Jacques this is Garee, whom I have told you about."

(Please turn to page 61)

To Have And To Hold

By MICHEL VILLON

HER name was Arlette Mimas, and she was almost twenty years of age. As she stood there on the dirty stairs leading to M. Bandon's office, she looked about fourteen. That was on account of the clothes she was wearing.

She was very pretty in a youthful way. Her hair was not fashionably done and she was using no make-up. Her dress was well-cut, drab in color and designed to hide every vestige of her figure. The dress was ably assisted by a tight bandeau and an ominous girdle. No sign of hips, no sign of bosom. Which was a great pity, since Arlette was generously endowed in both directions.

With Arlette Mimas on the dirty stairs was Tomaso Trico. It was quite obvious that Arlette was in love with Tomaso, and it was equally obvious that he felt the same way about her.

In a hushed whisper, Arlette said, "Give me the license, Tomaso."

Tomaso produced the document from the inside pocket of his coat. Sadly, he handed it to Arlette.

"*Petite*," he said sorrowfully, "I'm afraid it isn't going to do any good."

Arlette took the piece of paper with a determined expression. In a firm tone of voice, she said, "If it does no good, then you must wrong me, Tomaso."

Tomaso took her in his arms and held her corsetted body close to him. Tenderly, he said, "*Jamais!* That, Arlette, I shall never do. Unless I win you in marriage, then I don't win you at all."

Arlette ran her long fingers through the boy's hair. "You'll do as I say," she said. "I am a child no longer and M. Bandon is going to find that out. Wait for me here, Tomaso. I won't keep you waiting long."

They kissed. A kiss that seemed to have no end. Their hearts were pounding, and Arlette could feel the rise and fall of her bosom within its satin prison. They broke apart. Breathlessly, she raced up the stairs and out of sight. Tomaso sat down on the stairs and lighted a cigarette with fingers that shook.

M. BANDON DID not keep her waiting. In less than three minutes she was ushered into the great man's small untidy office. He was standing behind his old fashioned desk. His bald

head glistened in the summer sun and he was beaming like a well-meaning father.

"*Mon enfant*," he said cordially. "And what may I have the pleasure of doing for you?"

Arlette took up a militant stand in the center of the floor. "M. Bandon," she said, "I might just as well come to the point. Tomaso Trico is in love with me, and I am in love with Tomaso Trico."

A cloud drifted across the beatific face of M. Bandon. "I had heard rumors," he admitted.

Arlette tossed the marriage license onto the desk. "*Voila!*" she said.

M. Bandon picked it up and studied it. His face slowly reddened, and the hands which held the innocent piece of paper commenced to tremble. Finally he dropped it as though it were a live wire.

"I forbid you to do anything of the kind," he said.

"And I'm not going to pay any attention to what you say," Arlette answered defiantly.

M. Bandon controlled himself with great difficulty. "Arlette," he said, "before I remind you of the contract I hold with you, allow me to jog your memory. When you came under my management you were an inexperienced chorus girl of sixteen. I've nurtured you, I've taught you everything you know about the theatre. I've built you into a sort of myth. A nymph. Your public thinks of you as a little, unspoiled, unsophisticated girl. If you married, you would lose all your glamour for them."

"I marry Tomaso in the play, don't I?" Arlette countered.

"That's a different thing," M. Bandon told her. "The audience knows you are only acting."

"According to the critics, the ceremony is so realistically done they really believed we were getting married."

"A momentary reaction and very flattering," said M. Bandon. "And now let me remind you about the contract. If you read it, you'll find that it specifically states that you are to remain single until you're twenty-five."

ARLETTE ADVANCED TOWARDS the desk. "And what am I supposed to do in the meantime?"

M. Bandon shrugged his shoulders. "What you like. But be discreet about it."

"M. Bandon," said Arlette with admirable

control, "Tomaso and I have discussed this thing and he is not willing that we should do it that way. He insists on marrying me, and I am going to marry him."

M. Bandon took the license and almost threw it into her face. Arlette clutched it and held it tightly. "Then you automatically break the contract and that's very foolish."

"I made that contract when I was very young. I did not know what I was doing."

M. Bandon smiled. "You're still very young, my dear," he said. He gazed at her critically. "Tiens," he said, "you still have the same figure you had when you came to me at sixteen. No more mature."

"You don't say so!" stormed Arlette. "And whose fault is that, I'd like to know? Yours. Making me wear armor. So I have no figure, *hein?*"



Tomaso walked to the back of her chair and gazed down on her beauty.

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Her eyes blazing, she tore off the unbecoming hat and rumbled her dark hair. Before the startled M. Bandon knew what she was about, Arlette commenced to rip at the row of buttons down the front of the drab dress. She literally tore her arms out of it and tossed it to the back of a chair. M. Bandon raised his hands.

"Stop!" he cried. "This must not go on!"

"That's what you say," snorted Arlette. M. Bandon covered his eyes as she started to work on the girdle. Somehow, she managed to pry herself out of it without removing her panties.

PANTING, HER BREASTS rising and falling, Arlette stormed about the room, her hips swaying. There was even a subtle movement to her strong white thighs. She was breathing heavily through her nose. M. Bandon still had his eyes covered.

"*Regardez!*" Arlette ordered. M. Bandon refused to look. Arlette went behind his desk and pushed him into a chair. She climbed into his lap and tore his hands away from his eyes. Deliberately, she placed one of his pudgy hands on her knee. M. Bandon gulped.

"So I have no figure, *hein?* I'm not mature, *hein?* Look, you old ape!"

M. Bandon looked. His eyes began to glow and his face got a little redder. Arlette wisely took the flush for the danger signal and slipped to the floor.

M. Bandon, his bashfulness a thing of the past, frankly watched her while she got again into her torturing clothes. Finally, he said,

"Nevertheless, Arlette, I must hold you to the contract. I hate to do it; but I'm, first and foremost, a business man."

Still clutching the license, Arlette walked briskly to the door.

"I am going to marry Tomaso Trico," she said. "I've been doing it on the stage every night for six months, and now I'm going to do it in real life."

"You'll regret it to the end of your days. It breaks a contract with the most powerful theatrical manager in France."

Arlette shrugged her full shoulders. "So be it," she said. Then she left.

TOMASO JUMPED TO his feet when he heard her footsteps on the stairs. She said nothing when she reached him, but he could tell by the expression on her angry face what had happened. He took her arm and they left the building. They sat down at an iron table at a sidewalk cafe.

"*Cochon!*" exploded Arlette.

"I knew what he'd say," Tomaso said,

Arlette turned to him. Her deep, lovely eyes on his, she said, "I don't care a damn about the contract, Tomaso. Marry me now. This very minute."

Tomaso shook his head sadly. "I know life a little better than you, Arlette. A few years from now, supposing something happened and you and I were not getting on well together, you'd throw into my face the fact that I made you give up your career for me."

"I'd do nothing of the kind," Arlette said. "How dare you say such a thing! And what makes you think we wouldn't be getting on well together?"

"We're not supermen," Tomaso told her. "We're only human."

That started it, and they had several more bocks and a terrific row. Arlette finally jumped to her feet and left the table. Tomaso started to follow her, then he suddenly remembered one of the things she had said at the height of the argument and he had another drink instead.

WHEN TOMASO TAPPED on Arlette's dressing room door that night, he was probably the most miserable man in the whole city of Paris. She called to him to enter, and enter he did.

Arlette was sitting before the mirror in a loosely fitting kimono and slippers. Tomaso gulped. She did not look at all unhappy. She was smiling and there was a twinkle in her eye.

"Hello," she said. "Sit down, *mon cher.*"

Tomaso walked to the back of her chair and dropped his hands to her shoulders. Deliberately, Arlette allowed the kimono to gape a little, and Tomaso was afforded a glimpse of white gleaming skin. Arlette gazed at him in the mirror.

"I'm sorry," Tomaso said. "Please forgive me."

Arlette showed very white teeth in a brilliant smile. "It was as much my fault as yours," she said generously. "If you'll forgive me, I'll forgive you."

Tomaso swept her out of the chair and into his arms. Arlette clung to him, and he could feel the outline of every curve of her body through the material of the kimono.

When Arlette pressed her moist, soft lips to his, she was breathing heavily and she was trembling in his arms.

Her eyes were starry. Tomaso held her close. In his nostrils was the subtle perfume of her hair. Beneath his touch the silky texture of her bare, round arms. Then those same arms were about his neck and he was being kissed as he

had never been kissed before. Not even by Arlette.

It was Arlette who urged them over to the battered couch. It was Arlette who shoved them onto it. She came into his arms and hers were about his neck. With a tremendous effort of will, he managed to keep his hands off of her. He knew that once his itching palms came into contact with that soft, resilient flesh, he was lost; along with the ideals he cherished for the future of himself and Arlette.

IT WAS ARLETTE who took his hand and put it about her waist. It was Arlette who held his hand captive there.

Tomaso flushed scarlet and . . . the piping call of the assistant stage manager calling the fifteen minutes saved the day. The spell was broken. Arlette got to her feet and pulled the kimono more tightly about her.

She gazed passionately at Tomaso. "Tonight," she said darkly, "after the show, you and I, *mon ami*, are going to have a date."

Tomaso made for the door. He was grinning uncomfortably. "I won't see you after the show," he said.

"*Eh bien*," Arlette said. "We shall see what we shall see."

She sat down in front of the mirror and continued her interrupted make-up.

EVERYTHING WENT PERFECTLY until the final scene in which Tomaso and Arlette went through the mock marriage ceremony. The cast knew something was wrong the minute the *padre* entered. He was not the actor who usually played the part. But it was too late to do anything about it, and the scene progressed as per schedule.

The curtain fell. Bows were taken. Then a frantic stage manager dashed out onto the stage. Consternation reigned. Arlette was the only person who kept her wits.

To the stage manager, to Tomaso and to the company at large, she said, "Allow me to introduce *Padre Igor Borg*. He is a genuine, *bona fide padre* and Tomaso Trico and I are legally and securely married. Take me to my room, husband," she concluded. Midst a deep silence, Tomaso conducted his new wife to her dressing room.

He shut the door. "Are you telling the truth, Arlette?" he asked.

Arlette flung herself into his arms. "The truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth," she said. She kissed him passionately and clung to him. Triumphant, she said, "Didn't I tell you we'd conclude our little scene after the show?"

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"But how did you manage it?"

"Poof! Easy. I went to *Padre Borg* and told him the whole story. He was doubtful at first, then sympathetic. He agreed to it. Then I went to *Pierre Lovelle* who acted the part in the play. He refused to have anything to do with it. Therefore, I paid two *apaches* fifty francs apiece to take care of him for the evening. *Pierre's* quite safe. Probably philosophically drinking cognac somewhere."

Tomaso laughed and held her tighter. "You certainly wanted to get married, didn't you?"

"Since there seemed no other way to get to know you. Shall we do something now? Or shall we wait?"

THEY WERE FORCED to wait for, at that moment the door burst open and *M. Bandon*, the stage manager and another man rushed into the room. *M. Bandon* took the center of the floor. His face was purple and his soft flesh was shaking with agitation.

"You . . . you . . . you . . ." He glared first at *Arlette*, then at *Tomaso*.

"Have you come for the contract?" asked *Arlette* sweetly.

"I most certainly have."

"Wait just a minute." *Arlette* slipped out of *Tomaso's* arms and went to her trunk. After a bit of foraging, she returned with the required document. She handed it to the fuming *Bandon*. He took it and glared at it. Then the third man stepped forward.

"Hurry up and destroy it, *Bandon*," he said.

Bandon eyed him sourly. "What business is it of yours?" he wanted to know.

"I want to sign *Mme. Mimas*, or rather *Mme. Trico* myself."

"I don't know who you are," *M. Bandon* said.

"*Paul Harris* of New York," said *Mr. Harris* quietly.

"Why should you want to sign her up?" asked *M. Bandon* suspiciously.

Mr. Harris shrugged his shoulders. "Should I tell you my business?"

"Hah!" barked the stage manager seeing the light. "He sees the marvelous publicity value of the thing, *M. Bandon*. Just the true story, unvarnished. True love finding a way over obstacles."

M. Bandon looked at the faces about him. He hesitated. The idea seemed to take hold. *Harris* glared at the stage manager. *M. Bandon* handed the contract back to *Arlette*.

"Keep it," he said.

Arlette shoved it aside. "I don't want it," she said haughtily. "I could never be happy

under the management of a man who did not approve of the man I was in love with and the man to whom I was married."

"Go ahead, Bandon," urged Mr. Harris. "You know you can't get work out of people who aren't happy working for you. Tear the contract up. I approve of the young lady's choice."

THAT SETTLED IT. M. Bandon forced the contract on Arlette and at the same time he forced a smile. Blandly, he said,

"We can all make mistakes, Arlette. Now I see it a little differently, I do agree with what you've done. And to prove it . . . what would you like for a wedding present?"

"A check for ten thousand francs and a percentage of the play we do together in the Fall," Arlette said promptly.

M. Bandon staggered back. Mr. Harris said, "Tear up the contract, Bandon." M. Bandon glared at him, then he reached for his check-book and started to write.

Not long afterwards, behind the locked door of the dressing room, the resumption of a very interesting scene was in full and hearty progress.

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(Conclusion)

YOU'RE not as beautiful as I thought, come to think of it—not with your hair untidy and your face sunburned—and your clothes in rags! I guess I didn't realize how much of the charm that lured me was—due to an expert maid and a lot of fancy bottles and jars!" he said quietly—and before she could gather her scattered forces to answer him, he had walked out of the room and closed the door behind him.

She had the day to herself to get over her seething rage. By night, she had formulated her plan. When he came in, armed with another string of fish as indication of the way he had spent his day, he found her clad in a rather amazing garment that had been contrived simply by cutting off her evening gown just above her knees. She had set the table for dinner and had opened half a dozen cans of the food on the kitchen shelves and since the only cooking necessary had been to heat them, she had managed, with the fish that he cooked, to offer a fairly presentable dinner.

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Afterwards, they did the dishes together and Peter charitably forbore to comment on her clumsiness at the task.

If he noticed that the straps of her ruined gown managed to slip down over her shoulders and reveal creamy flesh, more often than was strictly necessary he made no comment. But before they had finished in the kitchen, she knew that he was not as calm as he pretended to be. In the living room, the waves of scent from the orange blossoms beat about them, doing strange things to their pulses, stirring them to a new urgency before which their defenses went inevitably down.

Suddenly, Shirley was in Peter's arms, and crushed so close against him that on the soft, yet resilient satin of her body she felt the hard, uneven thudding of his heart as his pulses raced. His hands were caressing her. His mouth was clinging to hers, pleading dumbly, with a new humility for the gift she had to give.

Here was where, in the plan Shirley had formulated, she was to draw back from his arms, and give a light, melodious laugh before she pranced off alone to her bedroom. But something seemed to have gone wrong with that plan. She didn't even think of it as he held her close, and kissed her. As his hands explored all the loveliness of her delightful body. She throbbed with an emotion that met his own. Everything was forgotten save the scent of the orange blossoms, the magic of this night in each other's arms, their beautiful isolation from all the rest of the world. . . .

IN THE MORNING, Shirley awoke and stretched, yawning a little, luxurious as a cream-fed cat. She slid out of bed, donned the scanty panties and what was left of the evening frock. In the living room, she found Peter who was standing at the window, staring out into the scrub-palmetto that stretched away down to the lake.

"I'm—sorry, Shirley," he told her quietly, his face grave and stern. "I—didn't mean to lose my head. I meant only to—give you a little scare. I felt you had it coming to you! But—you were too much for me. I'll—do anything, of course, that you will let me do in the way of making amends—though I know of course, that there's really nothing I can do—"

Shirley laughed and Peter stared at her. She was radiant, lovelier than he had ever seen her in the year he had known and adored her. Her body was like an instrument superbly and gloriously made for love—

"There is something you can do to make

amends, Peter—you can marry me, if you don't mind!" she told him sweetly.

Peter stared at her as though quite sure one of them had lost his mind.

"Marry you?" he gasped. "But—Shirley—I've thirty-five hundred dollars a year and a job—you said you wanted a rich man—"

"I said a lot of fool things," admitted Shirley promptly. "But that was before I knew—how glorious just—love could be! And now that I have learned—oh, Peter, Peter—please—marry me right away—we've—lost an awful lot of time!"

And with that she swayed into his arms and somehow the frail straps of her wrecked evening gown failed of their alleged duty and Peter's adoring eyes were gladdened by it as his arms closed about the loveliest girl in the world. And then time stood still, and there was no sound in the room save their little murmurs of love—and all about them the scent of the orange blossoms that added their perfection to a moment already superb.

All Alike

(Continued from page 52)

Suddenly she began to cry and just as suddenly Gary's arm was about her shaking shoulders. Jacques seemed to sense what was going on. Presently he broke the silence.

"Life is very short for lover's quarrels, *mes enfants!* Better to love when you are able, for there are those of us who envy your youth. There is a little park not far distant and I can sit by the window and await you."

So presently Gary Frainne sat miserably on a bench beside Mignon in that shadowed little park. "How can you forgive me," he groaned. "But how could I know you looked through the door?"

She kissed him and laughed. "Men, men," she said, "they are all alike! And always will be simply—men."

"But Bob Jennings!" He sat bolt upright. He remembered what he had seen, remembered the bet.

She shrugged. "I was very angry, Garee, and very hurt. And women, perhaps they too will always be simply—women!"

FOR A MOMENT he sat silent then again enfolded her in his arms. Presently he leaped to his feet, seized her arm.

"Where—" she began.

"A taxi, Mignon, we've got to get a taxi. I've got to telephone or send a message to Eve!"

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She stiffened suddenly.

"I've got to tell her it's all off, thank goodness! I've got to tell her that French girls aren't all alike and that I can't marry her because I already have a wife!"

Her gasp was horrified but he kissed her happily and drew her close. "You see, *cherie*, by the time she finds us I'll be married! To you!"

Invitation To Desire

(Continued from page 42)

you had checked out. Last night you played me for a sucker. This morning you discovered you hadn't been faking—that you really loved me. Isn't that so?"

Marthe nodded tearfully: "I thought you would hate me because of last night."

Jared stepped toward her, crushing her scantily clad body in his arms. "I want to prove how wrong you are," he said softly, his hand closing possessively around her, "on one condition."

"And what is that?" Marthe asked, yielding her lips to his.

"That you don't take anything for granted!"

Somehow Marthe did have presence of mind enough to speak to Paulette who still stood in the doorway.

"Finish packing, Paulette," she ordered, "but remember I'm going on a honeymoon—not a business trip!"

Detained In Paris

(Continued from page 17)

full blown bosom rose and fell with her increased breath. The blood began to tumble through her veins.

"But to make sure these bets are laid on the race," cautioned Andy, his eyes gleaming, "we will have to prevent those thugs from seeing us. They're watching the house which means we'll have to stay in this room until evening."

Roxanne gave him a look that is known the world over—but especially is that look to be valued in Paris.

"We can spend ze day, *mon coeur*, rehearsing for a night in ze Park!"

But Roxanne knew when she entered his arms again that it was going to be more than a rehearsal.

Million Dollar Kiss

(Continued from page 12)

Antoinette sobbed. "Wiz two men!"
"Two men?"

"*Oui, Monsieur.* It is horrible!"

Footsteps sounded in the hall. Jack stiffened. Knuckles rapped at the door. Jack slid behind the couch. "Open the door," he rasped, "but don't try to escape or I'll shoot you!"

Antoinette came off the couch, answered the summons. For a moment the person at the door was obscured by her body. When she stepped aside Jack almost swallowed his tongue in amazement. There, slouching into the room, tired and bedraggled, was Marie!

"Marie!" he called.

The girl's head snapped back. Her dark eyes widened. Her hand leaped to her throat.

"I am ready, *Monsieur*," she murmured.

Jack came from behind the couch. "Ready for what?"

"To go to zee prison. All day I have tried to get zee money."

"What money?"

Antoinette spoke up. "Now I can tell you, *Monsieur*. I did not know you were zee American from whom zee diamonds were stolen. Poor Marie was forced by two Apaches to go into your room and take zee diamonds. When you made love to her she realized that you were zee only man she could ever adore. Zee apaches would not sell zee diamonds for less zan 10,000 francs. My brother and Marie and myself have been trying to get zee money to buy zem back and give zem back to you."

Jack dropped the gun on the bed. "You poor kids!" he gasped. "You really didn't have to bother. They didn't get the right diamonds. They got a duplicate set of paste diamonds I always carry with me to stall off thieves." He grinned. "They aren't even worth 10,000 francs."

ANTOINETTE KNEW enough to turn her back. Jack eased his arms about Marie's waist, drew her close to him. The pleasantly familiar warmth of her body thrilled him.

"You were ready to do anything to get those diamonds back, weren't you, *petite*?" he murmured.

Marie looked up. "Kiss me," she whispered.

Jack had no fears now. He placed his lips over her moist mouth. Even if they had taken the real stones this would have almost been worth the loss. And there was more to come, he knew. That first million dollar kiss would develop into billion dollar ecstasy!

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Monte Carlo Widow

(Continued from page 7)

urge of her awakened response. He saw her eyes, deep wells of light, unveiled at last so he might read their wondrous message, their invitation.

"Monsieur!"

But there was no stopping Dunham. He reveled in her perfumed hair, in the alabaster expanse of skin and the sensuous, tempting lips that at last grew warm and clung in kisses that seared him like glowing embers.

"One night!" he whispered hoarsely. "One night to remember forever!"

Her rounded arms coiled and linked about his neck.

"Take it, *monsieur!*" she breathed.

It was nearly noon when Dunham awoke the following day. He propped himself up on one arm and looked out at the golden sun-glare painting the balcony with yellow radiance. He smiled slowly, his mind going back through the hours. Then he stretched, yawned and picked up the telephone beside the bed.

"Desk clerk? Connect me with Madame Fevrier's suite."

A COUGH CAME over the wire.

"I am sorry, *monsieur.* Madame Fevrier is no longer here."

Dunham's eyes opened wider.

"What? No longer here? You must be mistaken. Where has she gone?"

"To jail, *m'sieur,*" the clerk said nonchalantly. "She has been under suspicion for a long time. This morning Inspector Dupre made the arrest."

Dunham's mouth opened. It took him a long time to form the question.

"What was she arrested for?" He laughed hollowly. "There has probably been a serious mistake."

The wire hummed.

"No mistake, *m'sieur.* The Monte Carlo widow has confessed. She is an accomplice of *Monsieur* Bernard Fuller, the English crook. He very cleverly left his loot in your room for her to pick up in the early morning hours. *Monsieur,* she must have entered your chamber last night while you were asleep and retrieved Fuller's latest plunder. You see? She left nothing!"

Dunham put the phone down.

"Took everything," he said to himself, "left nothing—but a memory." Then he yawned again luxuriously. "Wonder how Cora is," he thought. "I'll have to drop her a line today."

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