

Adam



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BILL DODGE, city reporter for The Midland News, was on his way to meet a French girl at the Hotel Edgewood. He checked the photographed news release in his coat pocket. It came from the publicity office of the Sapphire publishers and read in part:

"Literary critics will honor the remarkable young French genius, Mademoiselle Madelon Chatenay, author of Europe's current best seller, 'Chere Ami', at the Hotel Edgewood's Embassy room this afternoon at 4:30 . . ."

He wondered if she would have an affected snobbishness of so many Europeans that Americans have no savoir faire; that American men and women were dolts.

He hoped not. He had read her book and liked it so well he volunteered to review it in the Midland News' Sunday supplement. "Chere Ami" was a tale of theatre personages involved in anguished and complicated love affairs. Bill found it hard to believe that the author was only nineteen. How could one so young write so tenderly and perceptively? Lord, he figured, she must have been not more than eighteen when she started her novel.

"I was beginning to think you weren't going to get here, Bill."

derstand certain overtones of the various loves that most American critics missed."

"See Frank, that proves how well I understand the Gallic mind and spirit."

Frank laughed, and introduced Bill to the young Mademoiselle. Instantly, Bill was pleased that he had pleased her with his review. She had a small figure, with a miniature pertness. And though she looked undeniably young—even younger than her nineteen years—her facial features were sensual: two very black eyes, brows that were stylishly tapered like darts, and very red lips. She seemed animated by the cocktail reception.

"Mademoiselle, this is Bill Dodge of The Midland News—the smart one who wrote your best American review."

"Enchante, Monsieur." She extended her hand palm down. Bill gave it a firm grip.

Bill moved in close, wanting to know this young woman better. He, a 34-year-old bachelor, generally did not like women unless they had some sharply outstanding characteristic he found admirable. He enjoyed dating and the intriguing play and counterplay that he used to steer women into his bedroom. But he couldn't sleep with just any woman; he had to have

no ordinary interview.

She continued, "Now you cannot ask me about love, for example. I have not known nor observed American men in love."

Bill grinned. The people around them, absorbed in other conversations were not paying any attention to them. Bill, more and more, wanted to meet her on his home grounds.

He said, "But how about our food? It seemed to me that your characters were forever talking about food and restaurants."

"Ah, Monsieur Dodge," she replied, shaking her head, "some fine restaurants in Boston, New York and Philadelphia, but everywhere it is so much not nice." She looked regretfully at a sardine canape she held in her hand.

"May I cook for you?"

"You are joking, no?"

"No, let me take you to my apartment, and I will make for you alone *Poulet aux Cepes*."

"Cepes, you can get these in Midland?"

"I have these shipped to me from New York."

"Ah, monsieur. You interest me very much already. But would it not disturb your wife?"

"I am not married, Mademoiselle."

"Sorry, Bill, I have to interrupt you." Frank Hobart had someone else by the elbow to meet the young authoress. She and Bill exchanged brief glances of despair.

Bill said quickly, "I'll be at the Midland News." She nodded. Bill left.

He had been at his desk for an hour and a half, writing on newsprint half-sheets the several assignments he had that day. He was proofing his story on the Mademoiselle, based largely on a press sheet Frank Hobart prepared, when the telephone rang.

"Dodge speaking."

"Monsieur Dodge, we have finished here and I am famished."

Bill was delighted, since he half-expected her to get tied up in some Sapphire business. Evidently to a French woman alone in America, a gourmet's kitchen must look like an oasis in a desert of generally second-rate American restaurants.

"I will pick you up at the hotel in ten minutes." His thoughts at the moment were concentrated more on the recipe than the mademoiselle. He enjoyed thinking about the preparation of good food. He would have to pick up some chicken at the supermarket. She might like shopping with him amidst typically American huge neat piles of canned goods.

By the time they reached his apartment, Bill and she felt very comfortable with each other. She had been briefly caught in the entry gate at the

The young French authoress piqued his national pride

youth without innocence

by K. ROBERT HOWARD

"Hello, Frank. You know that my tastes in food and women owe first loyalty to the French." Bill was speaking to Frank Hobart, a former reporter on The Midland News who now handled publicity and public relations for Sapphire Publishers.

Frank picked a drink off a passing tray, handed it to Bill, and said, "Follow me," as the two made their way through a tightly packed chattering cocktail mob who came less to honor the French author than to exchange gossip, swirl free whiskey, and eat the dreary hors d'oeuvres and canapes. Bill always avoided the food.

Frank continued, "Bill, I showed your review to the Mademoiselle, and she was delighted. It seemed you un-

derstand certain overtones of the fair lady in bed.

"Mademoiselle, I understand that you have already visited New York and the Atlantic Seaboard before this Midland visit. How do you like us?"

"What can I say, Monsieur Dodge, everything is so enormous." Her accent had a piquant upswing on the final syllable of each word.

"How about some general comparisons between this country and France?"

"I must be very careful in my answer, no?" she said archly. She and Bill had been pressed closer together by the growing crowd in the room. In the several moments of this interview, Bill and she were weighing each other, each sensing that this would be

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market and didn't know what to do. Bill rescued her quickly, and the two had a private joke and an experience to share.

"Oh, Bill, this apartment is charming." She examined pieces of primitive sculpture which Bill had collected.

"Madelon, come here to the kitchen and keep me company while I fix the chicken."

"I did not touch a speck of food after you left, so you must make for me something very good," said Madelon.

"Your confidence flatters me. It won't take too long. Here, drink this."

"What is it?"

"A vodka gimlet."

"I still ask, what is it?"

Bill laughed. "It's vodka wedded in a tasty marriage to West Indian lime juice."

"Tres delicieux, mais oui!"

"When you're through with that, there is more in the shaker." Bill started cutting the chicken on the kitchen board.

"Oh I am so happy I meet you," said Madelon as she suddenly hugged Bill.

Bill, surprised, said, "Hey, I've got a knife in my hand." He had never experienced such an immediate intimate feeling with any girl. She was so completely natural. He felt it proper for him to lay down his knife and kiss her. Her arms tightened around his neck, so he kissed her again, deeply.

"Ah, Bill, you are the first American I have kissed. You are almost as good as a Frenchman."

"Almost?" Bill exploded. "Now listen young lady," Bill picked up his knife and shook it, "you are insulting

my national as well as personal pride when you say that Frenchmen are better than Americans."

Then they both laughed, united in stronger feeling of an intimate private relationship. Bill finished cutting the chicken and sauteed the pieces in the pan. Madelon watched admiringly as he added the dry white wine and brown stock.

"You can cut the French bread," ordered Bill, as he put together a green salad.

"Yes, Bill."

Bill set the dishes on a low table in the living room, and piled up cushions on the floor for seating.

"Oh Bill, what a magnificent idea, eating on the floor, mais oui!"

The dinner was perfect.

They scattered more cushions on the floor, both feeling very content as they reclined and sipped *cafe noir*.

"Madelon, do you mind if I ask you a very personal question?"

"Ask me, and let me decide whether I shall answer."

"How could you write about love with such knowledge in your book. You're so young!"

She smiled, put down her demitasse, turned over on her side, and pressed her body against Bill's.

She closed her eyes when Bill united his lips with hers and parted them with his tongue. His tongue caressed her lips, her teeth. Then he sucked slightly on either side of her lips.

"What a pleasant kiss, Bill."

"Shall I turn out the lights?"

"No, I like the lights on."

She lay on her back to stare contemplatively with enormous eyes at the ceiling, and closed them as Bill gently passed his hand over her breasts. Her nostrils flared and she began to breathe heavily. She made no move when Bill began to unbutton her.

His hand wandered over her dress; her body squirmed under his touches.

Then she sat up, clasped Bill and placed her body atop his; one of her thighs burning between his legs. Her kisses seemed like quick hot brands. Her fingers were all over Bill in a network of convulsive shudders.

She was going too fast for Bill. He stopped her. "Here, let me undress you," Bill offered. He finished the

unbuttoning, and helped her slip off the dress. She wore no bra, just a thin full length undergarment. She bent and picked it up at the hem and lifted it up over her head. She held it in front of her, while she stood completely naked before Bill. She smiled, then threw the skirt in Bill's face. It was warm with the heat of her body and smelled pleasantly from the perfume of her skin.

She had a slightly mocking expression on her face. Her body appeared so young, so narrow of hip. She walked up to Bill, and stood against him. "You're almost as good," she taunted.

He took a firm grasp of the back of her neck and thrust his tongue so deeply into her mouth that she gasped with surprise. He leaned his naked leg on her thighs; they felt warm. She slipped down to the soft cushions on the floor. While his hands worked deftly on all parts of her body, he moved his tongue along her neck, her ears, her arms. Her breath came more rapidly through open lips and she murmured unintelligible French expressions. A moaning writhing woman had an inflaming effect upon Bill.

He trembled. With all his strength he strained himself against her. She had now the feverish look of love-thirsty women whose wild bodies seem consumed by an ever palpitating ardor. Her hands too were engaged in a prodigious activity of touches . . .

* * *

Bill put on his shorts and heated up some more *cafe noirs*. He placed the cups on the floor beside her and sat down.

Madelon recited,

"How fair is thy love

How good are thy caresses!

How much better than wine!

Thine odor pleases me better than all spices;

Thy lips drop as the honeycomb;
Honey and milk are under my tongue."

Bill asked, "Original?"

"No, my dear, Pierre Louys."

He liked her breasts; they were not ponderously large, rather smallish warm sweet breasts.

She followed his gaze and confessed, "American men seem to prefer such enormous breasts that I should feel inadequate.

"No, they're just right, so properly firm," Bill said encouragingly.

"I like these. When I am alone I play with them, I give them pleasure. I want to kiss them. Kiss them, my dear. Kiss them for me."

Bill did, and a new surge of energy pulsed through Madelon's body. Her quick transfiguration astonished him. She threw her head back over the cushion, and her hair streamed out. There was the fury of a goddess in her body; her whole being was transported in great convulsive movements. Her fingers scratched Bill's back.

"Vite, vite," she begged.

When did she discover the true wonders of love? She said at fifteen! Lord, thought Bill, with her unquenchable fires she is going to have material for a full set of encyclopedias

before she's twenty-one.

On another day Bill looked back to this night with amazement. Her arching shivering body knew no limits. Bill could not refuse; he wanted to make her take back the world "almost." He tried out every variation he knew, and in turn learned a few things from this most *knowledged* French girl. After the fourth time, they left the floor and went to his bedroom to continue. Finally, exhausted, he fell asleep. He thought she would too; she gave out a long sob, tore at the bed sheets, and her burning face fell on his neck and she lay quiet.

In the morning Bill awakened and reached across to clasp her hand and join the battle again to make her take back the word "almost."

She had left. Bill looked at his watch; it was 8. She must have gotten up very early. Bill felt chagrined that he slept so soundly that he didn't hear her, and worse because he had not made her reconsider her invidious comparison with French men. She did not leave a note. What the hell, Bill said to himself critically, did you expect an ode to Bill Dodge for accomplishments in love?

How dare he compare himself to the men in her novel! They probably actually existed, and she probably drained them all.

He called the hotel and found that she had checked out.

In the newsroom of *The Midland*, he stopped to look over the morning assignments on the city editor's desk.

"Oh, Bill, Frank Hobart was by with some pictures taken at the French girl's reception, and he left an envelope for you," said the editor.

Bill noticed his name written in a precise continental script. Madelon. He tore open the envelope, read the note and smiled. He said to the puzzled city editor, "Stars and Stripes Forever!"

He tucked the note into his pocket and decided he would save it. Madelon, the Mademoiselle Chatenay had written: "You were fine even in sleep. Yes, I tried you, but you didn't know it. What greater test can there be than that. You, Monsieur Bill, are not 'almost'; you are *'better'*." And may I add, my dearest, you are definitely to be included in my next book. You will be *the* American, such a great and strong American."

Bill had no memory of that final test of fire, but he felt that that was irrelevant and accepted the accolade like a proud American, and walked to his desk, whistling, "Stars and Stripes Forever."