

Chanson du Konallis

A Story by EMILY JONES

She was exquisite.

The gown was a plain white sheath. The body beneath, one long shimmering river of movement; restrained and delicate. The arms reached up, in the mood of the song, and pulled the emotion of the taut melody to her finger tips. The voice, in Gallic tremulo, gave out at once passion and indifference. Monmartre haunted the room.

Mon coeur a de la peine
C'est qu'il pense a Paris
Au vieus Paris sur Seine.

Konnie watched the singer and listened to the words. She translated effortlessly in her mind: "When my heart is in pain - Paris..." Paris indeed. Men had made Paris a woman in the mind. Indeed. She fingered her drink, the narrow frosted glass with a puff of fizz crowning it and the cherry floating atop. The cherry looked like her nails; red and gleaming even in the dark room. "It's because of Paris, Old Paris on the Seine." Paris the woman. She lifted her glass and drank the coldness of the cocktail. Paul was all but gone. The thing he had for these synthetic chanteuses. It was all he ever needed; one night like this in an intimate club with some American girl up there singing in one of those cultivated French singing voices and accents. Then, he was set for months. They moved him. She did not look at him. She knew how he looked. His eyes rather full of life at the moment, his lips moist and full of pleasure. His hand, finely manicured and beautiful, lying perhaps on the white cloth of the table, toying no doubt with a mixing stick. When they got home, he would speak French to her until he went to sleep . . .

M'a donne les plus grandes joies
Et vers lui je reviens sans cesse
C'es l'ami que l'on n'oublie pas...

Konnie looked up to the singer again. She was a marvelous looking creature at that. Paul had talked for weeks about their coming to see this one. Konnie studied her. Yes - this one was exceptional. The voice - the voice really knew what it was doing. The rises and thrusts were honest and well placed and the tongue seemed to love the French. That was good. French had come early in her life and she always hated that strained thing that Americans could do to it; only the English were worse. But this girl - she took another drink and let the words turn into English in her head again: "Has given me the deepest joys...I always come back to her...She is the friend one can never forget..."

"Bon!" she found herself saying almost aloud to the girl singing from the middle of the night club floor, "Bon!" Her eyes fixed themselves on the singer's face. It was all planes. Marvelous planes. The cheek bones high; the full lips sensuous beyond description; and the eyes like dark slanted slashes across the face...The eyes! Konnie shifted in her seat and looked quickly to the table. What a strange moment. It had happened before in life. On the street; parties; in classes in school years back; the thing of being surrounded by many people and suddenly finding another girl's or woman's eyes, commanding one, holding one's own. It was extraordinary. Pleasant, she thought. No, not pleasant. Terrifying because of the kind of pleasure it brought. Yes - oddly enough the most supreme kind of pleasure. She smiled to herself. It was, aside from whatever else, an amusing play on the sense of English words. Pleasant was wrong to describe it, but pleasure, ah!

"Isn't she quite marvelous, darling?" Paul had lain his hand on Konnie's.

"C'est bon!" she said and lifted her glass in a salute to him. He laughed that special laugh of his to show that he knew she was a little tipsy, and that he was delighted about it. He longed, she knew, for an extension of any aspect of her rare frivolity in their everyday life. She couldn't help him. He had taken pains to marry Konalia Martin-Whitside of the Washington Martin-Whitsides, and what he got, he got! Reserve. Buckets

and buckets of reserve. Her family had grown reserve in Virginia for generations and she was a true harvest. She smiled at her imagery. Occasionally she had pangs about various unfortunate things, including her marriage, but she kept them rare. She had a simple design for life which made rarity of thought quite possible and desirable. It was, of course, that life was a rather simple but enduring bore. Moreover, she had everything splendidly under control; she was able to prohibit at will whatever unpleasant or rebellious thoughts that occurred to her. She had cultivated that as her family had cultivated reserve.

She looked again to the lovely one in the center of the floor who was singing something a little more lively. Her arms had come down from the air and were moving about in front of her in rhythm to the song. Konnie studied the brown skin for several seconds before it occurred to her that she was admiring it. Whatever must it be like to wander about looking perfectly suntouched all the time? She suddenly giggled aloud. It was so wild, the things one might think privately. She took another drink and the images tumbled down easily from the reaches of her mind that were still full of adolescent fantasy:

Egyptian queens...striding along mammoth corridors in the temples (or palaces or whatever the hell they usually strode along) graceful the way only queens could be (one was taught!)...in something white and tight and gathered at the hips with those long pleats hanging down to the golden sandal tops (or was that simply a movie vision of a brown painted Vivian Leigh from a later time? Heavens!) Her mind lingered a moment with Vivian Leigh... Anyhow - Egyptian queens...very young, very supple and very beautiful with the stiff black hair hidden under those curiously attractive head dresses as on all those vases and ghings...Cleopatra? No - not Cleopatra, she was Greek or something. This particular queen would be darker - like the Nile without moonlight; with high cheek bones and -

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be under a new section of the code or amended to section 311 (indecent exposure) rather than classified as "vag-
lewd."

Testimony obtained in these hearings will be used by the Interim Subcommittee of Constitutional Rights for future recommendations for changes in the penal code by the State Legislature.

CHANSON DU KONALLIS

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and full, impossibly sensuous lips - like - like
her!

Konnie sat up in her seat abruptly and put her glass down. That would be quite enough of that! This thing of allowing the mind to do what it would lately - well - it really was a little too much. She must go to the ladies' room and adjust her make-up and look at herself and quiet it all down if Nefertiti up there would ever finish! Ah! Nefertiti! That was the one. . . !

She looked at the singer again and there they were, the eyes, waiting. Something not unlike pain shot through Konalia Martin-Whitside Heplin, II and she trembled. She did not drop her eyes this time. Why should she? There was pleasure in the looking, she thought suddenly, wildly, yes, she would look right back at her! And she did. And the two very black ones in the center of the room smiled at her and talked to her, and the smoky, dark lashes opened and closed for her - and Konalia Martin-Whitside Heplin, II sat and looked back and felt insane with pleasure.

Pleasure. Why had pleasure so frightened her in the past? Why must one constantly run from it? Control it? Who were all those dead people who were deciding things from their graves? All those generations of highly respected poor old souls who had done this or that in their lives; founded this or that. What had they to do with her! Why was she so bound to them? Who had made them right about everything? And why -? Pleasure indeed. Had they

ever had any? And if they had who were they to deny her? Or if they hadn't who were they to be experts in the matter? Pleasure indeed! Paris indeed! Paris. Paris the woman. Paris a woman. Paris and Lila. Lila and Paris. Lila. Lila pushing through high grass of a French meadow; Lila with the small body and the golden hair. Lila. And she, Konalia, with her shoes and stockings off, racing about the hills, shrieking, wild things about France and summer, her hair flying - free and seventeen. Seventeen and free ...free...free. Konalia the shepherdess - from Washington, D.C. And the overpowering memory that would not go away: that indestructible second; that flash of impossibility of a small and lovely blonde girl leaning, laughing, panting against her as they posed for the picture...her cotton dress damp and sweet against her...

Konalia lifted one hand suddenly as if to stop herself. How foolish! How destructive! Why ever must that silly image persist, so many years between, why ever must it persist! She was not, after all, a goat girl. And she was indeed Konalia Martin Whitside Heplin, II. And that was rather that! The liquor started to fade with the thoughts. Moreover, upbringing had come to a pretty pass indeed when she could actually sit around like - like - well, one of those women - ogling colored girl singers! She certainly was not like that, or a blasted goat girl.

"Would you like to meet her, Konnie?" Paul was leaning toward her again. His eyes lit with his most boyish expectancy. "I know the manager here. He might-"

She heard her own voice and it was marvelously normal, cool, proper, the essence of disdain. "Are you quite mad, Paul?"

"Well, why not? I mean if she would join us - I think it would be fascinating."

"And I think you carry your fascination too far for taste." She turned her head from him, so that the total effect of the long, beautiful, aristocratic profile could work its magic. Remind him, drive him back to his senses.

"I - I thought you enjoyed her," Paul said, his voice

near a slight whine.

"That doesn't mean, my dear husband, that I must have her to luncheon tomorrow."

"Who the hell said anything about luncheon?"

"Please don't swear."

"Well please don't work so hard at being a blasted snob. You don't have to, you know, it's built in."

"If you really wish to spend the evening insulting me, Paul, we might as well go home. I'm quite ready in any case."

Paul exhausted his hands in the air a little. "I don't wish to insult you and I don't wish to go home either. I just want to have a nice evening. And if you could forget for five minutes that old David Whitside almost made it over on the Mayflower..."

"Really, Paul-!"

"Look, all I want is your permission to ask the manager if Miss Tige would care to join us at our table. It is so simple and it could be interesting. I can't imagine what all the fuss is for."

"I am not making a fuss."

"Then let me invite her," Paul pleaded, more boyishly than ever. "She'll probably refuse anyhow. They say she's very difficult."

Konalia turned her eyes coolly, hardly looking out from under her lids at him. "Good heavens, I've married a celebrity collector!"

"Oh, Konnie!" Paul Heplin sat back then with disgust and defeat and looked at his wife with total unfriendliness. Then suddenly he sat up and lifted his fingers in the air for the waiter who was there like clockwork.

"Paul, whatever do you think you are going to do?"

Her husband ignored her and spoke to the waiter briefly in the ear. The man bowed and was off to the manager's office.

Paul sat back with satisfaction. "Well, we'll see what we shall see. If the name Heplin still means anything around here we shall soon meet Miss Mirine Tige personally." He giggled then, "Wherever do you suppose these girls dream up these names!"

"Well-!" Konalia said, "Well!" She rose from the table and Paul leaped to his feet looking frightened.

"Darling-"

"I am going to the ladies' room, if you don't mind." Paul sat down and watched his wife make her way to the ladies' room and felt warmly how she really could go along with things when she wanted to.

When Konalia came back to the table the singer was seated and Paul was holding a one-sided if animated conversation. Paul stood up as his wife came up, grinning happily. "Darling - this is Miss Mirine Tige. Miss Tige this is my wife."

"How do you do," Konalia said coolly and sat down. In the second she took to look at Mirine Tige close up she was startled to see that the mirage on the club floor was real and true. The young woman had apparently removed some of the heavier performing make-up, and Konnie could see that she was at least as young as Paul had insisted.

Paul rushed on conversationally. "Your command of French is simply marvelous. My wife and I have spent a great deal of time in Europe since we were quite young and I daresay our accents can't compare to yours, even though Konalia speaks it beautifully. Did you study it as a child, perhaps?"

Konnie watched the woman lift her eyes to Paul with cool, dry, indifference, "On a sharecropper's farm in Georgia?"

Konalia would have let herself laugh ordinarily, but something in her consciously rebelled at the insolence that she felt exuded from the woman. She hardly represented the Old South or any of that, but really! There were just some things one maintained. Tradition, it was true, was almost mystical in the way it bound one. But, nonetheless, it did bind one, thank God! Furthermore she could see that her husband was himself a little taken back by the abruptness of the reply. People rarely resisted Paul's social charms and women almost never.

Paul tried again. "Did you like France?"

Mirine Tige looked at him again. "France is France."

Paul Heplin looked a little beaten, but not quite. "Yes - but the French have such a marvelous thing. I mean I think it is quite true about the French attitude, don't you?"

"About what?"

"Well," Paul Heplin lifted his eyebrows a little helplessly, "About everything. That's just what I mean."

"Oh."

"Perhaps you think differently. Having seen it from a different point of view. I mean as an entertainer."

Mirine Tige sighed a little. "I have been in many different countries, Mr. Heplin. France was simply another one. I found there what I found everywhere. That it was a country full of men and women. Some of whom were charming; others bores - still others beasts." She looked away.

Konalia looked at the woman. Her voice was certainly as compelling in speech as in song. Surely the most dramatic voice she had ever heard.

"Did you like France, Madame?" Mirine Tige switched to French unexpectedly and Konnie almost jumped realizing that the voice made up of guitar chords was coming at her.

"Uh - Oui - I find French culture extraordinary and satisfying. Yes, I think it is a unique country."

Mirine Tige nodded at her in the continental way of chanteuses and went on in French. "May I compliment your accent, Madame, full of the classroom but charming."

Konalia felt outrage flood through her as she forced herself to give the only possible polite reply, "Merci, Mademoiselle."

Mirine Tige did not let go of her eyes and Konnie felt she was almost smiling behind the insolent lips. "What did you particularly adore about France, Madame?"

Paul shuffled in his seat. "Look - I think it's sort of affected to speak French at home. Like showing off or something, you know?"

Mirine Tige addressed him then in English. "Really? Why? I enjoy French because it is a beautiful language. Don't you enjoy speaking it?"

"Yes, of course, I love the language -" Paul began.

The singer's answer came back in French, "Then, Monsieur Heplin, why not speak it when you feel like it." She looked to Konalia, "and all else you enjoy. One might learn that from the French."

The conversational music ended from the piano and Mirine Tige prepared to leave them. She stood up and Paul rose politely. She offered him her hand and smiled at him. "It's been quite charming meeting you. I must get back to my work." She turned then to Konalia, "Madame."

Konalia murmured, "Yes. Very pleasant to have talked with you."

Mirine Tige did not offer Konalia Martin-Whitside Heplin, II her hand, but she stood a moment in front of her as if deciding something. Then she spoke. "I must tell you, Mrs. Heplin, that I came to your table because the manager told me, when he asked me, that you were the

handsome young couple at the front center table. So I came. I came -"

Konalia felt that the woman's body swayed in front of her suddenly as when she sang; then she realized that they were merely waves of loveliness that shimmered in front of her. She longed to close her eyes.

"I came," Mirine Tige was saying, "because out there where the lights play tricks on the faces of those who watch - you seemed like someone I knew once. In Paris. It was a mistake of course. Forgive me for staring. But," and Konalia wondered if she only imagined the hissing sadness in the remark, "the lights do play such tricks. Goodnight."

Paul and Konnie watched the young woman walk away from them toward her dressing room. Then Paul collapsed in his seat in a fit of laughter! "Well! She is rather difficult all right - but enchanting I thought."

Konnie looked at him and did not see him. Pleasant she had said, pleasant. It had not been pleasant at all; if anything, in those terms, it had been downright unpleasant. But the other - it had been so full of the other - plaisir.

"It was awful nice of you to be so sweet about the way I went about it, darling. It was nasty of me I'm afraid." He smiled at his wife a little sheepishly, with what in fact he had always considered was the smile to shatter her defenses. "But I'm sated now. Curiosity thoroughly satisfied. No more celebrity hunting! Happy?"

Konalia looked away. He was sated. The diversion was over for him. Tonight he would sing a few songs from Monmartre and fall asleep, completely satisfied after liquor and entertainment. Happy. And she - she put her fingers to her brow - she must have another drink, more and more that made it easier, just one drink before they left. Then at home in bed, she - she would lie there until dawn... cursing Paris; and French meadows...and Egyptian queens... and all those eyes that seemed to turn up in life...cursing Lila for her sweetness - and cursing Mirine Tige; and the idiocy of Greek mythology and whoever it was in her miserable family who had ever named her after a goat girl.