NICE LITTLE GIRL

Being a Flirtation and a Love Story.

AND ALSO A COLLABORATION

An American Girl in Paris Sightseeing is Accosted by a French Student Thinking Herself Insulted Beats Him With Parasol— Marries Him.

"As she walked along the Quai Saint Michel!"—old de Crussol began the story—"she was a pastel in palest blue. Her gown was a well-tailored linen, fine, cool lines; her hat was wreathed with forget-me-nots. Perhaps it is an old fashion—this was some time ago. But her shoes, her gloves and her eyes were black. Her cheeks, her lips and her Baedeker were red. So was her parasol, which she carried under her arm. She was American, and very serious just that minute, for the mad thirst of sightseeing was in her veins. And when to an American business becomes pleasure or pleasure becomes business, it is best to beware of that American."

"But he did not know this," Madame de Crussol interpolated. "He was French, with that italicized Gallicism which is youth's way over there of being aggressively patriotic. And he was concentrated student, wide of brown velveteen trousers, eccentric to the verge of madness in cap, free and fully flowing as to tie, elaborately generous as to hair—which is youth's way of emphasizing and illustrating life; making it picturesque and very much worth while, and filling the world with its optimistic perfume as the flowers in the market near the bridge make redolent the whole Place Saint Michel."

"He had seen her," continued de Crussol. "Oh, truly he had seen her before she crossed the bridge with her eyes bent upon the open Braedeker, a pretty frown on her clear brows, an altogether insulting preoccupation about her that challenged him."

"He sauntered up," Madame went on, her fat shoulders shaking now, "arranging carefully to pass her so that she could not overlook him—an altogether ridiculous figure, his hands distending his wide trousers and thrust deep into his pockets; altogether absurd, really, were it not for the color o' youth in his olive skin, a certain mother-of-pearl luster in his eyes, and an impudent gay happiness wreathing his red lips beneath a faintly penciled mustach."

" 'Une bonne enfant,' he said to her in his musical tongue, smiling straight into her eyes—which she raised startled as his shadow fell on the page. 'Une si bonne enfant en bleu!' " (It was Monsieur who took up the dialogue, acting as he talked and making the little scene vivid with eyes and hands and animated speech.)

"In a moment"—Madame threw out her hands with a comic gesture of despair—"in a moment she knew it had come—that unspeakable, inexplicable, unforgivable impertinence of the foreigner, against which she had been warned, and at length, at her pension. But she was ready for it. She had her own plans for defense. She intended merely—she had always intended to effect utter ignorance, not only of any flirtatious implication, but of the language, too; and if the attack had not been so unexpected she might have carried out these excellent intentions of hers. A remembrance of her prearranged system did indeed come to her, but it was faintly and forcelessly, as the theoretical instructions of the swimming teacher come to one when he feels his heels coming up—up—up, and his head relentlessly going down. In spite of all she could do, she was conscious of the red that mounted from her throat above its broad,turned-down white collar to her very temples—the shameful flag of acknowledgement that made her ache to beat herself for being beaten."

"He saw the blush and laughed aloud, a gay French note of exhilaration and enjoyment. Oh, but she was mignonne like that!" put in Monsieur with enthusiasm. "He was intoxicated with the delightful result of his experiment, and sought for an inspiration as to the next step."

"But she was American and intolerant of being conquered. Being herself, she had but one weapon—the weakest; she had but one course—the hardest. But with an infinitesimal lift of her chin, she was on her way again before he had time to realize that she had recovered. She walked swiftly and resolutely, and—"

"And something in the set of her shoulders," interrupted Monsieur, "cried to him 'Take care!' Yet everything that she was and he was called to him 'Dare—dare!' So he compromised. When she disappeared in the direction of the Sainte Chapelle (the rage these Americans have for old stained glass and for old stained royalties!) he set his elbows on the parapet and watched the boys fishing in the Seine; watched and waited as patiently as they waited and watched the end of their lines. . . . Such is the patience of all kinds of anglers."

"Half an hour later when she came down the boulevard," said Madame's soft voice, "he had passed utterly from her mind. She was very imaginative and very romantic and very American; consequently the rainbowed glory within that jewel-box of a chapel, and its aroma of royalty at its apogee, had intoxicated her. She was bemused, belated, in a dream of color and kingly splendor. She was walking through the Grand Monarque's Paris where courtiers in satin and laces strutted about on their high red heels, and if her shinning eyes stared straight at their sartorially degenerate descendant, she was not aware of it."

"He was, though," declared de Crussol. "And by some esoteric, psychial process her innocence gaze changed impertinance to audacity. He walked up behind her, as she passed him.

'Hier sur le pont Saint Michel,
J'ai vu marcher la Belle—'

he sang almost in her ear."

"She did not turn. She did not know the old song," explained Madame, "nor could she make application of his saucy parody."

"So then, partly because the very gratuitousness of the insult provoked it, or merely because it was slender and round and tempting, he stepped to her side and—put his arm about her waist. . . . Oh, lightly and for less than a second—a mere sketch of agesture! I would not say he really touched her." (This from Monsieur, with a chuckle that belied his deprecating shrug.)

"She turned upon him then—still with no memory of his personally; but with a consciousness of indignity that she had not believed she could experience and live, she recognized that same antipathetic breed of impudence. If she had not been overtired—she took sightseeing very conscientiously, and was either in an almost hysterical condition of merriment at the close of a hard day of it, or easily excited and irritable—as I said, if her nerves and her temper had not been so sorely tried she would not have done it. No—no, Christophe," Madame de Crussol glanced indignantly at her collaborator, whose attitude was all contradiction. "No, she would not—I feel sure she would never have done it. . . . But—well, anyway, with a flaming sense of righteous wrath she seized her pretty parasol and with all the force of nervous excitement she—she beat him about the head! Yes, she did—actually!"

"He ducked—he laughed—he gave utterance to a profusion of amazed, rattling-r'd exclamations. He retreated—his foot slipped on the wet pavement—he fell, and a fiere tearing down the quai charged full upon him." —This fromMonsieur.

Then Madame: "There is only one thing quicker and more irrational than a fiacre driven by a Paris coachman. And that thing gave a great leap now in the girl's breast and then resumed operations she found herself back on the sidewalk kneeling, with his corduroy sleeve still clutched between her fingers, while he—he—"

And Monsieur: "He lay at her feet, holding his breath, so close had been his escape, so nearly had that mad cocher come to murdering him."

Madame—All she had done, all she had strength to do was to drag him partly to the side, so—

Monsieur—So that only his arm was broken. "I have but one left, mademoiselle," he said, smiling up at her—really, though, he was faint with pain as he got to his feet, but, as has been said, he was very, very French—"but it is still and always at your service."

Madame—She thought he was about to repeat the insult—she did not know how badly he was hurt—and a murderous fury blinded her.

Monsieur—He laughed, assured her that she misunderstood him—though I'm not sure that she didn't gauge him rightly, the jackanapes!—and offered to conduct her home.

Madame—"Thank you, I don't require an escort," she said curtly, and turned to leave him.

Monsieur—But the frightened, half-sobered driver, the gardiens de la paix from the bridge and the fountain, the street boys and the women from the flower-market had collected about them by this time.

Madame—She found herself the center of a chattering crowd of foreigners and—

Monsieur—And her prudish American soul was filled with dismay.

Madame—And indignation—at him for being the cause of it.

Monsieur—He realized it in an instant—oh, but he had learned a lot about American women in a short time!—and humbly he strove to appease her wrath. "It is nothing, you owe me no apology, it was my own carelessness," he said quickly to the cocher. "Go then—go, it is nothing; here is a franc for the fleetest!" he cried to the boys, and spun a coin glittering down the bridge toward the quai. "Mesdames, I see thieves down in the market," he told the flower-sellers. To the gardiens he passed a couple of francs and in a swift whisper, "Demand her name and address." he urged.

Madame—The hypocrite! But she was not to be bullied. She was American, you see, and in America one does not readily yield up one's identity to impudent strangers. "Your name and address, Mademoiselle," said the big sergent, pulling out an official-looking book. "That is my own affair," she answered haughtily. "Mademoiselle, it is my duty to inform you—" began the functionary, stern with the necessity of earning his pourboire. . . . But she had turn-

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