

We took the Golden Arrow train from Victoria Station to the Gare du Nord. A dear friend of ours from Cairo, Graham Eyres Monsell who was a colonel in the British Army, came with us and we all stayed at the smart but not flashy Hotel Pont Royal on the left bank close to the Seine. That night in the hotel bar we had drinks with a beautiful French woman Denis had known from his pre war Paris days. She was an acclaimed poet. She was also, sadly, consumptive and was just recovering from a long bout of the illness. In less than a year the disease would claim her life. While they were catching up on news of old friends a dark and rather handsome man came up to the table and warmly greeted her. She introduced him to us. He was Albert Camus, and he was drinking at a nearby table with Jean-Paul Sartre. Having become a tourist attraction at the Café Flore they had recently abandoned Saint-Germain-des-Pres for the more secluded atmosphere of the Hotel Pont Royal.

I saw all the sights of Paris that week: the Louvre, Notre-Dame, the Champs-Elysees and the superb views of the city from both the steps of the Sacre-Coeur and the top of the Eiffel Tower. And I was taken to some of the finest restaurants: the Tour d'Argent, Grand Verfour, Pruniers, Maxim's. It was at Maxim's that we lunched one day with Graham's lovely sister, Joan Eyres Monsell and her handsome lover who she would eventually marry, Patrick Leigh Fermour – both of whom I had met at Denis's flat in Cairo. After a sumptuous meal and a great deal of wine Paddy insisted that Joan should buy a hat and we would help her choose it. We went to a very opulent looking salon in the Faubourg-Saint-Honore full of grand Parisian ladies of a certain age seated at gilded rococo mirrors trying on exquisite concoctions of twisted buckram and straw. Joan scarcely had time to look at one of these millinery miracles before Paddy decided to run up and down snatching hats off the heads of startled women and trying them on himself. Not surprisingly we were asked to leave. Graham, Denis and I were highly embarrassed but Joan who was well acquainted with Paddy's little pranks thought it quite amusing, and it meant she didn't have to buy a hat that she would never have worn anyway.

Lunchtime at the Ritz Bar the next day we had the great surprise and pleasure of running into Joy Murchie with whom we consumed several champagne cocktails. The elegant woman sitting at a table in the corner, Denis informed me, was Coco Chanel. That night with Joy we went to some boites on the left bank where singers in funereal