

CHAPTER I

Paul had been making good progress with the Jeanne d'Arc, although the position of the body was a difficult determination. Although clad in a long chemise, which made the forms of the lower body imprecise, captive in the rising flames, the arms were free and needed to be reaching upwards toward the imagined heaven for which the gaze was also searching.

He had been fortunate enough to find an intelligent model, whose had even read Michelet's account of Jeanne's martyrdom, and had imagination enough to grasp what he was trying to accomplish. She had an appropriate frailty and pallor, but also a kind of innate resolution. Although it was not easy to maintain the requisite pose and the requisite expression for long periods, she showed a rare determination. There were not many pearls of that quality in the Montmartrean mire. He had been fortunate, too, that Juliette was not as much in demand as many of the girls who hung around in the cafés and restaurants frequented by artists touting for such employment, being a little older than most and not as pretty. In consequence, she had agreed to work for a relatively modest fee and also to guarantee him the best of the daylight hours for the four consecutive days that he estimated necessary to complete the central figure of the painting to his satisfaction. The painting would take a good deal longer than that to complete, of course, but he had already sketched and applied preliminary colors to the surrounding composition, and filling in the detail, although slow and painstaking work, would only demand concentration, patience and a steady hand.

Since leaving Jacollet's studio, where he had been a pupil for a year, Paul had not worked extensively with models, painting primarily from the imagination, but he had been criticized for that. Although his Mourgue la Faye had won a medal at the previous year's Salon, he had been strongly advised by friends and critics alike that he could not make a living painting imaginary fays and sirens in numinous settings.

"It's 1901," Victor Marvaud had told him, "the days of the Salon de Rose+Croix are over, and Symbolism is dying. A new era has begun. Your spirit painting might be useful in making contacts and connections, but it's not a route you want to get stuck in. You need to become expert, as well if not instead, in painting mundane portraits of real people. A certain amount of impressionist blurring doesn't hurt, and even an element of caricature, but the real has to be in there if the profession is to provide your daily bread."

Victor was not an artist; he worked in a bank. Nevertheless, he fancied himself as an intellectual all-rounder as well as something of a dandy. He had known Paul since early childhood; they had grown up together in Toulouse, attending the same lycée and maintaining a close companionship while they had continued their studies. Like Gaston Lambrunet, who had completed their trio, Victor had always taken the view that it was up to him, as the son of relatively well-off and settled parents, to "look after" Paul, who was an orphan, and he had somehow appointed himself as a kind of mentor even at an early age, regardless of any lack of qualification he might have to give expert guidance. Victor was never short of advice, or at least of opinions, on everyone and everything.

But sometimes, Victor was right; Paul had to admit that his self-appointed mentor had the gift of adaptation to his social surroundings. Having moved to Paris only a year before Paul—and having played a leading role in persuading Paul that if he really wanted to be a serious painter then he must come to the capital—Victor had become thoroughly Parisian, even losing his southern accent, although refusing to sacrifice entirely his innate braggadocio. Victor seemed thoroughly at home in Paris, just as he had seemed thoroughly at home in Toulouse, whereas Paul....

"Could you lift the right arm a little higher?" he asked the model, his voice a trifle tentative, not yet accustomed to giving such orders. "Rotate it slightly to the right...that's perfect. Hold..."

The door of the studio was flung open, in a quasi-melodramatic fashion that only Victor could contrive—and Victor was, in any case, the only person he knew who could have got past Madame Cambourg, the concierge, to whom Paul had mentioned that he would rather not be disturbed. Not that

Madame Cambourg was obedient to instruction from anyone, let alone someone as trivial in her estimation as Paul, but there was nothing that she liked better than a license to refuse entry, and she was a dragon that few knights cared to combat—except Victor.

Paul was genuine angry at being disturbed in his work—not only in full flow, but, he estimated, working well—and by someone who really ought to have known better, but the resentful expression that he turned toward the unexpected visitor disappeared immediately when he saw Victor’s face, which had a distraught expression that he had not seen for years, since he had seen Victor receive the news of the death of his beloved grandmother. He almost dropped his palette.

He opened his mouth to say: “What’s wrong?” but had hardly formulated the first consonant when he was interrupted.

Bounding toward him, the elegantly-clad young man, neat and sharp even in distress, barked: “No time. Got to cut it short. *Palatine* was caught in last night’s storm, disabled and driven by the wind toward the Cornish shore. She struck a rock and was badly holed. All four lifeboats were put into the sea, everyone loaded, in as orderly a manner as could be expected. Gaston’s safe; he was in the last boat launched, and the first to make landfall—the first, at any rate, within reach of a telegraph office. Amélie and Martine were in the first one launched, with the other women and children—no news of their reaching land yet. Others to inform, must get back to the telegraph—but I can’t go with you to Juvisy tonight; I’ve asked Doctor Cros to pick you up, drive you to the railway station, take you to the Observatory and make sure you get back safely. You mustn’t even think of not going—it’s too important. I’ll get a message to Madame Cambourg as soon as there’s any news; if not, I’ll come to see you first thing tomorrow morning.”

And with that, he turned away—but not without having taken a quick look at the painting, and cast a comparative glance at the model, still holding her pose, perhaps more in shock than professional discipline. There was no approval in his reaction, let alone admiration, but Paul forgave him that; he obviously had more important things on his mind than appreciation of his friend’s brushwork.

Paul did not say a word, or even move a muscle, while the door slammed shut again and he heard the sound of Victor’s boots clattering down the wooden stairs. Then, and only then, did he feel the need to react—but did not know how.

Automatically, without any conscious decision, his right hand reached out toward the canvas again, as if to apply the brush to the half-depicted arm of Jeanne d’Arc, in mid-martyrdom. But he did not apply the tip of the brush to the canvas. Indeed he drew his hand back as he realized that it had begun to shake, convulsively.

He put the palette down and the brush, and he stared at his hand, as if it had suddenly become an alien object—as perhaps it had, given that it was moving without the slightest volition on his part, not exactly with a will of its own, but perhaps with a panic of its own.

Absurdly, he wondered whether he might have misconceived his painting, whether Jeanne d’Arc, as the flames of the pyre began to rise around her, could possibility have been reaching out in that fashion with deliberate purpose, or at least the illusion of purpose, rather than her flesh reacting of its own accord, without any reference to her terrified consciousness.

The hand was still trembling, not taking the slightest notice of the command that his mind was sending, ordering it to stop, to become steady. *But I’m a painter, he thought, I need my hand to obey my will; if I no longer have that...*

He could not stop his hand from shaking by exerting his will power—but it did stop, eventually. The wrist had been grasped. The model, Juliette, apparently having realized what it was necessary to do, had taken control of the wayward appendage. He looked at her. He could no longer see Jeanne d’Arc in her face, but only anxiety.

“Who was that?” she asked, perhaps feeling that it was the safest of several questions that might have sprung to her mind.

“Victor Marvaud,” he told her, and added, automatically: “My friend.”

“And Gaston?” she asked. “He’s your friend too?” While she was speaking she guided him away from the easel toward the divan on which she had been posing, and sat him down on it gently.

“The three of us grew up together in Toulouse,” Paul told her. “Gaston was in Spain, on family business. He was sailing to Le Havre on the *Palatine*, and then taking the train to Paris, so that we could meet up again...it’s been a long time...the storm...”

His eyes went automatically to the large bay window of the studio, facing northwards. The city lay in that direction, but the roofs of the houses on the Butte blacked the view of its sprawling extent. From his present position, in any case, all he could see was the sky: the blue, serene, afternoon sky, in which only a few cumulus clouds were drifting, last night’s storm in the Channel never having extended its edge as far as Paris, and having doubtless tracked north-eastwards and taken its violence into the North Sea, leaving peace behind...and wreckage...

“And Amélie and Martine?” Juliette asked. “Is it them you’re worried about?”

Of course it’s them..., he began, in the angry turmoil of his sentiments—a turmoil that he had somehow not quite noticed until it was provoked, but his mind caught up with the thought before it could be voiced, as he mustered the awareness that the model could not possibly be aware of the reason for his anguish, and was merely trying to get a grip on what was happening, in a spirit of good will. She was trying to help.

“Amélie is Gaston’s mother,” he said. “She...well, I had no mother, and she was kind to me...always very kind. I haven’t seen her for nearly two years...not since I came to Paris...but...I’m fond of her...”

Her pale blue eyes were studying his face with what seemed to be a remarkable curiosity, although he knew that the impression might only be a result of his own suddenly-heightened sensibility.

“And Martine?” she prompted, again.

“Gaston’s sister.” He left it at that.

The penetrating gaze was no sham. “And you’re fond of her too,” the young woman remarked. It wasn’t even a question, merely an observation. How much had she observed, Paul wondered—not because he was curious about the precise extent of the model’s perspicacity but because he was anxious about the legibility of his thoughts and emotions, the extent to which his inner life might suddenly have been nakedly exposed to an enquiring eye, no more able to hide than his hand had been able to stop shaking. He nodded his head affirmatively.

“But they’re safe,” the model reminded him. “They were put in the first lifeboat launched, with the other woman and children. All the passengers were taken off, in an orderly fashion—that’s what Victor said.”

That was, indeed, what Victor had said—except that he hadn’t said that Martine and Amélie were safe. How could he? They had been cast adrift in a lifeboat in the pitch dark, in the middle of a violent storm, and hadn’t yet reached land, even though the entire morning had passed and the afternoon was beginning to wear away. At least, they hadn’t reached land within quick reach of a telegraph office. Paul did not know what the rules were for the evacuation of damaged vessels, but he assumed that there must have been at least two sailors manning the lifeboat, cable of rowing resolutely...but they would surely not have been able to row effectively while the storm was raging, and the boat must have been at the mercy of the wind and waves for hours—desperate hours, in dangerous waters. It could have struck a rock, like the *Palatine*, or capsized...

Deliberately, he pulled himself together. His hand was no longer shaking, and the girl had released it. The idea of picking up the palette and the brush, however...he sat in silence for a few minutes, while Juliette waited, patiently, still observing him.

“I’m sorry,” he said, eventually, surprised but gladdened by the seeming calmness of his voice. “I don’t think I’ll be able to continue, for the moment, but perhaps I’ve done enough for one sitting.” He made an effort to look at her, calmly, like a man in control of himself and the situation. He saw anxiety in her face, which might have been for him, although he did not get that impression.

Absurdly, he said: “Don’t worry—I’ll pay you for the full session.” He realized as he said it that she might conceivably take that as an insult to her concern, but was slightly surprised to see her bite her lip, and her anxiety seemed to increase, as if some plan that she had been nursing, patiently, had suddenly been disrupted.

His eyes strayed toward the door of the studio, to the place where Juliette had put down her bag when she arrived. It had not struck him at the time, his attention being focused on his preparations for the sitting, but it was an unusually large bag by comparison with the handbags that young Parisiennes, of whatever status or profession, usually carried. Thinking back, it now seemed to him that the model had seemed slightly anxious, even before he had asked her to strike the pose and feign the expression of distress appropriate to his subject. He had assumed, without really thinking about it, that she was getting into character. It occurred to him now that perhaps she really had been anxious about something. The bag, though large, was hardly large enough to contain all of a person's worldly goods...unless, of course, the person in question had very few worldly goods...

Paul stared at Juliette inquisitively. He had only ever looked at her before as a model, uniquely concerned with her ability to represent Jeanne d'Arc in an admittedly old-fashioned historical painting; it had never occurred to him to think of her as someone with a life, or even an identity, of her own.

He had been acquainted with the girl vaguely before he had asked her to pose for the painting; she was part of the community of the local enclave of the quarter, one of numerous young women who kept company with the artists of Montmartre, in the declining Bohemia that seemed to have lost its impetus when the calendar had imperiously marked the end of the *fin-de-siècle*. He had taken note of her physical appearance with a professional gaze, assessing her as an object...not even that, merely as a potential object. She was not pretty enough to magnetize the eyes in the fashion of some of the other, more flamboyant members of the strange assembly. She was sickly, but that was not unusual—perhaps a little sicklier than most, probably consumptive—but that, he thought, with a sudden twinge of guilt, had merely seemed to him to be a qualification for playing the part of a martyr in his assisted imagination. He had never once wondered whether she might be feeling ill, warranting or deserving of compassion.

"Something's wrong, isn't it?" he asked.

She contrived a wry smile. She took a deep breath, and said: "I was hoping to ask you for a favor when the sitting was over." Then she paused, as if expecting him to guess what the favor was.

He guessed. "You want to stay here until the painting is finished," he said, "because you don't have anywhere else to go, for the moment."

She didn't seem surprised by the guess; she had seen him look at the bag—and his thought-processes were, it appeared, nakedly legible, at least for the moment, in the wake of the shock that he had felt. "I was...thrown out," she said. "I'm sorry..."

"There's no need to apologize," he assured her. "Of course you can stay." He lifted his forefinger to indicate the gallery that ran along the edge of the rectangular room just above head height, like a minstrel's gallery in an aristocratic hall. "You can sleep on the mattress upstairs. I can sleep on the divan down here for a few days; it's no trouble."

He was still looking into her face, and he saw every detail of the change in her expression. As an artist, he felt that he ought to be able to read and interpret that change, but that kind of empathetic deduction had never been his forte. There was a little gratitude there, he felt sure, and surprise, but also disappointment, as if she had taken a punch to the stomach, the reaction to which she was determined to conceal, but could not quite manage.

He realized that when she had formulated the intention to ask him whether she could stay in the studio until the painting was finished, she had taken it for granted that she would pay for the accommodation with the use of her body; she had taken what he had just said as a rejection, a judgment that she was unattractive—a fear that she probably had routinely, doubtless sharpened to a new intensity by the fact that she had been "thrown out?" Thrown out by whom? By a lover, presumably, with whom she had been living, but who no longer wanted her.

Paul had been in Montmartre long enough to understand how some things worked there, even though there were aspects of the quarter's idiosyncratic mores that were not openly discussed. He knew that there were painters who assumed, when they hired a model, that the fee they were paying for sittings included sexual favors as well as posing. There were others who considered that assumption tasteless and unprofessional, and who prided themselves on being above that kind of sordid exploitation. Doubtless the models talked among themselves, and knew what to expect from the painters who asked them to pose,

giving them the opportunity to be selective. The general assumption, he knew, was that all of the regular models were prostitutes, more or less, but he was aware that there were infinite gradations within that profession, not merely of price but of appearances, and that there were many who took a pride in some degree or species of virtue. As a relatively recent and still raw recruit to the community, and one who rarely used models—living ones, at any rate—he had never felt any sense of entitlement with regard to the extra favors of the models, and in any case...there had always been Martine, distant but somehow ever-present.

He wondered momentarily how to repair the gaffe he had committed, but swiftly reacted with the thought that he had not really made an error in merely being polite, and that there was, in any case, nothing he could say by way of adjustment that would not make the impression he had given worse.

“I won’t be here tonight, in any case,” he said. “At least, I won’t be back until the early hours. I’ll tell Madame Cambourg that I’ve invited you to stay for a few days and that you can come and go as you please. I’ll give you the spare key to the studio door. I’ll try not to disturb you when I come in.”

The young woman’s changing expression was still unreadable, so far as Paul’s meager powers of penetration were concerned. Perhaps she was surprised that he was willing to leave her alone in his home while he was away for most of the night, given that her hardly knew her and had every reason to think that she might be a person of low morals, but she probably knew as well as he did that there was nothing in the studio worth stealing apart from paint and paintings, which would not be of any use to her.

When she eventually spoke, however, it was to say: “You’re going to Camille Flammarion’s Observatory at Juvisy—stargazing, I assume?”

He was not surprised that she knew what Victor had had been talking about, even though his references had been slight and fleeting, but he was mildly surprised that she had taken the wrong inference—unless, of course, she had done so deliberately. Flammarion was one of the most famous men in France, and everyone knew that he lived in his Observatory at Juvisy—but by the same token, everybody knew that it was not simply “stargazing” that went on there.

“There’s a séance tonight,” he said, simply. “Professor Flammarion has invited every notable medium in Europe to the Observatory, over the years, to contribute to his scientific research into psychic phenomena. Tonight, he has a new guest, who is rumored to have remarkable powers.” *Aren’t they all?* he added mentally.

“And he’s requested you—or invited you—to draw the spirits his guest evokes?”

Juliette was a reader; she obviously knew something about the nature of Flammarion’s research. She could hardly be unaware, in any case, of the stir caused by Théodore Flournoy’s recent account of life on Mars, as illustrated and described by “Hélène Smith”—actually a medium named Catherine Müller—given the sensational publicity his book had received in the press. She probably knew as well as he did that, in spite of Flournoy’s attempt to explain everything that “Hélène Smith” drew or described in psychological terms, a rich American spiritualist had offered “Mademoiselle Smith” a salary in order to work full time on her visions of other worlds and images of Christ; that had probably caused her to jump to an erroneous conclusion as to why Paul was going to Juvisy. The model had also looked around the studio while posing and while resting between poses, and had doubtless formed an idea, clear if perhaps mistaken, of the kind of work that Paul did when he was not preparing a deliberately retrograde example of pseudo-classical historical art, specifically for possible exhibition at the next Salon.

“Dozens of writers and artists have taken part in Flammarion’s experiments in automatic writing and drawing over the last twenty years,” Paul said, defensively, “some of them much more famous and talented than me.”

“And because the spiritists are a tightly-knit...company,” she hazarded, “Flammarion heard what you’d done at Madame Pommerat’s séance last week within twenty-four hours, and immediately wrote to you? I presume you haven’t been to Juvisy before, or your friend wouldn’t have needed to ask someone to replace him in taking you there and bringing you back?”

Paul stared at her in frank amazement.

“This is Montmartre,” she said. “All the gossip in the world circulates here like water around a plug-hole. I’m surprised that I hadn’t heard that the *Palatine* had gone down before I came here. There isn’t

anyone in the local crowd who doesn't know that Henri Lemastur put you into a trance at La Pommerat's last week and that you drew a spirit that poor old Rochemure recognized as his dead daughter. Lautrec and Magre were there, damn it—it might as well have been headline news in the *Petit Parisien*. I guess the hundred jokes that have been circulating since then have all been whispered behind your back, and you've been blithely oblivious to them. That's not good—it's far better to have them laughing with you than at you, and anyway," she took the risk of adding, probably unaware that it made her sound like Victor, "it's not quite the reputation you're trying to cultivate with that." She nodded her head in the direction of the easel, although nothing could be seen from the divan than the back of the canvas.

Paul frowned. "You think I shouldn't go, then?" he asked.

She seemed genuinely startled by that, and suddenly repentant. "I shouldn't have said that," she told him. "I'm the last person entitled to an opinion, and the last one capable of giving you sound advice. Your friend is surely right, though—if you've been invited, you do have to go. There'll be important people there, people who are very useful to know, even people who might give you commissions, if you can put on a good show..."

Paul's pent-up emotion finally found an outlet, and exploded without giving him any warning. "It's not a *show!*" he snapped, furiously. "I'm not some kind of *charlatan!*"

She recoiled slightly, and this time the distress in her expression was far easier to decode. "I'm sorry," she said. "I shouldn't have said that either. I didn't mean to imply...forgive me, please, I'm not quite myself at present, and you're the last person I want to offend, in the present circumstances."

Paul immediately repented of his flash of anger, which he knew to have been quite unjustified. "No, I'm sorry," he said. "I'm...overwrought. The news about the *Palatine*...it really shouldn't have hit me so hard, but it did. Amélie was...not exactly a mother to me, I can't say that, but...well, I don't think Gaston or Victor ever realized how much she did for me, and how much I needed it, at the time. I haven't seen her for so long that it's a trifle absurd, I know, but..."

He had selected Juliette to model his martyr precisely because she seemed intelligent, and sensitive—right for the part and capable of playing it. He realized, therefore, that he ought not to be so very surprised that she actually was intelligent and sensitive, and able to read him like a book in his present condition. "And Martine," she suggested, "wasn't exactly a sister?"

"No," he said, dully. Quickly, he added: "Not that we were lovers." Immediately, he realized how stupid that must sound, and how stupid, in fact, it was to have said it aloud.

"I understand," she said, softly, almost as if she did, although he felt certain, in his admittedly-confused mind that she could not.

There was an awkward pause. Evidently hunting for something to say that was safe, the model eventually said: "Might I have heard of the medium that Flammarion has invited to Juvisy tonight?"

"I don't know," Paul answered, also feeling that it was safer conversational ground and glad to move on to it. "I hadn't, but that's probably not surprising, as I'm even newer to that than I am to this." He waved a hand vaguely in the direction of the canvas. "If by the medium you mean the somniloquist, I believe that her name is Talia Cadelan."

"That's good—somniloquist," the model observed, "Everyone else says somnambulist, even though they don't do any walking. Yes, I have heard mention of her and her partner. Not the conventional double act; her magnetizer is also a woman, something of an amazon, I believe she calls herself Zosima, although I dare say she was baptized a simple Marie or Jeanne, like the rest of us. From Egypt, supposedly—but a hint of the mysterious East is almost obligatory nowadays, so she's more likely from Marseille. Said to be very...talented."

"You're skeptical? You assume that she's a charlatan?"

"Oh, I believe in hypnotism, and the power of suggestion, even animal magnetism...but as for conjuring spirits, that might be a different matter. You're not, then...skeptical, that is?"

"About spirits? Frankly, I don't know what to believe in that regard...but that I see visions, that's a simple matter of fact. Whether they're products of my own mind or whether they come from outside, I'm not sure, but that I have them...and that I can be induced to have them by hypnotism, whether it's really a kind of psychological magnetism or not, isn't in doubt..."

He stopped, thinking that he was letting his tongue run away with him and that he was saying too much, but when she seemed to be waiting for something more, he carried on. "In a way, I'd far rather believe that they were products of my own mind, my own creativity, than that the dead were reaching out to me, intent on communication...but in either case, I'd really like to be able to control the process, to be able to organize it consciously. If Flammarion could help me to do that...or Richet, or Le Bon, or one of the other high-powered scientists who'll probably be present tonight, I'd be very grateful...although I'm sure that their agenda is somewhat different."

Juliette thought about that for a few moments, and flicked a wisp of dark hair away from her pale brow before saying: "You don't believe, then, that you really drew Rochemure's daughter?"

"I believe that Baron de Rochemure is a man afflicted by grief, who was at Madame Pommerat's séance because he was desperate for Lemastur to produce evidence that his daughter still exists somewhere beyond the grave, and that he would dearly have liked to believe that I had seen her spirit, even on the basis of the vaguest of resemblances in a rather poor sketch."

"She didn't identify herself to you while you were sketching her, then?"

"I was hypnotized. I had no consciousness of what I was doing, and I have no memory of doing it." He paused very slightly before adding: "Have you ever been hypnotized?"

"No," she said. "Not knowingly, at any rate. I think I've always known what I was doing, acting within reason...but can any of us be entirely sure, if animal magnetism really exists, of not being affected by it, and not just if we consult a mesmerist physician?"

Paul assumed that it was a rhetorical question. He looked at her curiously, surprised by what she had revealed of herself since the moment when Victor's melodramatic entrance had shattered their previously-comfortable professional relationship. "If I'm not being indiscreet in asking," he said, "how did you come to find yourself suddenly homeless?"

"Indiscreet?" she echoed, wonderingly. "You're talking to a cheap whore who thought you'd be a soft touch for providing a convenient place to sleep while you needed to finish your picture, and you're worried about being indiscreet? Believe me, Monsieur Furneret, that's the last thing you need to worry about—and if you're worried about how you're going to get rid of me when your painting's done, don't. I won't overstay my welcome. I always go meekly."

"That wasn't..." he began.

She raised her hand. "No, of course not—you were just making conversation, and you wanted, entirely understandably, to know exactly what you'd carelessly let yourself in for. I was thrown out, as I said, but you don't need to be worried about the reason. He'd just got tired of me—found someone else. Not as pretty, in my opinion, although God knows that I'm barely fit for posing as Jeanne d'Arc, let alone Venus...but she doesn't cough blood. He's a prudent fellow, and even though I'm not ready for the hospital yet, he knows which way the wind is blowing. So do you, don't you? You only see me during the day, when I'm at my best, but you know what I am—that's why you picked me for your picture, no? Easy to see me as a martyr?"

Paul winced at that, and his inability to deny it. "What will you do, then?" he asked, tentatively. "When the painting is finished, that is?"

"Get a room," she said. "It's easy enough, if you're not choosy. Don't worry about it—but it's nice of you to think that you ought to. Most wouldn't. I won't say that I'll be fine, because we both know that I won't, in the long run—but if I can visit you in your visions afterwards, I will. It would be nice to think that I can continue working, even when I'm dead...if posing counts as work. I won't be able to do the other, of course, but at the risk of being indiscreet, I don't think I'll miss it, if I'm in any state to miss anything."

He wanted to say that he was confident that she would live for years yet, especially if she got away from the polluted air of Paris to the balmy climate of Provence or the heights of the Alps, but he knew how ridiculous those suggestions must have sounded on the numerous occasions that she had presumably heard them before.

"I'm sorry," he said.

“No need,” she assured him. “You’re being kind. I’m grateful. And you’re going to put me in the Salon, as a saint. There are some I know who’ll laugh, but that won’t stop me being pleased. It might or might not be the only immortality I’ll have, but either way, I have every interest in the painting going well.”

“You’ve been in other paintings,” Paul said, “even in the Salon. You must have at least half a dozen chances of that sort of immortality.”

“As a hackneyed reclining nude or a neo-Naturalist slut? I’ll take Jeanne d’Arc, thanks. A better class of Symbolism by far. Be sure to credit me in the press coverage, won’t you? Put my name on the record for future generations.”

Paul was about to say “Of course,” but stopped, embarrassed.

She contrived another wry smile. “You don’t know my name, do you” she said.

“Only Juliette,” he admitted.

“Scaran,” she said. “Two *as*, not like the writer. Haven’t you heard the other girls calling me Scarab?”

“No,” Paul admitted. “I don’t really talk to them much,” and hastened to add: “timidity, not disapproval.”

“We’d figured that out.”

“Oh?”

This time the smile was almost a laugh. “You think because you don’t talk to us that we don’t talk about you? That isn’t the way it works. We figured you out months ago, while you were still at Jacollet’s. Mind you...” She stopped, and frowned slightly before starting again: “You do realize, don’t you, that if you tell Mère Cambourg that you’ve ‘invited me to stay for a few days,’ the news will be all over the Butte tomorrow? The general opinion for some while has been that you were a fish waiting to be hooked...”

Paul shrugged his shoulders, hoping that the gesture seemed utterly casual. The model was still frowning, so he asked: “What’s the matter?”

“Nothing,” she said, but then changed her mind. “It’s just that, if you’re expecting this Martine, and she’s important to you...well, I wouldn’t want to get in the way. It’s one thing for the locals to get the wrong idea, but another for...someone for whom you might have plans. When your friend Victor sends word that she’s safe, and tells you when she’s due to arrive in Paris...I won’t exactly be able to disappear, while you still have to finish the painting, but I’ll...in fact, it might be better if you didn’t say anything to Mère Cambourg and I’ll leave now, as usual. That way...”

“You don’t have to do that,” Paul told her. “If it’s more convenient for you to stay, stay—and you don’t have to disappear, no matter who arrives. We don’t have anything to hide.”

The frown deepened. The young woman seemed to be in a genuine quandary.

A sudden thought occurred to Paul. “Have you had anything to eat today?” he asked.

Juliette blushed. “Have you?” she countered.

“No,” he admitted, “and I won’t have time to eat at the restaurant at the usual time, because that’s when Victor was supposed to be picking me up, and I was planning to have something to eat earlier. If this doctor he’s asked to pick me up comes at the same time...”

“Dr. Cros? Don’t you know him, then?”

“No. Do you?”

“Only by reputation—assuming that it’s Antoine Cros. Old, well-to-do, first-class clientele, but good heart. Does charity work at two or three hospitals. Something of a hero to the poor way back in the Commune, I gather—before you or I was born, obviously—but too well-connected to be shot or sent to New Caledonia. Still something of a legend hereabouts, where legends linger. If you can make a friend of him, he really will be able to introduce you to the right people.”

“That’s not why I’m going to Juvisy,” Paul said, with a hint of snap in his voice again. “I’m going to take part in an experiment, and to make observations of my own. Trust Victor to have a legendary doctor, though, even while he’s not really ill—and only he would have the cheek to ask him to give his friend the starving painter a lift to the Gare du Nord and see him safely home from the return train. But we’re

straying from the subject. The point is that time is wearing on, and I need to get a bite to eat before I get washed and changed to go the séance. Would you like to come with me to a café, or a wine shop—assuming, that is, that the answer to the question you didn't answer is *no*?"

The model frowned again, apparently back in the quandary. "God, I'm stupid," she said. "Why on earth do I suddenly have this strange idea that I ought to protect your reputation. You're a painter's for Heaven's sake. I was perfectly ready to blow it sky high when I asked you if you could stay for a few days, on the assumption that I'd pay for the privilege on my back, so why do I care now that people are going to assume that's the case, when it seems that you don't actually want me. Don't I have my reputation to think of as well?"

"Look, how about this: you don't say a word to Mère Cambourg, and we don't go putting on an exhibition in any wine shop. I'll slip out now and buy some fried potatoes, charcuterie, bread and wine, and we can eat it here. Then, when the doctor comes to pick you up, you swan off to Juvisy with him and I stay here. Mère Cambourg will know I'm still here when you go, obviously, and she'll think that I must be still here when you arrive back, whenever that is, but with no explicit declaration, she can't be absolutely sure that I didn't go out while she was in the courtyard, or simply while her back was turned.

"By the time you get back, you'll probably have news of your friends, or, if not, Victor will come to bring you up to date in the morning. Then you can make up your mind what the wisest course of action is. Or, if you prefer, I could just go, and come tomorrow at the same time as today, as if nothing had happened...as, in fact, it won't have."

Paul thought about the options. Then he took out his purse, and shook out a handful of coins on to the divan.

"That's for the food and wine," he said, pushing two coins forward; "and this is the fee for the sitting," he added, pushing two more. "I won't say anything to Madame Cambourg—she can draw her own conclusions, as she pleases—but my offer stands. You can stay here as long as it's convenient for you to do so, and the hell with what anyone might think, including Victor, Gaston, Amélie and Martine...assuming that the latter two aren't at the bottom of the Manche."

She winced at the last phrase, but she took the four coins.

"Thank you," she said and added: "I really didn't want to go. I'm sorry."

"You have nothing for which to apologize," he assured her. "If you hadn't been here, and hadn't been so kind and so sane...I don't think I'd be feeling as sane myself as I am right now. Thank you."

"You're the one who's making me a saint," she told him.