

April in Paris, 1921

A KIKI BUTTON MYSTERY

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 HarperCollins *Publishers*

HarperCollinsPublishers

First published in Australia in 2018
by HarperCollinsPublishers Australia Pty Limited
ABN 36 009 913 517
harpercollins.com.au

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Prologue

TWENTY-ONE RUE DELAMBRE, MONTPARNASSE, Paris. The little studio at the very top, just a white-washed attic really, a single room. With a low ceiling, only just high enough for a man without his hat, windows that stretched to the floor and opened straight out into the Paris air. They opened straight out into the view, down the street, over the four corners, down to the river, over the cartwheel network of streets to the Eiffel Tower. A dizzying view laid out like a model for a Montparnasse genius. I can still smell it, the street scents of freshly baked baguettes and galettes, sour wine and faint piss, salty frying and cheap tobacco. The hall smells of disinfectant and sweat. My studio, whitewash and Gauloises, geraniums in the window pots, old wine and cheap candles and sex – the smell of freedom. Have you also been cooped up in a house, restricted by uncomfortable clothes, hemmed in by social expectations, poor pay, and relatives, colleagues, even friends, with no imagination? Then you know what it means to run away to your own special place, to live in your own flat and earn your own money and every hour is yours to do as you choose. And that's what Paris was like in the 1920s. Utterly free.

Ain't We Got Fun

I ARRIVED IN LONDON in the slushy February of 1921, so cold and grey that I had to grip the radiator in my hotel to warm my fingers. I'd taken a cheap little room near Victoria Station, with faded floral wallpaper that peeled with damp at the corners and so small that I'd had to leave my trunks at the station. I'd taken a cheap little room as I didn't expect to be in it for more than a minute. Bertie would never let me stay in such a dive if he knew I was here. Which he didn't, yet, so I changed my woollen gloves for my fur-lined leather ones, tied my coat more tightly around me, packed my handbag and set off for the Strand.

The city greeted me with intermittent sleet, weather rarely seen in either of my Australian homes, but it wasn't a shock. It wasn't my first time in this city. I'd lived here in 1914, doing the rounds of debutante balls with my boring cousins. Then I'd been here on and off all through the war, relishing the precious hours out of my nurse's uniform. I didn't finally leave until January 1919. It was cold and grey then too, a grey that stayed with me even when I sailed south to Sydney sunshine. But now I was excited – and nervous and confused and amazed – to be back. The energy of the city, electric and dangerous, warmed me more than the rattly radiator I gripped ever could.

London bustled and jostled, and in this part of town the ticket sellers rubbed shoulders with pink businessmen in their bowlers; loud boys in flat caps winked at the smart secretaries who affected disdain; big-lunged flower girls set up a chorus to cajole fat old men with their moustaches. The streets were grey, the buildings were grey, and life moved with the swift ebb and flow of the Thames. I walked quickly, the city demanded it, towards the office of *The Star*.

The Star sold celebrity gossip. The star of *The Star* was subeditor Bertie Browne, my friend, confidant, sometime lover and oft-times saviour from the worst moods of the war. Bertie's uncle was a newspaperman who could have established Bertie in a sombre and respectable broadsheet. But what Bertie liked best, what he was best at, was chatting over cocktails in underground bars. He was very happy with his little entertainment rag. The offices were at the other end of the Strand to Fleet Street, in order to be closer to Soho and all its celebrated types. The building's façade was forbidding grey stone, but the little door had number 72 painted in gold and led to a narrow wooden staircase covered with playbills. I climbed up to the top floor and waited in the dark smoky foyer.

'Kiki Button!' He burst through the door in an explosion of green check. He ran over and picked up me up, swirling me round as he said my name.

'Darling Bertie.'

'When Mavis at reception said it was you, I couldn't believe it, but then I thought, No, I can believe it – it'd be just like Kiki to turn up unannounced. And in pure peacock blue too – right down to your shoes! All right, turn around, let me get a look at you.' He spun me around carefully as Mavis at reception gawked.

'Peacock-blue wool coat, fur-trimmed; navy stockings, navy button-up heels, peacock cloche, and is that...' he whisked off my

hat, 'a bob! Your hair is short, Kiki!'

'I had it cut when we stopped in Constantinople. I walked into this little barber's shop and chopped at my jawline with my hands. I had a full five minutes of pantomime with the barber before I could convince him that I really wanted it all off. People watched at the window—'

'The Turks smirked?'

'They laughed! And clapped, when the final lock came off. They insisted on buying me coffee and cake before I reboarded the ship.'

'A blonde woman with a man's haircut. You always were novel.'

'I just feel so... free.' I rubbed the back of my head with my hand. I grinned.

'That's your naughty grin, Kiki.'

'I have a little proposal.'

'Propose to me.'

'Let's get out of the office and somewhere more gossipy.'

'I'll get my hat.'



WE WALKED ARM IN arm through the back streets to Soho. His coat was a very fine cashmere in pine green, just the right shade to match his three-piece suit. Even his hat was green. He kept lozenges on him at all times, as he loved to smoke but hated the taste on his tongue. He popped one in his mouth as we left the building and I smiled – even the lozenge was green.

I nodded at it. 'Mint?'

'Lime.'

'We're two bright parrots in a world of pigeons, Bertie.'

'I think you mean we're two discerning citizens in a world of

timid muck. I just don't understand Britain's obsession with mud colours – didn't we have enough of that in the war?'

'Khaki, grey—'

'Brown, buff, taupe – ugh! Thank Bacchus for pink cocktails with twists of lemon.

Here, just around this corner.'

We'd cut through into the winding streets of Soho. In a little lane off a little lane was a tiny house. The upstairs shuddered with cacophonous singing but the basement blew ragtime up into the street.

'Down here. I think it's called something preposterous like the Mountain Rest Stop or the Wonder of the East, but we just call it the Old Standby.'

'Because it's always open?'

'It opened up as we all got demobbed. It's tiny, a tad dingy, but yes, Dixon can always be summoned from out the back to pour a whisky.'

The ragtime came from a rather beaten gramophone that sat on the bar. The bar itself was a bench, but the wall behind was decorated with a long mirror, just like a Paris café. The walls of the room were covered in posters – playbills, mostly, but also exhibition notices, newspaper articles, job advertisements, for sale notices, political pamphlets and lewd graffiti. A fire crackled cosily to one side, with two fat armchairs in front of it. A mix of odd chairs and tables were squashed in next to each other from the door to the bar, so we could hardly move even through the half-empty room. I sat down in one of the armchairs to warm myself. Bertie went up to a bespectacled man scribbling at a table, made an appointment to see him tomorrow and came back with two doubles.

'Proper whisky. The owner has a cousin's friend's sister-in-law's canary's something-or-other in the Highlands who sends down the

most delicious single malt. Half the price you'd get in the Savoy.'

'Who was that?'

'An out-of-work actor who's been sleeping with...' He stopped and winked at me. 'You'll have to read the magazine, Kiki. How's the dram? You're licking your lips like it's soaked into your skin.'

'Would you believe that no one would drink whisky with me on the ship over? The barman didn't think a woman alone was deserving of single malt. And in Sydney I was living with my Aunt Constance, whose strongest beverage was a particularly dark tea. In other words, the dram's divine.'

'As are you.' He reached over and smoothed my bobbed hair. 'I never thought I'd see you again.'

'Whizzbangs and flu pandemics couldn't keep me away.'

'I was sure they would.'

I raised my eyebrows at him.

He shrugged. 'You know, British fatalism and all that. When you left...'

His big brown eyes reflected the Kiki of 1919. Wan, worn-out by the war, I was almost mute. He'd found me three years earlier behind the casualty clearing station, teary in my grubby uniform, cursing the matron and the registered nurses and in dire need of a cigarette. He provided the smoke, a bon mot, half a music hall ditty made dirty with frontline wit and joined me in cursing the upper ranks. For years he provided the laughter, but by the time I left none of us had the energy to joke. I certainly didn't have the energy to know what I wanted, let alone to resist my parents' demands that I return home. Bertie sensibly feared I'd succumb to the Spanish flu. Instead, I nursed passengers all the way back to Australia.

I squeezed his hand. 'When I left we were all too used to final goodbyes. I'm here now.'

‘And as wicked as ever.’ He clinked my glass. ‘So, what’s your naughty proposal?’

‘I need a job.’

‘No,’ he gasped. ‘Don’t you have money? Pots and pots of it?’

‘My father has money, which I can only use to catch a husband, and then the money will be my husband’s. I need my own money.’

‘And you want a job – in the theatre?’

‘At the paper. At your magazine. Specifically, I want to be your society gossip reporter.’

‘We have one of those—’

‘But not in Paris.’

‘Oh – Paris! Yes, Kiki, yes, I love it.’

‘Look at these.’ I opened my handbag and shook out the contents. Twenty different cards, notes and letters fluttered out. Bertie picked them up.

‘The Honourable Mrs Hanley-Sidebottom cordially invites you to Miss Letitia’s ball on 20 February – Dear Katherine – Katherine?’

‘It’s my birth name. Katherine King Button.’

‘A solid, respectable name. It doesn’t suit you.’

‘Why do you think I adopted Kiki so readily?’

‘Because you despise your family and all they stand for?’

‘Well, technically I only got rid of my mother’s influence – King is her surname and Katherine is her middle name, after my grandmother. I’m still a Button.’

‘I never picked you as Daddy’s girl.’

‘If I were Daddy’s girl, I’d marry the son of the neighbouring wool baron and combine the properties, all while making babies, looking pretty and doing what I’m told. Instead, I’m here.’

Bertie kissed my hand in delight.

‘So, *Dear Katherine,*’ he cleared his throat and put on a posh accent, *‘when you get to London I insist that you visit me for tea at*

Belgravia Square – Dear Miss Button, I'm a friend of your father's (well my father is at any rate ha ha) blah blah et cetera, et cetera – are all of these invitations?

'I have another thirty telegrams in my trunk of people to look up.'

'But you're not posh. How do you know all these people?'

'Through Father's business contacts. He was here in London when I left Australia and spread the word that I was coming with a fortune for the highest bidder.'

'I thought you weren't—'

'I had to say I was coming over, for another season, to find a husband. It was the only way I could stop my parents from calling the navy on their runaway daughter.'

'Ooh, sailors – if only they had.'

'Well, quite. I'm also meant to be staying with my cousins, but...'

I shrugged, and grinned, 'my letter must have been mislaid. Anyway, the men want money and the women want any available men. The invitations flooded in.'

'But which are for Paris?'

'If I attend these three,' I sorted through the invitations to find the gilt-edged cards, 'then I will have all the Paris contacts I need.'

'Americans?'

'I love them. They're even richer than Father. The boys don't need my money and most would rather have an American girl. The American girls all know that and so consider me an ally, not competition. They're the best fun.'

'Apart from me, of course.'

'That goes without saying, the best of all Berties.'

He smiled and tapped the invitations on his knee. 'You know, my Aussie minx, I think this might just work.'

'I haven't crossed the seven seas for it to fail.'

‘Now, you’ll need to send me a column every week...’

We spent the rest of the afternoon working out the details. Gossip columnists report on the rich and famous, which in those days was mostly aristocrats and the idle rich and whichever Hollywood star breezed into town. I would spend some time here in London in order to secure my Paris introductions. Bertie would help to set me up in a little studio, preferably in a bohemian part of Paris, which I could afford on my income; I insisted on proper independence. I would send a column a week by the express post, to be printed each Friday – Monday was the London gossip, fresh from the weekend, and Wednesday was for the transatlantic tidbits (always, unfortunately, a few days late). My column would necessitate at least two parties a week: ‘But Kiki, as you’re doing nothing else, I think you can squeeze that in, don’t you?’ And while I was in London, Bertie insisted that I stay at his flat.

‘I have to make sure you know what you’re doing, Kiki. It’s my professional responsibility to show you how to party.’

And with that, we headed for a more exciting underground bar for a bottle of champagne and some illicit tickles. We downed it in double-quick time, but as it was still office hours and the place was empty, we moved our loose limbs to Bertie’s favourite dumpling house on Wardour Street. The steam was spicy and our heads were cleared with hot chili paste and cool green tea. Uncle Wu’s nephew, Young Wu, joined us for a little tumbler of rice wine at the end of the meal, his skin golden and his shoes shiny in the half-light of the restaurant. But he had to take his golden tones back to work, so we headed out into the chill night, browsed tipsily through the secondhand book stalls until, clutching cut-price vorticist poetry, we wormed our way into the 43 Club. Mother’s ruin came in every sort of cocktail and concoction and we danced and laughed until the poetry made sense, until we forgot our bloody yesterdays, until

we were hungry again and had to head back to Bertie's for late-night biscuits and whispers. We fell asleep with the dawn, stinking of booze and tobacco and sweat, in his tiny unmade bed.

London was a revelation, with its fancy stores and dingy bars, with its posh bohemians and serious barmen, garrulous booksellers and polite whores. This London I'd never seen before; it'd been off limits to a debutante and hidden from a nurse behind rows of khaki-clad lads. The footpaths were cold but Bertie's attentions were always warm as he helped me to get ready for my parties. He would often run to the flower seller downstairs to buy me a corsage so that he could have a matching buttonhole. I developed a taste for fruity lozenges and he learnt how to darn a silk stocking. We mostly woke up in the same bed.

Then it was the end of the month and time I stopped scandalising Bertie's neighbours. I loved being with Bertie. We were so free without our uniforms and our seven-day passes and our mandatory rush back to barracks. But much as I loved the city, it was all too close to Father's business contacts and Mother's vast network of cousins. I knew if I stayed too long that I'd be press-ganged into marrying some titled dullard before I had time to finish my champagne.

Bertie saw me off at Victoria Station. He'd bought my ticket, first class.

'Start as you mean to go on, Kiki.'

He looked like a painting set against the sooty and smoky rising roof of the station. His sandy brown hair slicked under his hat, his military bearing, long limbs and slender body somehow both louche and polite, as though they weren't really part of him. He wore a light grey suit, set off with a lavender shirt and a suffragette-purple tie. I half expected him to yell out 'Votes for Women!' but in a puff of steam he grabbed me and kissed me.

'Blackcurrant today.' I could taste the lozenges on his tongue.

'Don't forget me, Kiki.'

'How could I? You're my boss.'

'I don't think you can have a boss, Kiki. You just have people who give you money to do what you want.'

'We all need a reward after the war.'

'Can you be—'

'I can't be your reward, Bertie.'

'Of course not! Good grief. No, I mean, can you be sure to... to...'

He looked almost embarrassed. He straightened his shoulders and took both of my hands.

'It's been wonderful to have you here. I've been missing a true friend – all I have are colleagues, contacts and casual concubines.'

'A hellish triumvirate.'

'Quite. So don't just send the column. Write to me as well.'

'I'll be too busy.' The horn sounded and I kissed him quickly.

'Come and visit me instead!'

'I'll be at the Ritz!' He waved with his hat as the train pulled out of the station. Then he was gone and I was on my way to Paris.

All By Myself

IT WAS THE FIRST time I had seen the English countryside out of uniform. There were no troop trains and no barricades, no convoys of khaki trucks or beautiful, doomed horses as they cantered to the coast. It was the pure Kentish countryside as the tracks rolled on to Dover. Fields fallow with winter and the fog that settled close to the ground. Villagers that bustled around their little station, porters too young to have fought, women in faded black dresses selling newspapers and currant buns. Then Dover, seagulls crying into the ship's horns, the sea grey, then blue, then black as we left the train for the ferry to Calais. Every time I had crossed that channel before, it was towards the guns. On a clear day you could hear them as you sailed, their boom over the clack of the wheels as the train rolled towards them over the tide. Only the clamour of London could drown out their peal of doom. Now all we heard were the waves lapping the ship and the gulls that followed us over. I went outside to the bracing air and breathed in big lungfuls. No tears on my face, no cordite in my memory. Just soft, salty sea air.

A shiver ran through us when we docked. We were in France! Tricolores hung on the jetty, on every platform. The dining car of the Blue Train didn't offer ham sandwiches and custard but *baguette au jambon* and *crème brûlée*. I was too excited to eat. I

nibbled at cheese and biscuits, sipped at some strange-tasting red wine and stared out of the window. I knew these fields so well. All the rubble, the squat little huts, the profusion of poppies like blood spots in the sun – these were all still there, no one had blown them up or knocked them down. Young men took their young women to the places where they fought; old women took their old men to see the shallow graves of their sons. The train emptied as couple after couple drifted onto the fields for a battlefield tour. I overheard them, they proclaimed at how the fields looked stripped, pocked, full of metal still. I couldn't see it. I saw only that all the men were gone, the sisters and cooks, the horses and dogs. I saw the stillness, the absence of hurry and schnell, the absence of uniforms. I heard nothing but ordinary civilian sounds, the murmuring song of quiet conversations, porters and postcard sellers, the occasional toot of a tour guide – no yells, no shells, no orders bellowed from the end of the platform. The sun touched the field stubble and lingered, coaxing the crop to grow. Birds weaved in loops; swallows and sparrows and crows, they called into the empty air. My heart was full. It was a struggle to keep my eyes from filling as well.

Thank heaven for Paris. The train pulled into Gare du Nord with a sigh of smoke and steel. Uniformed porters, so smart in their red and gold, hurried up to the unloaded trunks. Flower girls and newspaper boys gathered in a semicircle and yelled in their broad French. Bearded old men and crisp young women, nannies with toddlers, and languid couples in silk and wool clipped over the platform into their own Parisian lives. I wanted to savour this moment and just watch from the carriage window. I wanted to jump out and kiss all the porters and street sellers. I controlled myself and hopped discreetly from the train to my trunk, from my trunk to a cab, from my cab to rue Delambre, Montparnasse.

My new home.

The cab driver just smiled when I gave him the address. It was already a favourite place for foreigners. Rue Delambre was the street with Café du Dôme and Café de la Rotonde across the boulevard, with studios and bars and bookshops full of writers, artists and bohemian tourists. My skin tingled as we wound through the streets. All the ordinary things struck me again as wonderful – all the signs were in French! You could buy baguettes in every bakery! Well-dressed couples drank their coffee on the street! – so obvious, so novel, I'd seen it all before, but somehow it felt new. It wasn't until I saw the advertisements for Dubonnet and Gitanes, the booksellers by the Seine, those markers of daily life, that I fully understood: now I live in Paris. I was there for myself, by myself. All the smells that wafted in the window, of fresh bread, old wine, unwashed beggar, burnt sugar, salt, fat. All the sounds of French yelled, muttered, sung and laughed. Even the men on the street corners, dignified in their wheelchairs, tin cup in one hand, nodding at each centime and franc that rattled their metal – it was just them, and me, and all the other war refuse, human flotsam and political jetsam that could only be saved by Paris.

Number 21 had a pale four-storey façade with the attic on top like a metal hat. Long windows looked out of the street, framed with shutters and baskets for window pots. Bertie had organised, through his contacts, a cheap little studio for me. I knew from the price that it would be on the top floor – I was to live in the little metal hat.

A stout old woman with a fed-up expression greeted my knock. She jangled the keys on her belt, handed me one, and directed two boys from the street to carry my trunk. She looked me up and down and sighed, but never said a word to me. What on earth had Bertie told her? The boys, in between cursing each other as they heaved my trunk upstairs, were more forthcoming.

‘You’re the blonde Australienne?’

‘There’s only one blonde Australienne.’

‘You’re a war hero.’

‘And a wealthy mademoiselle in disguise.’

‘And a writer! Will you write about the war?’

‘Where is Australia? Is it as far as Marseille?’

‘As far as the Dardanelles? My father fought there—’

‘I have a cousin from Marseille, it took her three days to get to Paris!’

‘My father never came back from the war... he’s a hero too.’

All this was exchanged in rapid patter. They made such a racket that people poked their heads out of their doors to look. Most were mothers, who gave a cursory glance and ‘Bonjour’ and popped back inside. This way I found out where the bathroom was – on the third floor, just a toilet and a sink – with a toilet on the ground floor as well. A young man, not much older than the boys, lounged in his doorway and smoked, his waistcoat open and his sleeves rolled up. He gave unwanted directions to the two boys and winked at me.

Finally we reached the top floor. There was nothing in my flat but a saggy old bed. One wall held two windows that, due to the low roof, reached from the floor almost to the ceiling. I opened them and found they had a little sill but otherwise dropped straight to the street. I kicked off my shoes, swung my legs over and lit a cigarette. The view over the city stretched on and on, over chimneypots and attics, over the Luxembourg Gardens and the Sorbonne to my right, to my left over streetlamps and metal roofs to the Eiffel Tower. The light was silver and the city shone, rain-shiny and lit up with a changeable sky. Paris stretched in front of me and all I could do was worship her winding ways. I leant back against the window frame and smoked.

Bright laughing people walked down my street to the cafés.

They wore parrot-coloured scarves and long coats slick with sudden showers; they wore enormous hats or no hats at all; they spoke loudly and their feet seemed to skip over the footpath. Some of them even waved up to me, complete strangers. The Rotonde's tables spilt up the street and around the corner, each chair full, the lamps and heaters from the restaurant keeping the patrons as warm as the wine. I never even made it inside, that first evening. I was hailed by an American who'd seen my feet dangling over my windowsill – 'Look! Hey, leggy lady! Hello! Do you drink champagne? Pink champagne? Of course you do...' No chaperones, no invitations, no introductions. We were all here for the same reason. We were all here to escape dull parents and scant options and bad memories. We were all here to explore art, music, sex and travel. We had already begun, just by being here, just by sharing a drink with a handsome stranger for no other reason than fun. Father's bluster and Mother's frown were very far away. Bloodied bodies and uniforms were just as lost. My stomach fluttered with excitement, bubbles, kisses and a feeling that I was flying.

I felt alive.



THEN IT WAS APRIL, with soft light on the chestnut blossoms shaken over tables by the breeze. The squalls of winter rain had faded, the sun said hello for more than a minute at a time. On the street people had swapped their heavy winter coats, leftover from the war, for more colourful, carefree models. I saw ankles and necks again, unwrapped from boots and scarves. Café heaters were not turned on until dusk and we could sit outside without shivering. In the patisseries, fresh strawberries – 'From my grandmother's hothouse, mademoiselle, very sweet' – appeared on the fruit tarts. Sparrows

and swallows returned to their nests in the eaves, awnings and boulevard branches. They sung into the dawn, earlier and earlier each day. As I stumbled home from bohemian nightcaps in poky studios, I found myself greeting them more often.

After a month my routine was established (well, as much as one could have a routine in Montparnasse). Each night I would head out into the city for a party. I would wear my most extravagant outfit, offset only by the pencil and notebook in my purse. Society reporters are professional partygoers. I wrote tactful, tasteful tidbits that had as much relation to reality as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Actually, *Alice* was like a philosophical discussion at a party with drunk five year olds, and so had more reality than anything I would write for Bertie. Here's an example:

Who would have thought that Lady Langborough sang opera? She delighted the assembled guests at railway-millionaire heiress Miss Cordelia McNeill's twenty-third birthday party on Saturday night. Lady L wore a beaded silver dress, with silver shoes and long silver gloves, and sang as clearly as the bell she so perfectly resembled. And what better tribute to Paris, this city that continues to give us joy and delight? The sweet, sad sounds of Puccini's La Bohème was a touching present for her friend, Miss McNeill. Miss McNeill herself was radiant in pink silk chiffon layers that made her as ethereal as the spring dawn over the city...

And so on. It was all just detail sewn together with bits of fluff. If I were being truthful, I'd write something like this:

Lady Langborough – the self-styled title of Jane Hotham of Boston – tortured us all with her sentimental rendition of Mimi's aria from La Bohème. Although no individual note was off-key, the sense was

decidedly out of tune. It was clear that the Lady felt starving artists to be as real as fairies or mermaids. She only needed to walk three blocks north or south of her gilded perch to find the Mimis still dying of consumption – but why let reality ruin a solid performance? For solid it was. All Puccini’s airy lightness was squashed by good, honest commonsense, in good, honest, tweeds and button boots. But at least she had commonsense, which is more than could be said for the host, Miss McNeill, who clearly couldn’t see that every guest was only there to partake in some of her father’s money...

But of course, that would mean I would never be invited to another party. While that was tempting, the independence that this job bought me was too valuable. I made meticulous notes on the dresses, food and the layout of the sumptuous apartments. I asked so many questions that the hosts thought I was genuinely interested in where they bought their rugs and who was related to whom. Usually the best bit of the party was when I found the prettiest young man and retired to bedroom or back room – or once even a stairwell – with a bottle of champagne for a swift game of hunt-the-slipper. I added ‘spice’, as the parties were ‘not nearly so lively’ when I wasn’t around. People performed for me, apparently. Heaven help them when I was absent.

If I had been to an aristocratic party, the type I wrote about for Bertie, then at midnight I would perform my Cinderella act and disappear, usually to Montmatre for jazz or back into Montparnasse for late-night gin and giggles. If the party started in Montparnasse... well, I would come home whenever the artistic talk or political dancing or licentious party games would release me. I would rise just before midday, sometimes entangled with a bright young thing and sometimes deliciously alone, and rattle down to my favourite breakfast café for multiple cups of coffee.

I would write up my notes in the afternoon and each Wednesday send them express post to arrive, by Thursday, to Bertie in London. One invitation would lead to the next, one party to another, the days brightening and lightening as we floated towards summer. I was untethered and delirious on French wine, scurrilous talk, and the view from my little garret. I slipped into this city as though I had never left. As though it had always been home.