

WHY DID ROBERTO LEAVE

This week, Picture Post presents the first instalment of a new kind of Serial Picture-Story



Why did Roberto leave Paris? (That's Roberto, up there.) Well, why did he? The clue to the answer is contained, more or less, in this picture. Strictly speaking, this ought to be the last picture in the last instalment of this four-part picture-story: because this picture was taken on the very morning when Roberto decided to leave Paris for ever, and to make tracks back to Mexico, which he

had quit some months earlier. Vali, the girl in the centre, would probably know the answer. Géri, the girl on the left, might be able to contribute some last-minute clues. This, it must be emphasised, is not a film. This is a real-life story about people who EXIST: and it will go on unfolding itself in Picture Post for four weeks. In the fourth week, you, too, may be able to grasp the answer.

by

PARIS ?

Photographed by ED van der ELSKEN

2

"What *is* Paris?" Roberto's mother had kept asking him, back there in Mexico City. On Roberto's first evening after his arrival in Paris, he wandered along to the Left Bank, and there, just near the Place St. Germain-des-Près, a sort of man glided up to him and said: "Like to go places, Bud? Like to see things?" Roberto was a good Mexican, and he hated the 'Bud' talk and the 'Bud' attitude; but he *was* in Paris for the first time, and he *did* want to go places and see things. So . . .

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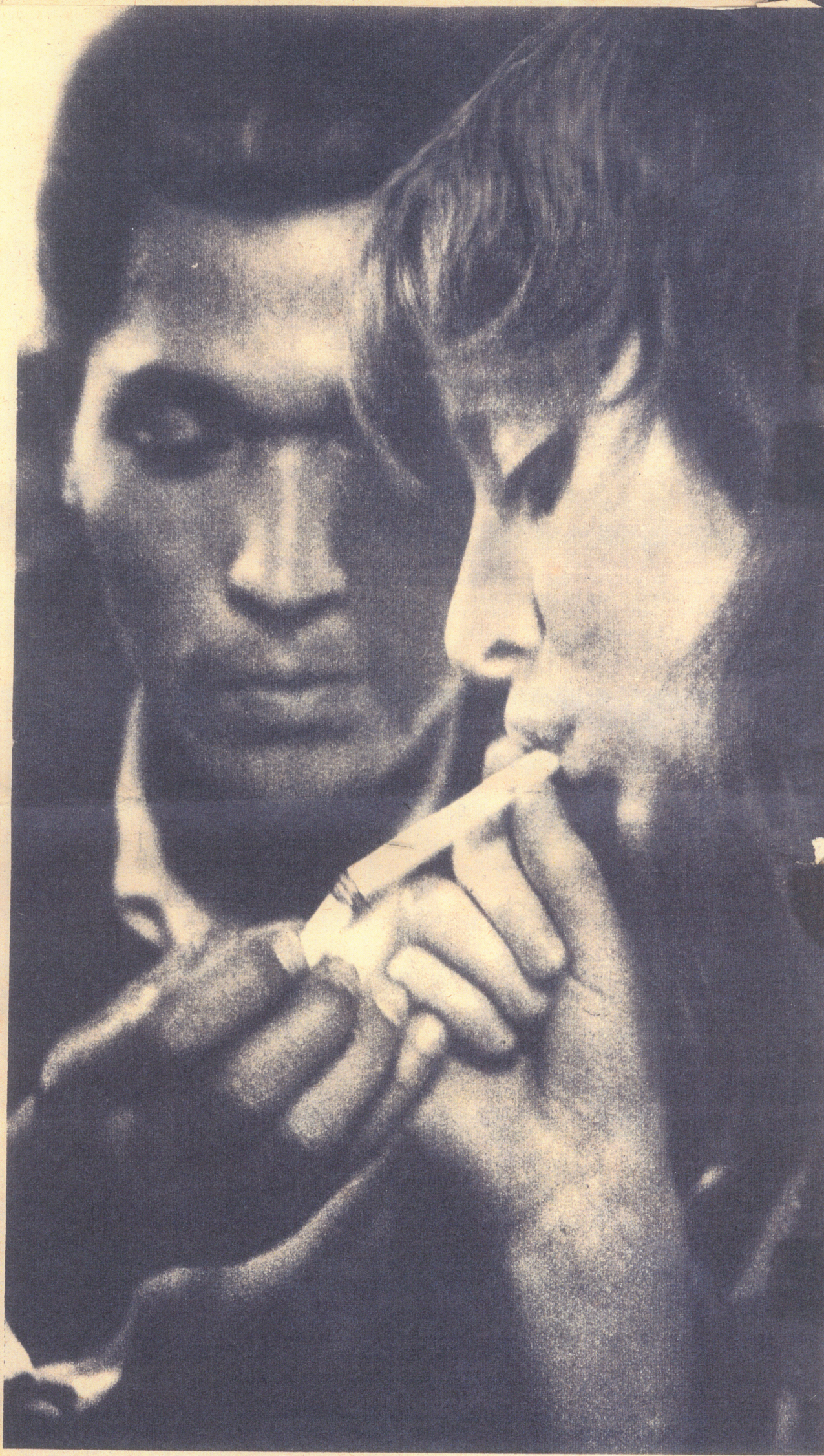
So . . . the man guided him to half-a-dozen night-spots in the St. Germain quarter; and there, at one of them, Roberto set eyes on Her for the first time. Actually, the first time he set eyes on her, he did not really see her. The only thing he really saw was the man She was dancing with. Coloured man: colourful man: man of formidable gusto. In that cellar night-club, Roberto never really saw her face. The curve of her left shoulder was all he saw. But the curve of her left shoulder was enough to dream about. (Paris is the City of Dreams of Curving Shoulders.) All the same . . .



THE FIRST TIME HE SAW PARIS

4

All the same . . . Roberto's immediate trouble was that he had nowhere to take his dreams to. No hotel room. Not enough folding-francs to squander, tonight, on paying for one. So he flopped himself down on a pavement bench, and let his dreams take over. He was awakened by a left elbow—an elbow that belonged to the shoulder that he had seen dancing with the negro in the night club. Coincidence? Possibly. Paris is the City of Coincidences. The girl said . . .



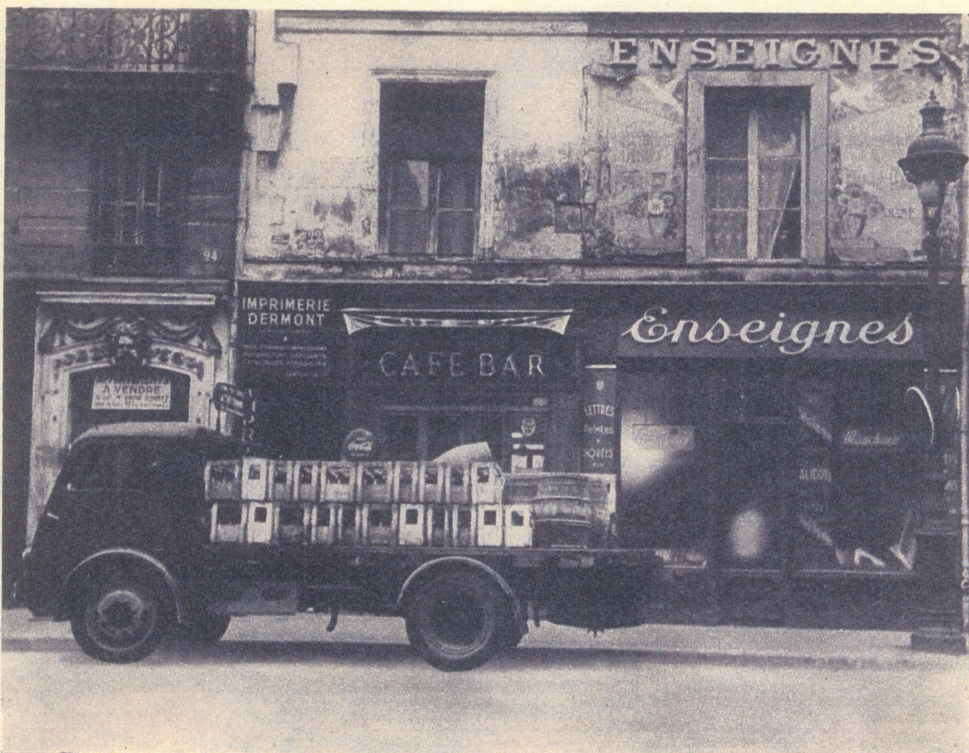
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The girl said . . . "Have you fire?" "Pardon?" said Roberto, preparing to flare-up. (Paris is the City of Insults.) "I mean," she said, "do you have a match?" He did have a match. He gave her a match. He also gave her—between that moment and the dawn—his life story. How he had quit Existence in Mexico, to seek LIFE in Paris. How he had fallen in love with her left shoulder. All this he told her, in the violet hours, on a bench in the street; because she, too, had no home to go to. (Paris is the City of LIFE.)

by

6 When the street cleaners had gone and the dawn had come, the girl on the bench said: "Paris is the City of Existence. But you and I need to get some sleep." "Possibly," said Roberto, "but where can one get sleep in Paris?" "It is difficult," said the girl, "but, from time to time, it can be arranged. So let us go, now, you and I, across to that Café Bar. They are open, now. And they are good people. They allow *human beings* to sleep on the café tables." (Paris is the City which is kind to Cats.)

7 In the Café Bar, they drank two cups of coffee, and they shared one crisp, warm roll of bread. The girl yawned, like a gorged tigress after an antelope-supper, and then she suddenly started sleeping. "One moment, *please*," Roberto whispered, "I absolutely need to know how you are called?" "I am called Vali," the girl murmured. Roberto sighed. "Vali!" he said, "Vali! Sleep well, Vali." But she was gone, already, through the doorway of her dreams. To himself, Roberto said: "What *is* Paris? O, mother mine, you who stayed back there in Mexico City, this son of yours has now been in Paris for eighteen burning hours, and at last he can answer the question you never tired of asking him. You asked me: 'What is Paris?' Now, I can tell you, mother! Paris is the April City of Paradise!"



PART 2 OF THE SERIAL PICTURE-STORY: WHY DID ROBERTO LEAVE PARIS?

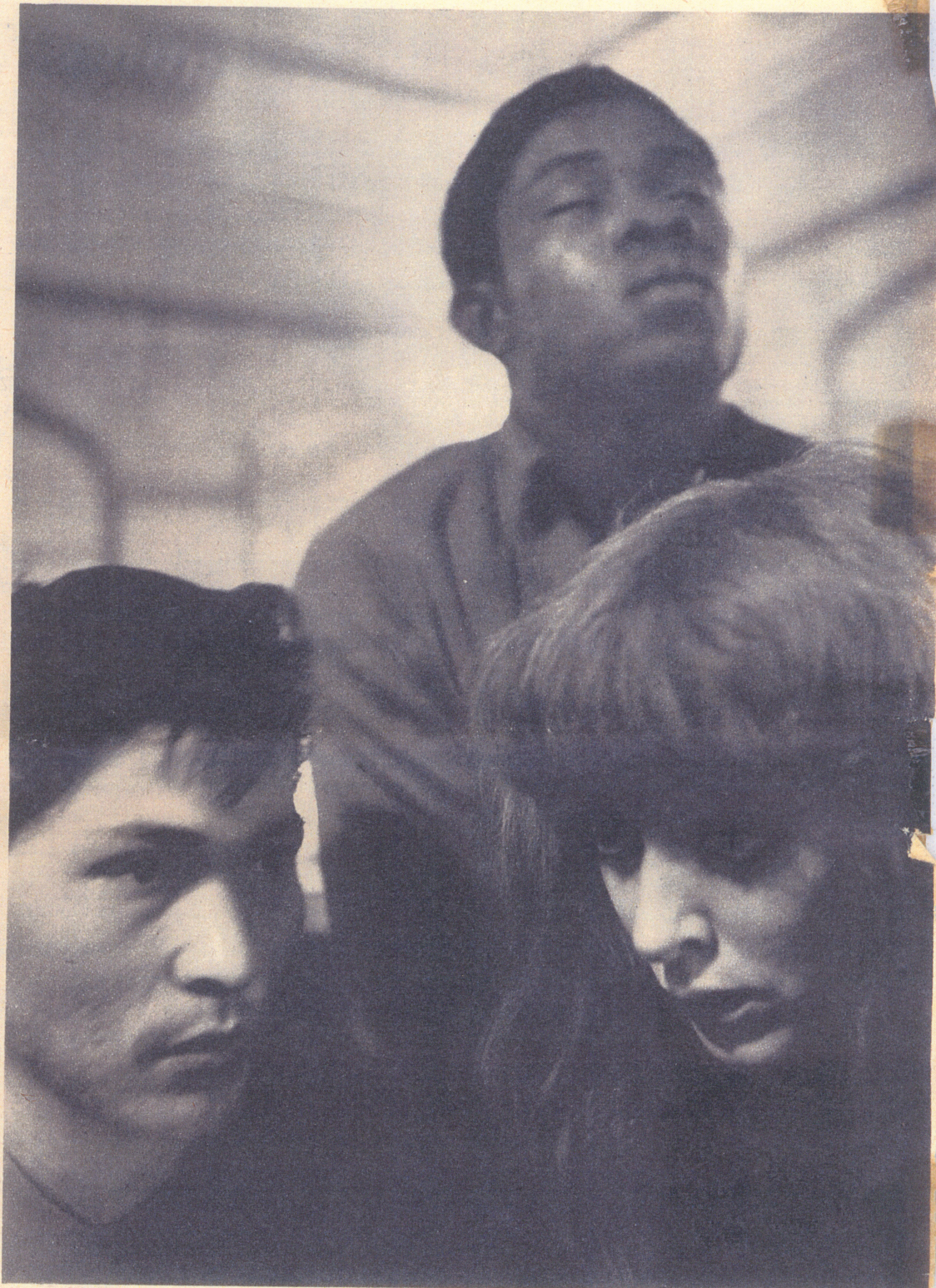
PARIS IS THE CITY OF JEALOUSY

I THE STORY SO FAR

"What is Paris?" Roberto's mother had asked him, when he announced that he was going to quit Mexico, and work his passage to France. "Paris," said Roberto, "is a city. *My* city." "Mexico City," said Roberto's mother, "is a city, too. *Your* city, my son. And, in any case, what is this Paris, that you keep on nagging me about, the city of?" "Paris, mother mine," replied Roberto, "is the City of Paradise." "Prove it, my son," said Roberto's mother. So Roberto set out to prove it.

On his very first evening in Paris, Roberto did prove it. He strolled down the boulevards of Paradise; and, on the Boulevard St. Germain, he met the lovely girl Vali. Paris—and Vali, too! On that first evening, Roberto was king—and the world exploded into Spring!

Photographed by ED van der ELSEN



2

This was Roberto and Vali on the day after Roberto's arrival in Paris. They had slept for an hour, slumped across two café tables, and the camera caught them now as they sat becalmed, in the lull before their first storm. To Roberto, at this moment, Paris was still Paradise. Vali had just said that, today, she would introduce him "to *her* Paris—and to her friends." At those words—far away in Mexico City, a bell tolled. For, from that moment, Roberto was hardly ever to be with Vali again—*alone*. Even at this moment, they were not quite alone. From over their shoulders, the lengthened shadow of a man fell between them, prising them apart. To escape the shadow, they left the café. Outside in the street they nearly tripped over a guitarist, who was sitting pretty on the pavement. He seemed to know Vali. Vali seemed to know him. As a matter of fact, Vali seemed to know a lot of people.



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Indeed, at the next café where Roberto and Vali called, Vali seemed to know everyone. Or, at any rate, everyone seemed to know Vali. And so naturally everyone wanted Vali to come and sit at *their* table. Vali was popular; indeed, it looked as if she had been popular in the Quarter for a long time before Roberto ever set foot in it. This was something which ought to make Roberto proud. Or so Roberto tried to tell himself. But it was Freddy who got his word in first. (That's Freddy, whispering something gallant to Vali, at this moment.) Freddy had a gallant approach to everything. He had served as a soldier in Korea. But this, at last, was Paris and not Pusan; and Freddy had dyed his hair in patches of three different colours, just to give the point home. To Freddy, Paris was Paradise Regained. To Roberto, now, it looked like a Paradise which, without due care and attention, could be lost.





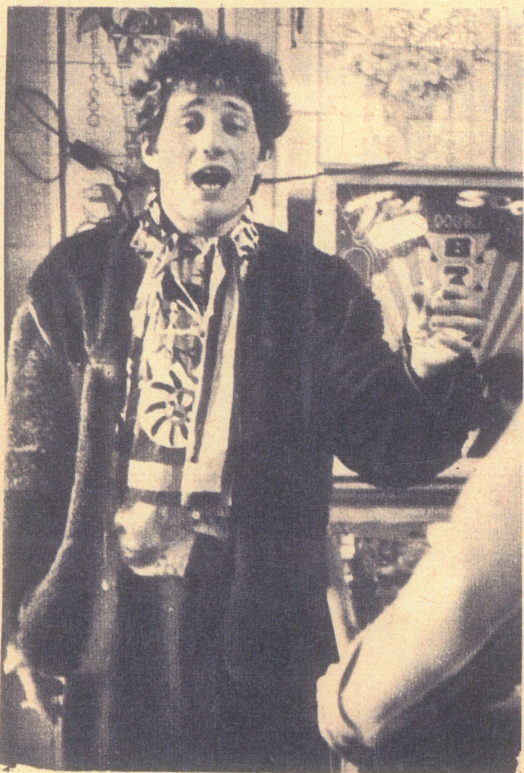
FREDDY'S EVENING OF TRIUMPH

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Freddy was a man of action. Roberto was something of a man of action, too; but he was also something of a philosopher. It was this, his second day, that taught Roberto that the people of Vali's Paris were perfectly capable of sitting in a café for an entire evening, while the coloured drinks seeped into them, and the life, apparently, ebbed out of them. And then, suddenly, they would spring to tempestuous life, and they would whirl out through the swing doors of the café and into the spiral night. And nothing more would be seen or heard of them till the next day.

Next day, however, plenty was seen and heard, by all, of Freddy. Next day, the streets of St. Germain shook, and the citizens of St. Germain shrank, when Freddy the Great came roaring by. Freddy the Great. Today, he was also Tamburlaine the Great, and perhaps Genghis Khan as well; and the sound and the fury of his passing-by suggested that he might also be Kubla Khan, giving his celebrated imitation of wailing for her demon lover. Or else that he was just off to Troy, with Helen tucked under his arm. This morning, Freddy was Czar, in

FREDDY'S MORNING AFTER . . .



5 OH! WHAT A . . .



6 . . . BEAUTIFUL MORNING!



7 . . . BUT VALI SAT IN AN UNKNOWN CAFÉ, ALONE . . .

Alone. The way Roberto could hardly ever find her. When Vali went to the cafés that Roberto knew, she was quite fenced-in by her friends. When she wanted to be alone, she went to cafés that Roberto did not know. In fact, there were still quite a number of things that Roberto did not know about Paris—yet.

NEXT WEEK: VALI AND THE GAY AMERICAN

THE CALL OF THE SEA

1 THE STORY, SO FAR

"What is Paris?" Roberto's mother had said, for the hundredth time, to her son, as she saw him off from Mexico City on the first stage of his Spring pilgrimage to France. "What is Paris? My son, I will tell you what Paris is *not*. Paris is not Paradise. Paris is no good, my son, to you."

But Roberto was a very young man, and Roberto knew better. And Paris, on his first evening there, proved him right. Paris was good to him. And Vali, the lovely girl he had seen with the negro in the night club, was gentle to him. And, for the first time in her life, Roberto's mother was proved wrong. Paris *was* Paradise.

"But what," Roberto had asked Vali, the next morning, "is *your* Paris, as you call it?" Vali had smiled and had got up from the table; and he had followed her out of the café. Vali's Paris? That, Roberto discovered, was one square mile of scented riverside quay and boulevard, furnished, the whole way, with crowded cafés and empty bookshops; peopled exclusively by men and women who had known Vali from time immemorial, and in all her previous incarnations; and distinguished by the fact that, though it was not difficult to be lonely in Vali's Paris, it was impossible ever to be alone there—with Vali! Back home in Mexico, Roberto had hardly foreseen that the sickly-green orchid of jealousy could blossom on the boulevards of Paradise.

THIRD INSTALMENT OF THIS SERIAL PICTURE-STORY

2

In amongst the asphalt jungle of St. Germain-des-Près, a previous generation of life-adventurers—the Existentialists—had striven to work out the equation: Love=Death. That, Roberto assumed, after two days in Paris, must have been how the eagle got two heads. Moreover, after a whole week in St. Germain, Roberto started to conclude that Vali had, at least, a hundred hearts. The French had a word for it: *Coeur d'artichaut*—artichoke heart. (Globe artichoke—the kind you can take to pieces, leaf by leaf, and distribute to all the other people at the dinner table, if you're in the giving mood.) At the end of his second week in Paris, Roberto challenged Vali outright. "What does Love mean to you?" he asked her, in his young way. "The little death," she answered. No one in the world could render *that* phrase into Mexican for him (or into English, either, for that matter). So Roberto did his best, and procured for Vali a rather small-sized human skull, made of sugar-icing.





"TALK OF SEA-BREEZES—IN ST.

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That presentation skull of Roberto's was not a mad success with Vali. Love=Death, maybe. But, in the Quarter of the Existentialists, X=0, without any question at all. And so, now, Vali wanted to be alone. To be Alone; or, at least, to be away from the encircling sounds and smells of the St. Germain Quarter and its eternal 'regulars.' To be away from the eyes of gawping tourists. Away from the two-headed eagles, and the one-headed eagles, and from the vultures and the wolves and the jackals. Away from the Pernod and the garlic. Away to those blue, remembered hills. Away, if possible, to where the sweet primroses beckon, and the sweet sea-breezes lick the corners of your mouth.

Talk of sea-breezes—in St. Germain-des-Près—and you hear the smacking of their lips. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.* It's just a matter of gum instead of garlic. Chesterfields instead of Gaulloises. In all fundamentals, the New World is mighty like the Old. Either, one has a cigarette, but no light. Or else, one has a light, but no cigarette. Those are the only two basic situations on earth. As every schoolboy—and sailor—knows.



by



GERMAIN-DES-PRES—AND YOU HEAR THE SMACKING OF THEIR LIPS!”

4

People who spend all their days and nights in the neighbourhood of St. Germain are very, very occasionally sniped by the notion that they are losing touch with the external realities. Among such external realities are sea-breezes and primroses. And, in this modern age, NATO. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation is unquestionably a worldly reality which deserves support; but it is a reality which one is apt to overlook when one is living in a celestial haze of Pernod and garlic. One even forgets who the accredited member states of NATO *are*. All the same, a time comes when one feels it to be one's duty, as a citizen of the Western World, to make the effort to remember—and to help cement that NATO Alliance. Well, then, *is* America a member of NATO? But, of course. (*Vive l'Amérique!*) Is France? One would certainly hope so—if only for old time's sake. (*Vive la France!*) Is Mexico? One doubts it. One doubts it *very* much. (*Vive NATO! Let's go!*) They went. And Roberto, the Mexican, watched them go—with wormwood in his heart.



NEXT WEEK: WHY ROBERTO LEFT PARIS

WHY DID ROBERTO LEAVE PARIS ?—fourth and last instalment



PARIS IS

THE STORY SO FAR

"What *is* Paris?" That was the question that had been asked of Roberto the Mexican by his mother, on the day when she had seen him off, reluctantly, from Mexico City, on the first stage of his self-inspired pilgrimage to France. And she had not stayed for an answer.

"What *is* Mexico?" the cafe-dwellers had asked Roberto, during the first week of his stay in Paris. "Mexico," he had answered, "is where my mother is." "From now on," said the man with the strange cigarette, "Paris will be your mother." "From now on," said the girl with the glaring eyes, "Paris will be your master-mistress." "All hope abandon," said the blind man at the next table, "unless you have a return ticket to Mexico City." "I have nothing," replied Roberto, "except Paris." "Then, Heaven help you," said the blind man.

But it was not so much Heaven as the lovely girl Vali who helped Roberto, in the end. It was Vali who helped him to know the people of *her* Paris—and *her* Paris turned out to be that holy acre of café-pavement around the Place St. Germain-des-Pres. It was because of Vali that Roberto came to know all the people of the St. Germain Quarter. It was because of Vali that Roberto came to feel that he was, himself, a living part of the true Paris. It was because of Vali, and because of the way Roberto saw her disappearing, one

Photographed by

NO MOTHER

day, with an American sailor, who was most definitely *not Paris*, that Roberto dreamed that he saw red, that he socked ten waiters at the café, that he massacred the gendarme on point duty, that he knocked the two bicycle cops off their bicycles, that he unhorsed the first four ranks of the Garde Républicaine, and that he entered the Prefecture of Police, and challenged the Prefect of Paris to a duel behind the back of the Mona Lisa. And, finally, it was because of Vali, that Roberto dreamed that he ended up in the Santé Prison (above), where, (if all that he had dreamt had been even half-true), he was certainly entitled to stay.

THE LAST CHAPTER

But Roberto's dream did not stop at dreaming that he had arrived, bloody but unbowed, inside the Santé Prison. Roberto's dream was a serial dream, in which his Paris past and his Paris future featured in alternate instalments. No sooner had the old, haunting image of the hectic, hothouse Vali, first seen dancing with a negro, flashed across the screen of his mind, than it dissolved into an image of the lovely sea-breezes-and-primroses Vali haunting the prison gates, of the lonely monastic Vali pining for the day of his release, of the forlorn and faithful Vali, waiting for to carry him home. ("You asked me, mother: what is Paris? Paris, mother mine, is the City of Fidelity.")

Continued overleaf





THE NEON-LIT DAWN OF ROBERTO'S LAST DAY IN PARIS

Paris is the City of Fidelity. Roberto, the Mexican, dreamed that, when he finally got out of the Santé Prison (into which he had so vigorously dreamed himself), he found that not only was the girl Vali waiting to welcome him, but that the girl Géri was in attendance as well. *There was fidelity for you!* In the café, from dusk to sunrise, Vali and Géri and Roberto talked and smoked away the night; and, as the sun reared up out of the Seine, Paris came to pieces in their hands. Paris was the City of Light: Paris was the city of Dreams. Paris was the City of Dreams of Curving Shoulders. Paris was the City of Life. Paris was the City of Existence. Paris was the City of Jealousy. Paris was the City of Absolute Despair. Paris was the City of Absolute Faith. Paris was the City of Fidelity.

"But you must clearly understand, Roberto," said Vali and Géri simultaneously, as if they had both learned the lines for a recitation class, "that, though Paris is the City of Fidelity, Paris is faithful *only* unto her own." And they glanced at each other, and smiled a tired, early-morning smile.

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Why did Roberto leave Paris? Was it because he had had enough of the bitter-sweet pastry of France? Was it because he had eaten his fill of "mille feuilles" in the "temps de mille fleurs"? "Why are you leaving Paris, Roberto?" the lovely ghosts inquired of him in the café, as he stood, a stranger and afraid, in the exit doorway of a world he'd never made. "I am leaving Paris," replied Roberto, "and I am going back to Mexico City—because *nobody* can bake 'tortilla' like my mother." And, at those words, all the church bells in Mexico City started ringing. And, at those words, in the church at the side of the Place St. Germain des Pres, they tolled the one bell only.

