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**KATIE
CHRISTIE**

BONNE NUIT

Fiction

Paris 1922

I woke at an interminable hour, my watch unwound beside me and the curtains dark. The smooth bedclothes were a cool tomb around my limbs. Outside, the air was as thick and silent as water. Suspended in the current, I traveled motionless past my familiar neighborhood now vague in black fog. Out of the formless seam between sky and earth, a restaurant rose clear and sharp. Landscaped, the chairs inside stacked on fine white linen, the shining candlesticks and the *maitre'd's* black jacket would have grown cold by now.

I swept past the wrought-iron gate to the patio at the back. Legs like polished ivory glowed in the night air. Crossed at the ankles and lifted atop a lacy metal table, one was covered in torn fishnets, the other smooth down to stiletto heels as pointed as the cigarette holder hovering between her slightly parted lips. Her heavily mascara'd eyelids dropped languorously then opened to accept my flickering shape in the reflection of her glossy eyes, and she tilted her head to expose the perfectly symmetrical beauty mark to the gas streetlight behind me. Removing the cigarette holder, its shiny black surface moist and sticky with rouge, she pressed her lips together and began to hum. She leaned forward to graze her fingers across her ankles and refasten the slim lines of her shoe straps. Her pale cheek brushed against the rough texture of the fishnet-covered knee as she straightened, humming. Pointing one toe, then the other, she kicked lithe legs into the air and spun on the chair, dropping her feet with a clash on the mosaic tiles. Her palms resting on her knees in a wide stance and torso pushed forward, she rose, circling her wildfire of curls stabbed through by black pins. Long throat thrumming with the melody, she drew her arms across each other and stretched towards the sky. At the climax she paused, holding the note in her throat, closed eyes upon the overcast sky, then sank slowly back to earth, her stance deep with bent limbs as she settled and ended her song.

Reaching an upraised hand into the distance between us, the middle finger drooping beneath the weight of an enormous green stone, she beckoned.

"La valse?"

I came.

In the morning, my sheets were hot and tangled and wet with salt.