



THE KISS

By Idly Lee

The setting sun filtered through the chestnut trees on Boulevard St Michel. The wind loosened my braids as I walked home from the studios, carrying my guitar case. April in Paris! At age sixteen I was on top of the world for I had just sung on national television!

A man walked beside me with a teasing smile. His mustache curled up in abrupt points, like the horns of a bison. Despite that ridiculous mustache, he was rather attractive. He had full lips, a rosy complexion, and a mischievous sparkle in his eyes. "Hmm, definitely charming for an older man," I thought.

His long fur coat opened with elegant negligence over an expensive wool suit. A silk handkerchief peeped from his upper pocket. His shoes were glossy and his hands covered with fine leather gloves. Next to him, close to the curb, a Rolls Royce driven by a uniformed chauffeur followed his footsteps.

He winked at me from the corner of his eyes. He was obviously rich. Maybe even famous. But so was I. Well, not rich. But I was certainly on my way to be famous. So this annoying man with his inflated ego wasn't going to impress me at all. I decided to ignore him, but he stepped closer and put his arm around me. I gasped. What nerve!

"I just saw you on TV!" he announced victoriously in a theatrical voice. Nothing was natural about this man.

Big deal, I thought. So did the rest of France!

"Well, did you really lose your country, young lady? Or is this just a publicity stunt? And how come a poor political refugee girl speaks perfect French, with no accent? Any explanation for that, my dear?"

I really started to dislike this arrogant man. How did he dare to doubt me?

"Those cute little pig tails, are they real?" He playfully pulled on them, shook them loose, and watched them cascade upon my shoulder.

"You are pretty."

He stepped in front of me, his moustache like curled walrus tusks silhouetted against the setting sun.

“Very pretty indeed” He whispered. “This soft light paints your skin translucent. Don't move!” He ordered like he owned me. “Hold this expression, I like you distant like this, a little melancholic.” He traced the contour of my face with one glove he took off and held like a paintbrush. The soft touch of the leather sent a chill through my spine. He turned my head to the side, reinventing or recreating me. He looked like a Dutch Master at work. A strange glow lit his eyes.

“I'd like to paint you,” he said with a theatrical gesture and a God-like posture. “You'll be my Madonna. A sensuous Madonna. Without any clothes on, just a long shawl, wrapped around your body like a snake, nestling its venomous head between your warm little breasts.”

He talked with a mellow dramatic voice and bulging, beady eyes, like a bad actor overplaying himself. Then he suddenly changed character and like an eager child, asked with a mischievous grin, “Would you pose naked for me?”

Confused and overwhelmed, this was more than I could bear. This man, who easily could have been my father, was rude, shocking and disrespectful. No one had ever talked to me like this. *Who does he think he is talking to? I am the daughter of an eminent Law professor, on my way to be a star! I have 5000 posters pasted all over Metro stations and the billboards in Paris, mind you! And today, after my TV show, Eddy Barclay, the record mogul phoned the station and offered me a contract. There! So who is this little vermin to treat me like this? And look! There is a growing crowd around us, all my fans. How could this man humiliate me in front of them?* Blood rushed to my head. I was furious!

“Oh, how charming!” He said. “You're blushing. Good, very good! So you're not a fake after all!”

“I am sorry, but I have to go. Good bye!”

He grabbed me. “Don't go yet,” he pleaded. “Listen, I am having a party at my hotel Saturday night. Come and sing for us. And bring along Ismael, the Gypsy guitarist from your show.”

“Oh sure” I promised knowing darn well that I was definitely not going to this man's hotel, and I had no intention to contact Ismael either.

“You know who I am, don't you?” He asked eagerly.

Was I supposed to? He mentioned his name, but frankly it didn't ring a bell. I vaguely remembered now. He was a painter. That was it! A zany painter. Not very talented, I thought. He painted strange things, like melting clocks and other nonsense, just to be different. His only talent lay in his eccentric interviews. This man would do anything to be noticed. He bicycles in hallways of world-famous hotels and orders smelly sheep to his luxury suite to paint them. Anything for publicity. How disgusting! The pushy little painter who tried so desperately to be famous, handed me a piece of paper he tore off from an envelope in his pocket and jotted down:

"Hotel Meurice, Saturday night 8 o'clock. Bring Ismael!" He signed it with a fancy, curving gesture that he finished up in the air with elegant circles, like a ballet dancer, before ceremoniously handing it to me.

He sensed my suspicions. "You'll be safe," he said with a Cheshire grin. "I'll even introduce you to my wife Gala."

He was almost convincing, however his eyes glued on my lips betrayed his true intentions.

Again, his expression abruptly changed. "Oh, baby, you look so innocent, yet you've got such sinful lips!" He pulled me closer. "Can I kiss you good-by?" but didn't wait for an answer. The next thing I remembered were his upper incisors gleaming in the setting sun. His lower teeth were worn down and blackened. They looked sharp and cutting as he bent over me, like a hawk before striking its prey. Then he swiftly glued his lips over mine. His enormous silhouette overshadowed me, like the wings of a victorious vulture. Shocked and angry, I was helpless as he pinned me down. His mustache, hard as a claw hurt as he forcefully pressed himself against my body. I had to close my eyes because his expensive perfume dizzied me. His fur coat felt soft, animal like.

I wasn't prepared for what followed!

Like a giant vacuum, his lips sucked mine into his mouth, licking and wetting mine like an octopus and then...Oh my god! And then! - His sharp and pointed tongue forced open my mouth and invaded my inner cavity, turning and swirling and probing up to my tonsils. The tongue was huge, alive and crawling all over inside, like a giant dragon, wagging its tail. I wanted to cough it out, tear it out, or spit it out. I was gagging. That tongue was a frightening nightmare. I wanted to wake up.

He retreated with a triumphant smile, a gladiator who just conquered the enemy. He gave me a last wink and disappeared through the crowd into his chauffeur driven Rolls.

I wished to die. The growing crowd around us was cheering, applauding, and whistling. I felt violated, dirty, and ashamed. I ran to the washroom of a nearby coffee shop and rinsed out my mouth over and over. Yuck! I never had a French kiss before, but God, this was disgusting! A blond girl followed me to the washroom.

"Oh, that kiss!" - She sighed, - "Lucky you. I would do anything to be kissed by Salvador Dali!"

The next morning, as I spread out the newspapers over the cafe table, Salvador Dali and his wife smiled at me from the pages.

Maybe it would have been safe to attend?

I didn't realize then that the man who gave me my first French kiss was one of the greatest masters of our century. Fortunately Ismael never found out how close he once came to fame and glory.

In quiet museums I often wonder, would I be proud or ashamed to see my naked body displayed on a canvas, infant on my lap, snake between my breasts? Did the Master remember at all the innocent schoolgirl he left so confused that spring afternoon on the Left Bank?

Thinking of Dali, I often wonder whether the butterflies in my stomach and the chills through my spine are due to admiration, desire, disgust, or regret. I guess I am still confused. If only I could taste again the magnitude of that chaotic, consuming fire that only a genius of his caliber can create!

Today, I would give anything to experience once again the strange passion of that kiss that frightened me so much on Boulevard Saint Michel on a spring afternoon in Paris!



The author's poster as a recording artist around the time she met Salvador Dali.