

An April Fool in Paris

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A Young woman prepares for a fashion show in Paris and is visited by friends, relatives and murder.

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AN APRIL FOOL IN PARIS

Louisa untangled the telephone wire before hanging up the white provincial phone on its cradle. Looking around at the majestic sweeping arches of the Bernoir Mansion, she sighed with reverence. The party tonight would have to go on without a hitch for all the dignitaries of the fashion world were to be there tonight. Madam;, her thoughts were interrupted by Gerard the gardener. The violets are a little wilted with the unseasonable warm weather; they will have to be watered again at sunset. Oh what a shame Louisa lamented. It will be all right; Gerard assured her they will survive. The rain is not too far behind, His broken English amused her, it was such a direct contrast to her brooklynese. She was so happy with her life as it was now. She worked for a major fashion design house on fifth in New York and one of her own creations was to be shown at the April Fashion show put together by her company's Paris headquarters. Simone, her boss, had requested that she pack and spend a month in Paris to prepare for the display on April 15. 3 weeks ago she had arrived with 17 pieces of luggage to exasperated looks from airline baggage personnel and disgusted limousine drivers as well. She had to bring every thing including her singer sewing machine. O yes she wouldn't leave that behind. It was her good luck charm. One of Simones best clients Madam Douseff and her Ambassador husband had helped Louisa arrange to lease the stately pernoir mansion that was build in 1910. With its fine white marble and tile made in Anjouie througout the dining room, The dining room was mirrored from one quarter from the floor up and bottom was decorated with white tile detailed with rose borders and chubby arrowed cups in the middle of each one. The crystal chandelier was made with fine Austrian crystal and the modernization of the mansion was expertly done by Madame Douseff herself. During World War II when the Germans invaded, the countryside was riddled with Mansion built circa 1880 and this being the less majestic of the dozens was trashed. Believe it or not, Madame douseff has said when she met her at the airport, every single mirror in the place had been broken With all that bad luck, no wonder the Germans lost she had added with a laugh.

She had become quite comfortable in the mansion these past few weeks. She felt that she would miss it when it came time to leave. But for now her mind concentrated on the elaborate affair that would be conducted in the mansion tonight. Yes it was beautiful but lonely. But that would all end this afternoon because she was expecting her brother Robert in tonight. The anthropology professor was coming in from Binghamton where he was a teacher at the University there. He had decided to take an early vacation during school break and h was ring in a surprise guest or should it be quest. Roberts's intense blue eyes had always been the magnets of allure for some very fine ladies from clerks to congresswomen. She knew he had a knack for traveling in wide circles. All in all she just couldn't wait to see him. Jus as Gerard exited the back door through the kitchen a knock came at the door. She ambled o it and opened wide unlike her tiny apartment in Brooklyn, the grounds ere immense and heavily patrolled by security on vespas. Hello, may I help you? she said to the big burly man standing in the doorway. I am Maurice the chef he said through his thick mustache.

An April Fool in Paris

Have hired for your party, yes. I have come early to set up the kitchen I hope you don't mind. He flashed a wide smile that couldn't have looked more fake and stepped inside before Louisa could answer. Lovely, Lovely he commented. You are glad I speak English, no. O yes I am very glad but I have a disadvantage. I don't speak chefese so I will have to greatly plan my menu to your suggestions. Would that be all right? Yes He said looking at me with pity as if to say poor little fish in the great big pond. Which Louisa likes anyhow. Yes Louisa said this way to the kitchen. He followed her into the room and saw his disappointed face at the small center worktable. He began lamenting. She cut him short I cannot worry about that now, I have too many things to do you do your best. Just then the phone in the hall jangled to get her attention. There goes my phone. Please excuse me. Douseff residence yes one minute Yvette the upstairs maid call to Louisa. Miss Louisa to pick up. Ties this is rudolpho office in Paris we are calling to confirm tonight at 7 Rudolpho will be attending and his guest. Yes it is a costume party. It will be fun. Very good. Robert arrived two hours later bounding out of the cab with sultry blonde with very heavy make up. Louisa ran to meet him. Robert you're here I'm so happy She turned to the bond an instantly recognized her. Robert sensing this still introduced them Louisa this is olivia dobey she hosts her own talk show. Its called here and now. Yes yes how I pleased I am to meet you Robert has told me nothing about you.. Surprise, Surprise. Robert smiled mischevously. My what a grand place you know I spend tow year in Paris doing research on aristocrats and their investments when I was just out of journalism school working freelance I sold that article to 60 minutes but that was so long ago I had forgotten how beautiful Paris is. The way her green eyes sparkled and her mouth widening into a smile revealing even white teeth. Louisa looked at her and imagined the face of a shark. Pushing the unpleasant thought aside she turned to Robert did you bring your costume. Yes I did and did Olivea. Don't tell me your both coming as Bill and Hillary Clinton. A Rush of laughter that sounded almost mad came out of Olivia mouth. NO, no, no. She exclaimed Napoleon and Josephine of course. Of course, Louisa smiled I should have guessed She felt an urge to violently strangle. What is Robert thinking with this witch? What are you blind? she said to him when they were alone. She's so plastic Who cares, she knows a lot of people. The right people. She's only been doing Here and Now for 6 months and its on at midnite and the rating are still good. Louisa rolled her eyes Jay and David have nothing to worry about. Shell be gone before you know it and so will you. She is so cutthroat did you ever listen to the questions she asks her guest. Some of them are uglier than the answers Didnt you when you were 5 years old take a frog and squeeze it until it oozed She never asked that but that's the kind of questions she asks shock questions and vulgar too. You can't help but turn her off unless you're some kind of a pervert. I never turn her off, I find her stimulating. Yeah Ill bet! Louisa sneered. And we both know whom you find stimulating it's her boss Jon Allen producer. Well you know I have kinda toying with the idea of Robert Dellacosta, talk show host. Haven't done that yet. What do you think? NO seriously I need her expertise on a program the school is putting together for a local cable network on anthropology. Where did you meet her. Through Kay Bianco, she's her make up person. No wonder she looks like that. Kay upset with you now. Na, she met some one else, I think. So How many people coming to this suare? About 25. And who are the chosen? Simone made up most of the list. Madame and ambassador douseff, the owners of this palace, some designers, models a politician or two and some friends in our industry. The douseffs, a lot of money huh? You know it. Ive seen her she as a pretty classy lady he looks like an old fart. He lost most of his + family in the war you know. No I didn't know sorry. Hey if you need to exercise there is a room down through the dining room. They just had new equipment delivered. Man he doesn't look like he exercising not him, probably her. She spends in clothes what I spend in yearly rent in just one month. She is one of our best customers. The door bust open and Olivia in lounging pajamas appeared still in full make up. Robert, didn't you hear me knock? No olivia darling do come in. Robert looked at Louisa that's my cue see you in a few hours Party starts at 7. So Early Oliva exclaimed that doesn't give much time she said giving Robert the once over

An April Fool in Paris

Louisa stood blinking at the soaked inspector in the doorway 5 hours ago her life was a dream now it had turned into a nightmare. Inspector Chenard of the Paris police removed this rainhat and it somewhat dryer while another bolt of lightning permeated the night sky. Gasps came from the living rooms and followed by murmured voices. The corpse heâs in here Inspector Chenard and his partner followed Louisa to the foot of the dining room and there though the hall to the exercise room and sprawled against the pedestal of the exercise bike was ambassador Douseff body very still unquestionably very dead. Miss Della Costa inspector began when did you discover the body.

â Louisa dabbing away at tears with an handkerchief, I was just coming out of the living room to check on dinner about 9:15 when I saw that the exercise room door was open. I know I had closed it earlier so I thought that someone was in there. I went to look who it was and then I saw his body on the floor. Just then Robert had come up behind her and put both arms around her shoulders. The shard was just behind him and looking similarly gray. â Please can't you see. â Who are you?â â I am Robert Dellacosta, Miss Dellacosta brother. Please Mr. Dellacosta I am obligated to conduct this investigation and I know that this is a very traumatic time for you sister but it must be done and I would appreciate without interruption. This is my investigation, please do not interfere. It if wasn't for his lovely French accent he would almost sound rude. But Louisa did not notice all she kept thing about was the body just a few feet from her. A gushing wound to the chest in addition to the wound on his head. I will have to question all the guests one by one. He said waking through the dining room to the living room something caught his eye halfway in the dining room. He bent down to pick it up and found a silver knob he looked at it curiously and quickly took out a handkerchief and wrapped the cloth around it. Louisa and Robert looked at each other, he first questioned Rudolfo his priest costume complete with hymnal very convincing costume except for the 3 carat diamond stud earring and ponytail sticking out from the pontiff style cap. Where were you around 9:00 p.m. the guests remember seeing the ambassador around a quarter to nine so it had to have happened a little after that. Speculation at this stage of the game. Rudolfo had gone down to the wine cellar for a bottle and his date Dianna the lovely dressed outrageously as Josephine Baker complete with Banana suit was there to witness and she said so. Robert and Olivia were out by the terrace that ran off the living room. The inspector could not help but notice how shaken Olivia was. I have never seen a dead body up close in all my years of journalism, I had always been spared that now I don't think I'll ever get over it. She stared blankly into space as she said this and the inspector though she might be a victim of shock and ordered her to have a glass of sherry. Hearing this she quickly seemed to regain her composure. Madame Douseff was hysterical and it took her good friends close to comfort or at least try to comfort her but she could not be comforted. When Inspector Chenard tried to question her she could not even answer any of his questions without having a crying jag. While the inspector was walking around all the guests and the butlers were still trying to serve refreshments not sure what to do with themselves. The inspector passed a tray that a butler was holding and picked up an hors d'oeuvre and bit into the tart taste of a cream cracker. With a full mouth he asked if the ambassador seemed upset while he was here. NO screamed Madame Douseff. He was not upset he was having a great time here. The doorbell rang at that moment and a pretty red-haired lady arrived Simone, oh Simone Louisa call to her. I can't believe what has happened and 5 days before the show. Simone there Simone consoled Louisa it will be alright. Inspector Chenard hurriedly arrived at the side and who are he demanded. Louisa this is Simone the head of the fashion show to be put here next week. What is your connection to the victim? He sneered and started speaking in French to the lovely woman. They conversed back and forth. What she was telling him was that she was at her Paris office going over design and organizing finishing touches for the show with restaurant owner Pierre Nieve where the fashion show was to be held. Easily checked out the inspector nodded. â Merciâ Simone said with a swing of her red hair and eyeing him with the same distrustful look he gave her. â What is the name of your company. Simone answered Simone de Paris near plaza Von Dome. Madame Douseff appeared at her side. Simone Simone she wailed why did have to happen. There now Cheri take it easy. â He had a bad

An April Fool in Paris

heartâ Madame Douseff explained locking eyes with the inspectorâ s. This I assure you was no heart attack. â Inspector: Jacques his agent called to him holding in his hand he displayed a paper napkin with a little green substance smeared on it. This was in the dead man's pocket. He brought it over for the inspector to get a closer look. Inspector Chenard eyed then sniffed at the dangling item, Lime he asserted as though he had found King Solomon's mines. In French he instructed the young man to seal it in a plastic bag turning to Louisa he said. We will have to have analyzed. So now Mr. Della Costa how is it you and Miss Dopey were out on the terrace in a rainstorm? Well it wasn't raining on us. It is two-tiered there was a covering for the second floor over us. Did you see anything unusual while you were out there? No Robert replied well did you see anyone else. We, we thought we were alone then we noticed that Madame Douseff was also at the other end of the terrace.

â Alone?â â yesâ How did you finally see her? Well we were talking ahem clearing his throat Robert went on and a flash of light from the lightning reflected on her jewelry I guess and it brought my attention and thatâ s when I saw her. But she is wearing pearls the inspector noted. We must have caught her gold clasp. Ah Yes I see. Anyway did she appear nervous? No she seemed quite calm. The loves thunderstorms as much as we do or so she said when I yelled over to her. Miss Dellacosta where were you at round 9. I was just checking with our chef on the orders because the guests were just drinking and I really thought it better to have some food passed out. You must forgive me because this is my first dinner party in a foreign country should I have let them get drunk she asked annoyed. No No I understand completely Inspector Chenard nodded in agreement. Tell me your exact steps. I told you I just checked on the orders and then I went back into the living room. Did you run into anyone, the chef and oh yes Rudolpho was very anxious to get something to eat. He said he hadn't eaten all day and he was famished. In fact he took the tray that the chef had just prepared and said he would help pass them around. He walked out of the kitchen stuffing his face. Inspector turned again to Rudolpho who was in the corner with Diana talking quietly. â May I call you Rudolpho. You are not French.â No I am English but I have lived in Paris for 14 years. You have made a great name for yourself I recent year, I understand. â Why thank you.â So is Rudolph is that your real name. â No, No it is notâ â What is your real name, for our records of course. My birth name is Randolph, my name that my parents gave me is Randolph Peterson. I was born in London and moved to America when I was 16. I studied fashion design at my NY Tech. I commuted every day from Greenwich Connecticut where our home was. I lived in the Bronx in a small apartment until 14 years ago when I had a chance to study under great fashion house like Simones here in Paris. Any other questions. His voiced bordered on arrogance. Diana looking frail and scared moaned â Can I go home/â no not yet Chenard turned quickly and then turned back again. Where were you at 9 PM Rage came upon Rudolpho's face and he shouted This is ridiculous, I told you I was downstairs trying to select a bottle of wine for Miss Dellacosta, she asked me to do it he added shooting a glance at Louisa. Yes that right I did Louisa acknowledged. â And you were with Diana Lavin is it? The girl nodded meekly. He couldn't help thinking what a pitiful creature so skinny he liked his women with meat. Dianna offered â We were downstairs in the wine cellar we walked around looking for a certain year that Rudolpho said he wondered if they had. I was too cold in the wine room so I went back to the foot of the stairs and waited. Are you sure he stayed in the room the whole time? â Why yes where else could he have gone without me seeing him. Her coffee complexion, which had paled earlier, was now deepening in color as she spoke. â Very Good thenâ he complemented her. â Inspector Chenard, Inspector Chenard?â â What is it?â The young agent Jacques was at his side quite excitedly speaking very quickly in hushed whispers. His eyes widened and he turned to Louisa. â Miss Louisa, it seems that your chef has a criminal record. Louisa face showed shock I got his name from Madame Douseff he explained quickly She must not have known. Why would you hire a person to be in your home and not check him out? Before Madame would answer Olivia broke her silenceâ She probably hired him to kill her husbandâ Everyone in the room gasped But Madame eyed her steely and spoke through clenched teeth â You little tramp, you don't what your saying Why are you here tell me As Louisa, Robert and all the others looked on in disbelief the two women started screaming obscenities at each other. In the middle of their tirade a barely audible knock came

An April Fool in Paris

at the door. The agent and the maid Yvette both went to the door. There standing was a man about forty with balding scalp. He looked at the both of them and brushed past walking directly to Louisa. Parli vous fance he said. Very little. Who are you? I hate to bother he said in broken English I am from the Lar fusion press. Quite a nite no.? Inspector Chenard ordered him out. And he had him bodily removed while the two women were still trading insults. You never loved him! Olivia was saying her face beet red. You just wanted the prestige that came along with being his wife. Oh you think he loved you you were just a dirty side dish he used to amuse himself with. Madame snapped back. That s a lie he loved me more than he could ever love you. He told me you know he told me about you he felt that you were slowly killing him with your distanced. You always tried to put between you . Still screaming she addressed the attentive audience that she was used to playing to. He had a bad heart and all she did was put pressure on him to buy her this or introduce her to all the beautiful people. you lying witch, youre the one who wanted to become the next Madame douseff only you couldn t get rid of me because you knew he loved me. He knew about the money and Rudolpho. Madame turned white for a split second and walked toward the inspector ranting. Inspector arrest this woman She shrieked. She is spouting lunacies she needs psychiatric help. Ladies, Ladies, please , Chenard said with a stern voice. Clear the room he bellowed except for Miss Dobey and Madame Dousseff. As the guests ushered out and the big mahogany doors closed behind them. Louisa couldn t help but overhear accusation rising to fever pitch from inside. And then suddenly only quiet murmurs were all that could be heard. Inside Chenard hushed the two women and told them to sit down. He paced back and forth for a minute than pointing a finger at Madame dousseff said I believe and correct me if I am wrong but you have been helping Rudolpho establish his reputation. She looked at Olivias smug expression and conceded yes he is a great designer, a real genius he asked me for help and I didn t see any reason not to. Without your husbands knowledge I presume. The inspector pointed out. You don t understand. Let me explain my husband always wanted me to be happy and lately I had been getting a little tired with all the ambassador wifely duties so I suggested opening up a boutique, just formal wear . "where is your shop?" Chenard inquired. It s not open yet I still have some details to work out. She started to explain in French but Olivia insisted that she know what was being said.

You see Rudolpho was helping me with advice is turn I helped with seeing that he could fulfill his dream. Olivia flipped a hand through her hair oh come on Bridgit, Did that include sleeping with him too? I am Madame Dousseff to you tramp. How dare you accuse me when you have carrying on an affair with my husband for twelve year? Yes Ill admit it I had an affair with your husband 12 years ago. It happened while I was doing a piece on prominent men in France and I was deeply moved about your husband s trial and tragedies during World War II when he was a boy. We have remained friends after it was over along time ago we are still just friends. Did you ever wonder why he insisted on buying this place Its because during the war the underground came her after the Germans had destroyed it as a place of solace. Hidden away from the atrocities that were happening outside that gate. Outside Robert had his ear pressed against the door until the young agent caught him Please monsieur he warned. Robert moved away joined Louisa who was deep in whisper conversation with Rudolpho and Dianna. The other guests were talking amongst themselves wondering half in French aloud half in English as to when they would be free to leave. Maurice the chef was still being questioned by other member so the French police and kept looking nervously at Dianna and Rudolph. Just then the doors swung open and out stepped bridgit douseff and Olivia Dobey they walked out calmly enough with only dagger eyes staring at each other. The agent who was question Maurice the chef went to Chenard and whispered in his year. Inspector Chenard seemed to engross him in fingering the plastic bag which contained the silver knob. He contemplating what was in his hand then walked over to the hall way where a tall copper container stood by the door. He began pulling out one by one the contents thereof finding one in particular his fait up like a Christmas tree. Walking back into the dining room he

paused and examined the fine tile and mirror. Turning to his assistant he motion for him to follow him he first walked up Madame doussef and I am sorry Madame I'm afraid you must come with me. What! The shock on her face was undeniable he then strode toward rudolpho monsieur Peterson I am arresting you for the murder of ambassador fanchot doussef. Now wait a minute. Louisa objected this is ridiculous he wasn't even around when the murder happened. Just then the young office appeared in the dining room and said something to the inspector. What did he say Louisa demanded he said only that the wine cellar is directly underneath this room?

Mr. Dellacosta you said that you and miss dobey were outside on the terrace when you saw a flash of light illumination you thought was madam desouseff jewelry but you see and I had noted she is wearing pearls but a something say a diamond would reflect a bright light. Turning to Rudolpho. You were out on the terrace with Madame Doussef. When the lightning lit up the sky you noticed Mr. Della costa and Miss Dobey and you quickly ducked away so they would not see you together. Rudolpho opened his mouth to speak but nothing came out. Before he could object Chenard pulled the hymnal from his waistband â Hey give me thatâ Rudolpho went to grab it back but Chenard was too quick for him Instantly his agent Jacque put his body between them as a shield. Holding him back. Chenard opened the hymnal to reveal a tiny bottle filled with clear liquid and double cross used to symbol liberate France used during world war 2 the cross of Lorraine. What have we here handing the hymnal and its contents to his assistant â rented the costume compelte with hymnal Rudolpho protested his innocence? I don't know how that got there. There is a scratch on the front. Anyone who had the costume last could have done this why don't you check with the shop that rented me the costume.â Chenard clasped his hands behind his back and stared at the ceiling â It also had come to our knowledge that Maurice had had a recent drug trafficking conviction and he seems to remember you has one of his customers. What do you say to that Monsieur Peterson.â He is mistakenâ Rudolpho began, but as hard as he could he still couldn't mask the panic look that seemed to take over the boyish dimpled face. Reconstruct taking a knife he tucked it between two tile with clips at top then let me see you went down to the wine cellar and meanwhile Madame doussef was showing her husband the new equipment that had come in the exercise room then she offered to be right back thinking some excuse to close the dining room door and to stand guard. The model diana is too cold in the wine cellar so she stood by the stairs before wthey you had gotten the tray of ho douve to stopped to put a bit what is in this glass bottle I suspect some hallucengic you knew he had a bad heart whether he died from a heart attack or went crazy it didn't matter it would either way work toward your plan to get rid of him so you and Madame douseff could have your dream realized you with great wealth and her to be with her young lover. But he turned toward the quests something went wrong when you were going into your act he pulled a knife from a place setting you wrestled with him dropping the hymnal contents on the floor you turned the knife toward him and plunged it into his chest he fell backward through the door in the exercise room and went down hitting his head on the bottom of the exercise bike, breaking his neck. Just then Madam de douseff opened the door asking what happened. You went to her took an umbrella out of the stand and told her to close the door you then wedged the umbrella inside the tiled secret door. To keep it open while you picked you your hymnal and contents. You then wedged the book and pulled them umbrella handed it to Madame douseff who put it back in the stand.unwedged the hymnal an slipped back down to the wine cellar grabbed a bottle of wine and walked back upstairs with diana as if nothing had happened. With tears streaming down his cheek and confessed that never meant to kill him. It was an accident he didn't thing the ambassador at his age would try to defend himself. He laughed and shrugged. I was only to drug him and make him go crazy. This way he would be committed and Bridgit and I would be free with all his money. As the pair were taken away Olivia went up to Robert â Im sorry I used you. I just wanted to see him again. I loved him that much. He was such an important part of my life. I understand, Robert put his arm around her. Miss Dobey the inspector called to her if it is all right I will be around in the morning to take a

An April Fool in Paris

statement. Yes that will be fine. Everything now had an eerie calm to it All the guest left and only Simone Robert, Olivia and Louisa remained. With a shriek Simone broke the silence. Tugging at her hair she wailed what are we to do the show is organize the invitations have gone out I will not cancel even when I had 104 fever with the flu I made sure the show went on. Louisa we can do it. The models are ready can you make your dresses you brought some sketches yes in four days. Louisa exclaimed plenty of time plenty of time. Ill do it on one condition whats that, Can we stay at your place tonight. Olivia was ascending the stairs and Robert called to her Olivia baby its all your. Lets get out of here the three grabbed their coats and were out the door. I must say you are a very beautiful lady Simone Robert commented as they walked to her car. Louisa tugged at his arm to hurry along.

An April Fool in Paris

An April Fool in Paris

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