

A Sunday Afternoon in Paris

by Jack Swenson

The painting and the two of them in the big room. A tableaux. The woman with the dark hair and green eyes, the tall American, the painting.

Later they found a cafe. She ordered wine in French, but she wasn't French. She was an American who lived in San Francisco.

The woman lived on one side of Paris, and the man lived on the other. She couldn't let him sleep in her bed, nor could she sleep in his. After midnight he walked halfway across the city to his shabby hotel.

The City of Lights. Yes. His room on the fourth floor. He had to climb the stairs because l'ascenseur wasn't working. He would lean on his window sill in the evening and watch the whores. They wore gaudy clothes and too much makeup.

Much, much later he remembered a day before they went their separate ways, a Sunday afternoon in Paris, not on Le Grande Jatte but on a lake near the zoo. They had rented a boat, and he had rowed them slowly, hither and yon, on a glittering waterway crowded with other boats. His friend had put her pale, lovely face up to the hazy sun, closed her eyes and smiled.

"Oh, Jake," she had said, "we could have had such a damned good time together." "Yes," he replied, "isn't it pretty to think so?"

