

# The grand tour

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While he was dancing the third time I paid the waiter. When Antonio returned he smiled mischievously.

«Made a date?»

Sometimes a grin serves as well for an answer.

«Well, *some* husbands . . .» I repeated.

The damned thing was you couldn't be annoyed with him. I looked musingly at him and quoted in a low voice, «It's a little deception here, a little deception there, that makes the world go round.» He looked surprised, but his answer came quick enough: «Some variety makes living so much more pleasant. And as long as no harm is done — well, *you* should know that best,» he finished, looking straight at me, but friendly enough. He was right — who was I to judge? There was a brief silence between us. Then Antonio put his strong hand for a second on mine — the peace treaty had been concluded.

Not until we were saying goodbye to each other before he took off on his bike did he remember the paying of our bill in the place.

«Oh,» I said airily, «It was a pleasure to pay for your pleasure after I had my own pleasure.»

I said this with a dead-pan face and there was alarm in his own when he looked at me. But not for long. A moment later we were both smiling at each other.

«Fond of me, you bastard?» I asked.

«You bet I am.»

His work-roughened hands gripped my own and I am sure he'd have kissed me then and there, had we not been on the street.

«See you in two weeks' time —»

«Sure — and make them go snappy.»

He quickly jumped on his bike and off he went. He turned once and waved his hand before he disappeared around the bend of the street.

It's nearly an hour's walk from the station to my place. But I walked it all. It was a lovely day in late spring. The lilac bushes were hung with their heavy grapes; you could not count all the colors of the tulips; there were forget-me-nots and daisies and velvety pansies; and above them all towered the huge chestnut trees in their full and fragrant bloom. Heavens, it was wonderful to be alive — and in love.

## The Grand Tour

by James Gilmore

Notes of an American jazz tune simmered up the blazing steps of the *Sacré Cœur* from the Place below, blending incongruously with an almost palpable blue languor that seemed to envelop him.

A steaming panorama of Paris spread below — a nearly commonplace vista of rusty grey buildings, trees and hot sky. There were even neon lights — why did it seem strange to see neon lights in Paris, he wondered. It was another jarring, unexpected sight in a series of disenchanting experiences he'd had these last few days. Now he felt stifled, not only by the smothering July heat, but by a feeling that somewhere he had lost his way, had missed his opportunity really to make something of this trip.

Europe had seemed much further away, a distantly-attainable goal, two years ago when he had dreamed his way through the first travel folder and wondered just how much money you needed to go. He'd have to fly, to save time, and that would cost more. Could he really do it? Would he, or was he just trying to persuade himself he would, if he had the money?

He did get the money, and he found out how to go, where to go, even if he were never certain why he was going. Did you need a reason for going to Europe? There were so many reasons for wanting to go.

So, this was Europe. Paris, France, specifically, but like all the other places he'd seen, somehow pallid pastel in comparison with the gaudy colors of travel bureau posters. Nothing was quite like what he expected, but he had to admit he didn't know exactly what he had expected.

Sacré Cœur: another in a tiresome string of churches. Eglise, cathédrale, basilica — they all had a cool and musty sameness, he thought, but welcome stops all the same when the day was as hot as this one.

He realized how close he'd been to the church last night when he took the «Paris by Night» tour bus that threaded up incredibly narrow streets into the Place du Tertre. He almost felt the elusive magic he sought at one of the small tables in the square, with only a tiny lamp to keep him company. He hadn't lacked for near neighbors — the Place was full of people, Montmartre characters and tourists mixed about half and half.

«On a summer evening you may dine here in the open air, with a genuine 'Utrillo' as background, the tour guide book said. He was trying to flag down someone who might serve him at least a vermouth when he heard the tour bus honking.

The Louvre had lived up to his expectations — living practically across the Rue de Rivoli from it, he'd been able to make three trips there and do a pretty good job of wearing himself out. The Orangérie, with its display of moderns he'd had earnest directions to see by all means, would have been anticlimax, he thought, and he had passed it up in favor of a trip to the Ile Saint-Louis, which had looked in a travel folder like an elegant and quiet haven but which seemed only cold and austere on actual inspection.

He had looked forward to something magnificent in the way of music at the Opera, but it was July and there was only the ragged end of a ballet season. The clerk in London was right — only American tourists go to Paris in the middle of summer. His room at the Regina with its western view — and afternoon sun — was like a closet in the desert and his clothes (of course, he'd brought too many!) all seemed smothering and terribly gauche. What could he expect in Rome next, if Paris was this hot?

He was thinking of his stifling room, sans bath, as he followed the tour guide back aboard the bus. He took a seat at the left and gazed with blurred vision once more across the mottled carpet of Paris, failing to distinguish any familiar buildings. The other bus passengers were in no hurry to board, perhaps because this was the last stop on the afternoon tour.

Two young men on a motorcycle were leaning against the parapet, sharing the scene. The dark-haired one on the back of the seat rested his chin on his companion's shoulder and twined his arms around his waist.

The boy in front swung around on his cycle seat and playfully grabbed his

companion by the arms, holding him stiffly away for a second. Then, drawing him to his chest, kissed him familiarly, tenderly on the mouth.

The tourist was aware of his fellow passengers drifting back aboard the bus, two by two, chattering about plans for dinner, the Folies, that wonderful place on the Left Bank — what's the name? — Les Deux Maggots? . . .

Tears swam in the eyes of the solitary American sitting in the bus. Eyes almost unseeing watched the youths sharing a laugh and pointing out something below in Paris, their familiar Paris, a Paris he could not know — could not share. He knew what Rome would be like — alone.

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## Book Review

A VOICE THAT FILLS THE HOUSE, a novel by *Martin Mayer*  
(Simon & Schuster 1959)

For those who like a career story with a solid framework and people who are «no better than they should be» although they are well on their way to the top, we recommend this book.

An American baritone with a reputation acquired in the opera houses of Italy, is to be launched at the Met. Rosa, the diva wife on his best friend, Harry, will also make her first appearance there.

This is the core of this well-written novel but the lively intrigues common to the world of music, and the supporting characters, cause the reader's eyebrows to disappear into his hair: The Inspector, Harry's father, is known to be a sodomist; his lieutenant, Sgt. Andrews, a handsome Negro, is seduced by him; the baritone's wife, unsuccessfully trying to achieve success as a concert pianist is made to seem a proper bitch; Bertram, rehearsal manager at the Met, who complains he'll never make the grade «because he's not a nance like those in power;» the architect who arranges a seance at a discreet hotel with an all-male audience at which Oscar Wilde's image is summoned to provide the keynote for the revelry which ensues.

Harry resents bitterly his father's sexual aberration, but the Inspector has the last word with his strange will after his death following this orgy.

An enigmatic facet of the book is the baritone's attitude toward the characters whom he knows to be homosexual. His refusal to participate in their quest for love may be understood since he is married; but why the attendance at their parties, and involvement in their lives?

The operatic background and behind-the-scenes glimpses have the ring of authenticity, as Mr. Mayer writes about, and reviews, music for magazines.

Diego DeAngelis