

*Matters of the Heart - A Creole Love Story*

Emile de Marigny stood stock-still in the middle of the dance floor, almost unaware of the couples swirling around him, the music barely penetrating to him. As the music came to a stop, he took up the slender fingers extended to him, and bent to kiss them. He bowed and then his eyes rose to meet hers.

He had watched her slender, lithe figure as she circled the dance floor in the arms of an elegantly dressed white man. It was a waltz, and he admired how easily, how smoothly she moved to the music. She was dressed in an ivory gown, which set off her own luminous ivory skin, and her shiny dark hair was piled high on her head, with just a few long curls allowed to fall beside her cheeks. As the music ended, her partner bowed to her, and tactfully withdrew, leaving her hand in hand with her latest admirer.

“You are... Nana,... aren't you?” he asked, still in a state of near shock, the words tumbling out awkwardly.

“Yes, Monsieur, but how do I know you? And why are you frozen *comme ça*,... in the middle of the dance floor?” Her beautiful dark eyes opened wide, as she smiled at him. He was a handsome young man, but his dark, wavy hair was standing almost on end, until he caught her glance and ran his hands through it, restoring it to some order. His dark eyes, almost black, were wide open as he looked at her, and from his accented English, she knew he must be a French Creole. His elegant evening clothes indicated he could afford the best.

“When I last saw you, my friend and I wondered if you would live,” Emile answered. “I held you in my arms, but you were unconscious. Do you remember anything from the night of the fire?”

“No, but my mama told me the story. I have wondered these last weeks, as I recovered, if I would ever know the name of the man who saved me, who risked his own life in the fire to save mine. Do I have the honor of meeting that man tonight, or perhaps you know him? I’d like to know his name, so I can pray for him, and if possible I’d like to thank him in person.”

Her voice was soft and melodious, so soft it was difficult to hear over the music again swirling around them. Emile was glad of an excuse to lean closer.

“Yes, Mademoiselle, I am that man, Emile de Marigny, and now, instead of standing here foolishly in the middle of this dance floor, may I ask you for a dance?”

He spoke awkwardly, but didn’t seem to mind poking a little humor at himself, and as he smiled, she laughed softly in return. She already liked the frank honesty of this young man, who didn’t seem to mind making fun even of himself.

Emile had not let go of her hand, and now he drew it closer, and his other arm reached around her small waist. He was sure she would assent, but he didn’t want to take a chance. He wanted this dance more than anything else in the world. Still he made no effort to begin dancing; cocking his head a little, he smiled and waited for her consent.

Her eyes were dark, magical pools, and they shone at him with warmth and gratitude. Her face was beautiful in an exotic way, with very high cheekbones, and eyelids which seemed to curve in an oriental way.

“But of course, Monsieur Emile, not just one dance, but as many as you like would not be too many in exchange for a life saved.... A thousand or more dances, if you wish.” And so they began that first dance together. Emile wasn’t quite sure if she was teasing him or not, but he was sure he would collect all the dances she promised and perhaps much more. He realized he was smitten already, and his mind was churning with possibilities.

“Tonight, and many more nights, Monsieur, I will be here waiting for you to claim your dances,” she offered, with a dazzling smile, which

seemed to radiate to every nerve in his body. He felt like he was melting away.

Emile had remembered her from that night, but her eyes had been closed then, her long dark lashes alone had shown, but now he felt the full force of those beautiful, big, dark eyes upon him, and although he was a good dancer, especially proud of his ability to dance in fact, he suddenly felt as clumsy at dancing as he felt in trying to talk to this beauty. He took a few quick, short breaths, and began to feel more in control of himself. Still it was a shock. He had rescued the most strikingly beautiful girl in the whole ballroom, perhaps the most gorgeous woman he had ever laid eyes on in his entire life. A thousand dances, she said he could have! And before they took their first steps together, he knew he would be back to dance with her again, and again.

That night they danced together as long as the music continued. Conversation didn't seem necessary, their bodies moved to the music in a natural harmony. Emile felt as if he had been lifted to another plane of life, of pleasure,... and as he studied her face, he was sure she felt the same way. What was there to say? The music alone gave their bodies a chance to communicate on a deeper level. Spoken pleasantries would not add to what they were feeling. Later there would be time for conversation.

Time passed, but they were unaware of it, only aware of the sudden, and almost overwhelming sense of attraction, of magic flowing between them, perhaps so powerful since they both realized that her life was a part of their unspoken transaction; that because he had rescued her, this relationship had somehow started differently from all others.

The music stopped, and suddenly Emile remembered.

"Please come with me, I do want to claim all the dances you will give me, but tonight I came with a friend, and I have simply forgotten all about him! Come, let's get some punch, and find my friend before the next dance starts," and lifting her hand up to his lips again, he kissed it, then still holding on, he steered a way for them around the dance floor. Finally he saw John, heading for the punch bowl.

"Ah, there you are! Guess who I found?" Emile said, drawing Nana up closer. "This is the very same young lady whom I carried out of the burning building! Remember?"

“Yes, indeed. Mademoiselle, it is certainly good to see you with your eyes open, and so well recovered. We worried about you,” John said, bowing to her. “Do I remember your mother calling you Nana?”

Emile looked nonplussed, and then burst out laughing. “I can’t believe I forgot to ask your name. I know it’s Nana, but Nana what exactly?”

All three of them laughed. “We didn’t seem to have time for formalities yet, just for dancing! Yes, I am Nana, Nana de Lis, and I know Monsieur Emile’s full name, but what is the name of your friend?”

Emile hurried to answer before John could. Somehow he didn’t want to lose the initiative.

“He is John Morgan, and he’s from New York City. This is his first trip to New Orleans. He was my roommate at West Point. We just graduated, and wanted to celebrate, so I invited him to come home with me, and get acquainted with New Orleans,” Emile explained, but as the music started again, he smiled at Nana, and in a low voice meant only for her to hear, he added,

“But Nana, you don’t need to remember his name, just remember mine!” They smiled at each other, and he drew her back onto the dance floor, holding her tightly to him.

She laughed softly. “You didn’t even give me a chance to be courteous and ask him how he likes it here.”

“That’s true,” Emile admitted, smiling triumphantly at her. “And so I’ll answer for him, he *likes* it here!” Nana laughed, throwing her head back, revealing her beautiful swan neck, and letting her long curls tumble around her shoulders. And Emile smiled, and swung her as far across the room from John as he could. Out of the corner of his eye he could see John, still standing where they had left him, with a puzzled look on his face. Catching Emile’s glance in his direction, he burst out laughing, and raised his glass of punch in a silent toast.

“I want to thank you for the beautiful lilies you sent to me at the hospital. It was you, wasn’t it? And was it you who paid my hospital bill? That’s what the sister told me,” Nana asked softly.

“Yes, I confess to both charges, but I didn’t know then that lilies were especially appropriate, because of your last name, de Lis - of the lilies,” Emile replied.

“Lilies, especially the big white Easter lilies, they are my favorites, and roses too, especially yellow roses,” she added.

“I’ll have to remember that,” he said, smiling at the thought of sending whole carriage loads of lilies and yellow roses to her.... Perhaps a carriage full of lilies one day, and another the next day, filled to the roof with yellow roses.

When the final dance ended, Emile asked, “May I come back and claim some more of my thousand dances at the next ball?”

“Mais oui, Monsieur Emile. I will save all my dances for you, if you wish.”

“If I *wish*? Oh yes, that *is* a magical wish, and I do want *all* of them,... *every last one!*” he said firmly. “And how long must I have to wait for the next dance?”

“I will be here for Saturday’s ball. That is only three days from now,” she answered, her dark eyes sparkling as she laughed softly at him. “You are funny! So do you think you can wait until then, Monsieur?”

“Barely, it will be très difficile, but somehow I will survive,... on hope and anticipation! And please, since you acknowledge that I saved your life, can we forget the formalities? I would like you to call me Emile,” he begged.

“Oh yes, pardon, I can begin that right away, Emile,” she said. “But now I must go, my mother is waiting to escort me home. A bientôt, Emile.”

Emile once again took that beautiful hand in his, and kissed it. “Au revoir,” he said softly and with meaning, taking one last long look into those gorgeous dark eyes, before she was gone. He fully intended there to be more meetings between them, many more....

As they downed another cup of punch, John grinned at Emile. “I say, it looks like you saved her life, but lost your heart! Am I right?”

“Well, I would like to come back for the next dance this Saturday, and I admit I am bewitched. She is not only beautiful, but there seems to be much more to her. Already I think she could become important in my life....

“Now, John, are you ready to call it a night and head home, or would you rather spend a few hours at Madame Lucinda’s Maison Bleu?”

Silently Emile was hoping that John would settle for a ride home, he had found the evening so perfect, he didn't want to lower the tone with the girls at Madame Lucinda's. Other nights, before this one, he would have willingly gone, but not tonight.

Perhaps sensing his friend's mood, John was willing to forego Maison Bleu's pleasures, so Emile whistled for Washington, who brought up the carriage from where he had been waiting half a block away.

The moon, a sliver of silver, traced thin crystalline patterns on the river's black surface, and flung slender shafts between the boughs of the live oaks which lined the drive, as they turned into Marengo. The Big House stood boldly drawn in the moonlight, its great white columns majestically surrounding the house, protective of all within it. But as Emile looked at his beloved Marengo, he realized the spell was broken; he knew with absolute certainty that he could not bring Nana here, to his home. But still he could see her, the magic could continue somehow, but in another, different world....

As Emile opened the door to the garçonnière, he said, "John, remember, we don't have to leap out of bed to any bugle calls tomorrow! Our summer has begun, so sleep as late as you like! And when we men sleep out here in our own separate tower, we don't have to worry about disturbing others, either when we come in late, or when we sleep late!"

"I guess there are some real advantages in having these exclusive quarters! Have a good night, Emile!" came the sleepy response.

Leaving John to take the bed on the first floor of the garçonnière, Emile slowly climbed up the narrow stairs to the second floor bedroom, and was in bed in mere moments. From the window he could still see that slender moon, and he could hear a whippoorwill call, and another answer, like a distant echo. He realized there would be limits upon his new relationship, but he knew he had found love for the first time, and he was not about to let go.... He would find a way, as many other men had done before him,... a world of love,... another world, a different world, one which could never be a part of his Marengo

It was nearly noon the next day when the two young men emerged from their *garçonnière*. Entering the dining room just in time for the midday meal, they found the black eyes of Monsieur Louis directed at both of them, with a glare. His wife, Madame Blanche, raised her face, turning her cheek to receive her son's morning kiss, and then extending a hand for his friend's more formal greeting - a kiss of the hand.

"Bonjour Mama, Papa, we are a little slow this morning, after a pleasant night in the city," Emile offered by way of explanation.

"Was the dinner dance nice?" his mother asked, pouring out two cups of coffee for them.

"Yes, very enjoyable," John answered, glancing significantly over his coffee cup at Emile, and deferring to him on whether he wished to bring up the rest of the evening.

"Pleasant, Mama, but the night was still young when we had escorted the young ladies and their chaperones home, so I took John on to another dance, and now we both know that the young woman and her mother, whom John and I rescued from the fire three weeks ago, have recovered. The young lady was at the dance last night, and John and I both recognized her. You may remember, we told you that the daughter was still unconscious when we took the two of them to Charity Hospital, so we wondered if she had lived. She has made a good recovery, and when we introduced ourselves, and told her where we had met before, she was quick to thank us for saving her life."

"That's good news. I have been praying for her ever since you told me the story of her rescue," Madame Blanche said. "Our laundresses did tell me that some of your clothes from that night are unsalvageable. They did the best they could, and managed to save some of them. But saving lives, well there is no comparison with the rescue of your clothes, so we forgive you! I'm just thankful that you both were unhurt, and no lives were lost."

"And that soot in my carriage, Washington has been able to scrub it out, so I don't have to replace the fine, new upholstery I had just put in it," Monsieur Louis muttered, then holding up a section of newspaper, he added,

“You gentlemen have been out so much lately that I don’t recall if I showed you the *Picayune’s* report on that fire. Somehow they did manage to get your names, and give you credit for the rescue. It’s unconscionable that the firemen couldn’t get there sooner! They said that when they started to the fire that night, they discovered that the new fire wagons they bought recently were too big to make it through some of the narrow streets, and they had to detour. They explained that’s what caused the delay. I saved this clipping from the paper, so you could both have a look at it,” Monsieur Louis said, handing it to John, who scanned it and handed it on to Emile, who read it through carefully, and the whole scene came back to him....

They had left the dinner and dance at the St. Louis Hotel, and dropped the young ladies and their chaperones off at their homes. Neither he nor John was ready to call it a night yet, so they were considering alternatives, either a visit to Madame Lucinda’s *Maison Bleu* to spend an hour or two with the girls, or to find a card game to gamble on at one of the Bourbon Street establishments. Suddenly they both spotted a cloud of smoke beginning to billow up not far away from where they were driving in the carriage. Not hearing any clanging that might indicate that fire wagons were on their way, they decided to hurry on, and see if they could help.

It was a small yellow creole cottage, with two front doors. They jumped from the carriage, and ran up the steps. John began pounding on one door, and soon an elderly pair ran out, dressed only in their nightclothes. Emile banged on the other door, and when he got no answer, he turned to ask the couple,

“Does anyone live in this side?”

They both nodded, and the old woman said,

“Yes, dere’s a motheh an’ daughteh, an’ dey waz home tonight. We waz all out hieh on de porch togetheh visitin’ till it got dark.”

John joined Emile, and together they kicked in the door. A cloud of smoke poured out at them, and they dashed in. Flames were licking at the sofa and climbing up the curtains in the front parlor, as they dove for the bedrooms in the back.

John was the first to emerge, carrying an elderly woman, who screamed at Emile,

“Git ma daughteh! She be in dat back bedroom. Please, mista, git ma Nana outa dere!”

She tried to get away from John, but he held her firmly, “My friend will do his best to get her out,” he said, as he carried the twisting, struggling woman out of the house. Even when he put her down on the banquette, he had to keep an arm on her, to prevent her from running back into the house.

“Ma Nana be in dere.... We gotta git her out,…” she sobbed.

Emile opened the other bedroom door, and smoke rushed out at him, engulfing him; and already he was coughing. He groped about, and his hand found the wooden frame of a bed. He felt along the mattress until his hands felt an inert body. Quickly he took the body in his arms and bolted through the smoke. He tried not to let the air out of his lungs, and with his eyes closed against the smoke, he felt his way down the hallway to the front door. It was only when he got to the porch, and was able to breathe again, that he looked at what he held in his arms. It was a young woman, and her filmy nightgown left little to the imagination, as Emile quickly became aware. She had a slender, beautifully proportioned body. Her breasts nestled against his chest, her long limbs rested over his arms, her head was thrown back, revealing a neck - long like a swan; and her thick, dark hair fell down in a tide over his arm. Carefully he negotiated his way down the front steps. And once he reached level ground, he was able to get an even better look at the woman in his arms.

He breathed heavily. She was the most beautiful young woman he had ever seen, but there was no time for admiration. Her eyes were closed, and he was sure she was unconscious. He turned to John.

“Here, hold her a minute so I can get in the carriage, then hand her in to me. We need to get her to the hospital right away. She seems to still have a very feeble pulse beating, I can feel it in her wrist, and her neck. But who knows how long she was in there. She could have swallowed a lot of smoke.”

John held her, and Emile jumped into the carriage and held out his arms. Carefully they eased her in. Her mother was right there, trying to scramble into the carriage, screaming all the while,

“Where you takin’ ma daughteh? Git her te de hospital raight now, an’ I go wid you.”

“John, help that woman in. She must be her mother, so we have to take her along.”

John took the woman’s hand, and helped her in, then got in himself.

Washington, who had been watching the entire scene, saw that everyone was in the carriage, so he lashed the reins, and the horses took off for the hospital. He was able to pull right up to the door, and a medical steward in a white coat came out to help them. He took the woman from Emile’s arms, and hurried off, with the mother scurrying behind him. Emile and John went inside more slowly, and were met by a nun.

“Gentlemen were you the ones who brought in the unconscious woman just now?” she asked. “And may I have your names, in case there is any investigation later? You both should at least merit mention for your heroism when the fire is reported in the *Picayune*.”

Emile bowed slightly.

“Yes, ma Soeur, we brought the young woman in. I am Emile de Marigny from Marengo Plantation, and this is my good friend John Morton, who is here from New York, visiting me.

“We were just starting home, when we saw smoke, and followed it to find a house on fire. Since there were no signs of any firemen, we ran into the house, and brought out a mother and her daughter. I want to give you some money to help with the daughter’s care, and if there is any left over, please will you see that some flowers are brought to her? Lilies perhaps. She didn’t regain consciousness, so we brought her here, and her mother. What are the chances she will recover?” Emile asked, pulling a wad of bills out of his pocket, and handing all of it to the nun.

“Thank God you were there to help, and, Sir, your generosity is greatly appreciated. As for the child, it’s difficult to say at this point what her chances are. We will see that someone is with her all night, and as long as is needed. We will do our very best, but of course, the outcome is in the hands of God. He may wish to keep her, only He will decide that....

"But there is no need for you to stay. You have told us all we need to know. Again thank you both for your quick action. We will hope you have saved her life. Now, if you'll excuse me, I must go and help with her care. God bless you, gentlemen, and goodnight."

Emile and John headed back to the carriage. "I guess we've done all we can. Let's hope she comes to and is all right," John said, then he started scrutinizing his friend, and he burst out laughing.

"Emile, I'm sorry, I can't help laughing. I don't know whether you look more like a raccoon or a chimney sweep! You are soot from head to toe, except where the sweat has run down your face; there you've got white patches! I guess I look almost as bad," he added, trying to brush as much of the soot from his clothing as possible.

Washington was bending over, looking in the corners under his driver's seat.

"Don' eben hava towel or any rags forh yuh all te clean up wid," he said. "Is yuh ready te go home now?"

"Yes, I don't think anyone would want to kiss either of us, or even dance with us, the way we look now. Never would know we were the same fellows who set out earlier to have some fun!"

Emile grinned, as he tried to wipe his face off with his handkerchief.

So, looking like chimney sweeps, or filthy street urchins, who didn't belong in Monsieur Louis' fine carriage with its brocade upholstered seats, they set off for Marengo.

Once safely in the *garçonnère*, John said, "I guess the best thing to do is just drop all our smoky, sooty clothes in a pile on the floor, huh," starting the pile with his own clothing.

"There's sure to be some hollering and complaining around here when the laundresses see this mess tomorrow," Emile said, grinning and throwing his own clothes into the pile. "But when we explain, maybe they'll start treating us like heroes!"

Emile remembered every detail of that night, and how he had seen her, seen how beautiful she really was, and how, later at the ball, he had seen those eyes open at last. He took one more look at the newspaper

article. They had the story right, but there was so much more to it, he thought. Perhaps even more than he could know, himself, at this time.

But then he came back to reality. He folded the article up, and put it in his pocket. Then he turned to his father. Who knows how long he had kept him waiting for an answer. And what might he be thinking? How much had his expressions given away, he wondered.

“Oui, that’s pretty much the story, Papa, exactly as it happened. And if you don’t want the article back, I might like to keep it for a while. You don’t want it, do you?”

“No, you can have it. I must say, usually I can’t find much truth in this newspaper, in fact in any newspapers. Haven’t much faith in them reporters,” Monsieur Louis grumbled. “I guess they have to get a story right once in a while, this one for instance. Now they can go back to their usual lies, and insinuations.”

“Will you boys be here for dinner tonight? We thought John might like to try another of our local delicacies, so Louie plans to send some of the young boys out to catch crawfish, and I thought we might have them for dinner, if you’ll be eating with us,” Madame said, turning to Emile for confirmation.

“Yes, I thought that today we might do a little fishing, or take a ride down the levée. We do have plans for Saturday night in the city, but not tonight,” Emile replied.

So that evening, John saw a large platter of steaming crawfish arrive from the kitchen.

“If they are too hot and spicy for you, just say so, and we’ll find you something else. As for how to peel them, watch this,” Monsieur Louis said, as he leaned closer so John could see how he peeled a few. “Of course, to be a true New Orleanian, you must suck the juice out of the heads, so at least try it, but we won’t force you to adopt that local custom,” and with that Monsieur Louis uttered a loud, sucking sound as he drained the juice from the crawfish he had just pulled apart. Then he looked up at John with a broad smile of pleasure, and everyone had to laugh.

“That’s how!” he said, picking up another.

“They’re like miniature red lobsters,” Joan commented, awkwardly working the shell off one of his, and popping the first morsel into his

mouth. “Spicy, yes, but very good. And not at all like eating big Maine lobster, entirely different, because of the spices, I guess. Delicious. Thanks for introducing me to them.” He tried one hesitant suck, just to please his host, and then gave that up, but he continued to peel and eat the crawfish.

The next few days Emile and John spent at the de Marigny summer home in Mandeville, sailing on Lake Ponchartrain, and fishing from the family’s dock.

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Emile cast his fishing line out, then settled back down on the dock, pulled his hat down to shield his eyes from the sun, and said,

“John, you know the Quadroon Balls, like the one we attended the other night, they’re a unique tradition here in New Orleans. Men from all over the world come here to attend them, and they say that our quadroons, or mixed-race women, are some of the most beautiful in the entire world, like the loveliest Hindu women, with their big, dark eyes, their pale, café au lait skin colors, and their lush black hair. Men come specially to dance with them, and sometimes they take these women on, and provide allowances and housing for them for a while, or even for a lifetime. Here that’s called *plaçage*.”

“Yes, I did notice the other night, that as a group, the women were strikingly beautiful. But I’m not sure I understand, when you say quadroon, do you mean that they are a quarter African?”

“Well that may have been the original meaning, but most of the time now, it just refers to people of mixed race. Mulattos, quadroons, octoroons,... we tend to loosely use the term quadroon to refer to all of them, and if they are culturally French, then we sometimes consider all of them Creoles. Some die-hards like to distinguish us French Creoles from the others, and occasionally you still hear us described as the ‘*ancienne population*,’ suggesting, I guess, that we French Creoles are basically pure, and not of mixed blood. How truthful and accurate that is, I couldn’t say. There’s been a good deal of interbreeding, although no one really talks about it, at least not in polite society...”

“So would Nana de Lis be considered a quadroon? It would be really difficult to distinguish her from someone of Spanish descent; her coloring could well be considered Hispanic. And do you plan to return to the ball tonight to see her, Emile?”

“If there isn’t anything else you have in mind, John. After all you will be returning to New York in just a few days, so we’ll do whatever you like. I certainly plan to meet up with Mademoiselle de Lis, whether it’s tonight, or another night, I do know that. And, yes, she is a perfect example of our quadroon beauties, with her ivory skin, big, dark eyes, and lustrous dark hair, - and her curves, so fine! But, what would you like to do tonight?”

“I can’t think of anything really. You have shown me all around New Orleans, so let’s plan to attend tonight’s Quadroon Ball. I know you don’t want to miss out on a chance to dance with your new-found beauty, especially while she still feels in your debt, and is gracious enough to give all her dances to you! I’ll even promise not to cut in on you!” John grinned at Emile.

Since the fish didn’t seem to be biting, the two of them soon packed up their things, and headed back to Marengo to dress for their night in the city.

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That evening they climbed the well-hollowed out stairs to the ballroom. As they entered, Emile’s eyes were already searching across the room for Nana, but he had a few last minute words of advice for his friend.

“John, remember, if you dance more than one dance with some of these beauties, watch out for their mothers! They are lurking about, just waiting to pounce on any man who dances more than a dance or two with their daughters. Don’t say yes to anything they propose to you, just enjoy the dancing!”

“Are you going to heed your own advice?” John asked, smiling at his friend.

“It may be too late for me! Mark my words, there will probably be a mother trailing me by the end of the evening! But, truthfully I have to

admit, I may be ready to make a deal with her mama by then, we'll see!" And with that, Emile took off in search of Nana. When he found her, he bowed and kissed her hand. His other hand came from behind his back, holding a corsage of yellow roses, and he smiled awkwardly at her, like a little boy.

"May I?" he asked, reaching out to pin the roses on her. Nana nodded, so he pinned the corsage on her, delighting in the feel of her breasts beneath his fingers. He tried placing the roses on one side, and then the other, prolonging the enjoyment of touching her, and he recalled how her breasts had rested firmly against his chest when she was unconscious in his arms. The image made him feel dizzy. How long would it be before she would let him hold her again, and this time conscious and willing, he wondered?

"Thank you. They are beautiful, and you remembered yellow roses!" she said, her dark eyes watching the movement of his fingers. He couldn't quite read her expression.

"I've been counting the days," Emile said, and his lips brushed Nana's neck with a feathery light kiss. "The last few days seemed very long, until I could see you again."

"I found it long too, and was very pleased to see you arrive," she replied, arching her neck towards him, as if seeking another kiss, and Emile had to repress his strong desire to cover that swan neck with kisses. The music began again, and he swung her into the waltz, grateful for the opportunity the waltz gave for their bodies to be closer. Emile smiled slightly, as he remembered that his mother still considered the waltz to be much too scandalous to be permitted. As they reached the far end of the dance floor, he swung them into a turn, and as they pivoted, his leg brushed intentionally against the inside of one of her slender thighs. This beauty attracted him as no other had ever done, and he resolved to try and establish a relationship with her, one he hoped would far outlast the thousand dances she had promised him.

"Has your family always lived in our city?" he asked, longing to know more about her