

PARIS MIETRO



CARL D. MALMGREN

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I dedicate this to my father, Carl E. Malmgren, a great reader and lover of books. He would have enjoyed this one.

Paris Metro

By
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PARIS

MIETRO



Ernest Hemingway



F. Scott Fitzgerald

I would stand and look out over the roofs of Paris and think, "Do not worry. You have always written before and you will write now. All you have to do is write one true sentence. Write the truest sentence you know." So finally I would write one true sentence, and then go on from there.

Ernest Hemingway

The only writing that was any good was what you made up, what you imagined. Everything good he had written he'd made up. None of it ever happened.

Nick Adams

*I know now that what you said in **Tender is the Night** is true. Only the invented part of our life—the unreal part—has had any scheme or beauty. Life itself has stepped in now and blundered, scarred and destroyed.*

Gerald Murphy

If the reader prefers, this book may be regarded as fiction. But there is always the chance that such a book of fiction may throw some light on what has been written as fact.

Ernest Hemingway,
"Preface" to
A Moveable Feast

PARIS METRO

Prologue

These events are well documented. In the early summer of 1925, Dick and Nicole Diver, whose primary residence was the Villa Diana in the south of France, were chaperoning their new friend, Rosemary Hoyt, around the sights and excitements of Paris. On their sixth day, they were accosted in their hotel by a respectable Negro named Peterson, who had become involved in a brouhaha with the Divers' friend, composer Abe North.

The Divers, well known for their *savoir faire*, were asked to sort matters out. During the deliberations in their room in the Hotel Roi George, Peterson waited for them in the hallway. Soon thereafter, his body was discovered in Miss Hoyt's room in the hotel. With the cooperation of the management, Diver was able to keep the entire incident covered up. As a result, the whole story has not been told.

The following manuscript recounts the adventures of a young man in Paris and purports to tell the real story behind those curious events. I cannot speak to its veracity, but I have supplied notes here and there which serve, I hope, to anchor it in the bedrock of truth.

Carl Malmgren

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Part One: Spring, 1925

*“May in Paris is the most of all most
everyanywhere.”*
e. e. cummings

*“You know what’s the trouble with you? You’re an
expatriate. One of the worst type. Haven’t you
heard that? Nobody that ever left their own country
ever wrote anything worth printing. Not even in the
newspapers.”*
Bill Smith to Jake Barnes,
The Sun Also Rises
Ernest Hemingway

PARIS METRO



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One

He found himself in Paris. He hadn't really intended to be there, in large part just because Paris was the place to be. Everyone he knew was either already there, on the way, or talking about going. Especially the Village literary crowd. Some of them had already gone over for a couple of months, making short trips home to boast of Paris sights and delights, of animated literary conversations at Paris bistros and cafés:

"*Ulysses* is already old hat—now everyone is talking about *Work in Progress*."

"Why would anyone want to live in London? It's so Waste Land."

"In the Village, the only Mann that anyone knows about is the Representative from Illinois. Or his daughter, remember her? The seventeen-year-old you took to a gin party in St. Louis."

They babbled on about the palpable excitement of Paris nights and the mesmerizing quality of the light. Nick had mixed emotions. He was curious, but skeptical. He remembered ruefully Gertrude Stein's oft-quoted aphorism: "Paris is where the 20th century is."

By the middle of the third decade of the twentieth century, many young Americans had apparently taken that idea to heart. Tens of thousands arrived on the docks of the Continent. In the spring of 1925, thirty thousand Americans called Paris home, according to the *Herald*.

Most of them had come over for La Grande Fête taking place in the City of Light.

Nick wasn't sure that he wanted to be at the party, or perhaps even party to the twentieth century. He felt vaguely uncomfortable with both.

He was, nevertheless, very much in Paris, and he followed the steps of many of his compatriots by checking in at the Hotel Jacob, on the rue Jacob, off the rue Bonaparte, in fashionable St.-Germain-des-Prés. His first excursion took him south into the Jardin du Luxembourg. He exited to the west on rue de Fleurus, taking note of the modest façade of number 27, Stein's residence. He turned on boulevard Raspail in the direction of Montparnasse.

Soon he found himself across the street from the Rotonde, and he remembered the critical words of the reporter for the *Toronto Star Weekly*: "*A first look into the smoky, high-ceilinged, table-crammed interior of the Rotonde gives the same feeling that hits you as you step into the bird house at the zoo. You can find anything you are looking for at the Rotonde—except serious artists,*"¹ the article by Ernest Hemingway began. Nick had read the piece by way of preparation for his trip. It had been a kind of homework assignment.

It was mid-afternoon on a nice spring day in early May, but only a couple of tables were occupied. Nick took a seat not far from a table where someone looked to be emulating a serious artist.

The good-looking young man sharpened his pencil, turning it over methodically in a conical pencil sharpener, while at the same time poring over the notebook in front of him. He grimaced as he reread the words he found there. Then he began to write slowly, as if he were considering each word separately.

Searching for *le mot juste*, Nick thought. Just as he finished his beer, his neighbor paused, looked up from his chapbook, and flashed him a smile.

“You’re American, right?” He gestured for Nick to join him and ordered two beers from the garçon.

“Is it that obvious?” Nick asked.

“New arrivals tend to have that shy but hungry look.”

The garçon put two demis on the table, and Nick’s new acquaintance handed one to him, picked up the other one in toast, and took a long drink.

“The beer is always colder and cleaner when you’ve done good work,” he said, then stuck out his hand and added, “I’m Ernest Hemingway. New to the Rotonde?”

Quite a coincidence, thought Nick. Trying to be offhand, he introduced himself and added, “I’ve been in Paris just twenty-four hours now, and this is my very first trip to the bird house.”

Hemingway apparently missed the allusion.

“Not too many women here now, eh? It’s stuffy inside, but on a nice afternoon you can get some decent work done outside. This is the place where the painters are supposed to hang out, so sometimes you get the gawkers, trying to figure out if you are Picasso. So where are you staying?”

“At the Hotel Jacob, not far from here.”

“Hey, that’s where my wife and I stayed when we first arrived in Paris several years ago. They still have holes on the staircase carpets?”

Nick nodded.

“Traps for drunken guests, that’s what those holes are. So why the hell Paris in the first place?”

Nick hesitated.

“Well, are you running, seeking, or chasing?”

“Good question. Maybe all three. In a way, you could say I’m here to be here. Or you could say that I’m here on assignment. You see, I was awarded a fellowship--”

“That sounds very Ivy League.” Hemingway’s lip curled. “What kind of ‘fellowship’?”

Nick could hear the quotation marks. “I’ve been asked to come to Paris and report on the American colony here, especially the artists on the Left Bank.”

“Ouch! Now that sounds like a positively shitty job. How did you get stuck with it?”

“I guess I asked for it.” But it was a long story, and Nick didn’t want to tell it. He tried to switch topics.

“Do you have any advice for newly arrived would-be writers?”

“Well, you’ve got a decent hotel. But it’s impossible to write in those rooms—too small, too cramped. You need space, you need air, you need a view—a writer with vision has gotta have a view. An atelier apartment is probably out of the question, so what you want to look for is your own personal café. No offense, but this one’s taken. Look for some place out of the way, some place airy and light and French, where you can’t hear a word of English.”

“Okay. That sounds feasible.”

“Then the notebook. It’s important. It has to be small enough to fit in the pocket of your most comfortable jacket. You must have it with you at all times so that it’s at hand when you hear the stray bit of conversation that resonates, or the *bon mot*, or when you see something in a new way and suddenly apprehend it. The best writers are keen observers and good reporters.”

“Like you. As a matter of fact, I’ve read some of the work you submitted to the *Toronto Star*.”

Hemingway flashed a big smile. “You found my stuff? Well, that at least proves you know how to do research. For your notebook I suggest something like this.” He held up his chapbook with its marbled covering.

“Portable and indestructible. And look at the number of pages.” He leafed quickly through the book.

“It’s good to have lots of space, just in case you get carried away by the muse. Lots of blank pages, lots of ‘em—you might say that the blank pages serve as a sign of the fact that your mind is open and receptive, that you’ve got no preconceived ideas to propound or axes to grind.”

“Or rather that you haven’t done any writing.” Nick appreciated the way Hemingway connected the aesthetic to the moral.

“Think of them as the clean, well-lighted place that you’re about to occupy.”

“Will you show me what you’ve written in your place?”

Hemingway shook his head and put his hand on the notebook.

“Checking on my progress? On assignment already, huh? Listen, I almost never talk about a work-in-progress. Spoils it if you talk about it. One of my golden rules: never talk about or read from something you’re working on.” He waved to someone approaching the café.

“Harold, come over. You’ve got to meet the newest member of the writing fraternity. Nick Edwards.” Hemingway introduced Nick to Harold Loeb, a genial-looking man in round tortoise-shell glasses and Ivy League clothes.

Then Hemingway pushed himself away from the table, saying that he needed to get some wires off. Reminding Loeb about their tennis date the next day, he grinned and shadowboxed his way down boulevard du Montparnasse.

“Interesting fellow,” Nick said.

“Indeed,” Loeb concurred. “He’s one of the real comers. You should see his forthcoming collection of short stories, *In Our Time*. It’s due sometime in the fall, going to be published by Boni and Liveright. They’re the same people who published my novel. As a matter of fact, I was the one who convinced the firm to take a look at his work. Anyway, *In Our Time* is very special, something new, a collection of short stories that reads like a novel.”

“Like *Winesburg, Ohio*?” Nick countered.

“Oh, much more modern than that, more experimental, more fragmented. And don’t make a remark like that to Hemingway. He’s doesn’t appreciate being compared to Anderson. No, *In Our Time* manages to be almost oxymoronic—very modern and very realistic at the same time.”

Loeb peered at Nick over his glasses. “So why are you in Paris? Here to check out the scene?”

“As a matter of fact, you could say that’s exactly why I’m here. And I’m sure you don’t know it, but your family, in effect, sent me over.”

“My family? What do you mean? Do you know my family?”

“I’ve met Uncle Simon and Cousin Benita. He made this trip possible, and she asked me to do her a small favor.”

Nick went on to explain that he was in Paris courtesy of a Guggenheim Fellowship. Loeb’s uncle,

Simon Guggenheim, had wanted to do something to remember and honor his deceased brother, Senator John Guggenheim. So he set up the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation with an endowment of three million dollars to recognize and underwrite the work of new and struggling artists.

“Some very talented people--musicians, artists, writers--have received awards.² We each get a stipend of \$2500 for one year, renewable for at least one additional year. It's not a fortune, but I just exchanged some dollars at twenty-two francs per dollar so I should be okay.”

Loeb grunted. “\$2500? That's better than \$200 a month. That'll go a long way in this town. Pretty generous of Simon. Wish he would be that generous with his blood relations.” Loeb frowned.

“So Hem says you're a writer, too. My novel came out earlier this year.” He paused. “*Doodab*—it was well-received in New York.³ Perhaps you've read it.”

Nick shook his head and Loeb again made a face.

“So what kind of writer are you? And how did you manage to earn a slice of my uncle's fortune?”

It was Nick's turn to grimace.

“I wrote an essay. It wasn't very profound or original, but your uncle saw it and asked me to apply for one of the fellowships. I did, and here I am, selected to do a follow-up piece.”

“An essay? How bizarre. What kind?”

“The essay was about the literary scene in the Village. It was called *Down and Out in the Village*,” Nick spoke hesitantly. “In it, I questioned the artists about their life styles, values, achievements, that kind of stuff. That's the essay your uncle saw, and I guess he appreciated its point of view.”

“I guess he *did*. \$2500 worth. I wonder how much per word that works out to. And what exactly is this project that my uncle is underwriting?”

“He asked me if I might want to do a follow-up article, focusing on the Paris scene. I think he’s either curious or worried about what’s going on over here.”

“That sounds like Simon.”

“So I submitted a proposal for an essay titled, *Lost and Found in Paris: Americans Abroad*.” Nick made the quotes sign and gave a shrug. “That sounds pretty presumptuous now. And here I am, as you say, scouting out the scene. So what do you think of Paris?”

“You’re too late. Paris is passé. Paris is over. I’m looking to get out. As a matter of fact, I’m thinking of going to South America. That’s where the real action is. Ever read Hudson’s *The Purple Land*? Great book about South America. It makes you see the continent, *feel* the continent. I even asked Hemingway to go with me, and offered to pay his fare, just because his Spanish is better than mine. But for some reason Ernest’s stuck on this place. You should ask *him* that question.”

“I will. I tried to ask him about his writing just now, but he made it clear that that topic is taboo. He doesn’t seem to want to respond to questions about his work.”

“That’s Ernest. Talking about it ruins it for him. Now what’s this about Benita? How did you meet my cousin?”

“Actually she sought me out. This past January there was this little soiree to recognize the first set of Guggenheim fellows. It was held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York—I guess that’s appropriate.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Well, like my essay, the Museum has real reservations about modern art and artists.⁴ Anyway, your cousin was there and she had her eye out for me. You see, she knew what my project was—that it would be taking me to Paris—and she gave me a commission of sorts.”

“An assignment from Benita? What could she possibly want from you?”

“Well.” Nick hesitated. “It has to do with her sister Peggy.” Nick saw Loeb wince. “Benita’s worried about her. It seems that since her marriage to Lawrence Vail--”

Loeb pursed his lips and interjected. “The infamous ‘King of Bohemia.’ That’s how he refers to himself.”

“Well, since her marriage, her behavior has been . . . unpredictable. Benita’s heard some stories and she’s quite worried. For one thing, as I guess you know, Peggy is pregnant again. So she wanted me to look her up, size up the crowd she’s hanging out with, perhaps even ask her to come home to have the baby. I am even hand-carrying a note for her. Do you know where I can find her?”

“She’s not in Paris. I’ll be honest, I don’t care for Vail, so we don’t see each other that frequently. I heard that she recently took off for Switzerland. She wants to have the baby there because she thinks the doctors are better. In some ways it’s a pity, because a second child will be just another tether to Vail.⁵ And Benita will never get Peggy back to New York. She hates the place. Will you show me the letter?”

Nick hesitated, and Loeb got up to go.

“Well, give my regards to my uncle when he sends you the next installment. See you around.”

Nick watched Loeb follow the path that Hemingway had taken down the boulevard.