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Translated from the French
by Marguerite Barnett

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Prologue

Writing is always difficult, more especially if it is about oneself. I am not one who likes confiding in others, even in my closest friends, so I hesitated for a long time before embarking on this enterprise.

I bought a green exercise-book, for green is the colour of hope, and this gave me fresh heart. My resolve was further strengthened by seeing my plans for my dream house in Sardinia beginning to take shape.

So I put my memory to the test.

It has always seemed to me pretentious to consider one's own life worthy of a reader's interest, but I soon found myself caught up in what I was doing and turned up all sorts of old anecdotes and memories from the past. Once again I saw friends I had quite forgotten, and their faces sprang to life once more amongst my memories.

And so I reached the period of my life that lies closest to my heart.

Hard as I found it to speak of myself, describing Aly as he really was proved even more difficult. But I hope my readers will forgive my amateurish efforts with all their imperfections when they realize how much real pleasure I found in setting them down.

In writing about Aly I have attempted to bring him to life for all those who never had the good fortune to meet him, and to show him as he really was, not as the conventions all too often made him seem, a man of deep and sensitive feeling.

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One May morning in 1925 my father went to the town hall in Laval to register my birth but, on arriving before the registrar's clerk, found that his mind had gone completely blank. He could not remember what they had decided to call me. The clerk had to come to the rescue and entered in the register the names Simone Micheline.

This incident would tend to suggest that my father had not attached any great importance to my arrival in the world, and sure enough, six months later, he walked out on us and set up home afresh in Rennes. Henceforth, my family was reduced to my mother and a sister three years older than me.

Nevertheless, when we were old enough to travel alone, my mother used to send Catherine and me to stay with our father for part of the holidays.

I remember very little about these visits. We used to catch frogs in the tiny streams that ran through the Breton countryside, accompanied by two of our half-brothers – for, in the meantime, our father had had more children – and we got on extremely well with them.

But one morning when I woke up I hardly recognized the household in which I spent my holidays. Everywhere people were whispering and weeping, and we were not allowed to play or to laugh. Later I had to go to church, and every time I looked down at my feet, I too burst into tears. For my beautiful new red sandals I loved so dearly had been stained black.

My father's youngest child, a baby a few weeks old, had died.

All this made a great impression on me, and when I got home I begged my mother not to send me to my father's any more for the holidays, and she agreed. I was seven at the time, and I never saw my father again.

I sometimes wonder about my half-brothers and sisters, whose very faces I have forgotten, and whom I may pass in the street, for all I know, without recognizing them. As for my father, I wonder if he even knows that Bettina is his daughter.

One of my father's brothers was a village blacksmith, while he himself worked as a railway clerk. It is from this Breton family that I inherit my eyes, my hair and my obstinate nature.

After my father had left us, my mother, who was a school-teacher, went to live in Elbeuf, an exceedingly ugly industrial town in Normandy.

His departure did not upset me, and I never felt the lack of paternal authority. I had a happy childhood.

At first we lived in the centre of the town, in a wooden house that looked like a Swiss chalet, wedged incongruously in between two tall, black-walled buildings. It seemed to us to have been expressly built for our games, for it had a low-pitched roof which was wonderful for climbing on. Moreover the rooms all communicated, which made it possible for us to race madly round and round inside on roller-skates. There was a quince tree in the garden, too, which became my hide-out, and I would spend whole days up in it, sitting on cushions wedged tight between its great boughs.

The owner of this quaint chalet was herself a wonderful stimulus to our games and make-believe. Just imagine in drab, dreary Elbeuf, she went about in a monkey-skin coat, followed everywhere by a silent negro servant!

She had lived 'in the colonies', and still spent part of each year there. But which colony? We had no idea, and were content to use the vague but poetic phrase 'in the colonies'.

We spent five years in that house, although it was not at all comfortable. The walls were so thin and so badly insulated that in the winter our coffee would freeze in the cups if we left them on the draining-board overnight.

But I shared a big iron bed with my sister in a room papered in bright red wallpaper with yellow and black japanese lanterns on it, and we adored this exotic touch which we owed to the lady from 'the colonies'.

My mother treated her job like a religious vocation. Her nursery-school class varied from year to year from thirty to forty children between the ages of three and four, mostly from very poor homes.

She was mother, sick-nurse and nanny to them all; she taught them to read and write, but she also washed them, nursed them if they were sick, saw to it that they had adequate sleep and

food, consoled them when they were sad and scolded them when they grew too boisterous. This endless round was a great strain on her nerves, and she would often come home worn out and irritable.

But the next day would once again see her dedicated to the same task, not only because she loved children, but because she had a strong sense of human solidarity.

We were not well off. Things used to be difficult towards the end of the month, and my mother often made us give away our worn clothes to less fortunate families.

She did not believe in hiding the seamier side of life from us, either. She would tell us about one five-year-old pupil of hers who used to come to school drunk. His parents were both alcoholics and gave him hardly anything to eat, yet would leave their bottle of red wine where he could get at it.

From my earliest years, I also saw something of the miseries of war. It was in 1936, when trains were coming in daily from the Spanish frontier full of Republican refugees who had fled their country. Those people – women, old men and children – were left herded together outside the railway station.

My mother would send me to them, wrapped round in a nurse's overall that was far too big for me, and with a tin mug slung around my waist on a piece of tape, so that I could help with the distribution of water and soup. I felt very important and at the same time deeply moved by the sight of these people numb with exhaustion, resigned to their fate and not even able to speak our language.

At that time my health was not too good, and we were obliged to leave our Swiss chalet in the centre of the town and go and live in the country.

When I was twelve I began to paint, and used to do so from dawn till dusk. At school I did not get particularly good marks for anything except drawing, but my mother, far from scolding me, used to encourage me in my love of the arts.

Our provincial friends were shocked by this unconventional upbringing, and my sister and I were regarded as eccentrics. It is only fair to add that they found our mother equally disconcerting, for she was divorced, had lived in Paris as a girl, played the piano and liked singing. Nor did she hide her left-wing opinions.

My baptism was a most extraordinary affair.

My mother, who was an atheist like her father before her, has not brought us up in the Catholic faith, to the great scandal of my grandmother.

So one fine afternoon under the pretext of taking me for a walk, all unbeknown to my mother, she took me to church, where the priest was waiting for us. I knew him and was scared of him, for it was he who used to come to our house to give us injections. There, in an empty side-chapel, he laid the salt on my tongue and also stood as my godfather. I was never to see him again.

There were, incidentally, several eccentrics on my mother's side of the family. For example, they used to take great pride in the exploits of a great-grandmother from the Basque country, who joined up in 1870 as a sutler in order to be able to accompany her husband to the war. She even broke through the German lines during the Siege of Paris and entered the starving capital, heavily pregnant, driving a waggon and six horses; shortly afterwards my grandmother was born. Her whole life long she was to be dogged by what had happened before her birth, so that if ever she showed signs of nerves or instability, everyone would straightaway exclaim: 'It's the Siege that did it!'

We also learned of the somewhat less glorious achievements of a great-uncle of mine who lost all his wife's dowry buying up casinos. He had acquired one at Dieppe and another at Le Tréport, both built out on piers, which were swept away one night by a high sea. Deciding that he'd had quite enough of games of chance, he resolved to stick to serious business in future and bought a solicitor's practice. Unfortunately he wasn't a solicitor, and that proved his final downfall.

I was still a little girl when the war became our main cause of anxiety. The Germans were advancing, and the Dutch and Belgians were in full flight before them.

In her usual charitable way, my mother threw her house open to these poor unfortunates, who had left all their possessions behind them. They would camp with us for a night, then move on, leaving us with a foreboding sense of imminent disaster.

Then our turn came to flee too. Catherine and I were loaded into a lorry along with a dog. My sister had one leg in plaster.

Somehow or other we threaded our way along roads raked with machine-gun fire and reached Angers, where our granny took us in. Later our mother joined us there.

Our grandmother was killed in an air-raid, and we had to flee again. This time we went to Agen.

After the armistice had been signed, we decided to return to Elbeuf. The journey was a nightmare. There were no seats in the train, just the floor of a cattletruck, where we all slept, rolled in blankets, half crushed by our neighbours.

At last we reached Elbeuf. The dog had never left our side. We were worried about what might have happened to the house, but it had not been hit and we found it undamaged. It bore the apt name *In God we trust.*

By one of those strange paradoxes of troubled times, our exodus from Elbeuf restored my health, for the fresh air of the open country made good the damage done by the city's smoke-laden atmosphere.

My cheeks grew rosy again, but I found to my horror that they were now covered in freckles. Up till then I had never worried about my looks, but now for the first time I found I hated my friends teasing me about the wretched freckles, and I determined to get rid of them.

But what could I use? Beauty preparations were out of the question as my pocket-money would never have run to such luxuries.

So I had to make the most of my imagination and what I could lay hands on in the kitchen. My mother used to think I was in bed, whereas I would get up again, sit in front of the mirror, and spread a concoction of milk, fresh cream and lemon juice over my face. The mixture was my own invention and proved quite useless. My freckles absolutely refused to disappear.

They drove me to despair, just as, later in my life, they were to be the despair of many a make-up man in the film-studios and changing-rooms.

It was these freckles that gave me the habit of looking at myself in the mirror, and I discovered that I was not bad-looking. I also noticed that the boys at school were well-disposed towards me.

One day, just as we were about to go off on holiday, I came home triumphantly from school, and told my mother the

English master had given me a little bottle of perfume. But she was furious and the following day, in a terrible state of embarrassment, I had to return his gift.

My sister Catherine had trained as a dental mechanic and at the age of eighteen went to work in Paris. She always came home on Sundays, and I would wait impatiently for her to arrive. Every time she came her appearance stunned me, and I couldn't take my eyes off her. So this was what a chic Parisienne looked like! I used to try on her dresses, her shoes and her silk stockings, and she sometimes even let me go out in her things to impress my friends.

It was at this time that I decided to become a dancer. My vocation was revealed to me one evening when my mother took me to the cinema to see Jeannine Charrat dance *The Dying Swan*; the very next morning I found myself aching for a partner, an audience and a pair of ballet shoes.

I found my partner by luring my best friend away from her Girl Guide meetings. My mother was only too delighted to become our audience, and I made some ballet shoes from a pair of espadrilles stuffed at the toes with cotton-wool.

We put on our home-made tutus, cleared all the furniture out of the dining-room, put a record on the tiny gramophone, tried out our entrechats and made rather wobbly attempts to dance on our toes. We never indulged in improvisation, but stuck strictly to the prearranged choreography which we had written down on a sheet of paper.

Our fame soon spread outside the family circle and we were asked to dance at the school concert.

I caught the eye of a manufacturer's wife. She was an American dancer, a real one, who had been a great success in 1930 in *Rose-Marie*. She gave me a real pair of ballet shoes, made me work at the *barre* and taught me tap-dancing.

I began to be considered more and more of an oddity in Elbeuf, but could not have cared less, for I already had visions of myself as a dancing star at the Paris Opera. It was a childish dream, but it did help me to forget for a while the hardships of the daily round.

Life was not gay under the German occupation. Sometimes we would cycle over eighteen miles in the hope of obtaining seven pounds of potatoes off ration. We used to listen in secret

to the BBC, and we were always on the look-out for planes fighting overhead.

At school some of the girls were forced to wear the yellow star, then one by one they disappeared. We would discuss them in whispers in the playground. Some had managed to go into hiding, but the rest, unfortunately, were arrested and deported.

One day, the delightful old lady in black who used to take her grand-daughter to school at the same time each morning, failed to appear. She was André Maurois' mother and the little girl was his niece. But I subsequently learned that they had managed to escape from the Gestapo.

Then, after all the bereavements, all the tragedies, and all the atrocities, hope was born at last with the news of the allied landing in Normandy.

Suddenly we found ourselves in the thick of battle. Once again we were awakened by explosions and once again had to take shelter in the cellar.

Then we witnessed another exodus, but this time it was one that filled our hearts with joy. The German army was in full retreat. Our house stood on the main road to Paris and German soldiers from the Normandy front, all either very young or very old, streamed past, trying to reach the capital across the few remaining bridges. They were a sorry sight, like all defeated armies, filthy and in rags.

The boys from our school looked very different. They had all joined the French Forces of the Interior and would come to see me in the evenings with a gun slung over their shoulder, and the proud romantic air of very young soldiers.

But the Americans who liberated us seemed even more glamorous. They were like suntanned Father Christmases as they rolled into the town in tanks laden with bread, tinned food, sweets, chocolate and cigarettes, in fact, all the things we had been deprived of for four years.

But still the battle went on.

My mother was terrified to learn that I had rigged up an observation post in our attic, from which I could follow the progress of the allied offensive.

On another occasion I was even more foolhardy. I slipped through the American minefields to bathe in the Seine, and was already paddling in the water when they began to shell the

bridges. A shell ricocheted off a wall and fell at my feet, but by some miracle it never exploded.

I need hardly say that, with all these things going on, my work for the *baccalauréat*, or school-leaving certificate, took very much a second place.

The war came to an end. I did not want to stay on at school, and in any case I was eighteen and should have been earning my living.

My mother had worked very hard to make sure my sister and I had a reasonably comfortable childhood, and now it was our turn to help her. But what could I do? I had neither qualifications nor any special vocation.

At last I managed to find a job. I was to spend several months learning how to tint drawings for an architect, after which I might, if I showed sufficient aptitude, be taken on as an employee and paid, though, naturally, it would not be very much.

The office I worked in was dark and dismal, and in spite of my love of drawing I was incredibly bored. It was then that I had the idea of going to work in Paris.

At first my mother was extremely reluctant to let me go. She reminded me of what had happened to my sister, who had rapidly tired of life in Paris and, after the Liberation, had returned to Elbeuf and married the local chemist who was a very nice man.

But I went on pressing my mother and finally she gave in.

And so it was that chance completely reversed our roles. Catherine still lives in Elbeuf; she is happily married with six children.

And as for me, I set out to conquer Paris.

2

So I set off for Paris.

This was my great adventure, my break with my childhood and carefree schooldays. I was fully aware of what was happening but it did not worry me, for even then I felt confident about my future, and this confidence has never deserted me, even in my darkest hours.

And in any case, what is there to be afraid of when one is eighteen? This is the age when one discovers one's true personality, one's capabilities and the full power of one's youth.

So one morning I arrived at Elbeuf station carrying a small suitcase; it was drizzling as I stood waiting for the train. My mother told me later that as she had given me her parting words of advice she had felt both 'moved and saddened' to see how happy I seemed to be going away.

But when I found myself sitting in an icy cold, almost empty compartment, I felt far less confident, in spite of the fact that I was dressed in my best clothes. I was wearing my Sunday coat, a pleated tartan skirt, my favourite shoes – black leather ones with crêpe soles which my mother had bought from a cousin of mine in Paris – and sheer stockings, a present of my sister.

To keep up my courage I reminded myself of the fact that one of Catherine's friends would be meeting me at Saint-Lazare and would escort me to the young married couple in whose house I was to live. So I told myself: there's no need to worry about the immediate future. But the wheels of the train still drummed more questions: 'and what then? What will you do in Paris?'

So when the train reached the hideous Paris suburbs, I felt just like a little girl again and longed to go home to my mother.

But the early morning welcome I received at Saint Lazare station brought me back to earth. I caught sight of our friend through the thronging crowds, and it was at his side that I took my first steps as a Parisienne.

He gave me some good news as the taxi bore us towards the Avenue de Villiers, where I was to stay. On the following day I was to go and see Jacques Costet, who had just opened a couture house.

At that stage I had no thought of becoming a model, for I was interested in dress designing, and had brought a few of the sketches I had made in Elbeuf with me in my suitcase.

At last we reached the Avenue de Villiers. The young couple were there to welcome me and seemed nice; they agreed to give me free board and lodging in exchange for which I was to look after their small boy and girl.

I spent my first day in Paris settling in. I wrote to my mother, and sauntered through the neighbouring streets. But my purse was exceedingly light and I realized I must get down to work as soon as possible.

I have always been one to face life's great moments with Olympian calm. So when I emerged from the Opéra underground station on the first morning of my new life, my heart was not beating unduly fast. I even felt a certain satisfaction at having managed the underground journey without a hitch.

At the entrance to 4 rue de la Paix, I found Jacques Costet's nameplate. The staircase was most disappointing – dark and dismal, not in the least like the luxurious place I had always imagined a couturier's to be. Of course I knew absolutely nothing about the world of fashion.

But when I opened the door that led into the couturier's rooms, I was quite dazzled. Never had I dreamt of so many lights, of so much warmth and of so many unfamiliar perfumes. I suddenly felt as if I had stumbled on another planet, a world full of animation, noise and ringing telephone bells.

Everyone turned and stared at me. I felt awkward and dowdy. I was wearing my hair very long over my shoulders and I began to wonder whether it did not look far too old-fashioned. My voice was that of a little girl as I asked to see the manageress, Madame de la Moissonnière, with whom I had an appointment. A fairly old, but extremely elegant lady with impeccable make-up led me into a big room with a line of gilded chairs down one side and asked me, in a sophisticated Russian accent, to be good enough to wait a minute.

It was a long minute. I had time to take a good look round,

and noticed that the chandeliers were left on in broad daylight. This seemed to me the height of luxury, for back in Elbeuf, my mother had constantly had to say to me, ever since I was a child: 'You've forgotten to turn off the light again!'

I had almost forgotten why I was there when a tall lady every bit as elegant as the first came towards me, accompanied by a strange young man, who did not even remotely resemble any of my friends in Elbeuf, although they had always considered themselves the last word in fashion. He looked rather like a bird, and was wearing very narrow trousers, an exceedingly long jacket, a very high shirt-collar and an extremely narrow tie. But it was his hair that gave me the biggest surprise. It hung low over his neck and was all puffed out over his forehead in a kind of loop.

This was Jacques Costet. He gave me a pleasant smile and I handed him my roll of sketches.

He glanced through the drawings. My fate hung in the balance. Then he asked one of his assistants to take me to the changing-room.

I followed her without fully realizing what was happening.

I had to take off my dress, and put on a much more magnificent one, then they took me back to the middle of the big room.

I suddenly found myself face to face with the entire staff of the couture house sitting in a row on the gilt chairs.

I had to walk up and down, then up and down again. Then, after a long inaudible confabulation, at last they said: 'Come along this afternoon. You can train as a mannequin.'

It was then that I realized that I would never be a dress designer. Of course I felt somewhat dazed, but not sad. I found the new job that had been thrust on me fascinating from the start. I had always enjoyed dressing up, and as a child used to put on my mother's dresses dating back to 1925 along with my grandmother's feathered hats and long gloves. It seemed a logical conclusion to these games to be trying on dresses in a couture house.

It was with a light heart that I went back to the Avenue de Villiers, and at two thirty precisely, with remarkable punctuality, I arrived at my new job.

I was still in for a great many surprises.

I entered what is known as the changing-room at a couturier's (the dressing-room in a theatre) which is where the mannequins get ready.

A lady who seemed to be in charge showed me my place in front of a mirror, and I sat down, conscious of the curious, ironical stares of a whole row of young women in white overalls.

I was told that I would not be taking part in the fashion parade but that first I must watch and learn. And, as if back at school again, I was given an overall exactly like the ones worn by my companions.

I felt a trifle embarrassed at having to undress here. I had not yet learnt that a couturier's changing-room is about as busy as a main-line railway station, and that no one takes the slightest notice of people wearing few or no clothes. The 'startled doe' act or shouts of wrath are reserved exclusively for intruders who inadvertently open the door.

On looking in my mirror I did, however, notice some of the girls smiling, no doubt at my unfashionable provincial undies.

When I had donned my overall, I began to do what the others were doing to keep myself in countenance. I combed out my unruly hair and at the same time answered their questions.

'What's your name?'

'Where do you come from?'

'How old are you?'

Once their curiosity had been satisfied, my companions completely forgot about me and went on making themselves up with great expertise.

So I just listened. I learned that Jacky, the tall, blonde sporty type, had an elderly lover who was a chemist; that Tony, the girl with the English accent, had a small daughter but no husband; that the strange and lovely Sonia from Russia went out a great deal, and that Maguy, the youngest, was a beginner like me. She was later to become my best friend. Then there was Jeannine, who lived alone in a tiny flat in Montmartre. Ever since I had arrived, she had never stopped smoothing blue eyeshadow over her eyelids, until her eyes looked like those of a doll peeping out from a slightly faded face.

They all spoke quite openly about their private lives, and the dresser, who knew everything there was to know about her 'girls' would give them her opinion, sometimes even her advice.

But the parade was about to begin. I grew even smaller and quieter tucked away in my corner, and watched every move with passionate concentration.

My companions put on their first dress, usually stepping into it feet first, but sometimes it had to go on over their heads, after they had covered their faces with a square of chiffon. For a second or so they looked like mummies with the chiffon across their faces, but it held their hair in place and prevented the dresses being marked by rouge or face-powder.

Everything was done at a fantastic speed. Hats were donned without a glance in the mirror, and all the accessories like gloves, handbags, umbrellas – and at that time there were a great many – were snatched up as the girls hurried into the showroom.

Then these handsome creatures would put on a haughty air before filing in one by one.

When they came back to the changing-room the whole performance would begin again. Off came the dress, and the mannequin dived into another. She would touch up her face-powder, comb a stray wisp of hair into place, give a yell as the zip nipped her skin, break into angry words on finding her shoes pinched, then off she would go again.

The parade ended in the traditional manner with the bridal dress. The whole changing-room looked like a battlefield: the ground was strewn with dresses and shoes the girls had been only too delighted to kick off. And as for the poor, exhausted mannequins themselves, they lay sprawled over their chairs with their aching feet raised high above them on the dressing-tables.

The dresser bent double as she threaded her way through it all, picking up one thing after another, in an attempt to tidy the room up a bit. The saleswomen poked their heads round the door and were sworn at, for their presence meant a request from a good customer for one of the dresses to be shown again.

During the course of that one afternoon I saw what was to be my fate for many years to come. I too was to know the nightmare of a zip fastener catching one's flesh, the agony of wearing shoes with heels that were too high, the weariness of walking up and down, up and down the carpeted floors, the hours of standing and the feeling of nausea at having to put on the same slightly soiled dresses day after day. But I was also to know the feverish excitement that holds the entire house in thrall during

the preparation of a new collection, the stage fright before the first showing, the joys of success and the despair that follows failure.

But I had not reached this stage yet. Tony very kindly offered to give me some help and advice so, when the last client had gone, she took me into the showroom. I was wearing a suit and I learnt how to walk with confidence and handle an umbrella elegantly. I felt more at ease in a very lovely evening gown and must admit that I experienced a certain self-satisfaction on looking at my reflection in the mirrors round the showroom.

Everyone was most complimentary and the very next day I braved the public eye, nearly dead with fright. But they were most indulgent, and the customers were clearly intrigued by my inexperience.

Jacques Costet was pleased, too, and decided to make me some dresses. Then came my first fitting.

I fainted. Yes, I did! I was not used to standing motionless for hours at a stretch with my waist pinched tight as in a vice, and I collapsed in the middle of the workroom, surrounded by sympathetic onlookers.

Then came my first success: I scored a great hit with a pink satin négligé worn over baggy black velvet trousers.

I still continued to surprise Costet's clients though, no longer for the same reasons, for now I knew how to show the clothes properly. But my round country-girl's cheeks and healthy appearance made me look quite unlike all the other mannequins.

Everything was going well, and I was beginning to enjoy my job. Life in the Avenue de Villiers was uneventful and pleasant. A bit like being at home, in fact, and since I knew no one in Paris I had nothing to do but mind the children.

As a matter of fact it seemed more as if they were minding me, because I slept more soundly than they did. Only once was I woken when one of them had a nightmare. I got up and rushed into their room, then suddenly felt completely nonplussed, not having the faintest idea how to set about calming the little boy's tears.

My pleasures were simple and suburban. On Sundays I would go to Montreuil or Chatou, both delightful little townships on the edge of Paris, but with very badly made-up roads. How many times must I have twisted my ankles on these roads in my

high heels! In the end I even had to borrow some shoes secretly from the collection; they had varnished wood soles and artificial leather straps, the height of fashion in 1945.

I used to go to see an aunt in Montreuil, and she invited me several times to lunch. She was an excellent cook. But unfortunately it was a long way by the underground and once I arrived late. Her husband was pretty cool to me when I did get there, so I never went back.

Paul lived in Chatou. For many years he had been the boy I most enjoyed dancing with at our young people's parties in Elbeuf. I thought I was madly in love with him, and found it impossible to visualize life without him. Now he had come to live near Paris to finish his studies.

I went to see him twice in Chatou, and we wandered up and down the dingy streets hand in hand. But things were not the same as before, for I had, or thought I had, experienced the Parisian way of life, whereas he had not. And in any case he rapidly grew homesick and went back to Elbeuf, and that was the end of our idyll.

Now I was all alone in Paris, and it was up to me to make the best of it.

Three months later I left the house in the Avenue de Villiers. And all because of a corridor. Somehow or other I always seemed to be bumping into the head of the house in this corridor, and, since it was narrow, escape was impossible. So to avoid this kind of encounter, I decided it would be better if I left, and I gave some trivial excuse as the reason for my departure.

But where was I to go? I poured out my troubles to the other girls at work.

'You poor pet,' said Tony in her inimitable accent, 'you come to my place.'

So I accepted her offer and the three of us lived together on the ground floor of a house in the rue Raynouard – Tony, her little girl and me. Actually it was more like camping, for she only had one room with a curtain down the middle, and it was not very comfortable.

I sincerely hope that life has given Tony, who is herself so generous, all the happiness she so well deserves, because at that time she was a very sad and lonely person. She had spent the

whole of the Occupation in an internment camp for British subjects near Paris, and after the Liberation had met an American officer whom she hoped one day to marry. But unfortunately he was not stationed in France and he only managed rarely to get leave.

My salary of five thousand francs a month was a meagre addition to our common funds. My lunch often consisted of a sandwich and a cup of coffee frequently replaced an evening meal. It was an excellent way of keeping my model's figure.

But I could not rely for ever on Tony's kindness, so I set about looking for other digs and succeeded in getting a room in our manageress's flat.

I only had two thousand francs left out of my pay each month with which to feed and dress myself. Fortunately though, my needs were as modest as my resources. I still went on wearing the same clothes I had had on arrival in Paris. And the room was everything I could have wished for. Just think, a room of my very own, with a gas-ring for cooking meals, and permission to iron my dresses in the linen-room.

I was overjoyed at it all, and nothing on earth would have made me admit that occasionally I felt miserably lonely and lost.

For what can be more terrifying than loneliness in the midst of a great city? Those endless Sundays, those pointless walks one goes simply to kill time. I used to walk quickly and not even look in the shop windows, or at other people. I simply wanted to tire myself out so that I would have a good reason for going back to my room, where I would wait impatiently for it to be Monday again.

Sometimes Sonia would take me on a nocturnal jaunt of hers, but no sooner had we arrived than she would disappear among her swarming admirers, leaving me entirely alone. I would allay my panic symptoms with a glass of cognac or bourbon whisky which I loathed, and would make timid rejoinders to all the eager attempts at conversation from men on the look-out for unaccompanied girls. There was music as well, and a buffet, and I would go home late.

But soon I found I preferred Maguy's company to this kind of night-life. She was the same age as me and also a mannequin at Costet's. She had always lived in Paris, so her life was not

fraught with the same difficulties as mine. I clung to her like a drowning man to a lifebelt, and went about with her and her friends for sometime. We were all much of an age and we used to meet in one of her friends' charming little flat perched up among the rooftops.

Bit by bit I got to know a few people, but I still felt very much of a stranger, and when I was alone I would think about my home town with a certain nostalgia. Yet when I did go home, which I could only do rarely because of the cost of the fare, I found I was not altogether happy in Elbeuf either.

I used to shock people there. They disapproved of the mascara on my eyelashes, my plucked eyebrows, and the glorious scarlet nail varnish I now wore. Even my sister was horrified at this, for she considered it the beginning of a slippery slope.

Dear Catherine, you were unfair to my harmless nail varnish. Although now I would agree that Paris is a dangerous city for a young girl. It only takes a bunch of flowers, a car, and a few understanding, carefully-chosen words, and she can become far too involved. Indeed it happened to me once. I was walking to the underground when a car drew up beside me and a smiling gentleman engaged me in conversation. I had met him before when I had been out one evening with Sonia. That evening he turned up again at Costet's and the following day I received a vast bouquet of flowers. The next day I had tea with him at the Cascade in the Bois de Boulogne. Then he asked me out to dinner. I was beginning to find him quite delightful when, to my utter astonishment, I learned that he had a wife and children. To think how naïve I had been!

I was naïve and yet I was protected by a strong instinct of self-preservation that has always saved me from danger when it threatens. What is more, it is not nonsense to speak of the innocence of youth. My emotional life was exactly like that of all young people of my age, even in the heart of the much decried world of haute couture.

I was enjoying my work at Costet's more and more. I did my first photographs when, one morning, the weekly magazine *Noir et Blanc* asked me to pose for its fashion page.

The Seebergers came along to the Rue de la Paix to do the photos. There were three of them: two brothers and one of their wives. Later on I was to do a great deal of work with

these charming photographers, but I shall never forget that *first* picture.

One of the Seebergers, the artist, used to decide what shots to take and actually take them. His brother was the technician: he kept the cameras loaded. As for the wife, she was his guardian angel and used to make sure my dress, my make-up and my hair were exactly right.

We wanted to produce a real shock effect in one of the photos, so we requisitioned a bicycle-taxi, as there were then still a few left in Paris. I clambered on to the stone balustrade surrounding the entrance to the Opéra underground station and must have looked like the Statue of Liberty perched up there. People stared and little groups began to form. But I felt happy when I reached Costet's again and was richer by several hundred francs, which I had desperately needed.

I was very poor but it did not worry me. Those first few months in Paris had taught me two things: not to mind loneliness too much and to retain a certain sense of moral independence towards money and material needs.

We had not been well off at home, far from it, but I had been dependent on my mother, and had selfishly handed all my financial worries over to her. But things were different in Paris. There I discovered what it is to be poor. I had to count every franc. Even taking the underground became a luxury, for my rent, food and upkeep simply swallowed up my meagre 5,000 francs a month.

How did I manage? Hervé Lauwick, the chief editor of *Noir et Blanc* came many a time to my rescue without realizing it, by asking me to pose. But even so I had to skip many a meal.

Fortunately, the occasional miracle occurred. One Sunday, one of those dreadful, lonely Sundays, I sauntered down the Avenue Victor-Hugo intending to buy myself something to eat. I was standing hesitating whether to get a lettuce or two tomatoes, for my finances were such that it had to be one or the other, when the shopkeeper who was serving me asked whether this was all I proposed to eat for lunch. Did I really look as starving as all that?

He invited me out to lunch, and I accepted, although it was rather a rash thing to do. We went into a restaurant where he

most kindly sat me alone down at a table, and then made sure I was properly looked after. And indeed who could have done it better for he turned out to be the proprietor of the restaurant. I had been right to trust him instinctively as I had done.

But even so it was a rare thing to find such good intentions shown at quite so apt a moment. More often than not one difficulty followed close upon another.

I had a room I was very fond of in the Square de l'Alboni and it was my own fault that I lost it.

Madame de la Moissonnière went off on holiday leaving me alone in her flat. The weather was fine and I discovered a motorized bicycle downstairs in the entrance hall. I felt tempted to borrow it; then one day I could resist the temptation no longer and appropriated the machine.

No more travelling in the underground. For a whole week I rode joyously through Paris, Paris of 1945, with its still empty streets. And to add to my bliss, I took the radio from the sitting-room and installed it in my room.

But unfortunately Madame de la Moissonnière returned unexpectedly and discovered the off-handed way I had been borrowing her things. She was most displeased, and I can well see why. She flew into a temper and asked me to vacate the room immediately.

I didn't know where to turn. The date came when I had to leave and still I had nowhere to go. A man I had met – you meet a lot of men when you are eighteen – wanted to help me. I scarcely knew him and found him neither attractive nor particularly nice. He was too effusive. He seemed to me desperately keen to give me riding lessons in the Bois de Boulogne and a flat in Neuilly which was about to be vacated. But I didn't want all these presents – what I needed was a room to move in the very next day. But this providential man had that too.

The next day I came to the Avenue Marceau with my two suitcases, still feeling a trifle anxious nevertheless. But the building seemed respectable and I felt reassured. The gentleman was waiting for me.

My room was shut off from the sitting-room by a glass-panelled door hung with rather tasteless curtains. It was full of very modern furniture – a divan, an armchair, and a big table. It seemed that this was his secretary's office and that she started

work at nine, so I would have to be up at the crack of dawn to let her have her room. There did seem a lot of snags, but I had no choice.

And in any case, the very next day, my landlord showed me a much more practical way out of this particular difficulty. On arriving back home after dinner I found the door to my room locked. I shouted for someone to help, when a door opened and there stood my benefactor in his pyjamas. Not a very tempting sight.

'My secretary must have taken your key with her,' was his shameless comment.

Whereupon he proceeded without further ado to offer me quite a different kind of hospitality. We began to argue. I wanted my key. He found me obstinate and maddening. I began to cry. At last, in a filthy temper, discouraged at finding me so stubborn, he flung the key at me. I was very nervous that night and slept badly with the door bolted tight, and when the secretary arrived in the morning I was ready to leave, and so were my suitcases.

But what was I to do? I could hardly be so stupid as to entrust myself again to the firstcomer, so before going to Costet's I found a hotel in the Avenue Marceau area and left my cases there.

As I made my way towards the Rue de la Paix I began to take stock of my situation; things did not look too good. I was living from hand to mouth.

Today, looking back from a distance on this period of my life, I am glad I had to live like this for a while, for, although it was far from a desirable state of affairs, it did help me to acquire an inner resourcefulness that I have often needed to summon since.

Then once again chance came to my rescue. I had only spent two days in the hotel when I met Tommy, a charming boy to whom I poured out my troubles. His parents were away on holiday and he offered me the use of their empty flat. In this way I would have the whole of July and August to get organized.

It was a colossal flat near the Place Victor Hugo.

I hardly saw anything of Tommy while I was there; we only occasionally bumped into one another in the hall.

All the furniture had been covered with dust-sheets and the bulbs in the chandeliers cast a greenish glow over its ghost-like shapes. It could hardly have been called a cheerful place. But a sunny balcony made up for all the rest.

By then I had spent six months in Paris. But what did I really know about the great city? I scarcely ever went to the pictures, and even less frequently to fashionable night-clubs. I never went to the theatre, and if ever I was invited out it was to dine with friends in one of their homes or to eat in some little local restaurant. And I enjoyed walking along the Avenue du Bois or along the Quais at dead of night.

But all these activities, it cannot be denied, had precious little to do with high society life in Paris.

3

I was spending the evening with some friends in a cabaret on the Rue du Colisée. It was late and I was feeling rather bored when a tall young man I had not met before came and sat down at our table.

He was no Adonis. He even had a slightly crooked nose, but he was attractive, and above all had the gift of making nonsensical remarks and amusing comments about everything.

He soon had me in fits of laughter. We danced round to the bar where he introduced me to some of his friends, 'the boys', as he called them.

The evening wore on, and I found I was no longer bored. In fact I really enjoyed being with Beno Graziani.

We told one another our life stories, which, as we were both very young, did not take very long.

Beno was a few years older than me. He had lived in Nice throughout the Occupation and had finished his education there, though his academic career had been reduced to an absolute minimum, the war having prevented him from studying for admission to one of the famous institutions of advanced education. So when the time had come to look for a job, he had found himself with no qualifications and no very clear idea about what he wanted to do. He had left Nice and came to Paris where his father now lived separated from his mother. At the moment he was trying to decide what he wanted to do with his life.

Not that Beno's heart-searching made him in the least gloomy; I was endlessly enchanted by his good-natured kindliness. As soon as I met him I felt safe with him. We met again the following day and every day after that.

His friends were nice, too, and welcomed me into their circle. We none of us were well off and all had to scrape out our pockets to find enough to pay for the odd meal out in some of the little restaurants off the Champs-Elysées.

Then came the spring and the first sunshine, and Beno and 'the boys' began to talk of holidays.

The word 'holiday' held no magic for me. As a little girl, I used to go to Dieppe, and still hated the memory of the shingle beach and icy water. Later, my mother had taken my sister and me to some of the smaller, cheaper places along the coast of Brittany where I had still hated sea-bathing and developed an even more passionate loathing for those hunks of bread and butter with a sprinkling of sand that scrunched between your teeth as you bit into them.

But for Beno the word holiday meant something quite different. It was a hallowed time, given over to baking in the sunshine and plunging headlong into a delicious warm sea.

As he showed me something of Paris – and before meeting him I had scarcely known more of it than the Champs-Elysées, the Rue de la Paix and the Avenue Victor-Hugo – he told me of his plans. Since he had still found no work, there was nothing to keep him in Paris, so he had decided to return to Nice for a while where he would not only be nearer the sun but closer to his mother's purse, which he hoped to find less firmly closed than his father's wallet.

He asked me to go with him.

It did seem a tempting offer. I must confess that I never had a moment's hesitation about what to do, and left Costet's without a single regret.

Of course the whole thing was pretty irresponsible, but we were very young and had visions of ourselves playing the lead in one of the world's great love-stories. Just then we could have lived on water and never gave the future a thought.

I was about to discover the Côte d'Azur for the first time, and a whole year in Paris had offered me nothing that made me want to stay there. What was more, going away now solved the problem of digs, which could be sorted out when we got back. I would find a new job, a new flat, and begin a new life. As always I was full of hope.

One of Beno's friends, a wealthy one this time, who was mad about sport, was going to Nice to watch a motor-race that was to take place on the Promenade des Anglais.

He found Beno good company, so he offered us both a lift in his car. We had a very jolly trip in the early hours of the morning, arrived at the Negresco Hotel, where Beno's friend had booked rooms.

I went straight from my sordid digs to that palatial luxury, in the midst of which I awoke to an unimaginably blue sea.

The palm trees were exactly like those depicted on the most gaudy of postcards, and as for the Promenade des Anglais, it was alive with the roar of hundreds of cars, for the race was that afternoon and the competitors were revving up their engines. It was like a fair in the midst of paradise.

I felt gloriously happy and utterly heedless of the future.

One thing did worry me, though: my dress, the famous check dress I had bought in a sale at Jacques Costet's was a woollen one, and I nearly died of heat sitting in the sun. I envied all the other women who were wearing summer dresses. I did in fact have my blue summer dress in my suitcase, but I liked it less than the beige one, and chose elegance rather than comfort.

I was not much interested in the race that took place beneath my hotel bedroom window, and that evening we left the Negresco, without many regrets, I must admit, for the following day I discovered a hitherto totally unknown world.

Beno had innumerable friends in Nice, whom he would run into on café terraces along the Promenade des Anglais, and we would all spend the mornings chatting.

It was at this time that I got to know Sophie. She and I did not immediately become fast friends for I was still too shy. Later on, though, she became one of my best friends and married the film director Anatole Litvak. Unfortunately, I was soon to realize that sunshine, in spite of its charm, did not offer a solution to all life's problems. Perhaps Beno's mother's purse had not proved to be as deep as he had hoped; that I do not know, but I do know that once again he had to begin to think of finding work.

Every friend along the Promenade des Anglais was called in to help. What we needed was some brilliant scheme that would enable us to earn a great deal of money without undue effort.

It was a completely hair-brained notion, but nevertheless someone hit on just the thing. 'One of the boys' suggested to Beno that we might take over the management of a bar he owned in Juan-les-Pins. According to him this would not only give us a living, but might well make our fortune.

We were mad, though not quite mad enough to rush into such a scheme without a moment's hesitation, since, needless

to say, neither of us had ever run a bar before, nor had we ever even considered the possibility of doing so.

Our friends urged us on. What were we afraid of? After all, our regular customers were guaranteed in advance for they themselves would use the bar.

So we let ourselves be talked into it and went to live in a small hotel next door to the bar, which was called the Pinède.

In 1946 Juan was very different from what it has since become. La Pinède, which had lent its name to our establishment, was not then, as it is today, a maze of parking places, one-way streets and 'no parking' notices.

I must admit that we were hardly enraptured by our first visit to our bar. It was deserted. Everyone said it would be all right, for after all, it was only April. Things would be quite different once the season began.

We were equally astonished at the furniture we found there. It was made in a Norman rustic style and seemed quite out of place in the hot, southern sun. There also seemed to be a thick layer of dust everywhere; but we were not to be beaten, and went out and bought brooms and scrubbing-brushes.

A few days later the whole place looked very much more presentable. We strung rows of tiny flags along the edges of the shelves and placed the few bottles left in stock on them. We arranged a few rhododendrons in a pitcher bearing the name of a famous brand of pastis. And finally, we put four metal tables outside on the tiny terrace to attract customers, or at least to show that the bar was open.

We worked very hard, sometimes far into the night, to have everything ready for the opening day. Beno had rounded up all his friends and acquaintances, every man Jack of them.

Everyone came along; no one was missing. They all served themselves and we had great fun. But when we came to count the takings, we found that our visitors had gone off leaving precious little in the till.

So we consoled ourselves with the thought that soon we should be getting the tourists, and indeed some did turn up during the next few days.

Something we had not foreseen threw us into a state of panic. Whatever would happen if someone ordered a drink we did not have in stock?

Another source of anxiety for us was preparing sandwiches and fried eggs for customers, who fortunately, often came to our assistance themselves. But my worst nightmare was giving people change, and I would break out in a cold sweat when anyone ordered coffee. I don't know what we did wrong but, try as we might, somehow it always reached the table cold, and lost us many an excellent customer.

It was the question of friendship that tormented Beno more than anything else. Whenever a friend of his came into the bar he immediately began to wonder whether he should charge him for his drink or not.

Of course, more often than not, the friend himself would put an end to Beno's dilemma; for instead of plunging his hand into his pocket, he would give Beno a great slap across the shoulders and say:

'Thanks, old chap; be seeing you!'

We had to cut our own expenses in order to avoid going bankrupt. This meant no more meals out, which made me rather sad, since I loved all the little restaurants along the sea-front in Juan.

So I unenthusiastically set about preparing lunches and dinners in our sordid kitchen. It was a dark, filthy hole with high-set windows, through which I could glimpse some very old palm-trees, where a couple of rats as big as cats lived. In spite of my presence in the kitchen they stayed on defiantly.

By now, little by little, Juan was being transformed. Summer was coming and holiday-makers began to arrive.

Beno and I began to think about the enormous crowds of people who would undoubtedly throng our bar, and came to the conclusion that we must engage a proper barman, a true professional who knew the difference between a Martini and a Dry Martini, someone who knew how to keep books, give change and replenish our stocks.

We had another reason, too, a less worthy one, for saddling ourselves with this extra expense. The presence of a barman would enable us to enjoy something of the sun and sea.

And so our Bohemian life went on.

From then on our days were pretty full. Early each morning our terrace would be invaded by Sophie, Christian Marquant, Irene Hilda and Pitou de la Salle, a great gangling lad who used

to sneak out of his bedroom window so that his parents should not know he was out – later he married Suzy Parker. Then we would all go off to bathe at Eden-Roc. This cost us nothing because one of the lads in our group was able to get us in free. We would finish the day dancing at Maxim's.

Every time we returned to the Pinède, we always hoped to find it full of customers, but more often than not, our barman was the only person there, and we would find him dejectedly wiping glasses.

One wonderful day I earned ten thousand francs, not by selling lemonade, but by winning a bathing beauty competition at the Casino.

Time passed quickly and I never regretted Paris. But one morning I realized that this sort of life could not go on for ever. Juan was beginning to make ready for the winter; everything was closing down, the shops, the Casino, Maxim's and the restaurants. The beach was deserted and the sun far from hot.

Our bar had not made our fortune during the summer. Come the autumn, it could scarcely do other than hasten our ruin.

I made up my mind to return to Paris, but Beno wanted to go via Auron, a winter sports resort near Nice where he had lived during the Occupation.

There we found more of his friends. Almost everywhere he went, Beno found friends.

But I was less cheerful, for my conscience was pricking me, and I felt rather guilty at having spent the best part of a year doing nothing.

So Beno and I made some wise resolutions. Once in Paris we would both find work and we would get married.

Costet had closed down, so a friend suggested I should go to Lelong, and I arrived there feeling just as apprehensive as when I had started in the couture business. I was given a dress from the collection to put on, and taken along miles of corridor to the boss's office.

Before going in I had to wait in a room full of mannequins and forewomen from the workrooms putting the finishing touches to the fittings they were about to show to Monsieur Lelong. Everything seemed to be organized and timed to the very minute like in the army.

No one took the slightest notice of me until a severe-looking young woman ushered me in. Then Monsieur Lelong said:

'Would you walk up and down, please, Mademoiselle. Just a few steps will do.'

I felt greatly intimidated by the pair of black eyes that fixed me from behind the desk.

Then without another word being spoken I was led away down the same corridors back to the changing-room. It seemed to me to have been a pretty chilly reception and this famous couture house appeared to lack any sort of charm.

On my way back I passed a man who looked far more friendly than anyone else. He was carrying a length of white cloth over one arm and was the first to speak.

'Have you already been taken on? Because if not, I'll have you.'

I did not have time to reply, for he was in a tearing hurry and had already vanished.

The assistant dresser who was accompanying me said in tones of great respect that that was Christian Dior and that he was about to leave Lelong to set up his own couture-house in the Avenue Montaigne.

I did not think any further about Dior's proposal for they came to tell me that in spite of my somewhat cold reception, they had liked me and were taking me on.

I have often thought about the encounter I had with Dior in that corridor. Had I accepted the position he offered me, my life might have been very different. I should never have been called Bettina.

I only worked in the Avenue Matignon for a month, but I retained my first impression throughout. The chief dresser, to whom I had taken a strong aversion right from the start, lorded it over a long, narrow changing-room. Her assistants trembled at her approach and would begin to stammer as soon as she gave an order.

The leading light of the changing-room was called Praline. She was very gay and very lovely, and did exactly as she pleased. But she was the only one. All the others, and there must have been ten of them, remain as colourless in my memory as the house itself. I had the good fortune to be given a place next to another 'new girl', a very sweet youngster, who was the daughter

of one of the customers, and had gone there for something to do. We soon became friends.

It was between seasons when I went to Lelong. Since it was winter the new season's collection had scarcely been started in the workrooms. The house was empty, and the only activity seemed to be up in the studio.

Since fittings had not yet begun, we spent our days in long hours of waiting. The new girls would chat together and we would manicure our nails. One day I even helped my neighbour peel vegetables for her evening meal.

I still wanted to marry Beno. I still saw myself making my life with him and hoped to have children. My mother was delighted at the idea, but my sister much less so.

I wept tears of vexation on the day she told me of her fears. She said that Beno was intelligent, but far too young; that he was not sufficiently mature, and had proved this during our escapade to Juan-les-Pins.

I protested. Beno had been working now for several weeks. He had met a radio manufacturer who wanted to market a battery-set in France, that was already well-known throughout the United States.

So Beno, along with Raoul Lévy and another friend, was to organize the sale of these radios throughout France.

But it was no battery-radio that won Raoul Lévy his fame some time later, but rather Brigitte Bardot, Roger Vadim and the film industry.

The whole business never turned out to be as profitable as Beno had imagined, for the man who initiated this small-scale industry had almost no capital, and the whole undertaking collapsed after a couple of years.

I did not listen to my sister's advice, but told her she did not understand me, and went ahead with my wedding plans.

Our banns were published in the Town Hall of the 16th district of Paris. It looked very respectable and middle-class, although the fact was that we had not picked this particular town hall, but had been obliged to go there for at the time we were living in the Boulevard Emile Augier.

Then we looked around for a flat. Our joint incomes made it possible for us to rent a small place in the Rue Gros. There was a piece of yellow mosaic with gold spots on it in the

entrance hall. But I was happy to have a home of my own at last.

The question of my wedding-dress also had to be considered. I asked them at Lelong's whether they would lend me one, but my request was turned down flat.

I did not know where to turn. It was my neighbour in the changing-room who came to my rescue. She had quite a private wardrobe and lent me a green woollen draped dress that bore the Fath trademark. Bless her for her generosity, for it made me able to face the wedding ceremony with a happy and untroubled heart.

At 11 o'clock on Friday, 13th September 1946, we found ourselves standing before the Mayor of the 16th district. He made a speech; I never understood a single word of it, for I felt too moved. But I signed my new name in the Register of Marriages with a firm hand, for I believed I was marrying for life.

4

I was bored at Lelong. Seeing the others going up to the workroom one by one for their fittings and being myself condemned to inactivity made me more and more depressed. I felt like the ugly duckling.

So I very soon left. A friend of Beno's was a saleswoman at Fath, and it occurred to me I might get an introduction to the great man.

My previous experience should have given me greater self-assurance, but, as the interview drew closer, I grew more and more nervous.

First I had to cross a boutique full of people and finery. I explained the reason for my visit to one of the young salesgirls who pointed up the stairs, a vast, wide staircase, thickly carpeted and banked with flowers, which I climbed in an agony of apprehension. Having reached the first floor, I managed to find someone to announce my arrival to Monsieur Fath, in spite of the hurly-burly of a busy afternoon.

I had never seen him before, but judging from the importance and sumptuousness of his fashion-house, I imagined him to be severe and imposing.

I sat waiting on a chair on the landing, beside a door through which I could hear the murmur of girls' voices and a familiar silky rustle. That must be the changing-room.

To my left was an enormous room with grey walls and carpeting, and beyond that, another room with saleswomen sitting like schoolgirls at small tables.

I was seated right in the middle of the passageway, and was not spared a single curious or critical glance.

When a new mannequin comes to work in a couture house, her arrival concerns the entire staff, from the salesgirls to the dresser, and she even figures in workroom gossip. Naturally, the mannequins who work there already are apt to be more caustic than anyone else for someone new constitutes a threat

to their order of precedence, to the unity of their common life, and to the kind of complicity that springs up between them *from* habits they do not like to see disturbed.

All this I knew, and when someone pushed the door open a fraction I grew scarlet to the very tips of my ears. I could just imagine their comments.

'Did you see her?' 'What's she like? – 'Oh, not up to much! – I preferred the one who was here this morning.' – 'I bet you he takes her on.'

Jacques Fath put an end to my misery.

He came almost running down the stairs. This was no grave-looking man, but a tall, sunburned, fair-haired boy with all the fragile charm of adolescence allied to that ease of manner seen only in the man of breeding. His eyes were green, and I liked him the moment I saw him.

I no longer felt nervous, and yet he was examining me from top to toe, or rather appraising me. I was wearing a dark green tartan dress, my hair long, and little make-up.

He pushed open the door to the changing-room and called:

'Madame Berthe, you'll be having a new girl tomorrow.'

Then he turned to me.

'What's your name?'

'Simone.'

Madame Berthe, a little, vivacious, chubby, grey-haired woman, poked her head round the door.

'But we've already got a Simone.'

Fath took another close look at me.

'You'll have to call yourself something else. You look to me like a Bettina.'

I had no idea what 'looking like a Bettina' involved, but I accepted his suggestion with a broad smile.

This second casual baptism was as simple and swiftly performed as the first. The Simone Bodin I had been until then fled back for ever to the land of shades. From then on I became Bettina to my friends, who made no protest at this change of status. Only my family still continued to call me Simone for some time.

When I went to work for Fath, I had never heard of Bettina, Goethe's young mistress in his old age. Later, Jacques told me he had taken me on because I had curving eyelashes. But this had

Bettina's first fashion photograph, modelling for Jacques Costet

Bettina aged five . . .
and in Elbeuf, 1940

nothing whatever to do with either Bettina or Goethe.

But none of this worried me in the slightest and I went home exultant. I was to earn 25,000 francs a month in a house whose atmosphere I had liked from the start.

Fath had opened his couture house after the war in a sumptuous building on the Avenue Pierre ler de Serbie which has since disappeared, and at that time it was at the height of its fame. The décor was exquisite, right down to the great painted Louis XV screen and the superb flower arrangements everywhere, even the stairs. And, dominating the showroom, above the chimney-piece, hung a graceful portrait of Geneviève Fath by Gruau.

On the following day I went to the changing-room and settled in my place amidst feigned indifference. But everyone was watching me out of the corners of their eyes. My calm and restraint must have pleased them, for they were not long in accepting me as one of themselves.

Madame Berthe gave me a place in front of a window through which I could see trees growing in a garden. It was all much more cheerful than the rather sombre street I lived in. And this changing-room was a nice one, that I knew from the start. Of course there was the occasional quarrel, but quarrels were inevitable and were always followed by boisterous reconciliations. Jacques Fath's own pleasant nature played no small part in the cordial relations and that existed between his 'girls', some of whom had already been working for him for several years.

There was no scandalmongering there, either. Once she had crossed the threshold after work, each girl took up the threads of her private life with no concern for the others.

I often only knew the Christian names of some of my friends there, and such scraps of information about their private lives as they were willing to divulge.

When I first went to Fath, Louise had been his reigning star for a long time. Everyone thought her wonderful, and she had no equal when it came to putting on long, tight, sheath-dresses, wrapping herself about in mink, or wearing enormous hats. She was very tall and thin, and held her head high when she walked, looking regal in her unparalleled elegance. She would enter the room, wrapped mysteriously about in a fur stole, which she would then throw off in a theatrical gesture to display the dress

beneath, and would walk off nonchalantly trailing the priceless fur across the showroom carpet.

'Oooo! Ah!' the startled audience would exclaim before beginning to applaud.

'My Louise,' as Monsieur Fath used to call her, knew her job through and through. The most respectable bourgeois life awaited her when she got home, in the form of a husband, a little girl and the kitchen chores. She would relate her domestic crises to us with great humour.

Simone was another quiet housewife. Her husband often came to fetch her from work, her mother-in-law looked after her little girl and I never heard her talk of anything but her financial difficulties.

Tulip was named after her country's national flower. She was Dutch and had slanting, Chinese eyes. If anyone asked her anything she considered indiscreet she would shut up just like her namesake at night. I never found exactly how old she was, nor to whom her heart belonged. She just smiled, gave vague answers and sent us postcards whenever she went away.

Everyone adored Doudou, the girl from Martinique. She was the very soul of fantasy, gaiety and exuberance and she had the slimmest ankles and wrists you could possibly imagine. With her diminutive waist held tight in a wide belt, her skirts billowing over layer upon layer of frilly petticoats, her mane of brown hair falling loose over her shoulders and her springy step, she never passed unnoticed in the No. 32, the bus that brought her to work each day from Passy. She used to make all her own clothes, and even other people's, and had a passion for little bows and strings of beads. Her husband, with whom she was very much in love, spent a great deal of his time travelling in far away places. Poor Doudou, she was not made for solitary life! No matter what was going on in the changing-room, her laughter and her sing-song voice would always cheer us up. She had lots of guts. Her taste was excellent and she used to entertain most delightfully in her flat which reflected her own femininity; there were little bows everywhere, and cushions, and shells, and music, and punch to drink.

Paquerette was utterly different. She bore no traces of the timidity and simplicity characterized in her namesake, the daisy. Where had she acquired her name? I never did find out. She

came to Fath a short while after me and was already known as Paquerette then. She was very beautiful, and looked terrific in the flashiest and most elaborate of dresses. She had brought a certain coarseness of speech and accent from the South where she was born, but she was a good sort, even if a bit of a grumbler, and she had us all in fits telling us all the lurid details of her love-life. The man of her dreams was a Russian Count, a colonel whom she married some time after coming to work at Fath. She had a violent nature and always managed to make everyone involved in an argument grow unduly heated.

One day she was expostulating furiously about what she called 'the spy system', which was in fact an intercom apparatus permitting direct communication between the studio and the changing-room. Unfortunately, at that very moment, Madame Fath had just switched it on to say something to us, and she overheard the torrent of abuse.

There followed the most comical of conversations between Paquerette, livid with rage, wildly gesticulating in front of the tiny microphone in the wall, and an angry voice distorted by the distance.

Madame Berthe the dresser was in a panic trying to shut Paquerette up, when suddenly, all dishevelled and livid with rage, she went up to the wall and shrieked in her Southern accent:

'And you can call me Countess for a start!'

Then she turned on her heels, picked up a vase and smashed it to smithereens in an attempt to soothe her jangled nerves.

To complete my picture of the world that was mine for five years, I should mention some of the less unruly members of the group. There was Denise, the sensible Denise, who was married to a writer and had a little boy. She was a keen sportswoman and spent all her free time swimming whenever the sun allowed. Ingrid was even quieter than me and was pink-cheeked and blue-eyed like all blonde Danes. Then a year later, Sophie, whom Beno and I had known down in the South of France, turned up at Fath.

Madame Berthe our dresser was always prepared to have a good laugh with us. Nothing ever escaped her, and thanks to her eagle eye, when we had finished showing a collection, nothing, not even a belt, was missing from the inventory. She

was an expert at dressing and undressing us simultaneously. With one hand she would hold out a petticoat for us to step into, while with the other she slipped us out of the dress we had just worn. But her greatest claim to fame was that she never pinched her girls with their zip fasteners.

Of course we would help a little by squeezing our waists as hard as we could with both hands, hollowing our tummies as much as possible and taking a very deep breath. Then the zip would close painlessly. This little exercise would leave us gasping for breath, but what could one do? We were by no means fat, yet at that time fashion dictated that we should be even slimmer.

There were things that happened at Fath that I would never have tolerated anywhere else, for at last I had found a house I enjoyed working for, and felt completely at home.

And the pleasure of working here did not end there, for no sooner had I gone to Fath than something happened which had never occurred at Lelong. Jacques summoned me to the studio.

It was a most attractive room on the second floor with big windows that gave on to the Avenue Pierre ler de Serbie. It was a delicious-smelling, cosy, comfortable room, with a large desk that was almost buried beneath piles of letters, a jumble of priceless objects, bowls of flowers that were constantly renewed, pencils, samples of material and sheets of drawing paper.

The apprentice couturiers, Philippe, Alain and Pierry, sat all day long in front of the other window round a big table, sketching dresses in outline. The boss would make the final choice and never minced his words when it came to criticism. There was clearly a great deal of heartache over which drawing he chose or what he criticized, for these young men lived in Fath's very shadow and had to adjust themselves to his whims, his likes and dislikes.

So there were sometimes sulks or bitter-sweet words, sometimes even tears. But hard work soon smoothed over all these petty jealousies, for a great deal of hard work went on in this extremely luxurious setting.

A couturier has to prepare his collection a long time in advance. First he thinks of a line. He may decide to turn his customers into lianas or tulips one year. Then with the help of his designers and inspiration sought from the chosen line, he thinks up sketches for actual dresses.

After that all that has to be done is to make the dresses, and at this stage the mannequin is called in. She is summoned to the studio and the couturier drapes his materials over her.

But her role is not an entirely passive one, for she can play her part in the creation of a dress, and sometimes helps to inspire the couturier. She may, by some gesture, some movement, some stance she adopts, give him an idea, either for some detail or even for an entirely new dress.

It would be false modesty on my part to deny having influenced Fath. A new mannequin – and I was a new one – never wears more than ten to twelve dresses at her first showing, but Jacques made me thirty, all very different from the others, thirty dresses with a style all their own.

At that time mannequins were all tall girls, mainly foreign, and very much the *femme fatale* type. But I was smaller and not in the least hieratic. Fath tried with me to create another type of woman, much more akin to the woman one might meet in the street.

For my first collection Fath designed two evening dresses. One was in bronze satin, full length and very simple, which I wore with a tiny tight-fitting Russian-style jacket edged with mink. The other was white satin and was even more romantic. Its white mink trimmings reminded one of *Swan Lake*.

All this took place when the 'New Look' had just come into fashion. But these dresses bore no resemblance whatever to the new style nor did they resemble anything Fath had created previously. They were far simpler in style, far less elaborate, and could still be worn now without appearing unfashionable.

Jacques never used to talk while creating. He would fold the material this way or that, stand back to consider the effect, then fold it again. But when he found something he liked his face would beam with joy.

And I would share in his pleasure, happy to have contributed in some small way to his discovery.

Jacques was indeed an extraordinary man. I have seen him do things that none but he would have dared to. Not only did he design dresses, but he made hats as well. And do you know whose head he tried them on? His own. He would sit before a mirror and place them on his head, and by pummelling and kneading them would eventually create something really smart. And what

is more, his hats really suited him and he never looked ridiculous in them.

Of course he loved dressing up, and would sometimes enter the studio draped in a length of cloth like a cape or a peplum. Then everyone else would do the same and there would be a rush to find a flower or a piece of material to create the funniest costume possible.

Jacques was always trying out new ideas. Soon after I joined him, he decided to launch the stiletto heel. Unfortunately we were still getting over the war, and leather was scarce. The big shoe manufacturers were still not making high-heeled shoes.

But Fath was not discouraged. He searched high and low and one day, in high glee, he told us the good news. He had run to earth the rare animal he had been after: a little craftsman in the Place Pigalle who had spent his life working for the type of customer who really appreciated a well-displayed calf, namely the local ladies of easy virtue.

I could well have been the happiest of young women, for I was making a good living, had a job I really enjoyed doing and seemed to be making a success of it.

But unfortunately my married life was less satisfactory. Beno remained a delightful companion but as a husband he was far from perfect. His various misfortunes had done nothing to make him more sensible, and he still preferred his pals, his meals out in little local restaurants and quarrelling with his family, who were growing more and more distant, to settling down to a permanent job.

I would come home exhausted in the evenings to find Beno in fine fettle telling me we had a rendezvous with friends in some bar. There would just be time for me to change before the round began, a round that would take us during the night to every night-club on the Champs Elysées, the fashionable quarter of Paris, and only end at dawn.

I should have refused to go out, but I too was young and the war years had deprived me of much fun. But even so, I began to wonder whether Catherine had not been right in putting me on my guard, not against Beno himself, but against a hastily concluded marriage between two people who were not really suited to one another.

Preparations for the collection chased away all my gloomy thoughts and soon I found I had no time to brood over my blighted hopes.

There were fittings going on all over the studio, and these long hours of standing were exhausting.

You cannot have a dress fitted without wearing shoes, and a mannequin's shoes are always torture to wear, for although they are made to measure by the best shoemakers, they always make them a size too small out of sheer coquetry, in order to make one's feet look smaller than they really are.

I would wait impatiently for the forewoman to reach the stage when she began to mark out the neckline or set in the sleeves, for then I could take off my shoes. But the agony would begin again when they came to levelling the hemline. The forewoman would crouch on the ground with her eyes glued to the hem and make me revolve very slowly, inch by inch, on my heels.

This was also the time when everyone would keep bursting into tears. The forewoman would cry if she thought she had muffed a dress, the mannequins would weep when a dress destined for them was given to another girl, and the second-in-command in the workroom would arrive in floods of tears because a dress had a mark on it.

Even I, with my nerves of steel, have not escaped these floods which nothing seems capable of stemming. Suddenly all seems to be irretrievably lost, both present and future, because someone else has been given a dress one was to have worn oneself.

As the great week drew near, everyone grew more and more jittery, and everyone, from the boss right down to the dressmaker's apprentice, was tormented by a single thought: was the collection going to be a success?

Fath had developed the tradition of showing his collection to Marie-Laure de Noailles well before it was ready. She would sit at the boss's desk and he would sit at her feet, then she would be shown the sketches and materials. Sometimes we would show her an actual dress if one was ready. Fath had great confidence in her judgment and if Marie-Laure went into raptures over anything the entire house felt happy once more.

The great week would begin with a dress rehearsal in which we all paraded before the saleswomen and the workroom staff

in the showroom. Of course our audience could scarcely have been called impartial. Each of the workrooms had its favourite mannequin, but for all that, the comments and applause of that afternoon told quite significantly which way the wind blew, and Jacques never failed to come and sit amongst his assistant dressmakers in order to catch their slightest comments.

The next day we held the Press showing. I remember being utterly astounded on the occasion of my first collection. I had expected to find myself parading before a group of supremely elegant women, for after all, were they not the very arbiters of world fashion? But I discovered an audience in which elegance was the exception rather than the rule. At that time the phrase 'fashion correspondent' had not yet come into use. And these ladies, with a few exceptions, used to come to the dress-shows with messy, uncombed hair, dressed in the most slovenly way imaginable.

Bettina Ballard was one of the notable exceptions. She was always dressed by Balenciaga and sitting there in the midst of the American, French and English staff of *Vogue*, she would have every couturier trembling in his shoes. She was always the one to give the lead in the applause, and she it was who indicated which dresses should be photographed.

Right opposite the staff of *Vogue*, in the best seats, sat another most important contingent, namely the editors and photographers of *Harper's Bazaar*. Their leader was Carmen Snow, a little white-haired lady who used to walk slightly sideways into the room with uncertain tread, but who nevertheless could bring ruin down upon an entire couture house. Her word was gospel to the American buyers and her verdict on a collection could be murderous. Needless to say everyone kept a wary eye on her, but it was all in vain, for she always seemed to be half asleep. Not a single line of her face betrayed her feelings. Her secretary would sit beside her and take notes about the dresses from her almost inaudible dictation which she did without turning her head, after summing up each dress in a flash with her blue, Irish eyes.

As I paraded before this highly specialized audience, I asked myself whether they liked the collection. I was still too much of a novice to be able to sense instinctively what their reactions were. So, once back in the changing-room, I hurried into the

jumper and skirt I usually wore to work and rushed off into the showroom from which I could hear a great roar of sound.

Fath was beset by a delirious crowd who were congratulating him and embracing him on all sides. I realized that the day was won, but my thoughts went no further, until Jacques signalled me to come over.

I was most surprised and walked over to where he stood. Then he said to his admirers: 'Allow me to introduce Bettina, my new model, whom you all seem to be especially interested in.'

And straightaway I was besieged with questions. Everyone wanted to know if I were French, where I was born, how old I was, and whether I would agree to pose for photographs. I realized that people had noticed me and that my success was due above all to Jacques's dresses but also in some small measure to my style of presenting them that was so different from that adopted by my companions. I had intrigued them all.

But our trials were not over, for the First Showing was to take place that very evening.

At that time Fath's First Showings were quite an event in Paris. They were held in the evening, and people used to come to them as if they were going to the theatre, to watch, but also to be seen themselves. So the rows of gilt chairs in the showroom were filled with royalty, famous painters, celebrated writers, women reputed for their elegance, and well-known actresses.

Both the evening gowns Fath had designed for me, the bronze satin and the white satin, were acclaimed on all sides. I also received a tremendous ovation for a green over-blouse worn with a large beret stuck with a pheasant feather. This kind of autumnal hunting garb was revolutionary, and was the forerunner of the straight, waistless dresses that were to become all the rage several years later.

After the showing, Fath introduced me, as he had done that afternoon, to his friends and customers. This was how I came to meet Christian Bérard. Of course I felt flattered, but I was even more pleased to see how delighted Jacques was to be showing me off.

It only took a matter of hours to turn me into a star. But was I immediately aware of the transformation? No, for one is not actually awarded the title with great pomp and ceremony. By calling you to the studio the couturier confers it automatically,

and the public gives it to you by recognizing you in the street. And the mannequin herself discovers one day that this is what she has become when she finds herself exhausted, and realizes that she is now working harder than ever before.

This was just what happened to me. I was very happy, I was earning a great deal, but I was too tired to be able to enjoy it to the full. And there were the customers to bring me back to earth whenever I felt tempted to escape.

You must not imagine that mannequins parade before an admiringly silent audience. Not at all! A couturier's most highly esteemed customers are sometimes extremely ill-bred. Some never listen to the number of the garment being displayed and, as the mannequin is about to leave the room, will say: 'Please could you tell me the number of that dress?' This is maddening, because one remark like this can well make you miss your next entry. Others do nothing but gossip about their family affairs throughout the showing and never look at a thing. Some stretch their legs right across the gangway.

But the most maddening of all are those who make personal remarks out loud as a girl goes by. 'Isn't she ugly!' they might say. No single flaw escapes them. 'Have you noticed how her toes turn in as she walks?', or again: 'I think she looks just like a slab of cream cheese!'

Once back in the changing-room we would tell one another all the horrible things people had said and done, would point out the guilty, and plan our reprisals.

These would vary according to the type of offence. It was easy to get one's own back on a customer who was just too thoughtless to keep her feet out of the way. You simply trod on her toes as if by accident. We would intimidate the chatterboxes by staring hard at their ankles. After a while they would notice and would fall silent, not knowing which way to look.

We had to take strong measures against the vicious sort. As we paraded up and down we would move in very close and then suddenly swing round so that the folds of our dresses brushed her across the face.

I was not the last to practise these manoeuvres. As you see, I was beginning to learn the tricks of my trade.

A year after my first showing Sophie came to work for Fath, and I had to share my stardom with her.

I was never in the slightest troubled by jealousy, for I immediately took to Sophie's kind of personality and way of life, and we became the greatest friends. What is more, I found it understandable that Jacques should need to have another girl to dress in order to get new ideas.

In any case, I suffered in no way from my rival's presence, for I continued to be summoned to the studio. Fath designed those dresses with the small, starched, white collars for me, and those black and white candy-striped blouses which made quite an impact on the small world of fashion.

During the fashion shows I had many such triumphs. I remember a red tartan skirt with green overchecking which I wore with a jacket which had the colours reversed, a guipure collar and cuffs and a black velvet belt. It figured in magazines the whole world over and was all the rage for a time.

Fath's couture house certainly did a great deal for me. It was in the showroom of the Avenue Pierre ler de Serbie that I first saw someone who was eventually to play a singularly important part in my life.

That was in 1948. I was sitting in front of my dressing-table doing my hair when an unusual commotion made me look around, and I saw all the other girls crowding round the showroom door that stood just ajar. I asked what was going on and they told me that Prince Aly Khan and the famous film-star Rita Hayworth had come to see the collection.

So I joined the others in watching the famous couple through the chink of the door. Madame Fath had come to pay her respects and was sitting beside them, something she hardly ever did. I thought Rita was very beautiful.

I watched them during the parade, too. Rita seemed to be completely indifferent to it all, and sat there with that look of nonchalance so often seen on much-admired women. Aly, on the other hand, was talking and laughing and showed a keen interest in every dress.

For one brief second my eye caught his, and he gave me a warm, sympathetic look, which nevertheless did not in any way excite me. When I came in at the end of the show, dressed as a bride, he smiled at me.

'Thank you, Mademoiselle,' he said, as sweetly simple and natural as you could imagine.

It is not only in my memory that this scene has lived on, for, by a strange coincidence, an American photographer, Robert Capa, who at that time was covering Fath's couture house, snapped me in that wedding-dress in front of the prince.

When I got back to the changing-room to remove all my frills and furbelows, everyone was talking nineteen to the dozen, and we went on discussing the fairy-tale prince, whom we all agreed was very good-looking, for a long time.

But by the next day I had quite forgotten Aly Khan.

I only thought again about him to curse him, for a few days later two of my friends and I were asked to go and show Rita Hayworth some of the dresses Aly had chosen for her. I was not at all pleased at having to do this, for they asked us to come at ten o'clock on a Sunday morning, and I liked to lie in late!

We reached the rue de Prony at the appointed hour, accompanied by a salesgirl and a dresser. We had about fifteen dresses to show, which the salesgirl unpacked in the room we had been shown into. I was yawning and grousing as I began to get ready, and took very little notice of what was going on around me. I was far too keen to be gone again.

Then suddenly Aly came in alone, dressed entirely in black. My ill humour immediately vanished as if by magic, I had fallen under his spell. Rita was not yet ready and he seemed embarrassed at the delay. He offered us champagne and chatted to us while he moved about the room. I had the impression that he was trying to be particularly nice, realizing that we must have been considerably put out at having to come so early and on a Sunday at that.

We had to wait an hour for Rita Hayworth. Then she looked at the dresses with an air of unutterable boredom and Aly had to insist that she try some on. They spoke English together and I did not understand much they said.

The dresses she chose happened to be mine, so I went up to her room with her to help. But she was not the same size as me and since she was unable to get into my dresses I had to put them on.

When our wasted morning was over, Aly came to see us off himself, and was as charming as possible to us, obviously attempting to offset his companion's capricious behaviour.

During the next few days he came to Fath with Rita for her

fittings and would sit on the stairs and watch the models file past as he waited, giving each one of us an engaging smile.

When the parades were over he asked me several times to come and sit next to him and we would chat together. He seemed very interested in my work and would ask me all sorts of questions, such as whether it was very tiring, or whether I had always been interested in fashion.

I found him most likeable but, even at the risk of disappointing certain romantic souls, I must admit that I had absolutely no premonitions about the future, and would have been most astonished if anyone had told me that one day I was to share Aly's life with him. So it was with complete indifference that I read the details of his amorous adventures in the newspapers.

5

I have already mentioned the green tweed over-blouse that won me my first success at Fath. Now that blouse was responsible for altering the whole course of my life.

The following day, a tall, handsome, easy-going American came and asked me whether I would be willing to pose for photographs wearing that over-blouse. I was overjoyed and agreed. He was one of the photographers from *Vogue*.

My experiences as a model were strictly limited to the one and only photograph taken by the Seeberger brothers in the Place de l'Opéra when I was still at Costet's.

So I was a trifle nervous when I set off to keep my appointment with my charming American. I had learnt how to make myself up properly and Fath had given me a certain style, but the world of photography is a mysterious one. A girl who may be beautiful in real life or in a couturier's showroom may turn out to be completely insignificant or plain ugly when immobilized and fixed on a photographic print.

I had to pose in a garden wearing my feathered beret, and *Vogue* must have liked the look of me, for the following week I was again invited to the *Vogue* studios. This time I had to pose wearing a whole collection of hats.

At the same time *Elle* was after me, for news travels fast in the world of fashion. That was how I came to know Jean Chevalier, or 'Cheval' as we used to call him amongst ourselves. *Elle*'s photographer became a great friend of mine, and I owe my first cover photo to him. That is indeed a date to remember in a model's life. That first cover photo was an Easter scene in which I appeared surrounded by multicoloured Easter eggs.

One photo leads to another, and soon I found I had a second job, being a 'cover-girl'.

Should I leave Fath? That was out of the question, and I soon found I no longer had a moment's free time.

Bettina with Jacques Fath when she was his leading mannequin

Photo. *Robert Capa*

In Jacques Fath's salon, Bettina showing a wedding dress in front of Rita Hayworth and Aly Khan

I had to dash from one studio to another and used to have a sandwich and a cup of coffee for my lunch. I would often have to rush off between two shots to present a collection at Fath. Then it would be off to the studio again... And so the days went by, always standing, always with an empty stomach.

It was even worse when the fashion shows were on. Then I had to pose for photographs late into the evening and my dinner became identical with my lunch, in other words hard-boiled eggs and a cup of nasty, tepid coffee brought over from a nearby café.

In those days, being a cover-girl was something new in France. It involved quite different techniques from those used by a mannequin and required altogether different qualities.

A mannequin wears dresses that have been specially made to measure for her, whereas the cover-girl has to pose in other people's clothes. And she somehow has to contrive to make those clothes look elegant, even when they are too small and will not zip up the back, or perhaps too large and need to be held with clothes-pegs.

Being a cover-girl is a wonderful training in controlling one's nerves. I myself have never been a very punctual person but now it was I who had to wait, to wait again, everlastingly to wait. There was always something missing. Either the dress I was to wear had not arrived, because the editor had been unable to obtain it from the saleswoman, or because another studio that had borrowed it before us had not yet returned it. Or they had not yet chosen what accessories I was to wear with it: what handbag I should carry, what gloves and what jewellery to wear. Or again, the scene was not set for the background.

Then when everything was ready at last, the lights would fuse just as the photographer was about to take the picture.

I would not grow agitated, for these hitches were frequently a real godsend and enabled me to get some rest. I could take off my shoes and relax in a corner. I would sometimes even stretch out on the floor, since one thing mattered above all, and that was not to appear tired, for lines of fatigue show up mercilessly under the floodlights.

Just as the mannequin collaborates with the couturier, so the model collaborates with the photographer. A good cover-girl takes up her stance immediately, and is paid more because she

saves time and money.

I learnt to move in slow motion. The photographer would raise one arm and call out:

'Stop! Hold it!'

He had hit on a good angle. I would do as he said, and hold my precarious position, torso thrown back, or arms outstretched, often in the most uncomfortable of attitudes.

Make-up is terribly important and it is absolutely essential to know how to do one's face. One stroke of a pencil round the eyes or lips can completely transform a model. You need to know your own face intimately in order to be able to correct your defects.

I would spend hours examining myself in front of the mirror without the least trace of complacency, yet these interminable sessions of self-criticism never bored me, for I loved to be able to transform myself at will.

When I was at the height of my career, fashion decreed very sophisticated photographs. Models never smiled, but stood with half-open lips in stiff, dramatic poses, and were represented as impersonal creatures, unreal beings.

In order to achieve this measure of sophistication which I did not naturally possess, I began by hiding my freckles beneath a very white make-up base. Then to give my cheeks a hollow look I would place a dark shadow below my cheek-bones. By the time my lips had been edged likewise in black, I would begin to take on the desired tragic appearance. But the eyes needed the greatest care of all. It was from America, where they had gone considerably further in this art than we had, that we learned how to draw a black line along the eyelids and extend it outwards, thus making the whole eye appear much bigger. I would cover the lids with dark green eyeshadow and run a heavy line of pencil along my eyebrows whose shape would vary in accordance with the whim of the particular photographer.

Jacques Fath gave me a great deal of very valuable advice, and used to bring me the latest beauty products or fashion hints on his return from his frequent visits to the United States.

Jacques was delighted at my success as a cover-girl. Not only had he never reproached me once for not being there a great deal of the time, but had, time and time again, recommended

me to photographers. This attitude was partly due to his natural kindliness and the fact that he was fond of me, 'his Bettina', but also to the fact that Jacques had a wonderful sense of publicity and knew exactly how to make use of anything that would enhance his own reputation as a couturier.

Then he also had the very rare gift of always being several weeks ahead of his time. Thus it was that he caused a revolution in women's hair styles through me.

At that time women were wearing their hair very long, and I myself wore mine in a chignon.

Then one afternoon, as I arrived at Fath, late yet again and was hurrying up the stairs in order not to miss my first entry, I ran into the boss.

He had just returned from a trip to the States where he had been designing 'off-the-peg' clothes, and I had not yet seen him since his return. I fully expected him to reproach me for being late, which would have been in no way unusual.

But far from it; Jacques never referred to my late arrival, but kissed me and said:

'Bettina mine, when you have done here, I want you to go to Georgel and have your hair cut. I've just seen a girl in America with hair as short as a boy's. You get all that cut off, and you'll look divine!'

I needed no urging, for I have always loved changing my hair style. And this was indeed a change; in fact it amounted to a revolution. So I hurried round to Georgel.

He was far less keen on the idea. In fact he was extremely reluctant to do it, and I had to insist before he could be persuaded.

Then at last, surrounded by every coiffeur and every shampooer in the place, who had all gathered round to see the great event, he cut my hair short like a convict.

Then I went back to Fath, expecting compliments. But Jacques looked at me, rather disappointed.

'No, no', he said, 'it's still too long. Go back to Georgel and tell him it's not to be more than half an inch long.'

So I was completely cropped.

My friends were divided in their views. Some let out a shriek when they saw me, while others thought the short hair suited me very well.

Walter Carone did a feature about me in *Paris-Match*, and soon I began to notice women in the street, at night-clubs, or at Fath, who had copied me and had their hair cropped too.

I had launched a new fashion, or rather, to put it more accurately, I had helped Fath to launch a new fashion.

It was to go with my short hair that he created his famous long line of striped blouses that did up with a rose.

I used to pose for all the papers, both French and foreign. The weeks were never long enough, and I even took to working on Sundays, since the couture houses were closed then and the photographers had access to their models.

It was not always fun and games either, cover-girls always have to wear the most unsuitable clothes for the time of year. In February they don summer dresses and pose all over Paris, even when it is deep in snow. But in August, beneath a blazing sun, they have to wrap themselves snugly in fur coats.

As for the fashion photographer himself, he has an endlessly fertile imagination and a real flair for hitting on the most uncomfortable of positions for his model to hold in the most unlikely place.

My childhood spent in the country helped me here, for it had made me tough, and I found I could brave an ice-cold Champ de Mars or the windswept terraces of the Trocadéro in a muslin dress and never catch a cold.

I had to learn the art of acrobatic strip-tease, for I often had to change in a car parked in a busy street and yet manage to do so without the passers-by noticing. All too often I had to use the Place de la Concorde as a changing-room.

I liked some of the photographers I worked for better than others, and I always greatly enjoyed my visits to *Elle* or *Vogue*.

Jean Chevalier, otherwise known as 'Cheval', knew how to create a very happy atmosphere around him, and I never grew bored, even if I had to hang about for hours in his studio. There was an amusing and pleasant atmosphere about the place, which seemed to be in permanent state of effervescence. There the staff were for ever thinking out new ways of presenting their material and everyone in this gay, lively world found their ideas received fresh stimulus from the visits the editor of *Elle* used to pay them.

There was a somewhat different atmosphere at the *Vogue*

studios, less of a family feeling but I had known the photographic team there for a long time and was used to their ways and felt at home everywhere, from the studios to the laboratories. Everyone there seemed to like me.

From time to time the staff of *Vogue* would try to alter the style of their photos, for novelty is of paramount importance in their type of work. So one day someone suggested asking Henri Cartier-Bresson to do a set of fashion-photos. Like all creative artists, this great photographer lives in a world of his own, and although he has close friends in the couture world, he has never given a moment's thought to the problem of showing a dress to its best advantage. They asked him first to photograph a pullover and told him he could choose any model he liked.

I was greatly flattered when he chose me, and together we set off early one morning, and walked for a long time through the Paris streets until we reached les Halles. I thought at the time that it was mere chance that had led us there, but I have since been told that Cartier-Bresson loved les Halles and would often visit it.

There, between two stalls, in a long alleyway with a high glass roof like those seen in old railway stations, we spent the morning taking photographs.

He used his Leica so discreetly that no one even noticed us. It was wonderful: I felt I had been sitting for a series of masterpieces.

And the photos were indeed lovely, though they never appeared in *Vogue*, for Cartier-Bresson had forgotten one small detail: he had failed to emphasize the pullover. This was how I came to wreck Cartier-Bresson's career in the couture world. Fortunately though, the world was able to offer him other ways of making use of his considerable gifts.

Since I myself spent half my life in front of a camera, I once took it into my head to switch places and become a press photographer myself, and a clandestine one at that.

I was very young at the time. I loved having a good laugh and would sometimes make my job seem almost farcical. As you will see, I had no need to fret about my choice of subject, for Princess Margaret was coming one morning to see the collection.

Fath was in complete chaos. The showrooms had been redecorated and every mannequin and saleswoman was expected

to look her very best. The building was being watched by plain-clothes detectives who had orders not to allow anyone to take photographs.

This we knew, and I realized that here was my opportunity to get what is known as a 'scoop' in the world of journalism, in other words a sensational photo.

I took up my position at the main entrance, hiding my camera behind me, but feeling ill at ease, however, for I had the impression that one of the detectives was watching me out of the corner of his eye.

The Princess's car drew up at the kerbside and she got out, accompanied by four ladies. At that moment I brandished my camera and, without any attempt to focus, released the shutter.

And then what happened? I ran like one demented towards the stairs leading up to the showroom, with my detective close at my heels. He was frightened to shout after me for fear of scandal, but as he raced up the stairs he kept muttering:

'Stop her, someone; for heaven's sake stop her!'

I took refuge in the changing-room, but he followed me in without a moment's hesitation.

I was in fact safe though, for there I enjoyed extra-territorial rights. The detective was greeted with shrieks of protest and my friends, scantily dressed as they were, sent him packing.

Unfortunately, this exploit profited me nothing, for the photo was all out of focus and I soon forgot all about it.

I have related this little incident to show how heedless I was of convention still. I still had a wonderful feeling of freedom, thanks, no doubt, to my youth and also to the kind of person I was. I lived just as I pleased, caring nothing for conventional behaviour, and still full of mischief, a relic of my happy childhood.

Even so I had my worries. My married life was becoming less and less satisfactory. Not that we had scenes or rows; but was simply that my husband still had no regular job, and, whenever he did find some employment, he always seemed to get involved in some hair-brained scheme or other.

By now I had come to the conclusion that Beno would never change, but would always remain the same delightful, whimsical creature I had met that evening at the night-club. And the serious side of my nature, which is something all women have

in common, made it impossible to accept this dilettante attitude to life.

Jacques Fath saw that I was not very happy and tried to help, for, although he was a friend who had endless creative power when it came to trifles, he nevertheless could be a wise counsellor in serious matters. So I poured out all my troubles to him.

He gave me his advice without ever dramatizing the situation, and he always managed to keep things in proper focus.

Beno and I agreed to separate, but I went back to him after a while. It is a rare thing for two people to make a success of a marriage that has been patched up like this, and ours proved no exception to the rule.

So I made up my mind to get a divorce, not, I must say, without some sorrow, for it is always a sad thing to leave someone with whom one has lived for a long time and to witness the final passing of one's first love.

6

As a child I had always dreamt of travelling, and the Normandy sea breezes had combined with the tug-boats and barges on the Seine to give me a yearning for far-away places.

I had done some travelling while I was with Fath. But although these trips had been very pleasant, they had not been at all what I had always imagined travelling to be. Everyone in the changing-room would set off together, but we always had to hurry the collection back to the base. It was an expensive business to move fifteen people about and it was all very much a family affair. We would stay at the best hotels and attend a dinner given in our honour. Then on the following day we would give the fashion show and would be off again, laden with flowers and gifts, departing as we had come, beneath the glare of flash-bulbs. I spent three days like this in Algiers, two in Vienna and Amsterdam, and twenty-four hours in Munich.

After I had become a cover-girl, I did a great deal of travelling. I went to Portugal and to Italy with some of the staff of *Elle*, and although these trips were unlike those I made as a mannequin, they were not like those I had always dreamed of, either. Here, there were no flowers and no receptions. We used to work the whole day long and never waste a single second of the precious daylight. In Venice, which I had so longed to see, I never had time to visit a single museum. It was cold there, and I had to spend three days posing in a summer dress by grey, ice-cold canals.

At the beginning of my career as a cover-girl, Jacques Fath gave me leave to spend a fortnight in London. It was the first time I had ever flown and I was a bit frightened.

I felt completely lost in the British capital. I picked a rather sordid room at random in a no less sordid area of London, and found the bed draped in a ghastly red artificial satin counterpane and a heater that would only function, and poorly at that, when you put money in the meter.

I worked all day long, and when I went back exhausted to my digs at night, it was to be greeted by a landlady who sipped endless cups of strong tea and talked in stentorian tones.

I had learnt some English at school, but once in London I found I could not understand a single word anyone said to me. When it came to paying a taxi driver all I could do was to offer him a handful of money. Nor had I any idea where to eat, and used to go to the most incredible places. Once I found myself having a meal at six o'clock in the evening, surrounded by a thronging mass of men, who looked lonely and resigned and had obviously eaten for years in the same place every evening, sitting at the same tables and partaking of the same dull food at the same moderate prices.

But the day came when I felt I could not stand this dull life any more, so I decided to take a room in a luxury hotel with an enamelled façade near Hyde Park. At last I had some hot water, a bathroom and assiduous porters. But unfortunately by then I was already nearing the end of my stay.

I returned to Paris full of unquenchable enthusiasm, for I had discovered England. I would talk about it endlessly to all my friends until one day one of them said:

'You are ridiculous, you know, you and your England! Anyone would think it was at the other end of the world to hear you talk!'

Several years later I went there again, this time for forty-eight hours to pose for a series of photographs taken at a circus near London. It was a most amusing trip which the English editors of *Harper's Bazaar* still remind me about sometimes.

We spent all our time with the acrobats and the clowns, ate our meals with them and were photographed as they rehearsed. The lion-tamer even wanted to take us into the lion's cage. But I would not go, for it seemed to be quite dangerous enough already to have acrobats perched up on huge bicycle wheels brushing our sumptuous spangled dresses as they rode by.

It was suggested that I might like to go on tour with the circus, and I felt quite tempted to do so, but I had several commitments in Paris and had to refuse the offer.

My first trip to the United States took place in June 1949, a visit I owed to Penn, one of *Vogue's* American photographers

for whom I had done some work the previous season.

I went by sea, tourist class, with only one tiny suitcase. There were three of us in the cabin but the crossing was great fun all the same. The Purser took charge of me and I never missed a single evening's entertainment. I used to tiptoe into my cabin at dead of night and undress in the dark so as not to waken the two cantankerous old ladies in the other bunks.

One morning as dawn broke, I stood on a mist-drenched deck, and saw New York, the great unknown, silent city, slip into sight.

Sophie, who had made the crossing some time before was there to welcome me. She had gone to the States to pose for some of the American newspapers and had already found us a flat on the fifth floor of a building in Park Avenue, which was known in New York as a 'good address'.

Sophie and I decided to spend the next three months living like American models.

In America every cover-girl has an agent who looks after her engagements and her contracts. *Vogue* sent me to Eileen Ford, a tiny little, fragile-looking woman with nerves of steel. She spent all day in front of a table laden with card indexes and seemed always to be answering four telephones at once. It was a most exhausting job, and I have seen her weeping from sheer weariness. And yet somehow she managed to find time to look after her husband and children, and even to do a bit in the house.

A New York cover-girl's life is utterly different from that of her Paris counterpart, for improvisation is out of the question in New York and so is the good-humoured, free-and-easy attitude to work we had experienced in Paris. Every moment was counted and timed and no one ever dared be even five minutes late. A model was expected to arrive dead on time, ready to pose, make-up completed and hair done. Her little suitcase was supposed to contain several pairs of shoes, a spare pair of stockings and a complete make-up kit, as a precaution against the most unlikely accidents. Neither must she forget her agency card which she carried so that her hours of work could be entered on it.

I found it extremely hard to adapt myself to this factory-like discipline and had to make a supreme effort not to arrive

late for my appointments any more. I found the whole set-up very strange.

One day when I was waiting in the cloakroom of some studio with my scrapbook under my arm, a lady arrived accompanied by a miniature poodle. She was wearing a navy-blue polka-dot dress with a matching hat. Her dog had on one of those little round hats seen on monkeys at the circus, likewise in a navy-blue polka-dot material. I asked the lady who her agent was and she mentioned a name I had never heard of. I then enquired what she intended to do with the dog while she herself was posing, to which she replied:

'But it's my dog who is posing.'

It was then that I noticed the poodle's air of confidence; he was a real old hand at the game. And as for the agency the lady had mentioned, it was one that specialized in hiring photogenic animals, be they dogs, birds or anything else that found its way into their files.

I also began to get to know the city better, and found that I was less often lost. It is only fair to add that I spent most of my time travelling in taxis and the New York streets still terrified me. Those vast preoccupied crowds, that never dawdled and never looked at you, seemed like two approaching armies marching towards one another each time they came to a red light. It occurred to me that if I were to fall down dead in the middle of the sidewalk, not a soul would stop.

It is true that Sophie and I had arrived at the wrong moment. It was horribly hot, and, in the studios, the lights made the dog-days even more unbearable. One had to touch up one's make-up every five minutes. I remember one agonizing session with the great photographer Penn, in which we were preparing a cover for *Vogue*. I had to hold the same position and keep the same smile from eleven in the morning until four in the afternoon. There is nothing so exhausting as this kind of photo. I never even left the studio to have lunch, but drank a carton of milk – in America they sell it in cartons – and ate a plate of salad in the studio itself, between two smiles.

In the evenings Sophie and I would go out a great deal. America is a most hospitable country and people often invite you out. But our ignorance of American habits and customs sometimes played unpleasant tricks on us.

A friend of ours from Paris, Philippe de Croisset, who was running the French *Vogue* at the time, happened to be passing through New York and invited us to spend a week-end in a country club. We agreed to meet him at New York Central Station.

We, in our naïveté, thought the club would be rather like some of the inns on the outskirts of Paris, and set off in linen trousers, without a single smart dress in our luggage.

The club turned out to be one of the most snobbish and exclusive in the country. The head waiter showed his disapproval by seating us at a table wedged between a door and a screen. Every other woman in the room was wearing a hat. The following morning Sophie, dressed in a pair of shorts, was on her way to the swimming-pool, when she was firmly stopped by the hall porter and made to use the service entrance. Philippe nearly died of shame and did not altogether approve of our giggling about it all.

We had another good laugh when two young Americans whom we considered pretentious bores took us to spend the week-end with friends of theirs in Long Island. Everyone was curious to see us. Just imagine, French model-girls with real Parisian dresses! But before dinner we had a wicked idea. I had a very pretty, very elegant pleated dress from Fath which I put on, but with it I wore a pair of heavy flat-heeled shoes and a belt belonging to a totally different outfit. As for Sophie, she put her dress on back-to-front; then we staged a late arrival for dinner and made our entry beneath the astonished gaze of all the guests. Not a soul dared laugh, and our hosts appeared not to have the slightest suspicion that we were putting on an act. They must have thought that the world of fashion had gone mad in Paris.

At the end of our stay, *Life* decided to write an article on us and our life in New York. Gordon Parks, a charming negro photographer, was to follow us everywhere to take the pictures. This he did for a whole week, moving from cocktail to dinner parties, from work in the studios to our shopping expeditions. Then one Saturday morning he called for us at our flat to take us into the country for a series of outdoor shots.

Sophie and I came down from the flat clutching our small suitcases, and the janitor, a man of about sixty who had taken

us under his fatherly wing, gave us a beaming smile.

'So you're off to the country for the week-end, are you? Well, have a good time.'

Then suddenly he seemed to turn to stone and stood there with his eyes cast up to heaven. For he had caught sight of an elegantly dressed negro sitting at the wheel of the enormous convertible Cadillac we were about to get into, and could not get over his astonishment.

And, as we stepped into the Cadillac, we had the impression that the whole neighbourhood had gathered at their windows, all as horrified as our porter.

The following Monday he took us on one side and, in a great state of embarrassment, explained that you simply must not do that sort of thing in America.

'But he's a photographer from *Life*; he's a friend of ours,' Sophie replied.

'And,' I added, 'he's coming round tonight to do some photos of our flat.'

And Gordon did come round that evening and stayed till two in the morning, working. But I had the impression that the janitor didn't believe a single word of our story.

Sophie went home by sea a few days before me. We had bought so many things in New York and had so much luggage as a result that flying would have been quite out of the question. I accompanied her as far as her cabin which was piled high with baggage and flowers and there said good-bye, sad to see her go.

I had had an offer to stay on in the United States.

A few days before leaving Paris I had been asked to meet the 20th Century Fox representative there who had suggested I might get in touch with their New York office.

But once in New York I had completely forgotten all about it. A week before I was due to return to France, it was they who got in touch with me and asked me to call at their office with all my photos.

Several busy-looking gentlemen looked through my scrap-book and offered me a contract. They wanted me to spend seven years in Hollywood. Just that. And I would be taught how to act.

I hesitated for a moment but eventually turned down the offer. I had no ambition to become a true career woman. I

had to earn my living and was earning it as well as I could, with a certain amount of help from chance, but I did not relish the idea of success for its own sake, nor of money for money's sake. Seven years in Hollywood seemed an eternity; seven years away from my family and my usual routine of life sounded like Hell on earth.

So I went back to France. But my time in New York had only acted as a further stimulus to my desire to travel more widely.

Two years later I set off again with Sophie, this time for Brazil. Sophie and I were the world's two most popular models at that time and were often asked to pose together because of our contrasting styles.

With two other mannequins, Alla and Sylvia (who subsequently married Daniel Gelin) we were to show the Dior collection bought by a Brazilian gentleman.

At first we took him for a madman, for he asked us to come a week early and set us up in a marvellous flat on the top floor of a palatial building in Copacabana.

'He's crazy,' we told one another. 'He's paying us for doing nothing.'

But our madman was really exceedingly shrewd, for we had brought his collection into the country in our own luggage without his having to pay a single cent's custom's duty. He had, without a word of warning, used us as accessories to his smuggling. Our stay in Brazil was enchanting, even if the spell was occasionally broken by untoward adventures, for it is no easy matter for two unaccompanied French girls to find themselves alone in South America where French women have a legendary reputation for flightiness.

One evening we were both invited out to dinner – we were careful to go out together – and found ourselves in a magnificent flat, although it did seem to be very scantily furnished. The meal was very gay, but all of a sudden we realized that we had better make our escape while we could, and we dashed out at top speed. Only just in time, though, for had we stayed a moment longer we should have found every door locked.

In the street below we ran into Jean Manson, the *Paris-Match* photographer in Brazil.

'Whatever are you doing here?' he asked in great surprise.

'Women don't wander about the streets alone after midnight in Brazil.'

We told him what had just happened and he took us out for a drink.

On another occasion a Brazilian friend suggested I might like to visit a famous beauty-spot just outside Rio on the edge of the forest, from where one could see a panoramic view of the whole bay.

All my friends warned me to be careful, for the place we intended to visit was more or less in the jungle, but they only managed to make it sound all the more tempting. So we set off by car just after nightfall. I felt very scared. I was driving, for I seem to remember my friend had not passed his driving test and drove very badly. We drove on and on along a road that wound uphill through the forest in a series of hairpin bends. Then suddenly, I saw something in the middle of the road. It was a man lying across the way.

'Don't stop, whatever you do!' shouted the Brazilian.

I began to shake all over, but did not slow down. The man got up and ran off just as the front of the car was about to hit him. It seems that this is how thieves manage to stop cars and rob the passengers.

Not wanting to miss one of the traditional Brazilian pastimes, I got myself invited to a *macumba* session.

They always began in the same way, with a midnight rendezvous in some strange place. We all crowded into cars with a whole lot of people we had never seen before. It was a strange trip. From what I could see of the countryside around Rio by the light from our headlamps, it was most impressive. We all had bottles of *Cachassa*, a very potent white spirit, with us.

We came to a half-ruined house with closed shutters, and with great difficulty managed to waken a woman inside. Then a long discussion took place; but we were not in luck, for it was the middle of Holy Week and during Holy Week there is no *macumba*; so we had to return to Rio without having seen the chicken slaughtered.

But some time later I attended an even stranger ceremony, when a Brazilian friend took us one evening to see exorcism practised amongst the members of a religious sect whose name I have forgotten.

This sect met in a huge tumbledown house somewhere in the city. We climbed a very steep staircase to a large room full of wooden benches, somewhat resembling the kind of lecture hall seen in some French provincial towns. The windows were heavily barred.

Suddenly I caught a whiff of ether. There were a great number of people present, particularly women. Sophie and I sat down a trifle anxiously on one of the benches.

Then, the crowd began to pray and sing. One had a feeling something was about to happen, for the singing seemed to cast a spell over everyone. Two rows of bearded priests were sitting facing one another in their long robes and they raised their arms until they met in the middle, so that their sleeves formed a long white arch through which the faithful began to file. From time to time one of them would be seized by a terrifying paroxysm, and would shout, writhe and foam at the mouth. Some even fell flat on the floor, while others dashed over to a window in an attempt to throw themselves out, only to be prevented from doing so by the others.

The priests went on chanting and the faithful, intoxicated with ether, went on singing their monotonously regular responses.

'Shall we go too?' Sophie whispered, overcome by the general mood of hysteria.

I was frightened. Supposing we were inhabited by the devil and that the same thing happened to us as to these others. I did not like the idea of finding myself in such a state of trance.

Then suddenly it all came to a perfectly natural end. Those who had rid themselves of their own private devil were carried off to one corner of the room where their family helped to revive them, and the crowd dispersed as if nothing had happened.

Brazil is a land of powerful emotions. Every time I run into Jean Prouvost, the big businessman who controls *Paris-Match*, *Marie-Claire* and *Lainière de Roubaix*, he says:

'Ah, Bettina, you and I nearly met our deaths together!'

This is no exaggeration. We were in Rio and had been out to dinner with him and a friend; then Jean Manson was going to drive them both to the airport.

It was not late, probably around nine o'clock, and Manson

was driving fairly fast along a motorway that had a low wall down the centre to separate the two carriageways. There was no one on the road either in front or behind. Then suddenly a lorry appeared, heading straight for us, collided with our car, went into reverse and disappeared. We were hurled against the parapet of a bridge and found ourselves suspended over the river. One side of our car had been completely torn off, and I can still hear Jean Prouvost saying to the woman sitting beside him:

'But I *know* it hurts! I'm *sure* it hurts!'

He thought she had hurt her head because she was clasping her hands to her ears, whereas all that had happened was that she had lost her ear-rings. We were all quite unscathed. It was a miracle.

But that was not to be the end of our adventures, for as we drew up at the airport we heard a volley of revolver shots ring out.

There were people running everywhere. We did not dare leave our car, for there were men taking cover between the vehicles. Someone fell to the ground and was hauled away unceremoniously.

The man in question had been a pick-pocket whom the police had been chasing and the other shadows we had seen flitting by in an attempt to hide had been his accomplices to whom he had passed the stolen wallet.

By now we thought we had really had our fill of excitement. But we were wrong, for they had not yet finished all the construction work at the airport and Jean Manson backed his car straight into a hole full of water.

The fashion parade was the culminating point of Rio's social season, after which we left for Sao Paulo.

We were squeezed into a tiny aircraft with hordes of businessmen who smoked enormous cigars and drank cup after cup of coffee, and we were all terribly shaken about.

Sao Paulo was still not much more than one vast building yard. We were only there for a week, but during that week we saw whole blocks of flats spring up and streets take on an entirely different look. It was quite staggering.

When the time came to return, I thought about the journey there and decided I did not want to go back by air. So Sophie

and I parted company and I went back by road, thinking I might see more of the countryside this way. It took two days to reach Rio and the road was nothing but one continuous string of potholes. By the time I got back I was nearly dead with exhaustion.

But even so my thirst for adventure had not been quenched, and, since I had earned quite a lot in Brazil, when the time came to leave, I decided to visit some French friends, the Gambas, in Buenos Aires.

The Gambas lived in the pampas between thirty and forty miles from the city. They had a llama who wandered freely around the grounds, but if you tried to catch him, he would turn round and spit in your face. I spent several days among the gauchos, who spent their whole lives on horseback and owned nothing but their knives and their saddles. They were a tough lot.

One of them, a very slender, handsome man, decided one day that he would tame a wild horse in my honour. So some peasants brought him a wonderful chestnut stallion no one had ever mounted. They tied him to a stake and the poor beast struggled so frantically that he finally broke a leg. The bone stuck right through the flesh and I ran off screaming, quite unable to bear to watch any more.

Upon my return to Buenos Aires I had a most unpleasant surprise, for during my absence I had left my luggage in my hotel bedroom and someone had ransacked it and taken all my money.

In a state of utter panic I went down to see the doorman.

'It's your own fault,' he told me, 'the hotel is in no way responsible for things left in people's rooms.'

I had nothing but my return ticket left and had to travel without a bean in my pocket. Yet even this disaster did not spoil my memory of a trip I never regretted having made.

7

I never go along the Avenue Montaigne without a tender glance at the white façade of the small hotel that stands opposite the Champs Elysées Theatre. For this was where I lived for almost ten years, and many an episode in my life took place in this building.

After leaving Beno I decided, somewhat at random, to live in the Hotel Montaigne, partly because it was cheap and also because it was almost next door to Fath, where I worked.

It was a small, modest, local hotel, still more or less unknown. There was hardly anybody staying there so I was able to pick the room I wanted. Not that they were very different, actually, for they all had well-worn moquette furniture, a wash-basin, a brass bedstead and a wardrobe with a mirror. Light streamed in through a great gap beneath all the doors, and the passage floors creaked with every tread.

As in a theatre, the Hotel Montaigne had a garden side and a courtyard side. On the garden side the rooms gave on to the Avenue Montaigne and were gay but noisy. Buses used to stop right in front of their shutters, those old buses with a platform and a bell I can still hear. Then during the summer, the Avenue Montaigne at night was like Saint-Tropez. At the Bar des Théâtres, people used to talk away in loud voices, just beneath my window, until four in the morning.

I preferred the courtyard side, for it was quieter, although even here the silence was relative, since my window looked out on the kitchens of a restaurant in the rue Jean Goujon that was famous for its couscous. At seven every morning I was awakened by the sound of a chopper and by the smell of semolina and red peppers.

I stored my things as best I could in the wardrobe, in the dressing-tables of this tiny room, and in a row of suitcases under my bed. The whole place was completely impersonal, but this has its attractions, and I infinitely preferred it to those sordid little furnished rooms I had lived in before.

I no longer had any practical worries. There was no cooking to be done, for the Bar des Théâtres became my restaurant; you could get sandwiches and fried eggs there for very little.

It was a lively, gay place, whose customers ranged from the butchers and dairymen from the Alma Market, quaffing white wine as they leant on the bar, to dancers from the Champs Elysées Theatre, and good-looking girls from the Avenue Montaigne, all cover-girls or mannequins.

The charming waiters in the café soon became like members of my family. They had fantastic memories and managed to remember all the little things I asked them to do and every phone message that ever came through for me.

The people who ran the Hotel Montaigne were no less pleasant, either. I had a soft spot for the night porter, a real good sort with a heavy moustache and a southern accent. He used to have me in fits of laughter. He knew everything about everyone in the hotel and if anyone came and enquired for me in my absence he would reply without batting an eyelid:

'Bettina is out. But I'm sure you could find her in such and such a place before eleven, or somewhere else between eleven and midnight.'

Monique Arnaut, one of Fath's mannequins who was just beginning her career as a cover-girl, was the first to join me at the Hotel Montaigne. Then came Jean-Marie de Prémonville whom she was later to marry. He was one of the *Paris-Match's* chief reporters and was killed on the Indo-Chinese front. He had been a paratrooper for years during the war, and had never lost his taste for risky ventures and skirmishes.

Jacques Schinler came from a very good Swiss family, but he, also, preferred the Bohemian life of the Avenue Montaigne to the rigours of a Protestant environment. He had embarked on the manufacture of plastic bottles, and we used to spend hours discussing the merits of this new medium, for which, I must admit, we foresaw no future at all. But we were wrong. Daniel Chandler was the wealthiest of us all, and we were constantly astonished at the cars he turned up in and the pretty girls he used to take out. But the fortune he had inherited from his parents, who had been deported to Dachau and had died there, soon melted away between his fingers.

Soon these various peoples, coming as they did from all four

corners of Europe, found themselves gathered together in the Hotel Montaigne, and became very close friends. We would all go out late and were always together. We always ate together in the little restaurants along the Champs-Elysées.

It was when I was with this gay group of people that I met Guy Schoeller.

Guy was a little older than the other young men of our set. He happened to have lunch with us one day and joined us again on the following days, a fact which surprised us all a little, since he normally led a different kind of life. He had inherited important assets from his father in Hachette the publishers, and was already well established in Paris. He liked good food, luxurious surroundings, and fashionable night-clubs. Yet nevertheless he agreed to share with us the horrible food our little restaurants served up.

Later, Guy himself showed surprise for the fact that he had adopted our way of life. But he always remembered the clothes I had on the first time he ever saw me. It had been winter, and I had been wearing a black oilskin mac and a beret over my long hair. I think it must have been the black beret that captivated him.

I went out a great deal with Guy. One day he took me out for lunch in a restaurant in the Avenue Kléber where we met Gaston Gallimard, the well-known publisher. During the entire meal the conversation ranged over nothing but books, contracts, and authors, subjects about which, I must confess, I knew nothing at the time. Even so Guy struck me as most attractive. Of course, he was doing his utmost to be charming. Although he was a much younger man than Gaston Gallimard, he nevertheless teased him like a brother. I suddenly felt he belonged to a world full of brilliant people, a world that I knew nothing whatever about, and I found it a disturbing thought.

We began to meet more and more frequently. He would bring me piles of books and I conscientiously read Tolstoy and Proust. It was Gaston Gallimard who first made me feel I would like to know Proust. Gallimard had let him slip through his fingers, and had later had to use all his ingenuity to get him back. I had visions of Gaston, lying very quiet like a large cat, purring away at Proust while waiting for him to come within range.

Guy used to discuss what I read with me, and he also introduced me to good music. I got to know his friends who were almost all journalists or writers. We used to spend week-ends at Villennes with Pierre and Hélène Lazareff, and I met Georges Simenon at the house of Gaston's son – Claude Gallimard. I was introduced to Jean Genêt, and we used to go out with Kessel. Those evenings were always great fun and full of surprises, and they never finished before dawn.

Gaston Gallimard used to give a cocktail party each week for all the authors whose work he published, and he once asked me to entertain Faulkner in whose honour the party was being given.

The famous American writer spent most of the time sitting on the sofa between his daughter and me. But you must not expect any revelations from me about his difficult writings, for our conversation was solely about Paris and his journey from the States. That was all I managed to drag from him, for he was an exceedingly shy man.

When I was in Cannes Guy took me to meet the poet Jacques Prévert one evening, and we drove up to St Paul de Vence to where he lived behind the Colombe d'Or in a small suburban house with a concrete path and a long narrow garden. We seemed to hit it off from the start and Jacques brought out all his collages to show me. He was just like a child showing off his toys. It was the wealth of imagination he displayed, rather than his strange appearance, that struck me above all. He talked incessantly, but in a very special way, for his conversation was one long monologue, consisting of the same things repeated over and over again in a flat, dull voice. Then suddenly, out of all this rather dreary repetition would spring some wonderful phrase, some image or some unexpected comparison that spoke straight to one's heart. These monologues were like his poems, for Jacques did his thinking as he spoke.

That evening in Saint Paul saw the end of summer. A storm broke over the village fête, flooding the marquee where people were dancing and washing away the rifle-range that had been set up beneath the ramparts. And Jacques wandered around like a Shakespearean clown in the midst of a scene that could have been designed expressly for him.

We were to become great friends. On another occasion he

wrote a poem for me in the Bar des Théâtres, and I can still see him sitting on the terrace, spelling out the words in his big round hand. But unfortunately I have since mislaid the poem in the course of my numerous moves.

Robert Capa was another friend I had at this time, and we met daily for about five or six years. He is undoubtedly one of the people I trusted most in my life, and for whom I felt the greatest affection. He was very unhappy because he was an excellent photographer and photography did not give him the satisfaction he sought in life. He would have liked to write, was always full of ideas, and would spend hours talking about his plans. He had originally come from Hungary and his accent was unimaginable. He would spend hours holding forth about philosophy to me.

But he was unfortunately one of those people who always seem to be on the losing side, to whom terrible things always seem to be happening. He felt sad but amiable towards others as well as to himself, thought a great deal about other people and was deeply affected by their poverty and the squalor of their lives. He would have gladly given away all he possessed.

He was short and dark, had very friendly eyes that sparkled with intelligence, and immensely attractive to women. But there had been one terrible tragedy in his life from which he never recovered. He had married a lovely young woman, also a photographer, and during the Spanish civil war she had been crushed by a tank beneath his very eyes. I think he was for ever seeking her image in other women.

But he was always very gay with his friends, and for ever making jokes. He had just found himself a huge flat in the Boulevard Delessert which he liked very much, but had to go to Indo-China as a reporter, since he had no money left. But he was utterly unenthusiastic about the trip. Maybe he had the feeling something would happen. I can still see him in the Avenue Matignon, the day before he left Paris. I was off to a photographic session and he came along with me, and seemed to find the prospect of his impending journey tedious. No sooner had he arrived than he was killed.

The year I went to the States, Guy took me yachting on my holiday and we took Jean Chevalier, the photographer from

Elle with us. He turned out to be the ideal passenger, as quiet as they come.

We sailed from Cannes to Capri via Corsica, then returned along the Italian coast.

We spent a week in Capri and were entertained by Malaparte whom Guy knew well.

I was fascinated by the author of *Kaputt*, for he never stopped telling tales about things that were supposed to have happened to him. Most of them were pure fabrication, but it did not seem to matter.

His house was no less strange, for you had to enter it through the roof. There were steps right across the façade, leading to the rooftop, and once up there, all you had to do was to climb down into the house.

The enormous drawing-room had hardly any furniture in it, but the floor was set with huge slabs of the local grey stone. Malaparte's pride was his fireplace, a vast fireplace with a glass back; you could see the sea and the coastline through the flames and burning logs.

The dining-room surprised me too for it had been decorated in the Bavarian style, like the ones you see in Swiss or Austrian hotels. It was tiny; its walls and ceiling were lined with wood, and in one corner stood a tiled stove. We ate several meals in this room and it was here that Malaparte told us of all the troubles he had with the local people. He could hardly have been on worse terms with his neighbours and his description of their quarrels took on all the appearance of an epic.

We stopped in Corsica on our way to Capri and found ourselves moored, every time we made harbour, next to a huge yacht almost as big as a liner. We must have been following the same course, and in the end we became friendly with her owner, an immensely wealthy kind of ship-owning Argentinian Onassis called Dodero.

We had greatly intrigued him and I thought I caught a glimmer of envy in his gaze, for he too would have liked to sail in a tiny sailing-boat, whereas his age, his wealth and his obligations kept him a prisoner in his liner.

He asked us to lunch. After our visit to Capri we ran into him again at Civita Vecchia, and it was then that he asked us to come on board his ship and let some of his sailors sail ours back

to Cannes. We accepted his offer and he took us to Rome and to Florence where we went to see the museums, famous buildings and the churches.

When our cruise was over he invited us to Maxim's in Paris for a big farewell dinner, as he was returning to the Argentine on the following day. And of course the favourite topic of conversation during October is always the Motor Show. The new Simca Sport had just appeared, and Dodero asked me whether I liked it.

'Oh, yes,' I replied.

'And can you drive?' he went on.

Guy had taught me to drive but I had no car. By the following day I had completely forgotten this inconsequential conversation, when someone rang me up, and said:

'This is Mr Dodero's secretary speaking. He left this morning but gave me instructions to hand over some car keys and documents to you.'

'But what car is this?' I asked.

'The one he ordered for you at the Motor Show.'

And a few days later at about six in the evening a chauffeur arrived in the Avenue Montaigne, wearing sky-blue livery and driving a black convertible Simca Sport car with green leather upholstery, and handed it over to me. It was a magnificent vehicle and I fairly jumped for joy. At that very moment Alice Chavane, the chief editor of *Elle*, happened to be passing the Hotel Montaigne, and I called her over. She had to listen, completely thunderstruck, to my incredible tale and admire the car given to me by a gentleman I scarcely knew.

He was also one I was never to see again, for Dodero died a few months later in his own country.

But that first evening my fabulous, miraculous present proved quite a source of anxiety. I could not leave the Simca in the street, but on the other hand I was not sufficiently sure of my own driving experience to risk trying to drive it myself, so I had to ask a friend to garage it for me.

A little later I ventured out in it and went round the Place de l'Etoile at seven that evening, accompanied by an Italian friend. She remained quite unruffled, however, for she herself did not drive and had not the slightest notion what a risk she was taking.

Two years later I sold the Simca to buy another, this time a small van which I had painted with yellow bands. It certainly looked funny. Only Carrère or I could have chosen such a car. But had Dodero not given me the first car, I should never have been able to acquire this one at all, for although I earned a good living, I nevertheless lived from hand to mouth and had absolutely nothing put by.

When I came to leave the Hotel Montaigne, it was only to move next door, for I had found a tiny flat there on the second floor with all its windows giving on to the Avenue Montaigne.

It belonged to an American lady. My Siamese cats liked their new home. Unfortunately I had to vacate it whenever the owner came back from Germany where her husband was stationed, and I would go back to the hotel. She usually warned me of her impending arrival, but once I had to move out in the middle of the night, and was very annoyed. I cancelled my agreement with her and moved my cats out. Later I found how much I missed being able to eat my breakfast in my bath, as I had been able to do there.

I was in love with Guy. I loved his intelligence and his rather sophisticated elegance. He always looked tired, but it was only in appearance, for behind the rather blasé exterior of one who has seen a great deal of life lay hidden an ever-wakeful mind that was interested in everything. It was he who had helped me to discover literature and those who created it. He had introduced me to a world whose very existence I had hitherto not even suspected, a world that had won me over from the start.

I was doing more and more photographic work, but no longer working for Fath. Then Hubert de Givenchy asked me to come and work in the fashion-house he had just opened.

I had known this handsome giant for a long time. He used to run Schiaparelli's boutique in the Place Vendôme, and always had amusing ideas for blouses, belts, pullovers, necklaces and jewellery.

After turning couturier he had found himself a large building near the Parc Monceau in the Gothic style of 1900, that had once belonged to Menier the chocolate manufacturer. They called this strange place, with its wood-carvings and stained-glass windows, the Cathedral.

Hubert not only wanted me to show his dresses, but to be his publicity agent as well, for had I not a multitude of friends *in the* Press and the world of fashion? So I accepted the offer, thinking it would be great fun to be in at the birth of a fashion-house and to work with a young man like Givenchy who had both youth and talent.

The building was fitted up in the most haphazard manner. They hung the walls with grey cloth to cover up some of the woodwork and fixed an awning overhead to make the ceilings appear less high and imposing. Screens were arranged in squares to serve as changing-rooms, and an old bathroom in the basement became the workroom with planks laid over the bath.

I phoned all my friends to invite them to the first night. It was a huge success. People flocked to see this youngest of all couturiers make his début and wildly acclaimed his embroidered shirting blouses with huge sleeves, which he had created specially for me.

I worked terribly hard and had to give up doing photographs in order to be able to devote all my time to Givenchy.

Nor was my private life running an entirely smooth course. Guy and I got on very well together and I was sufficiently in love with him to want to see our relationship made permanent. We would often talk about getting married, but time passed and still the idea remained only an idea. I was beginning to feel a trifle disappointed but I was not the sort of woman to force Guy to face up to his responsibilities although I was beginning to have a vague sensation deep down inside that my own feelings were not quite as they had always been.

Then one evening when I returned from work to the Avenue Montaigne I found a note from Guy saying he could not come that evening because he had to attend a business dinner. I was most upset, felt both incredulous and furious, and kept on repeating to myself, but only partly believing it, that things could not go on for long like this.

I got into the car and drove off without the faintest idea where I was heading. If ever I was unhappy I would sometimes drive about Paris like that, going just anywhere. It helped to calm me down, and I would then be able to go home and sleep.

I stopped at a red light in the Boulevard Saint-Germain and another car drew up beside mine. Someone shouted and I looked

round and saw it was Tola and Sophie Litvak with some friends of theirs.

'What are you doing?' they shouted. 'Come and have dinner with us.'

So I agreed. I was introduced to a tall, sunburnt man whom I thought they called Peter Viertel, but I was so angry with Guy that I paid him no attention whatever.

A few days later Tola Litvak saw me looking very tired and said they were both off to Klosters and would I like to join them there. Then turning to Guy he added:

'That is if you don't mind, of course.'

'No, of course not,' came Guy's slightly boastful reply, 'I trust her.'

Although it was in no way apparent, I felt very peeved by his reply, which I really thought was carrying things a bit too far. Sophie, Tola, Guy and I were dining together at the time, and although I looked at each of them in turn, no one seemed to have noticed Guy's remark. It seemed as if Guy thought it quite natural that no one should make advances to me and that I should remain faithful to him, while he so often abandoned me.

I went off to Klosters under Tola's watchful eye, and there I found the American novelist Irwin Shaw, with his wife and a whole group of friends.

Peter was also there. He loved ski-ing and used to spend the whole winter at Klosters. This athletic young man, with his hard, clean-cut face, was extraordinarily patient with me. I could not ski and he, a champion, used to accompany me very slowly down the ski-slopes.

I was blissful. At last I was getting a holiday, and was really enjoying my ski-ing lessons, though I wondered how I could have so completely forgotten the first time I had met Peter.

Tola had his eye on us and was the first to guess what would happen. Peter never left my side, and would join us for dinner every night at the hotel.

But holidays never last for ever and I returned to Paris alone. When I saw Guy again I had the impression that it was a very, very long time since I had last seen him, and he seemed to me to have changed. He was no longer the Guy I had once loved, whereas it was I who had really changed. I kept on seeing all sorts of faults in him that I had never noticed before, and

although I tried hard to fight against what I at first took for ill-humour on my part, it was all in vain. I thought about Peter while wanting to forget him, and I felt convinced that, nice as he was, he would never play any part in my life.

Fortunately I had other preoccupations to keep me busy. Givenchy had been so successful that he had been asked to go to New York to present his collection at the famous 'April in Paris' charity ball held annually at the Waldorf Astoria.

Givenchy created an evening gown for me in white shirting. It was very narrow and buttoned right up the front, enclosing the arms. This cape-like dress was to be worn with a vast caramel-coloured organza skirt. It was not what you could have called a practical garment, not the sort of thing to wear to go shopping in the mornings, but it was entrancing.

But alas, a few days before leaving for New York I heard that I would not be able to show the cape there, since the organizing committee for the ball wanted the dresses shown by socially prominent American women.

At first Givenchy refused, saying he wanted no one but me as mannequin. We tried to pacify him, we lectured him, and it was finally agreed that a very elegant young American friend of Hubert's would show the dresses with me.

So when I set off it was both as mannequin and Press attaché. We flew over with Pierre Balmain who greatly amused us by his clowning.

The evening of my arrival in New York I was in my room at the Waldorf Astoria, when the phone rang. It was the hotel porter to say that Mr Viertel was in the hall.

I was staggered. Peter had caught the plane after mine in order to join me.

I thought this was most chivalrous.

He showed me a side of New York I had never dreamed existed on the occasion of my first visit. Peter Viertel was an author and script-writer and introduced me to many writers and people in the world of films.

I was on television too. The ball was a great success, and afterwards Hubert and I appeared in the famous series, 'Person to Person' which was transmitted by several channels throughout the United States.

I arrived at eight in the morning and was taken into a room

that looked like a shop with a large window opening on to the street. Passers-by would stop and look at us and we were surrounded by television screens. It was very strange to see ourselves on these screens and at the same time see the crowds outside watching us through the window.

When the transmission was over the producer, Edward R. Murrow, suggested I might like to remain in New York and work for American television, but once again I turned down the offer, for I wanted to return to Paris.

For had I not at last found a sound, lasting love. Peter and I caught the plane together and I began a new life full of quiet confidence.

Little did I realize that with Peter too, the whole business would begin all over again.

8

I got on very well with Peter; I liked his fantasy, his easy manners, his friendliness, his interest in people and his love of sport.

He was an American of European origin who, at the age of 16, had written a charming and very promising book, which had fired him with the desire and ambition to become a great writer one day. But then the war came and he joined the Marines, whose tough-looking crew-cut he still retained. Once the war was over, he had begun to write film scripts and, finding he had to make a living, constantly put off the day when he could make a start on the book he really wanted to write. He was free to live wherever he pleased and used to travel a lot, although he clearly preferred mountains and ski-ing to anything else.

I felt very tempted to lead this kind of wandering life too, and somehow managed to join him between one collection and the next. I had become a free-lance model again, that is to say I was no longer attached to any particular house, but I had contracts pending with some of the newspapers for photographs and was only able to leave after they had been completed.

I spent two months with Peter, living like an American in the States. He had signed a contract with a Hollywood film studio and thought we might as well settle in California for as long as it took him to write his script, and as far as I was concerned these few weeks constituted a much-needed holiday.

Seen from the European view-point Hollywood appears as a dazzling, sumptuous city with film stars standing on every street corner. But it is really a far cry from this. The road leading to the airport is lined with squalid petrol-filling stations and the air is permanently thick with smog, a kind of dust-laden fog. One expects a paradise landscape and instead one finds oneself in the midst of an industrial centre.

Hollywood only forms part of Los Angeles. It must have been a truly splendid place in the early days of the film industry.

Some of the houses one sees there are really sumptuous; there are no fences between them, which must make for a complete lack of privacy, and one sees, side by side on the same stretch of grass, a Mediaeval castle, a Mexican villa, an ultra-modern block and a Norman cottage.

I lived in Westwood, the most recently-built suburb in this city of sprawling avenues, for ever encroaching further on the surrounding countryside. It is here that the University and College buildings are situated and one sees more students in the snack-bars than people from the film world.

I had an apartment there. All Hollywood apartments are exactly alike: all furnished alike, very comfortably but with no trace of originality. They all have the same indoor plants, the same furnishing materials, the same Impressionist reproductions on the walls and the same electric lights which are left on even in broad daylight. I was shocked at this waste and found the mixture of artificial and natural lighting most depressing.

My life was completely Americanized, in surroundings that were already somewhat familiar. In Paris Peter had introduced me to some of his country's intellectuals, usually people of left-wing inclinations, who, at that time, when McCarthyism was rife, used often to come to Europe. They were cultivated people for whom the cinema was merely a means of earning money more quickly than by writing books.

I tried to avoid going into the centre of Los Angeles as much as I could. It was there that all the offices and business-houses were situated. But I did have to go in one day, having agreed to pose for some fashion photographs.

So I set off in my car. People had said it was easy to get into the city; you simply went straight ahead. So I drove down Sunset Boulevard, crossed Westwood, Brentwood, Beverley Hills and Hollywood. Then I reached a point where the road became a motorway.

I did not know which way to turn. How was I to get off this highway? There was nothing you would do: you could not stop, you would not slow down, or turn round. I was lost. I could see myself condemned to drive for days and days on end along this road, while behind me the stream of cars urged me on and on. I was almost in tears when a policeman on a motorbike, seeing me hesitate at the wheel, made me pull up, fully prepared

to give me a ticket. I explained to him what had happened and he kindly suggested guiding me to my destination. So I did the rest of the journey behind him and my photographer was horrified to see me arrive with a police escort.

I need hardly say that I was shown round some film-studios. At one of them a very pretty blonde girl was being interviewed by a journalist and the man who pointed her out to me said she was called Marilyn Monroe, although the name meant nothing to me at the time since she had not yet achieved fame.

I preferred the big shops to the film studios, and especially Jacks, where all the stars bought their clothes. I would go there in the hope of finding the latest thing in bathing suits or slacks.

I used to go visiting too, to Viveca Lindfors and to the Premingers at Malibu Beach. All along the seafront here every house had its own swimming-pool, for the Pacific Ocean was too rough and cold to swim in. All the houses were made of wood but with every refinement of Californian comfort, from the latest Hi-Fi equipment to fully-automatic kitchens.

But the thing that astonished me most of all was the great number of valuable paintings hanging on the walls of all these Hollywood homes.

If any actor or producer wants to be well thought of, he must possess at least one Renoir, one Picasso, or one Modigliani. I saw my first Buffets at Jean Negulesco's, the film director. As he showed me round his house he casually pointed out his pictures, a seemingly endless collection of paintings and drawings: he even had some in the kitchen, and every square inch of the staircase was signed Buffet.

I got to know Elizabeth Taylor, who at that time was living with her husband Michael Wilding and their children in the most luxurious surroundings, although there was utter chaos everywhere. They both did the same sort of work, but she was more successful than her husband and this created certain problems. Jean Simmons had to contend with the same difficulties, being married at that time to Stewart Granger.

On Saturdays and Sundays Peter and I would often visit David Selznick, the producer, who was married to Jennifer Jones. They too had a house on Malibu Beach. You might well think we went there to bathe, but not at all; we used to go there to watch films! In California people who spend all their days in

the film world have rooms especially equipped with the latest gadgets for showing yet more films at home.

This world of movies that appears so attractive seen from a distance, loses much of its charm when seen close to.

The actors spend their entire lives with other actors, and when they meet of an evening it is always to talk shop. At big dinner parties or cocktail parties given by people from the film-world, one meets nothing but people in films whose sole conversation is about films. It is most depressing. Everyone drinks a lot in an attempt to relax, and the men talk together about their projects or watch television, while the women have tedious conversations about their domestic problems or their family worries. It is rare for anyone to give a sit-down meal since no one ever has anything to say to his neighbour.

Humphrey Bogart once said to me:

'I simply can't bear having to sit next to a woman at a dinner party. That's why I hardly ever go out and why, when I do, I drink too much.'

Humphrey Bogart and his wife Lauren Bacall, who was known as Betty to her friends, were, it must be said, Hollywood's great nonconformists. Humphrey was respected for his gifts and the career he had carved out but people were a trifle afraid of him for his mordant tongue. I got on well with them and found them both entertaining and likeable. They were two of the very few stars in California who did not take themselves too seriously, and Betty had a spontaneously friendly nature that I really liked.

Their home, with its swimming-pool, its tennis-court, and its two huge boxers who always seemed to attract the flies, was prettier than most. Betty and I had some tennis coaching together, for tennis is terribly important in California where the weather is always good. So a coach used to come for two hours every day to teach us the subtleties of forehand and backhand drives. Sometimes Judy Garland from next door would join us, but she was better at singing than at tennis.

Betty Bogart, although not possessing Judy Garland's great gift for singing, did nevertheless show quite an aptitude for it, and I heard her sing with Sinatra one evening after dinner, with Cole Porter at the piano. The song they sang would have fetched millions in any music-hall in the world.

But the star who made the greatest impression on me of all was Greta Garbo.

Peter had introduced me to his mother, Salka. She was the widow of a stage-director and had left Vienna to settle in California and write film scripts.

Immediately after her arrival in Hollywood she had become friendly with Greta Garbo and had made her work just as later on Lee Strasberg was to make Marilyn Monroe work. She taught her to act and would go with her to the studios.

I loved asking Salka about her former pupil. She told me that Garbo was extraordinarily shy. When she was shooting, screens used to be put up to hide her from the stagehands' gaze. Only a handful of close friends were allowed to see her at work. Salka told me how one day, when everyone had just stopped work on a scene, Greta appeared, dressed as Queen Christina, wearing a black velvet dress, and every electrician, every stagehand who, goodness knows, were blasé enough, had been spellbound by her beauty.

I was dying to meet her.

'Listen,' said Peter's mother, 'Greta is not exactly sociable but all the same we must fix a dinner party.'

The dinner party was arranged to take place at Christopher Isherwood's. I had just read his novel *Good-bye to Berlin.* He lived on a hill in a house surrounded by trees and shrubs.

I entered a rather low-ceilinged, dark sitting-room and saw Greta Garbo sitting in the shadows on a divan.

I thought she was so beautiful that it gave me quite a shock. She was both lovely and elegant, and yet she did absolutely nothing to enhance the effect, for she wore her hair in a fringe and had on a navy-blue pullover with a little scarf tied at the neck, trousers that were too big, and espadrilles laced around her ankles.

Her voice was deep and sultry, with a trace of accent; a very sensual voice, although she did not appear so at all herself; and yet in spite of the somewhat cold side to her personality, an aura of mystery seemed to emanate from her.

The only people at the dinner party were Greta, Salka, our host, Peter and me. She was very relaxed and talked a lot. Whenever she felt at home with friends she would become animated and gay.

I saw her several times. Salka would phone me at the eleventh hour.

'I'm coming over and bringing Greta for lunch.'

Greta always insisted on bringing her own lunch, a small packet of cottage cheese. She hardly ever ate anything.

Salka wanted her to settle in California for some months, so one morning we all agreed to meet to go house-hunting. I had arrived a little early, when suddenly Greta appeared in an old Ford. She was wearing an utterly shapeless jumper and a pair of slacks, and wore exactly the same things on every other occasion that we met. She had on an extraordinary baseball cap, and one of those little triangles people stick between their eyes to prevent them puckering their brows. She had obviously forgotten to take it off and, noticing my look of surprise, put her hand to her forehead.

We went over several houses. She always wanted Salka and me to go in first to make sure there was no one there, for she was frightened of strangers and their curiosity. She could never cross a street alone. One day after lunching with Salka, we found ourselves on Sunset Boulevard. There seemed to be an almost solid, terrifying line of cars racing along it and she grabbed my hand just like a little girl. I can see her still in one of those 'Garbo' straw hats, looking so lovely, for her face had such a beautiful bone structure that it would never age. Although she was so withdrawn, she nevertheless delighted me by her spontaneity.

Luis Miguel Dominguin was in Hollywood at this time, too. Some ambitious producers wanted to turn this great Spanish bullfighter into a film star, and Luis Miguel had come to America, a country he knew nothing about, not really keen to embark on this new career. He was a great friend of Peter's, and at that time enamoured of Ava Gardner, and what with pressure from the two of them and offer of film contracts, he had been persuaded to come to California.

Greta Garbo said she would like to meet him, so we planned a dinner party. Salka prepared some borsch which Greta loved; I roasted a chicken, Peter made a salad, and Luis Miguel turned on the charm. Greta seemed delighted by it all.

Luis Miguel Dominguin wanted to stay with us, for he did not know a single word of English, knew no one except Peter,

and felt a bit lost. We managed to find him an apartment in the same block, where he slept, spending all his days with us. But since Peter was busy at the studios all day, I became his guide. I would accompany him on his expeditions to buy shirts and belts and he would come to the supermarket with me. This handsome bullfighter – he had left the arena but did in fact go back – would come down in all his glory to our apartment every morning and prepare his orange juice while I made the breakfast coffee. I could not have dreamed up a more charming companion for my somewhat monotonous days. We would go to the beach together, sometimes with Annabella, the French actress who was living in Hollywood at the time, and often with Elizabeth Taylor.

But it was soon discovered where Luis Miguel was hiding, and from then on our telephone never stopped ringing, even in the middle of the night. It was always some woman admirer of his asking to speak to him.

A great number of these calls came from Ava Gardner who at the time was in Las Vegas. Ava and Luis Miguel had just parted company after one of the many scenes that interrupted the course of their love-affair. Luis Miguel was sulking and refused to come to the phone, so Ava, miserable and depressed, told Peter, whom she had known for a long time, all about her woes. Her feelings had no respect for the clock, and she would sometimes waken us in the very middle of the night while Luis Miguel turned a deaf ear to it all.

'I wish to goodness he'd reply just once, only once, so that she'd stop ringing up at all hours of the day and night the way she does.'

But this episode marked the end of their love-affair. After a month had gone by, Luis Miguel found he was not tempted by the film contracts offered him, and went back to his own country, happy to be with his bulls again. But his English had improved.

I, too, went back to Paris, and was not sad to go. I preferred life in Paris to California, for although it was less showy it seemed to suit me better. I soon tired of having nothing to do and I enjoyed being a model.

Peter had never been the kind of man with whom one could have long, intimate conversations. Even so, the question of mar-

riage had come up several times. But he was not free, for he had a wife with whom he had not been living for a long while, and he gave me to understand that divorce would be a long, complicated procedure.

He urged me to be patient, and to encourage me to forgive him, drew me into the hurly-burly of his life.

Once the collections were over I set off to join him in Spain where he and I were to stay with Luis Miguel. I had one last photo done in the *Elle* studios then rushed to Orly airport.

I thought Peter would be at the airport in Madrid to meet me, but when I arrived, there was no Peter. I cursed him, called a taxi and explained with great difficulty in words I took to be Spanish, where I wanted to be taken. The taxi driver did not understand so, in despair, I mentioned Luis Miguel Dominguin. The effect was magical. My cabby, wreathed in smiles, took me straight there.

I found Peter and Luis Miguel outside the house, just about to set off for the airport. Luis Miguel was doubly welcoming in an attempt to make me forget his late start in setting off to meet me. He introduced me to Lucia Bose to whom he was engaged to be married, and gave up his own room to me, while he himself moved into a tiny room.

His home was not very large and the sitting-room was always full of friends and admirers, for Luis Miguel kept open house.

As he handed over his room to me, Luis Miguel gave me full instructions on how to operate the geyser in the bathroom, showing me which tap to close and which you had to open. It seemed about as difficult as starting a train. Then he went off. The water was already beginning to run hot into the bath when there was a terrible explosion. Everyone in the house rushed to my room, to find me unhurt but the geyser gutted.

Luis Miguel introduced me to a world I knew nothing about: the world of bullfighting.

On the morning of a fight, we would go to the bullring to see lots being drawn for the bulls, and I would wander round to the stables where the picador's horses stood in melancholy rows. These unfortunate, skinny animals, with their unhealed wounds were indeed a pitiful sight.

I never really enjoyed bullfights in spite of their beauty, their drama and the colourful spectacle they presented.

I came away exhausted, two hours of noise, danger and emotion having proved too much for the novice that I was.

But Peter was deep in an impassioned discussion with Luis Miguel and Hemingway.

Hemingway never missed the feast of San Isidro, Madrid's festival week, for the fights that took place during that week were the most important of the year.

The three men got on very well together. Peter greatly admired Hemingway, who had a profound influence over him; and as for Luis Miguel, he had stayed some time in Hemingway's house in Cuba.

But most unfortunately, that year, no sooner had Hemingway arrived in Madrid than he fell ill. He loathed being unwell and was in a vile mood. Mary, his wife, found it extremely hard to keep him in bed, while he, enraged by everyone and everything, would see no one.

Nevertheless, one evening, Peter, Luis Miguel and I did pay him a brief visit. I was greatly impressed by this white-haired, white-bearded colossus, and could well see how it was he influenced his friends so profoundly. He was treating his illness with Dry Martinis, in spite of Mary's protests.

Soon, some more Americans, whom Luis Miguel had known in California and had fired with a desire to see the San Isidro festival, arrived in Madrid. One of them was Truman Capote, a diminutive, delightful, malicious and most entertaining man.

Luis Miguel invited us all to stay at his farm, some sixty to seventy miles from Madrid, where he lived a kind of Spanish feudal life. The farmstead stood in the middle of a vast expanse of uncultivated land, and was inhabited by Luis Miguel's uncle, his aunt and his grandmother, a charming old lady of ninety.

We used to go hunting in a jeep with Luis Miguel, sometimes taking guns, sometimes his falcon. But the falcon had to keep in training whenever he was not out hunting, so each day a small boy would arrive with a basketful of live wood-pigeons. They had had their eyes put out to prevent them flying too far, and these poor blinded creatures would be let loose for the falcon to catch and bring back to Miguel's gloved wrist. It was no doubt good training for the falcon, but it made me quite sick to watch.

I also went hunting with an owl. One afternoon we set off

with Luis Miguel and Lucia Bose to a cache made of branches and twigs and hid there, while a huge captive owl stood on a perch outside in full view. All of a sudden the owl bristled, and began to hoot and flap its wings. Some predatory bird had caught sight of it from the sky above and was swooping down towards it. Then, just as the bird of prey was about to seize the poor owl, Luis Miguel fired.

There were some hounds fed on raw meat living in a kennel, separated by a thickness of wire netting from a fox and a young wolf whom Luis Miguel was trying to train.

On the farm there was also a pretty little white bullring surrounded by tiers of seats, where he exercised young heifers that people brought him. One morning he had me down in the ring with him and we held on to opposite edges of a cape while an aggressive young heifer charged back and forth between the two of us under the cape. I nearly died of fright and begged to be allowed out.

We spent several days at the farm and on our last night there Luis Miguel got some Flamenco dancers from the next village to come over, one of whom, so we were told, was the best dancer in the whole of Spain. There were a lot of friends, too, from the neighbouring farm and we must have been at least twenty there. We all sat round a rough wooden table and partook of a Gargantuan repast, after which the dancing began.

The atmosphere soon became frenzied. Foreigners rapidly found themselves feeling more Spanish than the Spaniards, and everyone began to dance, encouraged by Flamenco, guitars, and wine. Couples paired off at random and took it in turn to perform, urged on by the guitarists and the wildly enthusiastic crowd. Some of these displays were good, but some were only worthy of the bear-pit at the Zoo. Then my turn came and I found myself partnered by Truman Capote who, if not the best of the dancers, was at least far and away the funniest.

We were still dancing at seven the next morning, there in the kitchen, before the granny of ninety and the entire household staff who were all clapping in time to the music.

That was my only visit to Madrid.

With the approach of winter Peter could not resist the call of the snow and, explaining that he could write just as well up in the mountains as in Paris, he loaded up his car, a red M.G.,

with skis, suitcases and a typewriter, and went off to Klosters, leaving me behind in Paris.

My photos prevented me from going with him, but I joined him as soon as I could in his flat or in the chalet he had hired. I loved Klosters. It was there I learned to ski, and there I wrote a story that appeared in *Elle*. While Peter worked away at his script, I would sit in the sun on the balcony and write about my life as a model.

But one winter Peter had to postpone the plans he had made to go ski-ing, since he had to go to Ireland. His friend John Huston, the director, had rented a house there; he wanted to make a film about fox-hunting, his latest craze, and asked Peter to go there to work with him on the script.

So once again I stayed on alone in Paris, and once again I joined Peter later. I actually went over several times to see him, and we stayed in a dusty old hotel in Dublin, or with John Huston, who had turned Irish by adoption, or in a pretty house next to his that Peter rented for some months.

Ireland is a poetic land, and I love it. It is so peaceful there that one has the impression of living in a bygone age, far from all the problems of the modern world. Ireland is the only country on earth where petrol-pump attendants wish you every happiness as they fill up your tank with petrol.

The poor in Ireland are very poor. Their sole preoccupation consists in having enough potatoes to see the winter through, and enough peat to keep their fires burning, and enough tobacco to fill their pipes. But in spite of the wretched conditions under which they live, they still retain a considerable fund of natural kindliness, and a delightful streak of madness.

Travelling along the roads of Ireland one encounters brightly painted caravans drawn by small black or piebald horses, and inhabited by tinkers, who are true gipsies. They light their camp fires anywhere they can and are cursed by the peasants for letting their horses roam along the roadside, feeding on whatever they can find. The tinkers also tend to be thieves; their womenfolk have long red hair and dress like gipsies, carrying their babies on their backs rolled up in a blanket. You usually see them with two or three other small brats clinging to their skirts as they make their way barefoot through the icy mud.

Peter and I used to go off hunting snipe, pigeons and partridges

over towards the west, in Galway, near the isles of Aran. We would dress in pullovers, mackintoshes and Wellingtons, and fill our pockets with sandwiches and flasks of Irish Whiskey, then walk all day often until nightfall across moorland and marsh. Clouds of birds and wild ducks would rise from the rushes, the golden reeds and the tall ferns, while the sky, a true water-colour blue, lay reflected in the marshes. The houses were white and tiny, just like in children's drawings, with only one door, one window and one chimney wreathed in smoke, standing out against the peaty-brown of the hillsides. I would return from these outings drunk with fresh air, fatigue and happiness.

The only thing people ever talk about in Ireland is fox-hunting and horses. People live in vast castles with practically no heating, just as they did three hundred years ago, with whole armies of servants and stables full of hunters.

On one occasion I did join in one of these hunts, although it was not something I would ever have chosen to do. Until then I had always been perfectly happy to follow the hunt by car.

John Huston, who later, to his utter delight, was elected Master of the Hunt, and his wife Rickie, were both crazy about hunting. Egged on by John, one of their visitors would sometimes succumb to the temptation of going on a cross-country ride, and would set off on a black horse, always the same one, John's usual mount. They set off all right, but they never got far, for the horse either came back alone to the stables, or would bolt with the guest clinging frantically to its mane, while John and Peter stood and watched the performance with the eyes of connoisseurs.

So I was really quite right to be wary of my host's horses, who seemed, like the Irish, to possess a streak of madness.

But everyone kept on saying:

'Why ever don't you ride, too?'

So one day, maddened by this everlasting provocation, I decided I had better try. Peter and John were both the sort of person who feels the need to put his courage everlastingly to the test by taking pointless risks, and I did not want to be considered a coward. So one day I announced that the following day I would ride, and then immediately regretted saying so.

It all began quite well. I donned a black coat, a pair of Jodhpurs, a small check waistcoat, a white shirt, a hunting cravat and a bowler, one of those small, hard, round hats that are meant

to protect one's head in a fall. I was nearly dead with fright, but thought nevertheless that I looked most elegant.

That day the meet took place far from our house, and very early too. I found the main party already drinking whiskey to get up their strength, and drank some too, although in my case it was to keep up my courage.

I was assured that my mount was very quiet and that he was so used to hunting that one simply had to give him his head.

An easy enough thing to say, but my mind was full of memories. I knew that during a fox-hunt the horses gallop across fields, jump walls, hedges, gates and wide ditches, and that they often fall. Then the riders get hurt, even killed. But I could no longer back out of it. The Irish are an intrepid lot, and even ten-year-old children follow the hunt on ponies.

During the early part of the morning all went smoothly. My mount jumped all the small streams quite unaided, and I began to think the day would go by without a hitch, when suddenly there we were, my mount and I, face to face with a huge ditch surrounded by a thick hedge. An Irishman's greatest joy is to be first to reach any obstacle, but there he must wait, since it is the Master's job to fray a passage for the others.

I was amongst the last to cross and my horse was growing so restive that I found it impossible to hold him back. He wanted to jump, so I shut my eyes and gave him his head; then, clasping his mane and keeping my head down to avoid the branches, I flew up and over the ditch. I just had time to catch sight of some of the other horses and their unfortunate riders floundering in the water, before I found myself, minus a stirrup, on the other side. Ten yards further on I was on the ground with my bowler jammed down over my eyes.

My mount, a well-trained steed, stood waiting for me, but it was quite apparent that he disapproved of this enforced halt. An elderly stable-boy, following well behind the hunt with a spare mount, helped me into the saddle again.

But by now the other riders were far away, and I could hardly even hear their shouts or the baying of the hounds. Every field seemed to be surrounded by equally daunting ditches, and there were no gates. My courage was beginning to fail me.

My steed, sensing my fear, refused ten times running to take a ditch that I did not in any case particularly want to jump. So

it was on foot and leading my horse by the bridle, that I made my way home, beneath the astonished gazes of the stable-boys.

I brought back a Sherlock Holmes type of tweed cap from my travels in Ireland, and memories of a country life I soon had to abandon in favour of the studios and sophisticated photographs.

Peter and I had some wonderful times together, but they were all too often interrupted by long absences. My work kept me in Paris where I had to manage on my own while Peter went on dashing about Europe.

It was not a sensible way to live, and this I was aware of in a confused kind of way; but the delights of our holidays hid the truth for me.

One year I spent a few days at Charlie Chaplin's home. His son, Sidney Chaplin, was a friend of mine. Whenever he was in Paris and that was as often as he could manage it, he would stay in the Hotel Montaigne where all his pals seemed to be. He was very gifted and could have been a talented actor, but he preferred spending every night out, sleeping until three in the afternoon, having a sandwich at the Bar des Théâtres, and dining at some good, small restaurant if he had the wherewithal, or looking for some friend who would buy him a drink if he was broke. This particular friend often turned out to be Irwin Shaw or Peter. Then, when things began to get too difficult, Sidney would go to his father's in Switzerland, and breathe a good whiff of family air.

Peter and I had come to Vevey by car, where Sidney was to wait for us at an agreed spot in the town so that he could show us the way and warn us what the parental barometer was likely to be registering. But this time all had gone well, and Oona, Chaplin's wife, and Sidney's stepmother, had smoothed the way very tactfully. Sidney had beat his breast and confessed to laziness and thoughtlessness saying: 'You know, Dad, I'm an idiot. I'm living like an imbecile.' And Charlie Chaplin had forgiven him.

So we found Chaplin Senior in fine fettle in his big white house, set behind smooth lawns and age-old trees. The furnishings were comfortable and middle-class, and gave the house an atmosphere of peace and security.

We ate with all the children, and this huge family made me think of my sister and the life she led.

I had already met the Chaplins in Paris and had realized then that only Oona was capable of giving that great man, her husband, the happiness he sought. He was exactly like the Charlie of the films, and in real life he unconsciously made the same gestures and the same gags.

After the meal Chaplin took Peter and me round his newly-acquired property, of which he was very proud. As we stood beneath some trees in the garden suddenly a volley of shots rang out. Chaplin's hands flew to his ears and he explained in exasperation what all the noise was about. His land was next to a military training ground, and only a wall stood between him and the manoeuvring soldiers. He swore he would move heaven and earth to have the noise stopped. I have just read in the papers that after nine years' struggle he has at last succeeded. Poor Chaplin. He who so valued tranquillity, how he must have suffered at having to listen each week to those shots ringing out, reminding him of the war he had so hated.

We returned to Paris. It was then that Monsieur Hein, a Hungarian who had once been a barrister and had embarked on the manufacture of pullovers in France, offered me a new job. He wanted me to design a collection for him.

I hesitated a little, but eventually agreed. I had to supervise the manufacture of the jumpers that bore my name – Bettina – in a diminutive workroom in the Faubourg Saint-Denis, and I organized the showing of the collection at the 'Régence' which at that time was run by Marc Doelnitz. I was my own mannequin and the show was a great success.

I designed some more collections, seeking inspiration during the spare moments I could snatch between one photographic session and the next, for I had not given up my work as a cover-girl. I found the terrace of the Bar des Théâtres a good place to work, especially in the mornings, sitting before a cup of coffee and hot croissants.

I often found myself seated next to Romain Gary, who also lived in the Hotel Montaigne, and like me came to seek early-morning inspiration on the terrace of the Bar des Théâtres.

When I look back over my many memories, this period of my life seems to have been so delightful and carefree, and yet I was

not entirely happy. Life in Paris, my trip to Hollywood and the contacts I had had with famous people had made me realize that I was not the sort of person who could give her entire life over to seeking success. I wanted something else from life, a more peaceful existence, life with a husband who would be a real husband to me.

But Peter had still not become that husband, for he was hesitant to divorce his wife for personal and entirely estimable reasons. And of course, one must admit, he was perfectly happy living the way we were, for it meant he was entirely free.

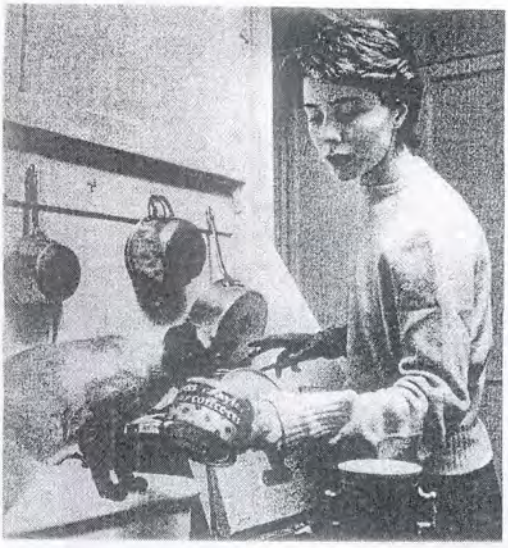
Men lack a certain instinctive feeling about things. He should have sensed that I was not entirely satisfied, but he never seemed to give the matter a moment's thought. I had left the Hotel Montaigne and was renting a delightful house at Garches near Paris, where he would sometimes come and join me, always delighted to be with me again.

But something was about to occur that was to separate us.

Aly as a child in Deauville

Yasmin on the beach at Deauville

Givenchy creates his first collection with Bettina as his model



At home in the Avenue Montaigne

9

Aly and I often talked about the way we met over a period of seven years, from that afternoon in 1948 when I first caught sight of him in the showroom at Fath, to the dance in 1955 that completely transformed our lives. The dance was held at Robinson, just like in the songs.

Aly used to say affectionately:

'I always knew you would be a woman who mattered to me in my life. I knew it from the very moment you were first introduced to me at Fath.'

I saw Aly once again before the Robinson dance. It was in 1952 when I was a mannequin at Givenchy, and he came to see the collection with Gene Tierney.

As soon as the last dress was off, I put on my own things as quickly as I could, left the changing-room, determined to avoid the crowds. I was off to do some photographs, and had a cardboard box under one arm. But there stood Aly. A group of chattering women thronged the floor between us; so, with a broad smile and a gesture that implied he was unable to get through the crowd, he called:

'Wait for me. I'll see you outside.'

It was then I realized that my reason for hurrying out of the changing-room had been so that I should not run into him, and I tore off down the stairs and dived into my car.

But, I often asked myself what had made me take flight like this? There is no doubt that I had felt frightened, frightened of this all too seductive young man whose charms the newspapers were for ever praising while relating the details of his amorous adventures. Was I already beginning to feel attracted to him? I must have been, for my fear could not have otherwise been explained; you don't run away from someone who means nothing to you. But none of these thoughts had even crossed my mind as I ran down the stairs on to the Rue Alfred de Vigny, my sole concern then having been to escape.

Later, Aly would laugh about the way I had stood him up that day. But he was never a man to force matters to a head; he simply let time work on his behalf. And how right he was, for fate had it that we should meet again quite unexpectedly one June evening in 1955.

A friend of mine, Françoise de Langlade, *Vogue's* fashion editor, and I had agreed to have a quiet snack at her flat after a harassing day at work. We would often eat like this, just a snack on a tray. Then afterwards, if we felt we could face it, we would go on together to a dance that was being given at Robinson by a wealthy Argentinian couple, the Carcanos.

I arrived at Françoise's place at nine, wearing a plain little black linen dress, flat-heeled shoes, and a long coral cashmere cardigan. In one hand I was clasping the dress I was to wear for the dance, a short white dress with big black lozenges, that I had borrowed from the Dior sales stock; in the other I held a pair of red, very pointed and rather uncomfortable shoes.

Aly was there. He had come to pay his respects to Françoise whom he had known for a long time, and was about to leave. Then, stopping short, he asked me where I was off to with all those things. I told him of our plans and added:

'But we probably won't go to the dance.'

Aly thought for a minute, then said:

'Why don't we all have dinner together? I'm supposed to be meeting someone, but I can fix that. I'll give you a ring as soon as I've finished.'

'Yes,' came Françoise's reply, for she knew his ways, 'we'll still be waiting for you at breakfast-time.'

'No, not at all; I promise I'll be quick.'

And off he went at the double.

I was thrilled. My fears had vanished, and I found Françoise's presence reassuring. And, I was about to have dinner with one of the world's most famous men.

We were to meet Aly at his house in Neuilly, so Françoise told me something about it.

'You'll see, it's very beautiful, but a bit cold.'

I could not picture Aly's home at all in my mind. I remembered absolutely nothing about his house in the rue de Prony which had struck me as decidedly unattractive.

An hour later the telephone rang.

'Come over, will you, and we'll eat at the Pré Catelan.'

And this was how, for the first time, I entered the house where I was later to live for five years. I had not the slightest premonition about what the future held in store, but was full of joy at the prospect of a pleasant dinner party which I never imagined might have any sequel.

As Françoise had foreseen, Aly was not there.

'I told you so; he's always late,' she said.

The butler, who must have been used to this kind of situation, offered us a wide choice of drinks and cocktails to keep us happy while waiting.

We opted for port flip. I did not feel very comfortable, holding my glass and perching on the end of a vast sofa. The drawing-room was not at all cosy. The chandelier was only half on and cast a dim, rather inadequate light over the sumptuous furniture in the huge room with its light wood panelling.

Some family photographs stood on two tables laden with precious boxes, and there were also some on a Buhl chest of drawers: the Aga as an Imam, a lady with a gentle face, probably Aly's mother, and two small boys, Karim and Amyn, his sons. There were also some more formal autographed photos of famous people, such as President Coty, with his 'most cordial wishes', General Catroux, 'To His Highness Colonel Prince Aly Khan, in memory of glorious hours'. As for the General de Lattre de Tassigny, he signed himself 'affectionately yours'.

'He might at least buy himself some flowers,' said Françoise, pointing to a vase full of wilted red roses.

Her remark set us both giggling, and we had still not managed to suppress our mirth when Aly arrived.

He shot into the room like a rocket, brimming over with apologies.

'I've so many things to do,' he told us.

How many times was I to hear that remark during the following years!

He joined in our laughter about the flowers, and switched on all the lights.

'How sinister everything looks in here!' he remarked.

Then, without even giving us time to finish what was in our glasses, he said:

'Let's go and eat!' and called: 'Jacques, is the car ready?'

He got into the driver's seat. I was worried about my appearance, for it seemed to me I was not very suitably dressed for eating out. But Aly said I was perfectly all right, and complimented me on my jumper with all the charm of manner he always used to convince every woman he ever met that she was the most beautiful he knew.

As we entered the 'Pré Catelan' I felt very happy about the evening's prospects, and had quite forgotten my weariness. Surrounded by assiduous waiters, Aly selected a table, ordered the meal for the three of us and some pink champagne. We liked this, and so, he said, did he.

It was pleasantly warm, and our table was the happiest in the restaurant. The band played Aly's favourite tunes and the band leader kept on making little knowing signs to him.

'Come and dance,' said Aly.

I went out on to the floor feeling shy and rather stiff, while all the other tables watched us. But the music helped me to relax; then, to my considerable surprise, I felt Aly's cheek resting on mine.

He danced the whole evening like this; first with Françoise, then with me, although I had the impression it was perhaps more often with me. But always cheek to cheek. This was how he danced with all women, regardless of their age or beauty and, of course, it sometimes gave some of them the wrong ideas. But I must admit that I, too, was under his spell that evening.

Everything seemed so simple. Only the present mattered. I never asked myself what might happen next: all I wanted was for that evening to go on and on.

At one-thirty, however, Aly glanced at his watch.

'I must leave you,' he announced disconsolately. 'I had to put off the person I was supposed to be seeing earlier till midnight and I'm already late for that.'

It occurred to me that it was a funny time to be meeting anyone and I wondered whether it was a woman.

'If you are going to this dance, I'll see you there,' he added, turning towards me.

'Yes, I'm going,' I replied.

But I thought he was joking, and felt quite sure he would not

come. In fact I was certain he wouldn't. And yet I wanted him to.

He dropped us at Françoise's flat where I had left my dress and my car and vanished into the night.

When we found ourselves on our own Françoise decided not to go to the dance, and I began to wonder whether I should or shouldn't.

I had agreed to go on to the ball in the euphoric atmosphere of the 'Pré Catelan', but since Aly had gone the world about me seemed to have become sensible again, and I found the idea of dressing and going out to Robinson rather a nuisance, inasmuch as now I felt certain that Aly would not come, and that he had abandoned me for someone else.

But I found I had slipped on my dress almost without noticing it and there I was sitting at the wheel of the Simca.

I did not know how to get to Robinson and was soon lost. As I tried to find a passer-by or a taxi to tell me the way I kept on telling myself what a fool I was. What an idiotic escapade it all was! But never once did it occur to me to go back home.

After many detours and much exasperation I finally reached the place, only to be suddenly overcome with the dreadful thought that the dance might be over and I the only person there. But in fact, although I would not admit it, another fear, scarcely formulated, was tormenting me, the fear of having missed Aly.

But my anxiety had been needless, for there were still crowds of people there. I saw some I knew, who were most surprised to see me arrive unaccompanied and at such a late hour, and I sat down at their table.

In spite of myself I found I had my eye on the door, and soon I saw Aly arrive.

I felt sure he was looking for me, and suddenly I was overwhelmed with a desire to hide, and hoped he would not see me. He asked the young wife of one of his friends to dance, and went on looking for me while they moved round the floor. I felt pleased that he was seeking me out like this, but would not have dreamed of doing anything to indicate where I was. All the same he did see me, and I was trapped. My heart began to thump, and beat still faster when he came towards me.

We danced, hardly uttering a word. Actually, I had no desire to talk. We danced on like this until seven in the morning, when we found it was broad daylight and we were alone on an empty floor. I was quite surprised to find that a handful of people who had stayed on late were eating breakfast.

It was time to go. Aly dismissed his chauffeur and asked me to drive him home. It was cold and he gently wrapped his own coat about my shoulders.

When we reached his house in the Boulevard Maurice Barrès he took his own car so that he could accompany me out to Garches, and we parted company on the Pont de Suresnes. That very morning he had to leave for Switzerland with his son, Karim, and his chauffeur. And I had to set off in a few days' time for Saint-Paul de Vence where I was to spend a week being photographed for *Life*.

'But how marvellous!' Aly exclaimed. 'I shall be staying at my house "The Horizon" in Cannes. Promise to ring me as soon as you arrive; I do so want to see you again.'

I was delighted to hear him say this, but, once again, as soon as I found myself alone, walking back across the Suresnes bridge, reality triumphed over dreams. I tried to forget the romantic night I had just lived through by reminding myself of all the things I had to do. I had work to occupy me until the end of August, then I was supposed to be spending a fortnight in Biarritz with Peter.

Then suddenly I became convinced that it would be a long time before I saw the seductive Aly again; our lives were too different.

When I set off for the South, one major preoccupation of quite a different order was bothering me, namely the most difficult mission I had been entrusted with by *Life* who wanted me to get in touch with Picasso. All I had to do was to persuade him to pose for some fashion photos with me. But I had been warned. Picasso was a very difficult man and I had not the faintest notion how I was going to set about my task. I did have some slight pretext for approaching him in the form of some lengths of material that were being printed in America with reproductions of paintings by Picasso, Chagall, Dufy and Braque.

But I hardly need say that the day was not yet won. The in-

spired idea of getting Picasso to pose could only have originated in the mind of an American fashion editor, but even so I thought it might be fun to tackle the dread Picasso.

We arrived at Saint-Paul on a dazzlingly sunny day. We were quite a crowd: two editors, one photographer, a dress designer, the mannequins, the chauffeur and an assistant. Together we completely filled all the small annexes in the grounds of the Hotel de la Résidence.

An idea occurred to me. I knew Georges Clouzot who at that very moment was making a film on Picasso, so I went and asked him if he would help.

He said he would and took me to the beach at La Garoupe, where we met the Picasso family and had lunch with them.

The Picasso I saw on the beach, the man who kept a watchful eye on his family like a good father, in no way resembled the tyrannical genius I had had described to me. He was astonishingly youthful and I could see a streak of the tough peasant in him. I also noticed the sly way he had of constantly observing nature and people.

I went to La Garoupe three days running and soon found I was no longer at all overawed.

I wore a huge old pullover that had been all stretched out of shape, but it was a glorious colour, somewhere between shocking pink and fuchsia. To my great delight Picasso noticed the jumper and told me how much he liked its colour. I felt very proud; this was the only reference he ever made to anything connected with his painting.

All he thought about on the beach was swimming and keeping an eye on his children.

I had a word with his wife, Jacqueline, about my scheme, and she suggested I should talk to Picasso himself about it there and then. To everyone's surprise he agreed without the slightest hesitation and we planned to meet the following day at his home.

That evening I hastened to give the good news to my anxious American colleagues. I was brandishing my pullover, for it had undoubtedly been due to this that we owed our success.

The following morning, after a long wait outside the closed gates, our team, feeling terribly overawed, was admitted to the Master's house.

On going inside, the first thing that struck me was the absence

of any furniture. There seemed to be packing-cases in all the rooms, and I imagined they must be full of paintings. Jacqueline looked after us all and one of the painter's daughters took me off to her room to change. There our editor, Sally Kirkland, a powerfully-built American woman with a man's voice, admitted to being in a terrible state of nerves.

But everything went well. Picasso was in a good mood, and we were ushered into his studio. It was a vast, high-ceilinged room built in the style of 1900, full of paintings on easels and crowded with great piles of miscellaneous objects, like iron bars, stones, a guitar, a few pieces of sculpture, chairs with dirty velvet upholstery and straw-covered seats. The ground was littered with sketches and unfinished drawings, and the whole place was thick with a goodly layer of dust.

This drawing-room-cum-studio, overflowing as it was with fantasy, opened on to the most romantic and old-fashioned garden you could possibly imagine.

Picasso, who was indeed in a wonderful mood, began to direct the photographic session himself. He chose the angles for the shots, and, like a waggish child, put on the strangest of hats, sombreros or guinea-pig felts, that he found lying about on the chairs or up on top of a cupboard.

What a wonderful person he was to pose with! There, before the eyes of his entire family and my American colleagues whom he now held completely in thrall, he devised an almost non-stop entertainment that seemed to amuse him as much as it did me. He spent the whole morning in shorts, play-acting with his stick and his hats, for the photographer.

Once the photos were taken, my mission was over, and I had to begin to think of returning to Paris.

I had naturally not forgotten my promise to Aly, but I felt embarrassed at the idea of phoning him. I had thought about him a great deal after that wonderful dance at Robinson, then little by little his face, that incredibly seductive face, had grown dim in my mind's eye. I felt a certain reluctance to stir up those memories again, and yet I had given my word. I was in an unbearable dilemma.

So I got round the difficulty by writing him a card, to avoid having to speak to him. But the card was returned to me: wrong address. Then suddenly panic seized me. I might never see

him again. How stupid I had been to behave as I had! I had done my level best to prevent our meeting and now when my plan seemed to have succeeded, I regretted doing what I had done.

For a moment I felt like lifting the receiver, but I decided not to, and drafted a message that read:

'I am off tomorrow. I did not have time to get in touch with you, but I'll see you some time. Bettina.'

I entrusted this note to one of the young women from *Life* who was to give it to him on the afternoon of my last day there.

Then I waited. The telephone rang and Aly was full of reproaches. But I felt happy.

'I'll come and pick you up at half past eight tonight for dinner.'

Naturally he was late, and I sat waiting for him on the hotel terrace where my friends from *Life* had already finished their meal. Everyone teased me, but I was not worried, for I knew he would come. Then I started at the sound of a powerful car engine and a few seconds later Aly drew up before the hotel in his Alfa sports car and came running towards me.

Once again he reproached me for not getting in touch with him and seemed unable to understand why I had not. It became increasingly obvious that he was not accustomed to being treated like this, and in my innermost heart I felt both pleased and annoyed. So he thought my heart had beaten for him alone since the night at Robinson, did he?

He apologized to me about the evening:

'You were too late getting in touch with me for me to be able to put my dinner guests off.'

So we set off to meet them for dinner in a small restaurant up in the hills behind Saint-Paul.

I was wearing an old three-quarter length white mackintosh given to me by a very small American man I once knew, a navy skirt and a bullfighter's shirt I had brought back from Spain. I felt I could have faced any fashionable gathering.

But as Aly and I walked into the dining-room at the inn, I had the curious impression that a deathly hush fell on the central table where some ten people had hardly gathered. It was then I realized that none of the other guests had been warned of my arrival.

There were some hasty introductions and Aly seated me on his left, with his uncle, Mario Magliano, on my other side. I met Karim and Amyn there, too, for the first time, and there were also some women among the guests.

The women immediately began to whisper amongst themselves, and there was no mistaking the fact that they were hostile, frankly hostile.

Aly, of course, talked a great deal to me and was even sweeter to me than usual.

'You really are the loveliest woman here,' he said. I smiled but was not taken in by that one, for he undoubtedly paid exactly the same compliment to all his women-friends.

After dinner he took us all off to Juan-les-Pins to dance at the 'Vieux Colombier'. Aly, with his usual courtesy, asked every woman at the table to dance, but that was not enough to pacify these ladies.

They were all very much on edge, and I found this rather funny, for it seemed as if I had caused quite a flutter in the hitherto so well-organized dovecot.

'I must be off,' said Aly suddenly, glancing at his watch.

He was flying to London by the first plane of the day, for one of his horses was racing somewhere in England.

He got into his car in front of the 'Vieux Colombier' and a woman climbed in beside him as if she belonged there. I was about to disappear when Aly called to me to get in too, in a tone that brooked no refusal. I was literally whisked away with them.

The young woman was not at all pleased and began to sulk, while Aly also suddenly seemed to become ill-tempered and began to drive at breakneck speed. I was terrified and, feeling my presence was not wanted, would have given anything not to have been there. I felt angry with myself for writing that note.

No, the world in which Aly lived was not mine, and I would never be able to become a part of it. I would never be the sort of woman who could put up with anything, even the most humiliating of situations, in order to please him.

The lady accompanied Aly to the plane, while the chauffeur drove me back to Saint-Paul as dawn was breaking.

During dinner, Aly insisted on my not returning to Paris, but I had refused. He had said he would telephone me and

come to see me, but I had told him I was about to go to Biarritz. I had let him see that the battle was not won, but I was fascinated by him, far more fascinated than I wanted him to think. As I sat in the car on my way back to Saint Paul de Vence I felt intuitively for the first time that Aly would indeed play a part in my life. It seemed a strange paradox, that I had spurned his advances and yet wanted to see him again.

10

By now Aly filled all my thoughts.

Reason dictated a thousand counsels of prudence, reminding me of the dinner party in the South of France, the ladies who surrounded Aly, his perpetual unpunctuality and the fact that his life was so different from mine. It reminded me of my own nature, and how much I hated complications, subterfuge, and all the intrigues that seem to be the delight of other women. I was not made for this kind of life of short-term affairs.

But whenever a bell rang in my house, all my good resolutions flew out of the window for, since that evening in Saint-Paul de Vence, I was on tenter-hooks all the time waiting for him to phone.

He rang me in Garches the day after I got back.

'I wanted to hear how you were,' he said.

He seemed worried. No doubt he would have liked to know how I had reacted to his female *entourage*, but I never mentioned the matter. I merely told him what fun the evening had been, not wanting him to know how much it had disturbed me.

'Are you very busy at the moment?'

'Oh, yes, heaps of photographs to do.'

'But why just now?'

'Because this is collection time.'

'How right you are,' he said with a laugh. 'My life has no seasons since horses run the whole year round. But tomorrow I'm off home to The Horizon, the house you refuse to visit. I'll give you a ring from there.'

He kept his word and rang me the following night from Cannes as he had done from London. After that it became a habit, and he phoned me every day for the next fortnight.

I used to wait for this daily phone call, but as Aly had strange notions of time, whenever I went out I would leave my telephone number with the exchange.

So one afternoon, right in the middle of a photographic ses-

sion at the *Elle* studios, I heard someone call:

'Bettina, Prince Aly Khan would like to speak to you on the telephone.'

Everyone turned and stared at me. My friends and colleagues showed no little surprise at hearing this name ring out across the studio, for they all knew about Peter; and as I ran to the phone I felt myself grow red beneath my make-up.

'I shall be in Paris on Sunday, and I must see you,' Aly told me.

But the very next day was Sunday and I was working. During collection time Sunday meant nothing to me.

'I'll call you again before leaving Cannes,' he went on. 'Then I'll ring you when I get to Paris to fix a time to meet.'

'I'll be at the studio.'

And, as he had promised, the following day, in the middle of the afternoon, he phoned.

'Come right over as soon as you have finished work,' he urged.

He seemed cheerful, and we agreed to meet at his house in the Boulevard Maurice Barrès; then he added:

'We'll go to the pictures.'

'But I must go back to Garches first; I've still got my make-up on, and I can't come out like this.'

But Aly was not the man to be deterred by reasons like these. He always had a ready-made solution for any problem that ever arose. I was greatly amused by this aspect of his character.

'You can take it off at the house. If you get there before me, ask for the chambermaid.'

I did arrive before him, a long time before him, having left the studio in a great hurry. The chambermaid, who had been warned of my arrival, took me up to a little boudoir.

As I removed my make-up I kept my ears open for the slightest sound, and kept on thinking I heard Aly's footsteps. But it was not him. He was late yet again, just as he had been the night we dined at the Pré Catelan, and on the evening of the dinner party in the South of France.

I was feeling tired, for I had been working all day. Then I suddenly began to feel annoyed at being kept waiting like this. He had fixed the time of our meeting, he had made me leave my work and now he was not here. He really was too rude for words.

I stood up, stalked out of the house, and went back to Garches feeling extremely annoyed.

As I arrived home, the telephone was ringing.

Aly sounded terribly sorry about what had happened, and said:

'I was at the races. I got home just after you had left.'

On my way back to Garches from Neuilly I had decided to tell him what I thought of him. But no one could have been more surprised than I to hear the tone of my actual reply. My anger had evaporated, and I answered him in a perfectly friendly way. He said he would send his chauffeur over to pick me up, and I accepted the offer.

Once back in Neuilly again, Aly was still not ready, and I had yet another wait in the boudoir where I had removed my make-up.

But this time Aly was in the house. I could hear him through one of the walls, shaving himself with an electric razor. The telephone rang several times and he answered it. Then he dictated some snatches of letters to his secretary. I gathered he was off again the following day.

For a brief moment my reason got the upper hand. What on earth was I doing here? I could never fit into this hectic kind of life, or live with so restless a man.

Then he appeared, and once again my reason foundered. His opening words were:

'I would very much like to go to the cinema.'

At least he was persistent, for he had not abandoned his original idea.

So off we went. I thought he would ask me what film I would like to see, but not a bit of it. Without a word of enquiry about the kind of films I liked, he led me into a cinema on the Champs-Elysées where they were showing a Western.

'This is the only kind of film I like,' Aly told me.

Don't ask me what the film was called, for I never did find out. I would be equally incapable of saying whether it was a good or a bad Western, for such was my surprise that I had great difficulty in following what was taking place on the screen at all.

But this was not to be the last surprise of the evening.

The theatre was almost empty, and we sat in the front row of

the balcony. Aly put his feet up on the rail, closed his eyes and no sooner had the first sequence begun than he was asleep.

I was absolutely dumbfounded. Never in all my life had I known a man take a girl out to the pictures and then fall asleep and utterly forget her presence.

And yet he did not annoy me; I even felt moved at the rather touching sight of this child-like surrender.

Later on we often referred to the Western he had never seen and he would laugh at my astonishment. He told me he always went to sleep at the pictures; he might well have added that he only went there to get some sleep. The truth is that he was occasionally very tired. That Sunday we went to see the Western, he had come all the way from Cannes by road, and was going on to Deauville the following day; but he would never have admitted he was tired.

When the words on the screen told us it was The End, I wakened Aly, and we went out to supper at the Polka des Mandibules, a small restaurant in Saint-Germain des Prés where each table had its own tap. When you turned it wine poured out, and in plenty, too, for a very moderate all-in charge allowed you to drink as much as you liked.

Then Aly took me dancing at the fashionable night-club, the Eléphant Blanc. There I found the Aly of the Pré Catelan again, the seductive Oriental prince, beloved by Fate, the man the newspapers never tired of describing. Of course I found Aly's worldly manner most beguiling, yet somehow I could not help remembering the other Aly, the one I had seen sleeping beside me like a child in his seat at the cinema.

As we danced, he tried once again to persuade me to come to Deauville with him. It was desperately difficult for me to refuse, and I had to plead a contract which I could not break.

So I remained in Paris. But it was from that moment that it all began as far as I was concerned.

Aly rang me every evening; he came to see me three times in one week, and one week-end asked me to accompany him to his stud farm at Saint Crespin, near Deauville. But still I hesitated for this was a decision fraught with consequences. If I agreed to go I realized that the whole course of my life would be changed.

I desperately wanted to go, but at the same time was

frightened. Yet Aly kept on talking of plans he had that involved us both, and I felt my heart thump as I listened to him.

'I would very much like to share your life, but I want to be the only one,' I told him one evening.

'You really are from Normandy, aren't you, to judge by the way you don't trust me!'

'No, but I don't want to be a mere name on a waiting-list.'

Aly was capable of exquisite tenderness, and his smile reassured me. It is only fair to add that all I needed was a little reassurance for love to win the day. I agreed to go.

He came to Garches one Saturday morning to pick me up. I can still see him there dressed in black.

We spent two wonderful days together, completely on our own, away from Paris and its social whirl.

The house was heavenly: a real Normandy house surrounded by white fences, orchards, and pastureland where the finest-looking horses in all the world wandered about cropping the grass.

Aly was very proud to show me round his stables, and as for me, I was busy discovering still another facet to his many-sided personality. He was spontaneous and lively like a happy child, and wandered about the fields in faded blue jeans and espadrilles.

One evening we went down to the village where there was a dance going on in the square, and we danced there too among all the peasants. No one paid the slightest attention to us, and we ourselves forgot all the things that loomed menacingly over us, everything that threatened to separate us.

Monday came all too soon. Aly went back to Deauville where his horses were racing throughout August, and I returned to Paris, completely won over and very happy.

A few days later I set off for Biarritz, but the prospect of the trip gave me no pleasure. For now I could no longer deceive myself: I was in love with Aly.

I would have liked to tell Peter the truth, but I was frightened of hurting him, even perhaps of hurting him pointlessly, since as far as Aly and I were concerned, nothing was settled, and life might well tear us apart at any moment.

I would have liked Peter to have guessed something, or to have questioned me, so that we could have talked the whole

matter over openly, but he was so sure of himself that he saw nothing and suspected nothing.

Only one person, a woman, discovered my secret.

Paris-Match had printed a photograph of Aly racing on one of his horses. We were having dinner with the Irwin Shaws, and everyone was talking about the photo. Some criticized him for riding with his stirrups too short, while others stood up for him. I felt flustered, for normally no one ever so much as mentioned Aly in these circles. Marion, Irwin's wife, noticed my confusion and when the meal was over took me on one side and asked me most affectionately what was wrong.

That evening I came to a decision: I would not return to Biarritz, but would leave Peter. I felt very distressed at the thought for he and I had been exceedingly happy together, but I felt I could no longer go on leading this double life.

Of course I should have told him the truth there and then. I did think of doing so, but my courage failed at the last minute. I hate hurting people and Peter seemed so completely unaware of the threat that hung over his head. So I thought I would wait for a better moment, still hoping he might become suspicious and thus make the whole easier for me to explain.

I returned to Paris and did a week's work before going off to Deauville at the week-end. Aly sent a car for me.

I remember arriving that evening in time for dinner. There was no one to welcome me and the house was deserted. I thought it was hideous, very untidy and full of incredibly ugly heterogeneous pieces of furniture. I was taken to my room and informed that Aly would soon be back.

I might well have been peeved that he was not there, but realized that in order to be free himself for the evening he had had to take all his guests off to the Casino.

I had been right. When at last he did appear, he had managed to slip away, leaving all his guests in the gaming-rooms.

Aly had told no one of my impending arrival, so when I appeared the following morning, I caused quite a stir.

There were a number of young women there whom Louise de Vilmorin nicely dubbed 'the ladies in slippers'.

It was a strange sort of life they led, for they were always around wherever Aly was, yet some were married and had their own homes and children. Some were invited to spend the whole

season there, while some lived elsewhere but turned up in the mornings, ate there, and only left late at night. Then there were the casual callers.

It would be false modesty on my part not to admit that my arrival caused consternation throughout this strange *entourage*. I had witnessed many a jealous scene in the various couture houses I had worked in, but they paled before what I inadvertently stumbled on at Deauville; and even then it was only the echo of the real thing that came to me through the walls and the closed doors.

There was no getting away from the fact that I constituted a serious threat to these ladies. I must admit that although irritated by this situation, and this is something that all women will understand, to a certain extent I felt flattered too.

Life in Deauville would have been torture had it not been for Aly. He, thanks to his extraordinary easy manners, and thanks also to his truly Oriental diplomacy, his intelligence and his sensitivity, managed to keep the upper hand in the most embarrassing of situations, and, in spite of all the dramas, the weeping and the hysterical outbursts, created a really happy day-to-day life for us all.

In the afternoons he would take the entire household to the races. One day when I was sitting in the area reserved for him and his guests, I caught sight of Anatole Litvak and John Huston in the crowd. They were both friends of Peter's.

'I thought you were in Saint-Jean de Luz,' said John, strolling up to me.

He must have sensed some emotional imbroglio from the tone of my reply, for he changed the subject. But I could say nothing to him, for I had still not dared talk to Peter about it all.

Normally I don't like confiding in people, but then I needed a friend to talk to, someone with whom I could discuss the decision I was shortly to have to make.

Most fortunately, I found the very friend I needed in Aly's own house – Sylvia, the wife of the great comic actor Danny Kaye. I had first met her in California when I had been there with Peter. She was a capable woman, of sound judgment, and she helped me a great deal.

We used to walk endlessly round and round the house while

she listened with angelic patience to my secret outpourings. She was very discreet and in no way attempted to influence my final decision, but merely kept on repeating:

'I know it will hurt Peter.'

But, alas, I also knew it would.

Every morning I found myself determined to go back to Saint-Jean de Luz and break with Peter. But every evening I would postpone the journey, for I found it impossible to leave Aly and was frightened I might annoy him by going off to the Basque coast.

I had made no secret of how I had felt towards Peter, and Aly had listened, though not without a show of impatience, for he was a jealous man, even about things that had happened in the past.

Then one day the inevitable occurred. Aly, impenetrable and cold, handed me the telephone.

'It's Peter phoning you from Saint-Jean de Luz. Tell him not to expect you any more.'

I picked up the receiver, and Aly, who was usually so courteous and discreet, stayed in the room.

'What on earth are you up to?' asked Peter, quite unruffled, almost joyful.

There he was at the other end of the line, determined not to understand, behaving just like an ostrich in order not to spoil his illusion of all being well. But Aly was standing close to me, hanging on my every word. Now it was impossible to put things off any longer.

'I'm not coming to Saint-Jean de Luz,' I said.

In spite of my firm tone, Peter was still not convinced.

'But you must be mad!' he replied.

'No, I'm living with Aly.'

Peter still did not believe me. Now he saw danger ahead – he could hardly fail to – but he would not accept the inevitable. He thought perhaps he might win me back, and begged me to go and see him, saying there were things he wanted to explain to me.

It was heart-rending, and I found it almost impossible to make him understand the decision I had come to. I was in tears as I hung up, but nevertheless felt as if a great weight had been lifted from my shoulders.

This sensation was not to last for long, however, for I found myself face to face with Aly, livid with rage.

'You didn't tell him firmly enough that you were through with him,' he said.

At the time I thought he was cruel, but later, on reflection, I came to understand his reaction. For Aly was a man who was always capable of shouldering responsibility, a rare quality indeed, since it was the first time I had ever encountered it in anyone who had loved me.

We stayed in Deauville until the end of August, and from there flew in a little hired plane to England, where Aly had to attend a race.

We made the journey with the trainer and the jockey, and were also accompanied by an old Irish lady who ran one of Aly's Irish stud farms and adored him like a son. She used to come over to Deauville occasionally in August to watch the races there.

I had never been to the races in England, and was most surprised to learn that at Goodwood no respectable woman would be seen without a hat. I had no hats, for they were things I never wore.

The old lady came to my rescue by lending me a straw garden hat with a velvet ribbon. It could hardly have been more banal, but Aly had fun saying to everyone:

'Look how well that hat suits her!'

I felt very nervous, conscious of the gaze of so many curious people.

I also discovered that Aly's popularity was not confined to the Continent alone, for even in England he was constantly surrounded by pretty women.

We travelled back that very same day to The Horizon. I was quite dazed, for never in my life had I travelled so fast. To Aly, on the other hand, neither distance nor difficulties seemed to exist.

This time we were alone with the pilot in the tiny aircraft. We ran into a storm and were horribly thrown about in the air pockets. I was terrified, my sole concern being to reach firm ground in Nice, but Aly mocked at my fears.

We reached the Château de l'Horizon. Night had already fallen some time ago, but even in the dark I could tell how

lovely the house was standing there all white on the edge of the sea.

Gany, the Indian butler, was expecting us. He had laid a table on the terrace, and the whole atmosphere was one of happiness and gaiety.

I thought I must be dreaming; what with the chirping of the cicadas, the sighing of the waves, and the stars overhead, it all seemed too beautiful to be true. Gany, with his duck-like waddle and his child-like soul, lent an atmosphere of tender comedy to my dream, too, and as for his face, it was radiant with delight that his master was home again.

When we had finished our meal, Aly took me by the hand, and said:

'This is your home.'

I stayed there for the whole of September. The house was almost empty. Some of Aly's friends would call in as they sailed past, but he was less welcoming than usual and did not urge them to stay. So they would have a drink and leave us.

The 'ladies in slippers' had miraculously vanished, for Aly, realizing how uncomfortable I felt at having them around, had got rid of them. And if one of them happened to ring up, she was always told he was not at home.

I was happy, and I think Aly was too. We were living entirely for one another, and when we went out and dined in one of the little inns along the coast it was always on our own, as sweethearts.

We used to go riding in the afternoons and sometimes even at dead of night, for Aly liked galloping beside me through the countryside after the dark had emptied it of people.

For the very first time I discovered the true Aly. Up to that moment, the force of events had swept me along. Of course I had had time to notice some of the very diverse aspects of his personality, but I had never had time to piece together all these many disparate elements.

Aly Khan has been described in countless articles, the Aly of social gatherings and the racecourse. For the most part these portraits are accurate descriptions of him, save in one detail. For they never stress how natural the Prince's behaviour always was.

He loved to charm people, friends and strangers alike. He always found the right thing to say, something flattering that

made people forgive his everlasting unpunctuality. When you were with him you always felt as if you were the only person he wanted to talk to. But he did all these things without the slightest trace of calculation; it all seemed to spring quite unself-consciously from the very depths of his being.

I don't think I have ever met anyone so sincerely and consistently genuine. In addition, this Prince upon whom Fortune had smiled, this great nobleman, this upholder of tradition, had also his Bohemian side, which could have been most unpleasant had it been tinctured with even the merest trace of affectation. But in Aly it constituted a delightful trait, for in him it sprang straight from childhood. He would simply forget the time, and would just fall asleep at the pictures.

One might have thought he would have become blasé, for many a man, given the same wealth, would have found his enthusiasm palling before long. But Aly was still capable of wonder; a new car would make him as happy as a child and for several weeks it would become impossible to tear him away from it.

But even so, he never spoiled himself. In fact he was the only person he was ever niggardly with. When the question arose as to whether he needed to buy himself a new suit, he would hesitate, and would fume about the price, for it was always too dear.

But when it came to gifts his reactions were quite different, for one of his greatest joys in life was giving presents.

I was deeply touched by something he did while I was at The Horizon. Without a word to me, he bought a house in Deauville for my mother, for he had guessed I was anxious about her. He did this, as indeed he did everything else, in an utterly spontaneous way, out of sheer kindness and without any ulterior motive whatsoever.

His generosity was not just a means of showing off, a mere façade, for he had a deep understanding of other people, and hated those he loved to be worried or anxious about money matters.

Still more paradoxically, this Bohemian, this nonconformist, was a deeply serious man. To see the way he lived one might well have thought him frivolous, but this was pure illusion. He had the gift of being able to do several things at once, and would

accomplish in an hour what it took others three or four to achieve. But this gift gave his life the appearance of being one long, hectic, disconcerting rush, whereas in fact Aly was a thoughtful man who never undertook anything lightly.

This I came to realize from seeing him work at The Horizon. He would shut himself away with his secretary for hours on end to dictate letters. Sometimes he would be exhausted at the end and doze off in an armchair. But soon he would pull himself together again, and, shaking himself out of his torpor with some amusing remark, would set about his tasks once more.

I also came to understand him from the many conversations we had together sitting on the grass at The Horizon, between two games of tennis, or after a swim or a sail.

He hated my being a model, not for reasons of propriety, but because he reckoned it was ruining my health.

'You are leading a ridiculous life,' he would say. 'Take a look at yourself! You're like a skinny cat and you get far too tired.'

He would talk about his plans for the future, and I was always closely linked with those plans.

'Living with me will involve you in certain responsibilities, and you'll have to get used to them.'

I replied that this was impossible, that I had to earn my own living. But one evening he said:

'No, you don't, since I intend to marry you one day.'

A few days later Aly took me to Yakimour, his father's home, for the Aga Khan had heard about me and wanted to meet me.

I discovered yet another Aly during this visit, a respectful Aly; for this intrepid, enterprising man, undaunted by any feat of prowess, be it ever so dangerous, was afraid of his father.

Once again I felt quite overcome at my discovery of this aspect of his character, for how very different the man I loved was from the conventional picture of him painted by drawing-room gossip!

At the end of September Aly had to return to Paris, and I stayed on alone for a few more days in Cannes.

Then it was my turn to go back to Paris. I had intended to set up house again in Garches and continue my work. My emotional life had been utterly transformed, but the practical details of life were in no way different. Of course, Aly had said he would marry me and I knew him to be a man of his word. I

knew he disapproved of my work, but nothing had been settled there, either, and I was anxious to go on earning my living as I had done before.

But I was in for a surprise when I got to Garches. The house had been stripped and all my possessions had completely vanished. I phoned Aly who replied with a great burst of laughter.

'You'll find everything at my house, all carefully put away.'

He had kidnapped me. Just the kind of thing he would do. And I had to agree that, once again, he had been right in taking a determined if somewhat brusque stand.

Aly could not really love the woman I had been up till then. He could not be expected to vie with my work, my occupations and my worries. What he needed was a woman who would give herself up utterly to him, a woman who lived for him alone.

And that was the woman I was shortly to become.

11

I had been living for some weeks in Neuilly on the Avenue Maurice Barrès, when I decided to go to Elbeuf.

There, I found an anxious family awaiting me. My mother, but above all my sister, were wondering what was going on, and what this sudden change in my way of life could mean. For up till then I had always worked, whether I had been with Beno, Guy or Peter. Then suddenly, there I was, abandoning my career.

It took a great deal of patience to explain to them what an unusual person Aly was, and how baffling his ideas sometimes seemed.

Aly loved women and he understood them. He would stick up for them through thick and thin, sometimes with an almost feminine lack of good faith. He would always consider a wife was right and her husband wrong, and was always prepared to make excuses in favour of the woman.

Paris seemed to be full of American women whose homes had broken up and who disembarked there with a bevy of children. Then Aly would step in and help, even going as far as to lend them somewhere to live, without the slightest hint of any ulterior motive, but simply because he understood their distress.

How many a time have I heard him repeat that in modern society a woman has a hard time and that men have not the faintest notion how to treat her.

But if Aly defended women, he also needed them, for although never alone, he was in fact a very lonely man. He needed a wife of his own, to be there at home, for him to come back to, and all his earlier love-affairs had been an attempt to find just that woman.

I might well be that woman; my character was such that I could well become such a woman. I was not impossibly possessive, and did not expect anyone to sit at my feet in a permanent state of adoration.

I was clear-headed too, and was fully aware of all Aly ex-

pected of a woman. He considered that she must never cease to play a modest and self-effacing part in life even while occupying the place of honour in the heart of the man she loved.

Aly was too intelligent not to see that, in the modern world, many women were obliged to lead their own lives outside the confines of their homes, but these career women were a far cry from his conception of ideal womanhood.

'A woman must be conscious of the duty she has towards the man she loves and is living with,' he would often repeat.

I agreed with him, and it was for him that I gave up my independent life. I found I could do this precisely because he had given me the wonderful reassurance of being the one person he needed.

Then of course, I loved him, he loved me, and one day we would get married. This he had promised, and no one had ever been given cause to doubt his word.

When I left Elbeuf my mother was persuaded of what I had told her, and my sister reassured. No doubt love had made me find the right words.

Once back in the Boulevard Maurice Barrès, I found myself plunged into a completely different sort of life from anything I had hitherto known. I sometimes even had the impression that all these profound changes were happening not to me, but to someone else, and that I was merely a spectator.

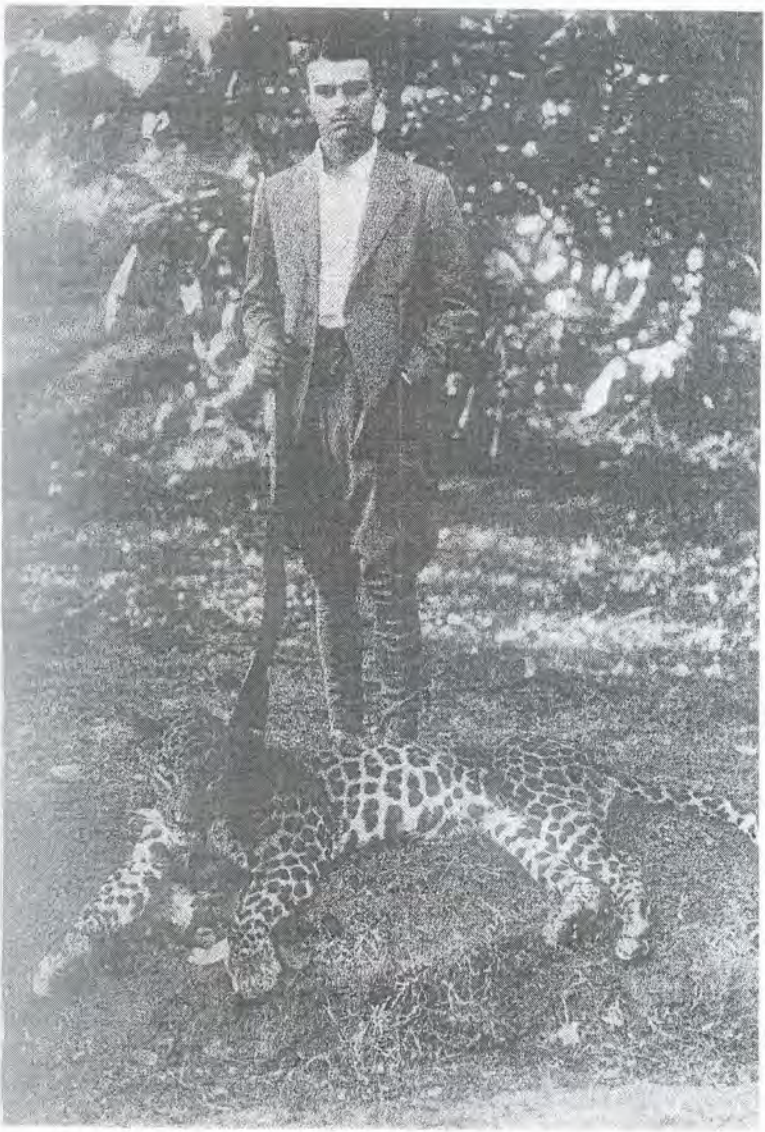
Aly wanted to transform me, and he set about doing so with the full force of his conviction and all his considerable powers of seduction.

From the very start he decided to hand over the Boulevard Maurice Barrès house to me. But I had absolutely no experience whatsoever, for I had always lived either in hotels or in other people's apartments. So I had to set about learning how to run a house.

I also had to learn about horses. Aly had taken me round his stables at Saint-Crespin, and we had gone to the races in Deauville. In Paris I went on accompanying him to Saint-Cloud, Longchamp or Chantilly.

He took charge of my wardrobe, for he loved dresses.

'If I had been a woman,' he would often say with a laugh, 'I would have spent a fortune at the couturier's, the jeweller's and the furrier's.'



Aly Khan, January 1951, stands over a leopard killed in a shoot

He took me to Balenciaga.

Before knowing him, I had never had a dress of my own, that is to say one from the big couture houses. Whenever I went out I would borrow one from the collection and return it the following morning. This did not worry me in the least for I had no strong feelings about ownership.

But to be wearing a dress chosen for you by the man you love and who loves you is quite a different matter. I rather had the feeling I was living in a dream world.

I consider that Balenciaga is the greatest of all couturiers and, although this is something very rare, his colleagues recognize him as such. He it is who sets the fashions for several years ahead. Every collection of his is a veritable nest of new ideas. But since his style is a bold one, since it is always in advance of the others, it is merciless on anyone who chooses the wrong dress, and there is nothing that makes a woman look more unattractive than a Balenciaga model inelegantly worn.

Aly had very definite ideas about how he liked women to dress. He would jot down the numbers of the models he liked, and would make remarks like: 'Oh! what a pretty dress! Get its number, quick!' Or: 'Take a look at that hat. She looks as if she has a tower on top of her head.' And he would laugh.

As for me, I felt just like a fish out of water. I could not get it into my head that I was there to buy dresses and not to show them, and Aly had to push me into the changing booth.

There, feeling slightly nervous, I would try on the dresses he had selected, and from time to time he would exclaim:

'No, not that one.'

Then the saleswoman would hurry the condemned dress away.

As in every other aspect of his life, he valued simplicity above all, and Balenciaga's uncompromising elegance delighted him. But he did not want me to wear dresses that were either too short or too low-cut. And he insisted on sleeves.

When I looked in the mirror I sometimes found it hard to recognize myself. Where was Bettina, the leading mannequin, ever in the forefront of fashion? The Bettina I saw had hair as long as Mélisande's, and extremely decorous dresses that were sometimes even longer than fashion dictated. But I accepted what I saw in the mirror with perfectly good grace, since I knew that this was how Aly liked me to look.

Some of my friends seemed shocked and wondered what on earth had happened to me, saying that I had quite lost my personality, poor thing. But I just let them say what they liked.

When I was working, like all mannequins, I never wore a slip: they always ruffle your hair as you take them off. So my undies consisted of a brief roll-on to hold my stockings up and a brassière. But the first time Aly saw me trying a dress on, he was shocked to see that this was all I was wearing. He sent the saleswoman and the forewoman out of the booth and told me firmly that I must wear a petticoat.

What he was forgetting was that this saleswoman and chief dressmaker had seen me just as scantily dressed as this for years!

So when the second fitting came round I was wearing a long petticoat and a brassière that would have been just the thing for a girl's boarding-school. And even so Aly insisted that the fitter should only enter the booth after I had the dress on.

Aly had a wonderful way of looking after me even in the most trivial details of my life. But he never relaxed his vigilance for a single instant. One day I said without thinking:

'I'm going to phone the masseur and ask him to come over.'

'Your masseur? A man?' said Aly.

He was furious. A masseuse would have been all right, but not a man. The same applied to the doctor. If I ever went to see him, I had always to take my mother or a woman friend with me.

This was his truly Oriental way of manifesting the great respect he felt towards the woman he had chosen. He was shy when it came to expressing his emotions, but capable of great outbursts of jealousy.

I had to give up seeing any of my former men friends, and this grieved me. On the other hand I did understand Aly's feelings about being the only man in my life. For what woman could have failed to be flattered by the demands, however unreasonable, of a man who refused to tolerate the merest idea of sharing me, or the least hint of a friendship that did not involve him?

Even so I have not forgotten several scenes we had that made us both intensely unhappy. In particular I recall a row we had in

which Kim Novak all unwittingly played a part, but a very different one from the one attributed to her at the time by the newspapers.

It was during the Cannes festival of 1956, in the first spring I spent with Aly. We were no longer hiding from the photographers and had to attend the showing of the film 'Picnic' together.

Before the screening we went to the Carlton for a drink, followed by a pack of photographers on the look-out for some sensational shots. Kim Novak, who was starring in 'Picnic' was there in all her golden-haired splendour, determined to let publicity do all it could for her.

Some of the photographers had rigged up a little scene, in which a flower-seller was to approach our group; whereupon the ever gallant Aly would undoubtedly buy a rose from her and present it to Kim; and the reporters would merely have to trigger off their flash bulbs.

But unfortunately for these over-imaginative young men, Aly sensed a trap, got up impatiently and walked away with me.

The screening was a great success, and a dinner was given afterwards in honour of 'Picnic' and its leading actress. Kim Novak's table happened to be right behind ours, and Ginger Rogers and one of her friends were sitting at it, right opposite me.

Aly, who would go to great pains not to offend any woman, and who always tried to put things right if he had ever been at all peevish, asked Kim if she would like to dance.

So, seeing me sitting there alone, Ginger Rogers' escort stepped over and asked me if I would care to dance. And I accepted without the slightest idea that I was doing the wrong thing.

When the band stopped playing, Aly came back to our table in a fury. It was the first time since we had met that I had ever danced with anyone but him. He did not make a scene but his silence told me exactly what he was thinking.

When the music began again he got up, walked over to Kim Novak, and asked her to dance again. What a windfall for the photographers!

After his second dance with Kim, he left her and went off

to the gaming-rooms, where he spent the evening in non-stop frenzied gambling. By three in the morning I had grown weary of waiting and went back to The Horizon.

I had done nothing wrong, and I wept from sheer misery and fury. How could Aly have left me alone, knowing how unhappy I was? In the morning the chambermaid told me he had gone for a swim, which made me still more unhappy and angry.

I flung on my clothes, snatched a handbag and ran out of the house. Off I went on foot, straight ahead, without the slightest idea where I was heading.

After wandering about for a long time I found myself in the hills behind Golfe-Juan, and collapsed on to a bank. I was quite incapable of walking any further, for I was worn out with crying.

There I sat on the bank for more than two hours, still weeping. What was I going to do? I did not even ask myself, for I was too upset.

Then suddenly I was startled by the sound of an engine, and a car drew up near by. Aly got out, looking distraught. He had thought me gone for good and had been searching for me.

He took me in his arms, and never asked for a word of explanation. We were so happy to be together again that we had both quite forgotten the whole incident.

But Aly's guests at the luncheon he always gave during the film festival never did understand why I appeared that day looking radiant, but with eyes swollen and reddened with tears.

Later Aly explained what had made him so angry.

'I can't stand seeing you dance with anyone else.'

'But you dance with all the other women.'

'That's not the same at all,' he shouted in a tone that brooked no reply. 'You're to promise me you never will again.'

I was flabbergasted. It was almost a comic scene and I found it very hard to understand why Aly should feel so strongly about this.

But he insisted, obviously attaching considerable importance to this promise, and I felt that had I refused, it might well have caused a breach between us. So I gave in.

And since I kept my word, the matter was soon forgotten. But if anyone ever asked Aly's permission to invite me to dance, he would reply in a cowardly way:

'You must ask Bettina herself.'

And I would invariably reply, sitting there beneath his falsely indifferent gaze:

'No thank you, I don't dance.'

Occasionally some blunderer would press the point and add:

'Aren't you allowed to?'

I would deny that this was so and in the end would say that I only danced with Aly.

Aly would sit there, impassive, but I knew he was pleased.

Aly gave me every possible proof of his attachment, and yet he needed to seek reassurance elsewhere. For he, the charmer, constantly wanted to prove to himself that his powers of seduction were not on the wane.

Moreover, every woman Aly ever met, be she sixteen or sixty, dreamed of falling into his arms. They were sometimes fantastically bold with him and this would give rise to the funniest of scenes.

One day in Cannes, during a big luncheon-party, a young woman seized what she thought was her opportunity and threw herself upon him as he stood in a telephone kiosk.

There was another who spent several days in the Boulevard Maurice Barrès house with her husband. She seemed to be crazy about Aly, although her husband took very little notice of the fact, even though she would make the most unusual sorties all round the house wearing a transparent dressing-gown. At breakfast-time she would install herself in Aly's study and turn on all her airs and graces, while he would make his telephone calls, receive visitors or dictate letters without appearing to see her at all.

Then there were all those whose chief concern was their publicity. Whenever a new film was announced, the leading lady would have found it most convenient to have been able to show her producers a newspaper headline that read: 'Aly Khan: another romance'. It would have been worth millions to the box-office.

Aly never seemed to be angered by these mercenary pre-

occupations, but in his customary benevolent way where women were concerned, would merely remark:

'Poor girls, they're welcome, for what good it does them.'

But I felt less philosophical about it all, and would sometimes flare up about the shameless effrontery of some of his admirers.

'You know, they really are the limit!' I would say. 'Did you see that one this morning who dived into the car so as to be able to sit next to you?'

And Aly would reply:

'Oh, for goodness' sake, don't you become like all the rest!'

He never told me anything about his past, for he was far too discreet and shy to do so. But my guess was that he had had to deal with many a jealous outburst during his life and had developed an utter abhorrence of them.

He had, moreover, perfected a special technique for avoiding quarrels. Whenever I began to upbraid him for anything, he would vanish into another room just long enough for me to calm down a little. Then he would return and, with consummate art, would change the subject. But he did it all so naturally that in the end one began to wonder whether one's jealousy had not indeed been ridiculous and hateful.

I would sometimes wonder what all my friends must think of me. 'Poor Bettina!' they must be saying, 'how she has changed!' And they were right; I had changed. The man I loved had transformed me and I felt no trace of bitterness about it.

Before I had known Aly I had led the life of an independent woman. I had considered myself free. But now I discovered that it had all been a delusion. I had been alone, horribly alone, with no one to depend on save myself, and no one can find freedom in solitude. A woman can only give of her best when she forms part of a couple, and she is only really happy to the extent that she feels herself to be indispensable to a man.

Naturally, the happiness I experienced with Aly was not to be had without certain sacrifices. I hated to see him so seductive to other women, but felt certain that in time he would tire of these facile conquests and that my happiness would then be untainted.

It is no easy matter for a woman from the Western hemisphere

to become the wife of an Oriental, but had not nature endowed me with special gifts in this respect?

I was staying in Cairo when I first asked myself this question, and I remember that first visit with the utmost pleasure.

Aly was off to India. I accompanied him as far as Egypt where I stayed with some of his friends, Mohammed and Laura Sultan, until his return.

I did not go out much except to visit the Pyramids and some museums. I used to go shopping in the afternoons with a group of women-friends; we always took a chauffeur with us as body-guard and chaperon, for women never go out unaccompanied there.

I spent my evenings at the Sultans playing taola, a fifth-century Persian game that later gave rise to our backgammon. And I did some tapestry-work, like Penelope. I had never done any sewing before, but I liked the cushion-covers I was making, with their sprays of flowers on a white background.

I greatly enjoyed this peaceful, comfortable existence in a hot climate, and I found myself adopting the customs of the country without the least difficulty.

Like all women in Cairo I took to spending a great deal of time over my daily toilet. I knew that Egyptian women have exceedingly soft skin, so I entrusted myself to a woman with a reputation not only as a masseuse but as a clairvoyant, who would come to the house daily, the way seamstresses did once in Paris.

I was quite frightened the first time I found myself at the mercy of this voluminous matron, dressed from head to foot in black and covered in gold bracelets.

After hustling me unceremoniously into a scalding bath, she began to scrub me all over with a camel-hair glove, which, even when softened with soap, scoured my skin almost to the point of drawing blood, while, through a dense cloud of steam, I could hear her bracelets tinkling as she intoned a quasi-religious incantation.

Then this colossal woman, still droning on, began an endless session of kneading, finally removing the hairs from my legs with *baklawa*, a mixture of hot sugar and lemon, as she told my fortune. I do not remember what she predicted for me for the very good reason that the voluminous lady from Cairo knew

no French and that although I was beginning to learn Arabic it was still very much a closed book to me.

And in any case I could not have cared less, for I had no fears as to the future. Aly had given me an unshakeable faith in life, and I thought I would spend the rest of my days with him, devoting myself entirely to pleasing him and making him happy.

12

'Let's go home . . . I'll see you at home . . .'

Aly was always talking about home. And I only had to witness his joy when he showed me round Saint-Crespin or his house in the Boulevard Maurice Barrès to realize just how much this wanderer needed a place of refuge.

Whenever he phoned me during one of his trips away, he would always ask for news of his houses. And even when he happened to be at the other end of the earth, his presence could still be felt in each one of them, for although they were all very different, they all seemed to bear the stamp of their owner.

Whenever Aly came to stay in any of his houses, it would always be a rush visit, and he would live permanently surrounded by open suitcases, always just about to shut them again. His houses at Saint-Crespin, Deauville, The Horizon and Neuilly were all equally chaotic, but I do not think Aly even noticed the fact. What mattered to him was the existence of a home there, nothing else, for, like many true wanderers, he could not bear hotels.

When Aly came to establish a stud farm in Venezuela his prime concern was to build a sumptuous house there, and he put as much loving care into planning the details of this dwelling on the other side of the world as he would have done into fitting up a chalet he was going to live in for the rest of his life. Whenever he went to England to spend a week at Goodwood or to the races at Ascot, he would always rent the same house by the sea.

His house at Neuilly was handsome, spacious, surrounded by a garden, and very well placed on the edge of the Bois de Boulogne. Even so it was no palace, but consisted of about ten tastefully decorated and furnished rooms.

On the first floor there was the hall and a very big sitting-room. Our bedrooms were on the second floor, along with two bathrooms, a dressing-room and the linen-room. On the third

floor, next to the guest-room was Aly's study where he used to work. It was a vast room with one wall entirely of glass, and looked over the woods. The house was full of beautiful things and priceless pictures by Dufy, Picasso and Utrillo. I liked the whole effect which seemed to my mind to match my idea of Aly.

But I soon discovered the reverse side of this dazzling medal when one or two revelations were made that left me gasping.

One morning I asked the chambermaid where the sheets were kept, to which she replied that there weren't any, or rather that the only other set was at the laundry.

I was told that we had to phone the laundry whenever a visitor was coming to stay. So the few sheets we did have spent their entire time dashing backwards and forwards between the Boulevard Maurice Barrès and the laundry.

Then on another occasion I found some heavenly lace that had belonged to Aly's mother, lying in a heap at the back of a cupboard. It was being used to edge sheets for the servants' beds.

Aly lived in such a whirl that it was impossible for him to take stock of the fact that everything around him was growing dilapidated. And since everyone knew he hated having to discuss this kind of thing, no one ever dared point out what needed to be done.

'I don't want to have to spend so much on keeping my houses going!' he exclaimed the first time I pointed out the fact that some of the rooms needed to be re-decorated.

He grumbled away just like a child, but I took no notice. The chairs needed to be re-covered and we needed a new stair carpet.

'How disheartening it all is,' he said.

I laughed and he let me go ahead. But I had to use all sorts of wiles to get him to pay the bills for things in the house. He was most amused at my stratagems.

Every time he went away he would leave me a large sum of money, saying: 'You might need this if ever anything happened to me. You never know.' But I would not even entertain the thought of death, for was I not his faithful life-companion, as was not he the most intensely alive of all mortals? So I would use his cheque to settle an account for carpets or some contrac-

tor's bill. When Aly heard about this he would be cross and tell me I was unreasonable. To which I would reply:

'And you can hardly have the nerve to tell me that the sitting-room chairs in Deauville didn't need to be re-covered.'

'Yes, but what would have happened if you had needed that money? When people die it takes a long while to settle their estate, and I wouldn't want you to find yourself in financial difficulties.'

'Don't think about things like that,' I would say. To which he would retaliate:

'But you do the thinking about everything else.'

Aly had a very strange relationship with his servants. He made them laugh, for he would always find something funny to say to them. But at the same time he expected them to do fantastic things. They would always be expected to go on working late into the evening, and sometimes he would make them travel all night long down to the South of France in a fleet of cars travelling at nearly a hundred miles an hour. But they put up with anything from him because they liked him. Things jogged along somehow or other in the various houses and nobody seemed to care very much.

At Neuilly it was almost impossible to get a meal served, for the chef, although charming, came from Goa, and used to day-dream instead of stirring his sauces.

I persuaded Aly to take on a French chef, once employed by the Aga, whose meals were always simple yet exquisite. Once he had settled in beside his cooking-stoves we found we could entertain, and our whole life was transformed, for there is nothing more wretched than a house where the food is bad.

I was the only victim of this happy upheaval, for I began to put on weight.

Aly was obsessed by his weight, and had to watch it closely, for he had not yet given up racing his own horses. So he would suddenly decide to go on a diet, and although it was positively draconian, he showed great will-power and would stick to it. So for a week he would eat absolutely nothing, and every day when luncheon time came he would be off to the Turkish baths. But, lest we should discourage or upset our sublime chef, I had to sit down all alone in our large dining-room and savour every dish.

In the evenings, Aly, who had come to hate restaurants, loved to stay at home. So we used to dine at Neuilly, even when there were no guests.

Aly knew just how people who do the cooking hate to be kept waiting, and would make a big effort to come to meals on time. And whenever he could not manage it, he would positively overflow with apologies to the chef. It was very funny.

The chef, however, had things well under control. He posted a servant on every floor of the house to let him know as soon as Aly left his study.

Some evenings, however, Aly would go too far and would still be working at eleven o'clock. Then the whole house was filled with gloom, and the chef, prostrate and hopeless, would slump on a kitchen chair, looking as suicidal as Vatel must have done. The butler stood waiting in the pantry, staring vacantly ahead, and the chambermaids wandered about on the second floor like lost souls.

It was so heart-rending a sight that I never dared walk round the house, but would pick up a book and pretend I had not seen that anything was amiss.

But Aly was so charming that he only had to appear and everyone, including the chef, whose roast was burnt, would forgive him.

Aly fired people with the most extraordinary devotion. One year he brought a young Ismaili student back from India with him. The boy wanted to come to Europe to learn French and had applied for and been offered the post of personal valet to Aly. He had not the slightest notion of what this involved, but he was so sweet and gentle in the exercise of his duties that his master eventually got used to his ways.

But one day Chottu fell ill with flu, and the chambermaid who was looking after him gave him some suppositories to cure his sore throat. The following day we asked Chottu how he was and he replied in dismay that he was not better.

'Did you use the suppositories?' we asked.

'Yes,' came the reply, 'I ate three of them.'

Aly was beside himself with mirth. He loved to tell people this story for he had a great weakness for slightly broad jokes and would almost choke with laughter as he told them, gesticulating and growing as excited as a small child. He also had a

fund of Persian and Arab stories in which olives and pineapples played a considerable part. These he never tired of telling and would burst into great guffaws of mirth every time.

How different Aly was from the conventional newspaper portraits! No one could ever have been bored in his company, so many-faceted was his personality and so unexpected the things he would do. At his instigation, life would often take on an almost droll twist.

Setting off for Deauville was quite an expedition. Everything had to be taken with us from Paris: the lamps, the silver, the china, and since there was not enough bedding in the Boulevard Maurice Barrès house, we had to move some from The Horizon, too. Then there were never enough beds, so we had to hire some divans. It was quite ridiculous; we would have done better to buy them, but it had become a habit to rent.

The house was always full during the racing season. Aly, like most Orientals, had a great sense of hospitality and treated his guests with infinite consideration. But they in their turn had to submit to every whim of the master of the house.

Sometimes there would be fifteen people assembled round the dining-table at one o'clock, but Aly's place would remain empty while he, alone in the next room, wearing practically nothing, would be busy doing his physical jerks.

Then there were those evenings at the pictures. Whenever a Western was being shown in one of the Deauville cinemas, the entire household was requisitioned, and no sooner had we all swallowed down the last mouthful of our dessert than we were all herded into cars and driven off to watch a lot of galloping cowboys. There were sometimes elderly folk among Aly's guests who did not at all enjoy these party games, but they were too well-bred to protest and had to accept their tedious duty.

Only one inhabitant of Aly's villa ever escaped the film, and that was Aly himself who, from the very moment the opening sequences came on to the screen, would fall sound asleep. And, naturally enough, this did nothing to soothe the irritation of those who did not happen to like Westerns.

But some of the more squeamish of our guests still thought these evenings at the pictures preferable to the trip to St Tropez. It was a traditional outing. One morning Aly would decree that he was taking us all to St Tropez. So every man, woman, boy

and staid ambassador would embark in a *criss-craft* that Aly would proceed to sail across the water like a speedboat. To his intense delight and to the corresponding despair of those ladies who had not acquired their sea legs, the boat leapt along from wave to wave, and that evening, the dining-table was surrounded by a somewhat greenish company of guests with little appetite for food.

When it was a question of pleasure it was nice to be rather fanciful like this, but where practical day-to-day existence was concerned, it had its limitations. Aly's houses, the houses he so loved, were becoming somewhat derelict.

He began to realize this and asked me to take them in hand. These houses completely transformed my life. Before knowing Aly a house had never meant very much to me, for since leaving Elbeuf I had more or less camped wherever I had been living, without ever having time to grow attached to places or things. But now I was with Aly, I became aware of an awakening taste for organizing the domestic side of life, a taste that is inborn in all woman.

Aly loved flowers as much as I did, and the two gardeners at The Horizon knew it. So whenever Aly went down there they would get someone from the local nurseries to come in and plant a whole lot of flowers at the last moment. But this cost a fortune. When I explained to Aly what was happening, he gave me a free hand, so I had a greenhouse built and terraces constructed, and soon we had baskets of lily-of-the-valley and primroses in mid-winter.

I was proud of my flowers; and Aly was so proud of me that whenever he served his guests peas from the kitchen-garden one had the impression he was offering them something immensely precious to eat.

I had a garden made at Deauville in the style of 1900, like the house. The house at Chantilly was surrounded by lawns and vegetable gardens, and I had a flower garden made there too that gave me great satisfaction.

Each house got the garden that most suited it and I would go from one to the other during the course of the year, discussing plans, deciding what we should order, and thinking up new schemes with the gardeners. I and my dogs would often set off alone on these expeditions.

My dogs belonged to Aly, and you may well be astonished to learn their most peculiar history. The father of this entire family was Harvey, the most entertaining dog I have ever encountered in my whole life.

It was he who chose Aly one day in Ireland, and he certainly made no mistake in his choice. They both had the same nature, the same vitality, the same vivacity, the same intelligence and a special kind of instinct. Harvey was the product of a strange breed of dogs, a cross between an Australian terrier and a Sealyham, bred by an erstwhile trainer of Aly's whom he was very fond of. Harvey was the product of the second generation, and since the breed was not yet established, the results were often very odd indeed. Harvey turned out to be quite unlike all the other pups in the same litter, for he was silvery white with three black patches, two black eyes and a black muzzle. His ears were as straight as chrysanthemum stalks, and he had stubby little legs and a square-looking body. Aly had noticed Harvey and Harvey had immediately fallen for Aly, and had wanted to follow him, so Aly let him. And that was how Harvey came to leave Ireland for France.

I first met him at the time Aly was coming to see me at Garches. One evening he brought the strange little creature with him, and Harvey began to sniff all round the house. He jumped up on to my bed, nosed about my things, and made it abundantly clear that he felt utterly at home.

'He's like me,' said Aly, 'he took to you straight away.'

I saw Harvey again that first night at Deauville when I arrived to find the house deserted by both Aly and his guests. The dog was tied to a door by a piece of string about ten feet long, and looked crestfallen and miserable. I wondered why he was tied up like this but heard the following day that he used to run away. Since he spent part of every year in Deauville, he had made friends, and would dash off to see them whenever Aly went to the casino or anywhere else where dogs were not allowed.

I grew very fond of Harvey. Aly adored him but did not really have time to look after him. Soon the dog would no longer leave me, and would accompany me everywhere in the car when we went to visit the different houses. Then Harvey acquired a wife, an adorable little Australian bitch sent over

from England by an admirer of Aly's. She was utterly lost when she arrived. But Harvey gave her dozens of pups and we kept them all. Aly kept on saying that he would like fifty dogs. They were diminutive little creatures who trotted along behind us like a lot of rats; we really did look a funny sight. But Harvey was a formidable animal, for he had never been house-trained, and Aly would be furious with the way he constantly made puddles on the new moquette and even down the curtains in the Boulevard Maurice Barrès.

But Aly would forget his anger in the joy both he and Harvey found in going together to visit the horses, either in the paddocks, at the stud farm, or at Chantilly. The ceremony consisted of going from one loose-box to the next with the trainer. We would enter one box, Aly and the trainer would talk for a while, while Harvey waited, then we all came out again and moved on to the next box, dog and master always keeping to the same rhythm. He never left our sides and seemed to revel in it all. If we went round a whole stud farm he would sometimes walk for hours in the cold, the mud and the rain, just to see the horses. He was gay and happy, exactly like Aly. Now as I write, he lives in Normandy with my mother, for he would be far too miserable in a flat without a garden. He had grown accustomed to spending most of his time in the country.

Thanks to Aly, I too got back my great love of the open air and life in the country that I had lost when I had ceased to be a child.

We often used to dash out of Paris at any hour of the day or night, so desperately had we come to need a breathing-space. We would very often go out to Chantilly in the middle of the night for the sheer joy of waking up in the country, and one night in June, after a ball, we set off for Saint-Crespin, with Aly in his dinner-jacket and me in long dress.

I remember another nocturnal expedition to Saint-Crespin one winter evening when the ground was deep in snow. It was most beautiful. Ours was the only car on the road, which shone white beneath the glow of our headlamps. Aly was so exhausted that I had to keep him awake by talking to him all the time. We reached Saint-Crespin towards six in the morning, where we found one of the chambermaids up and waiting for us. We drank down two huge bowls of hot milk and went to bed conscious

of the wonderful cosy feel of a winter-bound country house. Saint-Crespin was probably the only place on earth where Aly could rest and get some proper sleep. The telephone never disturbed him there and on occasion he was known to have slept for eleven hours at a stretch.

Saint-Crespin gave him a yearning for peace and quiet. One day he said to me:

'I would like us to have a house for just the two of us, a small house with no servants and no telephone.'

'What a dream!' I exclaimed.

But in Aly's world, dreams rapidly took shape.

He bought a plot of land in Geneva, on the outskirts of the city, along the road to Versoix where his father's house was. It ran along the edge of the lake, but was unfortunately a long, narrow strip.

Then one day, Aly, wild with joy, told me that he had managed to purchase the adjacent strip and that now he was going to be able to start building.

'I shall draw up the plans myself,' he said. 'I know just what I want.'

He wanted to build a classical eighteenth-century house in the French style. When the plans were finished, and we had spent long hours discussing the way the interior should be arranged, Aly asked a Swiss architect and his aunt, Madame Magliano, who had already done the interior decoration for Saint-Crespin, if they would undertake to carry out his plans. Aunt Suzanne was also asked to find suitable furniture for the house, and she and I scoured the Paris antique shops together.

Aly and I would often go over to supervise the work, and Aly would give his opinion on every detail. He would check the smallest architectural or decorative point and nothing ever escaped him. Not a single colour was chosen without his consent.

Then at last, after three years, the work was finished and the house looked very peaceful and lovely. We furnished it with exquisite pieces and with things that had caught our fancy. The greatest of all English landscape gardeners, Russel Page, designed a heavenly garden, and we found a Swiss couple, a gardener and his wife, to help about the place.

We were supposed to go there to rest whenever we had a moment, but we never did. I did spend a few days on two or

three occasions, but Aly had business commitments and was unable to come with me. And after that came the accident.

Nevertheless moving in to the house was a wonderful experience, one of the most perfect memories of my whole life with Aly. We spent a week there.

We sometimes prepared our own meals and would sit down to eat them after unpacking the china and glass that had just been delivered. Aly was as happy as a small child and went about opening cupboards and putting things away. He washed all the plates and dishes and wiped them very carefully. I would tease him, saying:

'If some of your admirers could see you now, how horrified they would be!'

At last Aly had the peaceful retreat far from the world that he had always longed for; his house, the perfect expression of his dreams, was one where he could be himself, where he could lead an untrammelled life with the woman of his choice, with his daughter, and any other children he might one day have.

I never heard Aly formulate any precise need for a family, or for roots, but the need was there, expressed in every facet of his frantic search for the outward and visible signs of security bestowed by a home and responsibilities. But he was never to rest in his Genevan home, that had given us such joy and so many a sweet hope for the future during every phase of its construction.

Aly's fate was not to become that peaceful man, dreaming beside a lake surrounded by some of the loveliest scenery in the world. Perhaps he died without knowing it. And yet he often seemed to me to have been aware – still more keenly aware than I myself at the time – of everything that lay between him and an existence in which nothing occurs.

Aly and Bettina in Monte Carlo on New Year's Eve, 1955

13

Aly hardly ever mentioned the woman he had loved more deeply than anyone else on earth. This was his secret, and I understood his reticence in expressing his feelings. The first time I stayed at The Horizon we went out to Monte Carlo one evening. Aly was driving, and as we entered the town he slowed down and spent a few moments in meditation. Then he said solemnly:

'Behind that high, white wall is the cemetery where my mother is buried.'

He never passed this spot without saying a silent prayer. His heart was filled with memories of the mother he had so desperately missed and he would go each year and lay a bunch of violets on her grave.

This most lovely, gentle and simple woman, who had the most wonderful complexion in the whole world, had given birth to a first son, Mehdi, who, however, had lived only a few weeks. So she had devoted herself entirely to bringing up her second child. The Aga travelled a lot, and, like all fathers who have little time to devote to their sons, he behaved unreasonably with Aly, and was capable of being over-indulgent at one moment and far too intransigent the next. His mother had attempted to alleviate matters by bringing Aly up rather strictly.

Whenever Aly was in an expansive mood and talked about his mother, I was always struck by his tone of great respect. But it was only from the odd remark thrown out during the course of conversation that he ultimately conjured up the image of the woman from whom he had inherited his charm and his fantasy.

At the age of nineteen Thérèse Magliano was an Italian dancer in the corps de ballet at the Monte Carlo Opera House, when the young Aga Khan noticed her grace and beauty.

In the spring of 1908 the ballerina and the Prince set out for Egypt and were married in Cairo. Four years later the young Aly was born in Turin.

After her marriage the young Begum had to leave the stage. But she began to sculpt and paint rather well instead, and exhibited her work in France and in England under the name of Yla.

She shunned an active social life, perhaps a little too much in view of her rank and her husband's position. But she worked in Bourdelle's studio and wanted to be treated just like any of his other pupils. She had her chauffeur drop her at the corner of the street so that she could arrive at the studio on foot. No one ever had the slightest idea who she really was until the day a fellow pupil ran into her accidentally at Longchamp.

'But whatever are you doing here?' he exclaimed, astounded at her elegant clothes and beautiful jewels.

She was most embarrassed and had to confess to being the wife of the Aga Khan, but asked her friend not to reveal her secret. So she was able to continue with her sculpture as unobtrusively as before.

She hardly ever wore her jewels and those who ever had the opportunity of seeing them still talk about them to this day. I have seen some photos of her wearing a vast necklace of enormous diamonds.

A few months ago an Ismaili brought me a locket containing a photograph of Aly as a little boy. He had bought it at a sale in London and had had the kind thought of offering it to me. It is a treasured keepsake of mine.

One day when the house in Deauville was being redecorated, I found a trunk full of toys in a cupboard. They had been Aly's once, for Deauville had been his home as a child, and here, on the beach, he had won his first race, on a donkey.

He was sent to England at thirteen, a separation that proved harsh for both mother and son; the Begum was a little anxious that her son's education should have been entrusted to a tutor who specialized in the sons of Maharajas, and her anxiety proved to be well-founded.

'He was supposed to teach me spelling, arithmetic, history, geography and many other things besides,' Aly would say. 'But one day he came to Ascot with me and that was the end of that. He never taught me another thing, for racing had won the day.'

From that day on Aly had no difficulty in leading his tutor

astray, and the study of horses rapidly took precedence over history and geography.

'But I was unbeatable at arithmetic after all my practice at counting the odds,' Aly would add.

So Aly entered the world of racing through this secret door.

'While my tutor was dashing from one bookmaker to another, I was busy ferreting about among the horses' legs having made great friends with the stable boys and jockeys.'

Aly still had two relics of those days, namely, two beautifully bound albums. In one he had stuck pictures of horses, with their pedigrees and titles to fame carefully and beautifully penned in his own fair hand. And the other contained his collection of photos of film stars, all the Brigitte Bardots and Marilyn Monroes of the day, as printed by one of the chocolate firms.

Aly was in England when his mother died of embolism after an operation, a terrible tragedy. The Aga Khan had been elected to the Presidency of the League of Nations and hardly ever had time to see Aly, so his childhood was appallingly lonely.

'My father believed in bringing me up the hard way. He scarcely allowed me any pocket-money, so I had to manage as best I could.'

Aly laughed at the memory of how he did indeed 'manage'.

'To begin with, I used to try my luck with outsiders. By staking very little there was always the possibility of winning a lot. Then whenever I found I hadn't enough money to bet, I would do a little trading. I sold my books, my rackets, my bicycle, and later my car. Then I would buy things back again, and later sell them once more. I very soon acquired a business sense, but of course this was hardly a fitting education for a prince!'

Just think, at the age of sixteen he was already living a man's life in London, and going about with married women. At eighteen he had a liaison with a young society lady who played a very important role in his life. He often talked about her, and owed her a great deal. For it was she who formed his taste, who taught him to notice things and understand people. No one had ever bothered about him before he met her.

This sensitive child was left entirely to his own devices and he undoubtedly experienced some very hard times, which left a permanent mark on him.

Aly's poor disciplined youth fired him with a taste for independence and an immense need for love. For deep down inside, he missed the stability that a happy family life has to offer. When the Aga remarried, his new wife, Princess Andrée, did her best to look after the young man, but it was too late, for by then Aly had grown accustomed to following only his own fancy.

All his intelligence and lucidity never managed to free Aly from his nostalgic longing for the vital sense of security that had been denied him. I was always aware of this inner sadness, that manifested itself in the ferment of his life and in his need to be constantly surrounded by people who liked him.

And yet he, who had suffered so much from his separation from his parents, did not manage to bring up his own children in their family surroundings.

Karim and Amyn, his sons by his first marriage, spent very little time with him. After the war they were sent to the Rosay School in Switzerland, and later to the University of Harvard in the United States. They did spend the whole of August each year at The Horizon with their mother, but their father went off to Deauville then. He did not visit them at school very often and if ever they came to Paris it was only for a brief stay of a day or two.

Later, much later, after the death of the old Aga, Karim spent ten days with us at The Horizon, and there, father and son discovered one another. Karim, finding himself suddenly saddled with considerable responsibilities, drew closer to his father and his greater experience of life. They spent whole days together which was something they had never done before, and I have the impression that they found they had a great deal in common. To that day they had been unaware of this because of Aly's timidity and the fact that he had always felt embarrassed by the presence of his sons.

But he certainly never felt awkward with Yasmin, who was the most enchanting little girl. I could well understand the depth of emotion Aly displayed over this child of his, and I remember the way he used to talk about her before I had met her.

Then one morning he came into my boudoir, looking deliriously happy and shouting:

'My Zine, Yasmin is coming . . . I'm going to see Yasmin!'

Never had Aly been so happy. He had just received a tele-

gram from the United States telling him of his daughter's arrival. He had been at loggerheads with Rita Hayworth's lawyers and had been prevented from having Yasmin to stay with him for over seven years. Then after long and painful litigation, the glad tidings came to him in the early summer of 1956.

From now on Yasmin was to spend her holidays with her father: a month in Paris, a fortnight at The Horizon and the whole of August in Deauville.

But Aly's joy had a small admixture of fear, for it was the first time the little girl had come to live in his house since Rita's famous flight back to America in 1948.

The child's return did not go unnoticed. The photographers were busy with their flash bulbs as Yasmin disembarked at Le Havre, accompanied by her half-sister Rebecca, Orson Welles's daughter, her mother, two governesses and great piles of baggage. Aly was there waiting for them on the quayside and drove them back to Paris in a large station-wagon, where he delivered them at their hotel and spent the evening with them.

I waited at home for him with Major Hall, his Irish stud manager. I felt anxious, knowing how fond Aly had been of Rita, and I wondered how Yasmin would take to me.

The house was surrounded by photographers, waiting night and day behind the railings along the Boulevard Maurice Barrès in the hope of seeing Aly, Yasmin, Rita, or me, while some of the newspapers were already carrying headlines: 'Will Aly take up with Rita again?'

Aly himself, incensed by these false rumours and hoping to give the lie to the scandalmongers, decided one evening that we should both dine at Maxim's with Rita Hayworth. At first I said I would not go, for I did not like the idea of having dinner with Rita, who had played so big a part in Aly's life. What was more, I thought it was both unpleasant and pointless to make a public spectacle of ourselves.

But Aly insisted, so finally I agreed. He kissed me and told me how stupid all the fuss was and that he saw absolutely no reason why we should not meet.

As we walked into Maxim's every pair of eyes in the room turned and stared at us. A great hush fell over everyone, followed by whispered comments. Aly seemed utterly relaxed and

appeared to notice nothing. He tried to liven us up as we ate, but it was no easy matter. Rita, very much the vamp, seemed on edge, while Major Hall, whom Aly had invited too, kept quiet like the good Englishman he was. But I guessed that he was thinking: 'It takes Aly to pull off something like this!' As for me, I had one thought and one only: to be through with the dinner.

Aly alone seemed delighted and I even had the impression that he was rather relishing our embarrassment. Fortunately, there is dancing at Maxim's and the occasional waltz would release us from our awkward attempts at conversation.

The next day Yasmin and Rebecca came to stay at the Boulevard Maurice Barrès house, and burst into my boudoir followed by a very good-humoured Aly.

'Here's Bettina,' he exclaimed in English.

I felt shy, and so did the little girls, for in a flash, with a child's intuition, Yasmin had realized that there were two of us to share Aly's affections. But by lunchtime we were all much more relaxed.

Yasmin was a bewitching little girl. She had a very lovely body, with narrow hips and long legs. She had her father's vivacity, his gestures and his way of walking, and the same way of throwing out her chest, as well as his nose and his chin. But she had inherited her smile and her eyes, with their rather heavy eyelids, from her mother. Her whole face was extremely mobile, and would change from the wildest gaiety to the most unjustified misery; she was very feminine, and wanted to wear her auburn hair long, 'like Mummy's'.

Later I discovered that she was appallingly coquettish and had an incredible urge to make herself up. Her greatest joy was to go into my room, put on some of my high-heeled shoes and plaster her face with make-up in front of a mirror.

The following day we set out for the South.

We had a whole month in which to get to know one another and we became firm friends. But Yasmin's discovery of a father she scarcely knew, of her grandfather the Aga, the Begum, and the new kind of life she was leading in a new house, all had the effect of making her rather too excitable.

And in addition the governesses found Aly and the life he led overwhelming and had lost all authority over the child.

But Aly on his side was so delighted to have his daughter with him that he wanted to spend every minute of every day with her. In fact I was the only element of calm in the entire household. I did my best to quieten Yasmin and to console Rebecca, for Yasmin was as cunning and wily as a little girl of seven can be, and took full advantage of her situation. She was for ever telling Rebecca:

'He's *my* father; it's *my* house; I'm going to see *my* grandfather.'

And of course this made for squabbles and sulks.

Aly made no distinction between his own daughter and Rebecca whom he had brought up while he had been married to Rita, and he would spend all day with the two little girls.

Then he experienced one of the greatest joys of his life. He discovered that Yasmin, his daughter, loved horses as much as he did. Not only did she adore riding, but she had an eye for horses at the races or on the stud farms. Without ever having been taught, she was somehow able to distinguish a good horse from a poor one, and she would follow her father, as good as gold, into the loose-boxes, and never miss a single word of Aly's conversations with his trainers, all of which was most surprising in a little girl.

Father and daughter were as strikingly alike in character and tastes as they were physically. Like Aly, Yasmin loved the life at Deauville and would spend all day in the riding ring in front of the house, where I would see her galloping, doing tricks, or setting out for a ride on her favourite horse regardless of the weather.

Then she relinked a family tradition, for, like her father before her, wearing the family colours, she won a trotting race.

In the afternoons she would come with us to the races, but we had to keep an eye on her to prevent her from becoming a nuisance to all our friends by begging them to bet on the tote for her with the money she had managed to extort from her father.

But if one of Aly's horses won, that was quite another matter. She would jump about and clap her hands and shout out, right in the centre of the grandstand:

'We won, Daddy, we won.'

And everyone on the racecourse found this boisterous little girl most entertaining.

By using all the charms she was so well aware of, Yasmin found it very easy to get just what she wanted. Her playmates had to do just what she told them, and in any case they would never have dared to stand up to her. But one day I did see her put out of countenance.

I had taken her to lunch at my sister's, where she found herself suddenly plunged into a family of six – five boys and a girl – who, being accustomed to doing everything together, took not the slightest notice of her. In a flash, she was transformed, and became shy and quiet.

On another occasion she showed such a degree of diplomacy that when I told her father about what she had done, he was greatly amused.

It happened in Deauville, too, during the course of another holiday. That year Rebecca had not come over with Yasmin. Rita was in Europe and announced her intention of coming to see her daughter. The house was full of guests.

'I've got to go over to England for the races there,' said Aly. 'You can look after them all.'

This was typical of him, and I felt pretty vexed. I had not seen Rita since the dinner at Maxim's, and since she was going to be staying in the house I made plans to play golf or go to the races every day.

One evening towards six I came home to change for dinner. Yasmin came into my room as she often would.

'Do you know, my Mummy's here,' she exclaimed.

Then, tugging me by the hand, she began to shout:

'Mummy, Mummy, here's Bettina.'

And she pushed me into a room where I found myself face to face with Rita.

We both laughed at this unexpected gesture and chatted together for a while. Yasmin had sensed that it was up to her to put everyone at their ease.

The following day we gave a big luncheon party, but Rita seemed all on edge. Perhaps she found it too uncomfortable to be back in the house where she had lived for so long with Aly. She left during the course of that afternoon.

Aly had great plans for Yasmin, and was longing for the day

she would come and live nearer. He wanted to give her a more European education, and wished also to protect her from the dangers of a life he knew only too well.

Since Aly's death I have often felt I would like to see Yasmin again, and when I went to Hollywood with Elizabeth Taylor and Eddie Fisher, I did try to see her, but in vain. But then last winter I heard a childish voice on the telephone. It was her. She had arrived in Paris the previous day with some friends and had phoned me immediately. I rushed out to meet her, and my heart was pounding. She was waiting for me in the street and threw her arms around my neck.

'Bettini, Bettini, Bettini!' she repeated.

This is what she used to call me. I took her out to lunch the following day and she asked me all kinds of questions about the dogs, and Chantilly, and Deauville, and told me about her own school. She suddenly seemed so grown-up. She never said a word about how sad she was to come back to Paris for the first time without being able to see her father. I did not want to leave her.

She had always seemed so close to Aly, and like her father she had this wonderful gift of youth that the passing of time can never change.

I could see him again, surrounded by Yasmin's young friends at a tea-party they gave in Deauville. Aly adored this kind of party. He enjoyed himself tremendously and right from the start seemed to enter the children's world quite effortlessly.

He also adored my nephews and would laugh every time he thought about the first time they ever met.

When he first saw them, the eldest boy was twelve, and the whole bunch, five boys and one girl, had been playing at 'being Aly' for some time. They had made him part of their games, where he took his place with other heroes, inspired by television, like Sir Lancelot, Ivanhoe and Tarzan, and he figured in them as a mysterious Oriental Prince, covered in pearls and diamonds, wearing a plumed turban, and a silken, gold-braid robe. This was Aly.

'I'm all powerful; I shall get in my plane, and come and kill you. I am Aly Khan,' the youngest boy, Mimi, would declare.

But how could this Aly Khan they had never seen not be a fairy-tale figure? He did such wonderful things for them. At

Christmas he would send them the most fantastic presents, and in the summer he would lend them a house in Deauville where the whole family spent its holidays.

But then one Sunday when we were staying at Saint-Crespin, Aly and I decided to go over to Elbeuf. So we rang up. They were all waiting for us, desperately impatient for us to arrive. Aly turned up dressed like a gardener, in his flannel shirt, blue jeans and down-at-heel shoes.

The children simply would not believe that this was 'their Aly Khan', and it took them a week to recover from their disappointment. After we had gone, my sister was besieged with questions:

'But why was he dressed like that? But he talks like us!'

From that day on the Oriental Prince vanished from their games, but they enrolled Aly as one of their playmates, a substitution he found enchanting and immensely flattering.

Soon the true situation seemed even better than the imagined one, for children know infallibly who loves them, and my nephews, all sensibly brought up in a united family, were ready to open their hearts to him.

'Why don't you have them over more often?' Aly used to ask me, for he enjoyed their company and did not seem aware of the demands their schooling made on them.

One day it occurred to us we might take Philippe, the eldest, to Ireland with us when we went over to visit Aly's stud farms there. My nephews were too numerous to have ever done any travelling; but on the other hand I could hardly have taken them all without their parents whom they were quite unaccustomed to leaving. So we decided that Philippe alone should be our companion.

Ireland seemed to him like the other end of the world. And he had never flown before, either. His parents drove him from Normandy to Le Bourget where he joined us.

My sister and brother-in-law were very upset. In all the excitement they had completely forgotten that you needed a passport to go to Ireland, and just as we were about to board the tiny Aer Lingus plane the authorities noticed that Philippe had no papers. There was a terrible fuss, the chief of police was called over and an endless discussion took place. Then eventually it was all settled. Philippe was ecstatic, and although somewhat

overawed at having been the object of such general interest, he would not have missed his trip for anything.

In Ireland Aly took him everywhere. He showed him the horses, he took him round the stud farms, and they both seemed equally happy. He loved showing off to others whatever was dear to his own heart.

They even went to a boxing match in a club Aly sponsored for the stable boys and other people employed on the stud farm. People had come from all the neighbouring villages to watch boxing matches between beginners of fourteen and fifteen, but there were also some professional boxers. Philippe loved it all, and still speaks of those Irish contests.

Another of my nephews spent his convalescence after an illness at The Horizon. The butler, Gany, whom I have already mentioned, was as child-like as any child, and took him under his wing. One day I found the two of them in the dining-room, with their eyes glued to a portrait of Aly's great-grandfather. It was a very finely painted, handsome portrait, like a Persian miniature. Gany was telling a story, one of those fables that runs with the black beard, dressed in a pearl-sewn robe, while the little boy listened to him, all agog.

My nephew saw Gany again on another occasion in Paris. Aly had suggested I might take him with all the children on one of the little steam-boats that plies up and down the Seine.

When I got home, I had to tell Aly all about our excursion and describe every detail of Gany's and the children's reactions.

This man Gany worshipped Aly, who had the rare gift of making simple people love him, a gift that always reveals the truth about a person's character. For Aly had managed to remain natural and simple at heart, which was apparent in his bantering manner, his comments on life and in his general demeanour.

He also had the ability, a fairly uncommon one, to put himself in someone else's place, and was always thinking of the best way to help anyone in need. For instance, one day after attending a race-meeting with a friend, he went right out of his way to visit an elderly Englishman who had just undergone an operation in hospital, and whose medical bills Aly was paying. He would go off to see him regularly without telling anyone, be-

cause he had once known the man on the race-tracks and knew him to be alone in Paris, without family or funds.

How badly the newspapers portrayed Aly, who was really full of good qualities! They could never see anything but the superficial side, and never mentioned his true character, which was in fact much more interesting. Only those close to him knew him and valued him at his true worth.

People say one can tell a woman's character by the contents of her handbag, but I think a man's pockets can be equally informative.

Among all these things would be his glasses, the glasses he could never find, the glasses that for him constituted a calamity, a permanent feeling of regret. 'I'm old, I'm losing my hair, I'm getting fat and I have to wear glasses,' he would often reiterate with genuine sadness, even if it was soon forgotten.

His pockets also contained a whole collection of keys, keys to the house, the cars, the garages, the bank safes, suitcases, cupboards and secret boxes. They came in all sizes, but fortunately most of them were small. They would get lost among business letters and notes from admirers, that often lay unopened in his pockets.

Aly had neither a fountain pen nor a gold pencil, so whenever he needed to write anything down, he would take the most ghastly stubs of pencil from his pockets, the sort of thing given away free to advertise some product or other, pencils that he had picked up goodness knows where. He had no diary either, like most business men, but would jot down engagements and telephone numbers on race cards or on old letters dug up from the bottom of his pockets. He even kept a small, utterly worthless notebook that the bank had given him as part of a publicity campaign; he thought it was pretty, so pretty that he would not use it. One might have thought that he would forget his engagements he had so casually written down, but not at all. He would arrive late, but he always did arrive, for he had a prodigious memory.

There was always loose money in the midst of all this chaos, and sometimes even more fantastic objects like those tiny bottles of liqueur that spirit merchants give away as samples. He would keep these because, although so rich and so generous, he loved people to give him presents, however small. Whenever an aircraft

was about to take off and the air hostess handed round sweets to the passengers, Aly would always take a whole handful, for it gave him the feeling that he was getting back a little of the vast sums of money he was for ever paying the air companies.

Although his appearance was casual, Aly was most particular about his grooming. He had one real phobia: the smell of tobacco. And he would suck Sen-Sen cachous to keep his breath smelling sweet. He had a very acute sense of smell and would air all the rooms in the house whenever anyone had visited us wearing too much perfume.

He had wardrobes full of an incredible array of European and Oriental clothes, of uniforms, tropical garbs, jackets made of skins from the Far West, Spanish shirts, Arab burnouses, or dressing-gowns cut from cloth of gold. But he always wore the same clothes and the same black ties since his mother's death.

He dressed very simply, and his subtle refined taste was expressed only in the quality of the cloth he chose, which was always cashmere or vicuna. Once a year he would spend a morning with his London tailor, choosing suits. But dressing was more of a sheer necessity to him than a pleasure for its own sake. He used to wear dark grey, black, light grey and sometimes navy blue.

But he loathed having to wear a coat, and one would see him at the races on the coldest imaginable days, with no coat on and with his tie blowing in the wind.

'But you are mad! You'll catch your death!' his friends would say.

He enjoyed wonderful health, and never felt the cold. Even in the depths of winter he would refuse to wear gloves, and I never saw him in any, even in the mountains. He thought men looked ghastly in gloves.

He had bought himself a black leather jacket in the United States which he would wear constantly, as part of his dinner-suit or to go to the races. We were both very fond of this jacket, which I called the Teddy-Boy coat. I still have it.

He would always wear the same hat to the races and this was as much a question of habit as of superstition. It was an extremely weathered old felt hat with brim well softened by the English drizzle.

'Where's my hat? Find it quick!' he would shout through the house.

Every day it was the same, for, except when the classic races were being run, for which he would wear a top-hat, he would never have dreamed of going to the races without his old brown felt. But when he came home he would put it down just anywhere, and of course the following day he could not find it, and everyone would be in a terrible state.

Sometimes as he changed for dinner he would say to the chambermaid:

'I lost today and I was wearing this suit. So put it away, will you; I don't want to wear it again.'

Was he really superstitious? I don't think so, but he enjoyed pretending he was.

He so loathed any kind of compulsion that he utterly despised the rules of correct dress. He refused to wear white like everyone else to play tennis, but always turned up on the courts in an old pair of faded blue linen trousers and a cotton shirt which he would take off when he felt too hot.

One year we took a week's holiday at Megève. It was the first time for ten years that Aly had been near snow. He had once had an accident that had kept him in a plaster cast for a year, not that this had prevented him from dancing, driving and rushing about. But he had lost his former skill at winter sports, although he did ski with me down the Mandarines, one of the nursery slopes. Even then he had not thought it necessary to put on proper ski clothes like everyone else in Megève and wore his town trousers and a sports jacket.

Certain objects had a mysterious attraction for Aly, and he would never be without them. He had received some magnificent watches as gifts, but the one he liked best of all was a large, vulgar, cheap metal one with a worn leather strap. He would even keep it on in the evenings.

He had, and had always possessed, everything the heart of man could desire, and yet had never grown the least blasé about it all.

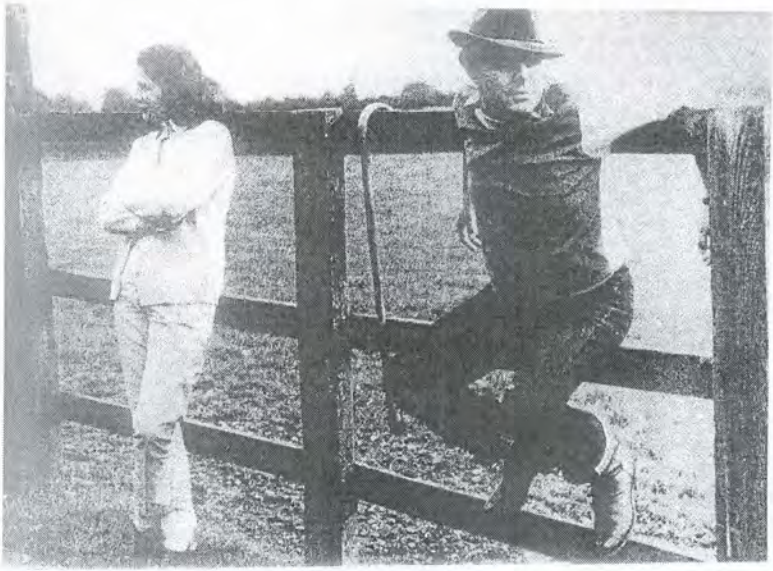
On the contrary, he constantly hankered after new things both for himself and for those he loved, for he had the art of giving.

The first time he ever gave me jewellery from Cartier was one summer, our first summer together. I had accompanied him

Photo Claude

Bettina with her dogs in front of Chantilly

and in 1960 at Chantilly



Ally and Bettina visit stud farms in Ireland ...

and in Venezuela

on a shopping expedition and was sitting waiting in the open car. When he returned a few minutes later he tossed a small box on to my knees before jumping in, as he usually did, over the car door, without bothering to open it. I opened the parcel and discovered a magnificent wrist-watch that I am wearing to this day.

He loved parties and would go to immense trouble to prepare them. His own birthday was always quite a ceremony. He was born on June 13. The number thirteen had dogged his whole family, and was, alas, to dog him too. His grandmother had been born on the thirteenth, and had died on the thirteenth. His father died on the thirteenth of July, and he himself departed from this world on the night of the twelfth to the thirteenth of May.

I always remember a dinner party I planned as a surprise for him on his birthday. It was the first time his whole family had ever been present all together. Yasmin was there, and Karim and Amyn, Aly's three children, and Princess Andrée, Sadri, and his wife Nina. I had also invited all Aly's friends to join us. The preparations had been made with the greatest possible secrecy, but naturally Aly, who was as curious as a small child, had been watching all my comings and goings. And in addition, the journalists had heard about the little party and had come to Chantilly, giving this family gathering far greater prominence that it really deserved. We had refused to allow them in.

Then suddenly in the middle of the meal we heard some shots ring out, and we all rushed to the windows. The gardener, who had been bringing some more wood in, had discovered three photographers hiding in the drawing-room. He had fired at them with cartridges filled with salt, which terrified everyone, though no one was hurt.

Whenever Aly's friends wanted to give him a present, they would always rack their brains to think of something. For whatever could a man want who was so fantastically well provided for already? Aly would be both astonished and amused.

'If only they'd given me a dozen pair of underpants; they'd be so useful!' he would say.

He meant this perfectly seriously, and I'm sure that such a gift, which no one ever thought of, would have pleased him immensely. He absolutely hated having to order himself shirts. And he also loved anyone giving him anything for the house,

even if it were only a set of glasses or very ordinary vases.

But the present that delighted him more than any other was the one his son Karim gave him the year he became Aga.

It was at Christmas, and Aly was very moved to discover he had been given a set of diamond cuff-links and shirt studs. He had a touching way of opening parcels, examining their contents, then of wrapping them up again in all the paper, as well as he could, taking infinite pains, as if planning to give himself another surprise. All these little habits were a legacy from his childhood, as was his love of tradition and spectacle.

This was why he, an earnest Moslem, would go to Midnight Mass at Christmas. He would go for the singing, the music, the smell of incense and the candles, for the mysterious, festive atmosphere that filled the church of Saint-Paul de Vence or of any other small inland village. He was a very sensitive man, and whenever we talked about art or painting I would delight in this sensitivity.

He talked about art without a trace of pedantry. He knew nothing about what was fashionable in the artistic world at any given moment and detested passing infatuations with a particular artist. He wanted his heart to be the only judge.

No one ever saw him at a private viewing because he never led that kind of social life, but he would often spend a free moment in an art gallery when he was in Paris, and would tell me what he had discovered that evening.

It was while we were living together that he got to know the artist Jacques Villon, and used to go out to Puteaux to see him. Villon had a reputation for being extremely unsociable, and he kept right away from the fashionable world. But he liked Aly and had even shown a certain surprise at his appreciation of art.

Aly wanted the old painter to sell him a very ancient canvas dating back to the period before he became a cubist; it was a portrait of the artist's own father. Villon wanted to keep it and would have required much persuasion to part with it. But Aly was always so charming that I feel sure he would have managed it in the end had not fate decreed otherwise.

Aly had also once been friendly with Dufy, but his friendship was marred by one regret, amounting almost to a feeling of remorse. Aly had asked Dufy to do a big painting of horse-racing for The Horizon. But when the canvas arrived, Aly must

have been in a bad mood, or overburdened with various worries. Whatever the reason, he refused to accept the picture. So someone else bought it, and Aly always regretted what he had done.

I would like to put an end to a myth about Aly and his paintings. Indeed, there are countless myths about him that need to be exploded.

In 1958 Aly decided to sell his collection of paintings, and the sale took place at the Charpentier Galleries. Everyone was busy saying that Prince Aly Khan was getting rid of his pictures in order to be able to feed his horses. Of course the horses cost a great deal to keep, but Aly certainly did not need to obtain money from his pictures to be able to maintain his stables. He simply wanted to buy some new paintings.

Aly followed the negotiations very closely, as he always did, for he had the great gift of being interested in everything. I think he began to regret his decision but, alas, by then it was too late to call off the sale.

He was infuriated by what kept on appearing in the press. But above all he felt sad at the thought of parting with the works of art he had lived with for so long. He saw his Dufys go, and his Boudins, with his Degas and his Utrillo from The Horizon. And when the moment came to knock down the very famous Dufy that hung in his room in the Boulevard Maurice Barrès, a painting of the racecourse at Deauville, his heart must have been filled with still greater anguish. But his father, realizing how unhappy he was, bought the picture himself and gave it to Aly as a birthday present.

This sale of Aly Khan's pictures, organized by Maître Ader, the famous auctioneer, was one of the major events in Paris that year. Everyone who was anyone joined the crush in the biggest and most famous art gallery in the city, which was full of photographers, radio and television commentators. Mike Todd and Elizabeth Taylor had come up from the South and, after fighting it out with an English buyer, managed to obtain the Degas, most of the Dufys, and one Utrillo.

When we got back to the Boulevard Maurice Barrès I took care not to talk about the sale, for I realized that Aly was too deeply upset by it all. But then a few weeks later we went down to The Horizon, where we saw the huge expanses of bare white wall still bearing the marks of the vanished pictures. Aly made

up his mind that he must replace them as soon as possible. He bought some by Dufy, whose brightly-coloured, happy, expansive pictures seemed to suit him. Later he also bought some pictures of horses by English and Dutch masters. And we never mentioned the sale at the Charpentier Galleries again.

But I feel sure that the memory of those agonizing days continued to haunt him, and several times felt convinced that this was so. My conviction was only further confirmed by the delight he told me he had experienced at getting the Dufy back after his father had bought it.

But Aly was never one to hark back to the past. His whole life was spent in the present or in planning the future, and it was undoubtedly this intensity of life in him that made people like him so much and that helped in addition to keep him in true contact with others. He was as much loved by ordinary racegoers on the green as by any duchess, and could take to anyone on his own terms without the slightest difficulty. Time may pass, the years may sweep away fashions, alter men's habits, even change men themselves, but Aly's friends will never forget the true riches to be found in his heart.

14

Aly's time-table was always full. In fact before I knew him, I could never have begun to imagine anyone living at such a pace. Yet this apparently disordered life, with its ceaseless activity, obeyed its own rules and customs that were strictly adhered to each day, under all circumstances.

Aly always had to be woken in the mornings, wherever he was and no matter what time he had gone to bed the previous night. It is only fair to add that he slept like a child, and a few hours' sleep would set him up again, no matter how tired he had been before, although it was always hard to waken him.

At Deauville or at The Horizon, as soon as the curtains had been pulled, the chambermaid would bring him a tray full of good things: there would be coffee, hot croissants, several sorts of stewed fruit and a basinful of peeled, green almonds. Aly was never hungry. He would take a few almonds and a little of the stewed fruit, that was all. But he would have been furious if a single croissant had been missing.

In the Boulevard Maurice Barrès house, the tray would be taken up to the top floor, where he joined his secretary, Monsieur Bigio, each morning.

Before dressing, Aly would sit in his dressing-gown, still only half awake, and read the papers and deal with his post, with the help of Monsieur Bigio, who had once been secretary to the Jockey Club in Cairo. He needed to be very, very patient, for his nerves were often sorely tried.

Aly would always sit in the same chair, often beside the telephone, with his legs crossed Turkish-fashion and ask for his coffee to be poured. It had to be scalding hot. But he would only drink it when it was cold, at the end of the morning, before going downstairs to dress.

First he would read *Sport Complet*, then glance through *Le Figaro*, the *New York Herald Tribune*, and the sports pages of the English daily papers.

Then his nerves would be stretched almost to the limit of their endurance by the press cuttings an agency used to send him. His weakness was in reading them at all, for it was a rare thing indeed for there not to be some inaccurate statement in one of the cuttings, and this would make him furious. He would screw the papers up in a ball and hurl them on to the carpet, where his dog Harvey, accustomed to this kind of game, lay in wait for them every morning and caught them as they flew through the air.

Having completed the task of reading the papers, he went on to his correspondence. According to him, he received five different categories of letters: business letters, letters from Ismailites, letters about his horses, bills, and letters from women.

He would hand the bills to Monsieur Bigio, saying, as if they were no concern of his:

'Here, these are for you!'

These bills, connected with his stables, his stud farms, his houses, or from garages, were often of astronomical proportions, and Aly preferred to let his secretary find out how much they were for. Then while Monsieur Bigio sifted all the bills Aly would read the letters concerned with his horses or his business transactions.

Next would come the personal correspondence and the love-letters. He never used to open all these strange missives, but would sort them out first according to their handwriting. There were some he read immediately, and some he stuffed into his pocket. Then there were those to be opened later, which in fact never were.

I have always been most intrigued by this correspondence that contained exceedingly surprising revelations about the way women behave. And I must admit that my curiosity occasionally got the better of me and I would glance over some of the letters, although Aly only very rarely left any of them lying about.

He would slip them into his dressing-gown pocket just like a child trying to hide something, then use the same strategy to transfer them into his suit pockets. But eventually, after several changes of suit, the day would come when he mislaid some of them.

I could scarcely believe my eyes as I read these burning, passionate pages, often written by the most respectable of ladies who had been to visit us with their husbands. These love-letters would come from all over the world, wherever Aly had been on his travels, and I do not believe that anyone could ever have received as many letters of this kind as Aly did during his lifetime. What I saw of them taught me a lot about the way women behave, for they all seemed utterly to forget their husbands, their children and indeed me, which seemed to me the height of shamelessness.

How was I to go on appearing serene amid so many rivals and so much feigned friendship? At first I felt strengthened by Aly's love, and it was a long time before jealousy managed to pierce my tough protective layer of tranquillity and destroy my sense of the ridiculous.

All I needed was a little reassurance from Aly, and I would sometimes talk to him about my feelings of exasperation, but always with the greatest possible calm. He would laugh, alternately mocking, tender, or serious, and thus give me back the necessary strength to feel happy and to be able to greet my rivals with a smile.

Aly loved me and I loved him enough for all these matters to seem trivial.

Then one day I began to feel so exasperated by the ever-growing, overwhelming army of enamoured ladies, that I too began to make little jealous scenes. Every other woman now seemed a potential enemy. The fact that Aly had not yet married me kept hope burning still in all their hearts.

But I knew in the depth of my heart that Aly still loved me and that as time went on he was growing more and more attached to me and needed me more than ever. But one had to know Aly and his need for security to realize this.

Even so I did give way to jealousy, for I was incapable of not feeling hurt when I saw how delighted he always was to be the centre of all these amorous intrigues. Yet I soon realized that scenes never did any good, and that I always ended up more miserable than before, with the added certainty that every word of reproach could only drive Aly further and further from me.

He was peeved with me for behaving like this, and would say:

'What, are you just like all the others?'

It was an adroit thing to say, for it made me aware of how ridiculous I was being.

Then one day, without any special effort on my part, I suddenly grew more philosophical. I realized it was more important to love and forgive Aly than to try to imagine he would one day turn into an irreproachable paragon of virtue.

So I gave up the struggle and took out my patience again as if it had been a piece of tapestry work. And in the end I found that these love-letters meant as little to me as letters from complete strangers.

There were some letters Aly gladly let me read: many requests for money or work, and the occasional letter from a crazy inventor. There were love-letters in this lot, too, often accompanied by photographs of the prospective candidate.

Once on January 1 Aly received a badly tied parcel:

'I say, it's from the Deauville woman!'

He had recognized the handwriting. For the past ten years this complete stranger had been sending him regular assurances of her undying love. He opened the parcel rather gingerly, with a pained look on his face, only to find an old satin shoe inside which he hurled as far away as it would go, angry with himself that his curiosity should have got the better of him.

I realized then that some people were capable of spending a lifetime writing to someone they had never met and would never meet. Some of these unfortunate creatures did not even ask anything of Aly, but were quite content merely to declare their passion. Others would make some request in the hope that it might bring them face to face with their beloved.

Aly was so used to getting letters like these that he usually could tell what was inside without opening them. He never threw them away either, but stuffed them into piles of those little bags the airline companies hand out to their passengers. Whenever he went off on his travels he would take some of them with him, just picking at random, thinking perhaps he might have time to go through some of the letters in them. But he never did, and the bags would travel right round the world and come back again to form a great pile in one corner of his study.

Aly had an absolute abhorrence of anything he considered morbid or unhealthy, be it on the physical or the moral plane. He felt upset by, or even frightened of certain subjects and

attitudes, a fear that age did nothing to attenuate. He had a horror of anonymous letters, of which, unfortunately, we both received a great number.

For many years we were pursued by a strange bird of ill-omen, almost certainly a woman we did not know. She was undoubtedly in love with Aly and used to write to us either in English or in Italian, telling each of us ghastly things about the other. She must have known Aly's mother well, and kept herself thoroughly well informed about every detail of what we did. There were certain disturbing details in the midst of her frenzied meanderings, though. For she used to describe the clothes we had worn to the races, and would say that she had seen Aly on a certain day having tea with a woman in a *patisserie* on the rue de Prony.

About six months before Aly's death she stopped pestering us. I thought I had managed to identify her, for whenever I went to the races I had the feeling I was being followed by a very dark-skinned woman of about sixty, who always stood behind the window to our box. And every time I turned round I saw her staring fixedly at me. It really was a horrible sensation, and I had the feeling of living in a Hitchcock film. I had a sense of foreboding that something was about to happen.

A couple of months after Aly's death I received a note from her that read:

'You got what was coming to you. You deserve everything that's happened to you.'

It was her last letter. The number of these anonymous letters varied in proportion to the number of articles the press wrote about us. If ever our impending marriage was announced, we would be deluged with them. Aly seemed to have the knack of smelling out the offensive letters, even before he had unsealed them, but if by some oversight he happened to open one, he would pull a wry face and throw it away.

Aly's letter-reading was constantly interrupted by phone calls, which was hardly surprising. There were two lines to the Boulevard Maurice Barrès house, and they were both permanently engaged. The telephone seemed an integral part of Aly's life. Yet what was so extraordinary was that the very moment he left the house, it suddenly stopped ringing. It was most mysterious. The house grew calm as soon as he had gone; it was

just like the Sleeping Beauty's palace, with everyone lying prostrated from sheer exhaustion.

But no sooner had Aly returned than the game would begin all over again.

'Your Highness, someone is calling you from London ... Your Highness, Karachi is on the line.'

Aly must certainly have been one of the telephone company's best customers, as he was where the airlines were concerned, too. Whenever he was away he would phone me every day from the most unlikely places. I have had calls from the heart of Pakistan, from Venezuela, from India. I used to be amazed to think how he managed to get calls through from some of these places. He would ring from New York to tell me he was bored, or from Calcutta to say he found the heat stifling. He hardly ever wrote, although I did receive a few letters from him, in particular a beautiful one from Zanzibar. He had phoned from there, but had wanted to write too, to describe the country to me, which seemed to him to be a real heaven on earth. He wanted to take me there.

At the end of the morning Aly, exhausted and already late for his other appointments, would go down to the bathroom where the chambermaid had laid out all his things. She would often ask me which suit he intended to wear, and he liked me to choose one for him. I knew he was so busy that it seemed pointless to worry him over such trivialities.

I enjoyed the time I spent with Aly as he was dressing. I used to sit down on a huge pouf, for at last we could have a chat together. But unfortunately these moments of intimacy were all too often interrupted by the telephone or by his secretary coming in to take down correspondence. Aly would sometimes even dictate letters from his bath.

The chambermaid waited for him with his clothes, and would put his shoes on for him as he tied his tie. As soon as he had finished dressing he would run downstairs.

There was always a crowd of people waiting to see him on every floor of the house. He would say a word or two to them as he went by, and had to be as cunning as a Sioux Indian to make his escape. If he wanted to leave the house without being seen he would slip out by the kitchen door, just like in a play.

Although the chauffeur might have been waiting for him for

at least an hour, if the engine was not actually running as he got into the car, he would exclaim indignantly:

'What! Isn't Lucien in the car yet?'

Every day it was exactly the same. Then he would dash off to his various meetings, that would keep him out for a completely unpredictable time. Sometimes he would return one hour or two after going out, but occasionally he would only get back in the evening. I never enquired what he had been doing, but used to learn by chance that he had been to the bank, or had gone to the mosque. He would arrange to meet me at the races if one of his horses were running at Longchamp or Saint-Cloud, but he never stayed there long, either. No sooner had his horse crossed the finishing line than off he went again, always in a hurry.

I used to go as far as the car with him, in the vain hope that he might take me with him, and I would watch his car speed off in a cloud of dust, thinking rather sadly what an elusive man he was.

'See you soon, Zine my love,' he would call. 'Hurry up home now. I've fixed a dinner party and an evening's bridge for tonight, so go and have a word with the chef about it, will you.'

He never even needed to talk to me to know what was in my mind, and he went off pleased that he had been able to give me something specific to do that would help to make me forget my sadness at not having spent the afternoon with him.

To get back into the house again he had to use the same stratagem as to get out, for during his absence still more visitors had arrived, and the drawing-room, passageways, and corridors were all being used as waiting-rooms.

His regular visitors all had their fixed places. Alec Head, Aly's trainer, Madame Vuillier, who bred his horses, and her assistant Robert Muller, would all wait on the third floor, in the corridor leading to his study.

Ismailis, accompanied by their wives in saris, were always put in the drawing-room. They invariably brought Aly red roses, the Aga's family emblem. During his father's last years Aly took over the majority of his religious functions and never a day passed without some of the faithful coming to see him from India, Madagascar, Syria, or other even more remote places.

Whole families would come to seek his advice, and would ask him about their family affairs or questions of health. He even had to intervene occasionally where the problem concerned a woman, which was indeed a rare thing, since Ismailis regard everything connected with women as strictly private. But people would tell Aly anything, for he had the exceptional gift of being able to make personal contact with anyone. He readily understood other people and his judgments were sound. I feel sure that the advice he gave was most valuable.

Aly also had to see his bookmaker, who came to the house to take bets on English races; other visitors would include the architect of one of his houses, a friend who had come to ask a favour, and the painter he had commissioned to design the menus for the dinner he was giving after the Grand Prix. He had the gift of being able to deal with several totally different things at once. His capacity for work was prodigious, excessively so, in fact, for it made him very impatient. He grasped everything very quickly and would expect the same of everyone around him. And if people were slow to see some point, he would fly into a furious rage, which meant that anyone working with him needed nerves of steel and an extraordinary degree of devotion.

Naturally these rather unreasonable demands went hand in hand with great charm, which Aly took care to foster as much as he could.

As I have said, he loved people to like him, and women as well as men showed him a considerable degree of devotion. He had always had women secretaries before Monsieur Bigio, and had always led them an impossible dance. When he came in in the evenings, sometimes after midnight, he would start working again, and his secretary had to be there. He had a young Russian woman of about thirty-eight to work for him once; she was tall and very smart, but, being of an extremely nervous disposition, she had to take sleeping pills; then of course she had to take more pills to wake her up. She drank coffee all day long, chain-smoked, talked a lot and was generally rather scatty.

Aly often lost his temper with her and never let her get away with a single mistake. His secretary's tears were hardly the thing to calm his nerves, and he would come down from the study looking pale and fretful.

The unfortunate secretary hung her head. But if she heard him come in at two in the morning she would run down in her dressing-gown to make sure he did not need her. And of course he often took advantage of this nocturnal devotion and would begin working again. Towards five or six in the morning I had to phone up to him to tell him to go to bed. But the fact was that my phone call woke him up, for he would have fallen asleep, letter in hand, while his secretary sat there terrified at the thought of dragging him from so deep a sleep.

If he began work in his dinner-suit, he would first take off his tie, his jacket and his shoes. Then followed his socks, and before he knew where he was he would be sitting in an armchair with all his clothes strewn around him on the floor. Anyone inadvertently opening the door would have roared with laughter at the sight, but the secretary was used to it.

Most of the time he worked sitting on the floor, and his secretary had to do likewise to make notes.

When Aly went to America, this nice secretary never turned up the following day. We thought perhaps she was not well and had been unable to come, but not at all; we never saw her again. What had happened to her was a complete mystery. No one ever found out.

Aly loathed waste, and could not stand anyone leaving anything on his plate at a meal. I always found it surprising that one who was so generous could be so thrifty as well. It was always over such little things, too. For instance, if we were giving a dinner party at home, whether small or large, and Aly found himself sitting next to me, he would never use his own serviette, so as not to crease it, but would say what a pity it was to rumple such a beautifully folded napkin.

He would use mine instead.

He had a great weakness for sorbets, and every day we would have a different kind. I can still see myself in the car on the way to Orly airport, with a plate in one hand, feeding Aly as he drove. He was always in such a hurry that he had not had time to finish his sorbet at the meal.

He was always in a rush, and we lived in a permanent state of panic. He could never even leave on time to catch a plane and would drive himself, for he hated being driven through the crowded Paris streets, preferring to manage for himself. But

even while driving, he would go on working, so his secretary had to come along too, and would sit there making notes till the very last minute; there would be the chauffeur too, and the dogs, and the luggage. Then when we reached the airport we still had to rush. But everything would turn out all right in the end, for all the pilots liked Aly and the planes would wait for him, while even those passengers who were most displeased about being kept waiting would forgive him when they saw him dashing up the gangway, his arms laden with letters and newspapers. He would beg their forgiveness like a small boy caught doing something naughty, and everyone would forgive him.

Even on normal days our lives seemed to be perpetual rush. There would be more visitors after the races, and they would keep Aly busy until dinner time. If we were going out the visiting would finish earlier, but even so we never managed to arrive on time anywhere. And if we were dining on our own, Aly would go on seeing people or telephoning until ten o'clock.

And time still had to be found in the midst of all these visits to fit in the barber, the masseur and the manicurist. They too needed to be very patient.

Aly's hairdresser was an old Figaro of a man who had been used to Aly's whims for years. He was quite imperturbable, and would cut his hair while he signed cheques or put his shoes on. The masseur used to be summoned for seven o'clock, and would set up his couch and wait for his client, sometimes until midnight, and no sooner was Aly lying there before him than he would fall sound asleep.

The manicurist too, had to come at any time of the day or night, but she did not seem to mind any more than the hairdresser or the masseur, for Aly treated her with his customary warmth and indulged the same fancies with her as with the others.

After dinner Aly hated to see his guests merely talking together. He felt one should 'do something'. And since Aly himself adored bridge, he would terrorize his friends into playing too, and would keep them at it till four or five in the morning. His guests would be almost collapsing with exhaustion, but still they must go on playing and play well.

If we were not playing bridge, Aly would take us all to the pictures, and of course it had to be a cowboy film. His guests had to submit to watching the galloping horses and the sheriff's

harangues while Aly sat beside them fast asleep. But, recalcitrant as they were, their agony was not over even once the film had come to an end, for then they had to tell Aly what it had all been about, and discuss their opinions of the film, since Aly was perfectly capable of judging a Western even if he had only seen a few shots from it.

Our taste in films was not at all similar, and this used to lead to passionate arguments. I wanted to drag him to see Resnais' 'Hiroshima', but he never would. He claimed that it was both horrifying and dull. Of course, he was full of preconceived and quite unshakeable ideas, and had a horror of anything 'intellectual' or anything that took itself too seriously.

He thought French films were too dramatic and too cynical, and Italian films too sad. He liked American comedies best of all.

'I want to laugh when I go to the pictures,' he would say.

'But you never laugh, you go to sleep,' I replied.

'Never mind that, I hate sad films.'

Although he never read detective stories, Aly did enjoy seeing them on the films, provided they were American. But he liked horror films even better, and we sometimes found ourselves in the oddest parts of Paris in our search for some small cinema that was showing a horror picture. He also liked Hitchcock and Brigitte Bardot, whom he considered very beautiful.

At last Aly discovered the cinema of his dreams on one of the Big Boulevards. You could go there after midnight. The films they showed were always of the poorest quality, but little did Aly care, for what he wanted was a dark room filled with the dull purr of the projector and a gentle background hum to lull him to sleep.

We sometimes went to the theatre too, where Aly slept just as he did in the pictures. I remember one dress rehearsal we attended, where we sat in one of the front rows and Aly fell asleep right under the actors' noses. He was wakened by the applause before each interval and would clap like everyone else, but far too vigorously, like someone who has just woken up and is still not quite sure what he is doing.

But one ghastly thought haunted him and tended to spoil these restoring sleeps of his: he used to say to me at the beginning of a play: 'You must waken me if I snore.' Then when he did waken, he immediately enquired whether he had snored.

His taste in theatre was roughly the same as for the cinema. He enjoyed American plays, and next on the list came Roussin, then Anouilh. He had been vastly amused at Sagan's 'Château en Suède', and he never missed a first night at the Comédie-Française.

But one place he never went to sleep was the circus, where he would laugh like a child. And since I myself was very fond of clowns and acrobats we would often go.

Another thing Aly enjoyed was dancing. People have always claimed he enjoyed night-clubs, but this was not true. He did not drink and hated the night-club atmosphere. But you could dance there and that was why he went.

Whenever he had worked on late into the night or was just back from a journey, his greatest delight was to go to the Eléphant Blanc. He would drink a cup of coffee while I sipped a crème-de-menthe, then we would dance without a pause, and without ever going back to the table.

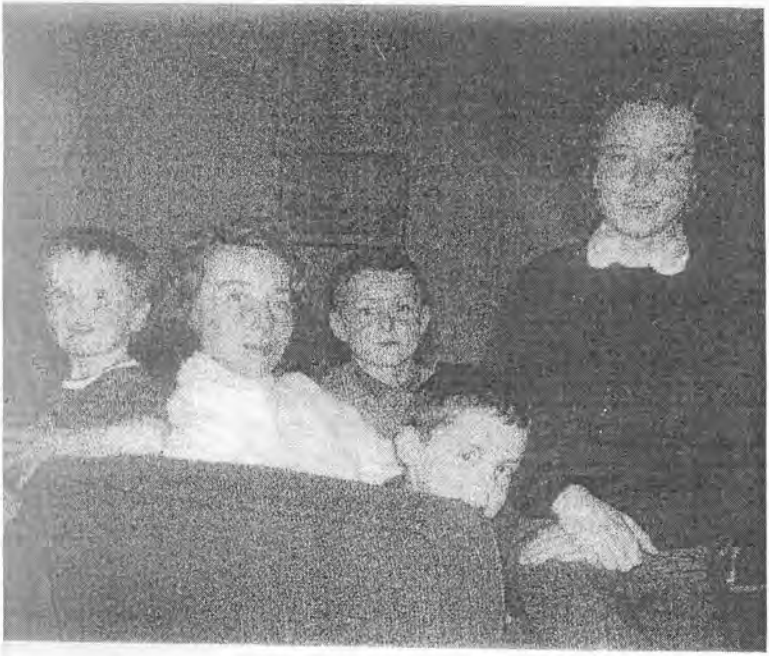
When we got home, he loved to wander all over the house, going from room to room as if he was seeing it all for the first time. The day's frantic activity had given way to the silence of a sleeping house. He always found something or other to do in his study, and I would wait for him, then we would go round the house together.

'Look, Zine, look how lovely that piece of furniture is,' he would say, pointing to his latest acquisition. 'But those flowers are finished, we must do them again.'

So together we would change the flowers. Then he agreed to go to bed. He did not need much sleep, but I did. He would have liked me to lie in late of a morning, but I always wakened when he did. For how could I have slept in that house when it was brimming over with activity as it always was?

Aly also manifested his love of improvisation in the way he travelled. He would always tell me he was off somewhere at the last possible moment because he himself never knew when he was to go. In his eyes, it was all the same whether he was setting out for America or Chatou. We had to gather all his possessions where they lay strewn around the house and pack his cases in record time. The chambermaids were terrified of leaving anything out, and would search frantically for the made-up bow tie he always wore with his top-hat. His chauffeur would be

Bettina with the Begum at Prince Aly Khan's funeral



Bettina with her nephews and nieces

responsible for the binoculars and his secretary saw to his important papers.

During the course of his travels, Aly would issue vague invitations to everyone, saying:

'Come and stay whenever you like, and make yourselves at home.'

So when he got back he would find his houses full of people he scarcely knew or had utterly forgotten. But he was in no way put out, for quite rightly he reckoned that the best way of giving his guests a pleasant holiday was to leave them as free as possible, so he usually saw extremely little of them.

These house parties were sometimes made up of the strangest assortment of people. I remember one occasion at The Horizon where we had the following people staying at one time: the telephone operator from the Ritz in London, a charming woman who spent a month with us every summer, Alexander and Maria Pia of Yugoslavia, General Bonafé, the Count and Countess of Ganay, Alec Head, a few Egyptians and some others besides. They all got on very well together, but it was no easy matter for me to co-ordinate all their different time-tables, to know who would be in for lunch, and when, to find out their several plans and make arrangements for arrivals and departures.

And I had to look after all the houses at once, for Aly always sent people to them all at the same time. I would sometimes curse these strangers, and say, in weariness and exasperation:

'There is nowhere for me to go for a little peace and quiet. There are always people everywhere.'

We had visitors to stay less frequently in Paris, for the house was smaller. But even so Aly did invite people occasionally.

There was the time when Aly was away and suddenly two most amusing American ladies descended on me, in the Boulevard Maurice Barrès, loaded with luggage. One of them was a long-distance walking champion and had crossed America twice on foot. She was slender and lively, wore flat-heeled shoes, looked like Katherine Hepburn, and was eighty. The other was very young and charming, an Olympic ice-skating champion. I introduced myself to them when I ran into them on the stairs; they had not the faintest idea who I was, and I had not been expecting them. They were to spend a couple of months in the

house, although Aly, who was in America at the time, had forgotten to warn me about their arrival.

But everything went off extremely well, in spite of the rather domineering old lady's pet foibles and whims.

Another very amusing thing happened to us in 1958 when Mizra, a great friend of Aly's, was President of the Republic of Pakistan. He was coming to France on an official visit at the invitation of President Coty, and had asked us to put him up in the Boulevard Maurice Barrès.

He was accompanied by his wife, two secretaries, an aide-de-camp, and his entire household: his laundryman, his cook, and a fleet of others. Aly and I found ourselves practically out in the street, and I set about emptying all the cupboards. As usual, all Aly's other houses were full of people, so we had to take refuge in the flat of a friend of ours, Robert Poirier.

It did seem strange to think that Aly, with all his houses, was having to rough it at night in a tiny flat, just like a student.

The official visit of any President calls forth a vast number of police escorts on motor cycles, who seemed to be permanently installed in the Boulevard Maurice Barrès. Aly soon became very popular among them.

Jean Prouvost organized a shooting party for President Mizra and his friends, who were all excellent shots. We set off one evening, and I accompanied the ladies in their car, travelling at a speed appropriate to Oriental ladies in their saris. It was indeed a strange sight to see these ladies, shivering but dignified in their violet, yellow, red or green silk, wandering down the paths that crossed the unusual countryside around Sologne. Aly and I did not join in the hunt, but followed the others on foot. The best shot was one of Mizra's officers, who never missed a single shot; his bag called forth admiration from everyone.

On the day of their departure, the President, his wife and Aly lunched at the Elysée Palace. After taking leave of President Coty, Mizra bent himself double to squeeze into Aly's B.M.W. sports car, having refused the offer of the huge official car, to the astonishment of both guards and President. Aly roared out of the gravel courtyard of the Elysée like a rocket, preceded by a motor-cycle escort delighted to be going so fast.

On the very evening of President Mizra's departure, Aly himself had to leave for England. The motor-cycle police escorts de-

cided it would be kind to accompany him to Orly. Naturally, we were running late and it was raining.

So we found ourselves with two motor cycles behind and two in front, all blowing their whistles incessantly to clear the road ahead, for there was the usual seven o'clock rush on the roads. But it turned into a race between Aly and his escorts, and we lost two of them on the way: the first at the Etoile, and the second as we approached the Champs-Elysées roundabout. We were driving on the left the whole time and I was terrified. Although the police on their motor cycles kept on blowing their whistles, I kept on seeing traffic lights ahead, yet by some miracle, cars seemed to stop to let us through. These motorized police escorts were real acrobats on their huge machines, driving them at eighty miles an hour through crowded streets. The one who did reach Orly at the same time as us was absolutely delighted, and both he and Aly burst into great peals of laughter and shook hands. But as for me, in spite of all my admiration for these break-neck daredevils, I was only too pleased to have got there safe and sound.

It was from Deauville that we usually got the most amusing stories concerning our visitors. It was a big house with a lot of bedrooms, and during the summer there was a fantastic, continuous procession of people coming and going the whole time. People moved in and out without the slightest sign of embarrassment. It was just like a hotel. In the mornings one would run into chambermaids carrying piles of sheets. Every year the same friends had their regular rooms, and during the month we always spent there Aly had time to look after his guests.

There were always some Ismailis. Aly would take them off to the races, and I shall always remember how funny they all looked setting off in a great hurry so as not to miss the first race. The cars were full of friends of every nationality and of women in saris. There were lots of other women too, either staying in the house, or just over for the day.

Aly had no fixed time-table, but he did like a swim at seven in the evening, weather permitting. You have to be fairly tough to bathe at that hour of the evening.

Yasmin was staying with us, as she always did at this time of the year, and Aly would call:

'Are you coming with me?'

Father, daughter and dog would all set off together, and I would watch them from my window. It was a most comical sight, for Aly would take Yasmin by the hand and walk very fast as he always did, throwing out his chest as he went. Then there would follow a group of stoical-looking ladies who, trying in spite of everything to stay in his wake, were endeavouring unsuccessfully to catch up with him and Yasmin. They wore high-heeled shoes and very narrow skirts, and since the path was not wide enough, they had to walk along in Indian file.

At low tide the poor unfortunates had to walk miles before reaching the icy water. Then Aly would run back home again, completely indifferent to his admirers who by now were blue with cold.

From the time he worked for the United Nations, Aly used to entertain many Americans. He had himself been entertained in Washington by the small group of ladies who live under the impression that they control world politics because their houses are permanently thrown open to politicians and diplomats. Aly invited one of these hostesses to spend a week in Deauville.

But she had only met Aly in America, that is to say in his official capacity in a very formal environment, and had therefore imagined life in Deauville would be similar to the kind of life she led at home.

She must have thought he lived like a true Oriental Prince in a real palace, surrounded by courtiers, and she had come over with a vast wardrobe of clothes and a husband who, accustomed to being completely dominated by her, never had a word to say for himself.

I found them sitting in the drawing-room, a room full of ill-matched furniture that could not on any account have been called sumptuous. They had been waiting patiently for us for over half an hour. She looked most distinguished in a dress that would almost have passed as a cocktail dress, and was wearing jewels. Her husband sat stiffly on the edge of his chair, and they both looked ready to brave any social gathering, however elegant. Aly and the other guests were not there and our Americans did not seem to know what to make of it all. So I talked to them for a while, until at last Aly arrived, wearing old blue tennis trousers, drenched in perspiration, followed by all the others looking no better. Some were in bathing costumes, while others

were wearing riding dress. The unfortunate lady realized in a flash that the house was by no means as elegant as she had thought.

Aly was in a hurry that day, and wanted us all to eat our lunch as quickly as possible so that he could dash off to the races in his car. So there was none of the brilliant conversation the American hostess had been expecting at the meal, and Aly went off before we had finished, leaving his new guests a trifle dazed. He did not want to miss the first race. That evening Aly had decided we would eat in a little restaurant in Trouville. He was wearing blue jeans, but the American lady turned up in a white tulle evening dress studded with turquoises, and her husband had put on his dinner-jacket. Aly had somehow to make his guests think they had done the right thing, so he changed after dinner and took them off to spend the rest of the evening at the Casino.

Our American friend had brought so many smart clothes with her that we hardly knew what to do with her. She would come to the races wearing broad-brimmed hats that were completely out of place on this very informal racetrack. One morning we planned to go on our customary picnic to the stud farm at Saint-Crespin. The previous day she began to grow a trifle wary and asked me whether the dress she had on then would be suitable. It was a woollen dress that she obviously considered the height of informality, whereas it was actually extremely dressy.

I told her it wasn't really suitable and suggested she should wear trousers. She came in silk slacks and a lot of costume jewellery, an outfit eminently suitable for Capri. But there was nothing we could do about it.

Yasmin and I were both equally curious to see what she did have in her wardrobe, so we cast a surreptitious look at it that evening when we came in. The unfortunate woman had absolutely nothing suitable with her for the kind of life we led, and I don't think she enjoyed her stay very much.

When we stayed at The Horizon there were always many guests there too. But there too, it was when Aly was away that the funniest things usually seemed to occur. Of course they always seem funnier to relate afterwards than at the time.

One day an elderly Englishman turned up, someone Aly had known on the racetrack for many years. He had never been

out of England. For, say what you like, such people do still exist. He had just lost his wife.

'Come and stay at The Horizon for as long as you like, and bring anyone you like with you!' Aly had said, in an attempt to comfort him.

Then he had completely forgotten the invitation. He had grown so used to asking this particular Englishman to come, and he never did, that Aly never imagined for a moment that he would turn up one day. But one winter there he was, with his entire family: his daughter, son-in-law, son and daughter-in-law. They were all charming, but they too had no idea how one lived in Aly's houses and thought we would spend all day sitting talking to them in the drawing-room. The old gentleman sat there all the time and I had to spend hours talking to him.

Aly got back from India two days later, very tired. I went to meet him at the airport.

'I don't want to see anyone,' he said.

'But your Englishman is there!' I replied.

'What Englishman?'

'Your widower friend.'

'Goodness, I had forgotten all about him. I don't want to see him.'

So for a whole week Aly lived in hiding in his own house in order not to have to meet the widower and his family. The whole thing was like a farce, with Aly slinking along corridors, and the two of us creeping out on tiptoe while the others ate, after instructing the butler to keep the drawing-room and dining-room doors shut.

Then our English friends began to talk of going home, so Aly decided the time had come for him to put in an appearance. He made a show of having just arrived by plane, and the warmest of greetings were exchanged between him and his visitors. When Aly suggested we might all go to the ballet in Monte Carlo that night, the visitors seemed very anxious not to overtire one who had just made so long a journey, and I had great difficulty in suppressing my giggles.

Aly was incapable of sitting through a whole performance, so he went off to gamble and really only saw his guests at the supper we all had together afterwards. And the widower and his family never for one moment suspected Aly of the trick he

had played on them all, and returned home delighted with everything and laden with presents.

But we did not only have odd guests. Sometimes friends, our real friends, would come at Christmas or during the summer holidays.

Aly adored practical jokes, and January 1 was the great night for them. The staff would all dress up, and we were served by masked faces or by the butler, looking utterly imperturbable, wearing a tramp's shoe with a huge pink rubber toe sticking out of the end. Yasmin thought it absolutely wonderful, and so did her father, who enjoyed himself every bit as much as she did.

Charles de Breteuil was the great specialist in this kind of nonsense joke, and he and Aly would go off together to Cannes every day in their search for new tricks. When Louise de Vilmorin came to have a meal with us they placed the farting cushion on her chair, and she took the joke very well.

You could not touch anything in the house that was not a trick; but unfortunately in the end one was no longer surprised to find one's teaspoon melting into one's cup, or a book explode in one's face, or see snakes and spiders crawling out of boxes. But there was always some new victim to be taken in.

One evening, Jean Cocteau, a great friend, had dinner with us, and we decided to offer him the whistling Camembert. The butler rehearsed the trick beforehand and it all went off perfectly.

Dinner time came and the cheese was handed round. Cocteau, deep in conversation, went for the Camembert with his knife, although it must be admitted that it had been much used and no longer looked much like the original. But there were only candles to light the table and Cocteau did not notice the difference. The cheese refused to whistle, and still Cocteau poked away at it. The butler was shaking all over with suppressed mirth, and we were beginning to wonder what had gone wrong, when suddenly the Camembert gave a whistle, Jean Cocteau dropped his knife and burst out laughing, not at all put out.

I liked seeing Aly having fun with his friends. He was happy and relaxed, and to see him one might have thought him a very gay person. But this was not so at all, for in spite of appearances

he led an extremely complex life, a life full of responsibilities and pitfalls, and was always a prey to anxiety.

He tried to escape from his worries by indulging in the simplest of pleasures, for he knew how to preserve that gift of wonder that others stifle when they cease to be children.

15

Before getting to know Aly, I had never evinced any more interest in the personality and life of a horse than in those of cats, dogs or birds. And in spite of the great affection I have always felt towards animals, although I admired horses, they always made me feel rather uneasy. This was no doubt a result of ignorance, for I had never had occasion to live at close quarters with a horse, whereas dogs and cats were familiar friends. Horses seemed to me to be handsome and strong, and I had been terrified by one during the hunt in Ireland; yet somehow or other I never felt close to the horse.

Then one day I learned how to lay my hand on its neck, how to kiss its soft nose, and to say hoof instead of paw. I learned to recognize a broad-breasted animal when I saw one, and began to appreciate this harmonious machine made of an athlete's muscles. In other words, I began to acquire an eye for a horse, and found myself regarding it as a slightly supernatural being, the object of our hopes, our studies, our loving care, and our long, impassioned conversations. I never grew bored listening to Aly and his trainer talking about horses, calling to mind past exploits and prophesying new feats for their favourite mounts. They would devote whole evenings to this kind of conversation, after spending the entire day walking through the fields of Normandy or Ireland, going from one paddock to another on the various stud farms.

I came to know a very small part of the infinite field of knowledge surrounding a horse, for racehorses have very full and interesting lives for anyone who can understand them. Every horse has its own history, its family tree, just like those of the large human families, and has its own tastes, whims and preferences.

If a horse turns incessantly round and round in its stall, this means that it doesn't like being alone. So you must give it a companion, either another horse next door with just a wire

netting between them, or a sheep, or even a cat. I once saw a cat in Ireland who lived on a horse's back, slept there and even sharpened her claws there. How pleased those two animals always were to see one another! I have also personally witnessed the devotion of a horse to a pigeon, and Saint-Crespin always preferred mint sweets to sugar lumps.

I had evidence of a horse's wonderful memory and of his friendship with Man, one day when we were in Ireland, during one of the trips Aly and I made there. I adored going with him, and loved these visits more than anything else.

We were visiting the stud farms, all six of them, and Aly and I went from one to the other, often on horseback, along the narrow stony lanes of the Irish moorland. Murphy, my mare, was old, quiet and comfortable. Aly inspected not only every mare, foal and stallion, but also examined the state of the paddocks, the fences, the walls and the livestock. He would have a pleasant word to say to every stable-boy, would make enquiries about their health and would hand out small presents and sympathy, both greatly appreciated by his employees, particularly coming as they did from an employer who loved horses and knew so much about them.

Whenever any visitor came to the stud farms, Aly would never fail to point out the miles of hedges that surrounded his land. There was so much hedging that two men with huge shears – they would never have dreamed of using machines for the job – were fully occupied keeping them trimmed. It would take them days to get right round, and when they did, it was immediately time to start again. Of course, it is only fair to add that the Irish rain makes nature particularly prolific.

Aly was always accompanied by the same people on these tours of inspection. There was Major Hall, Alec Head, the jockey Aly used to bring over for the Curragh races, the manager of the particular stud farm, the manager of all the Irish studs, and Nelly Smethwick, an old lady whose age was a closely guarded secret and upon whom everything connected with our life in Ireland depended. She managed the stud at Gilltown, where Aly's house was.

She kept a wary eye on everything from the horses to the gardens, whose flowerbeds and greenhouses were her pride and joy. Aly had to go round the garden at least once, admiring

every peach and every rose. The house and its kitchen were always well stocked with the things Aly enjoyed. There was always tea and lots of cakes when we arrived home hungry from our open-air expeditions, fresh caught salmon, pink champagne, cigarettes, although Aly smoked but rarely, Chartreuse to drink, Aly's old velvet jacket and his check shirt. And the same maid was always there, full of tender solicitude as she took off Aly's wet shoes for him. All this, all this devotion had been going on for twenty years, since the day Aly had bought the stud farm.

These all too short trips were a wonderful relaxation for him and gave him immense pleasure.

Once we went to see Vimy, one of the Irish National Stud stallions, who, in his heyday, had belonged to Pierre Wertheimer. Alec had trained the horse and had not seen him for four years. Before entering the little run in front of the stallion's loose-box, Alec began to talk to him from quite a way off. The horse rushed to the door of his stall, neighing with joy, and as soon as Alec went in, reached for the pocket where he still remembered Alec used to keep a lump of sugar for him. There was no doubt how pleased he was to see Alec, who was greatly moved.

Where I was concerned, learning about horses was a never-ending task. I had to tax my memory to its limits. But I did want to share Aly's passion for horses with him. Owning a racing stable was not just a rich man's hobby for him. In his eyes it presented a challenge, for he loved taking risks and he loved gambling. He was constantly taking risks with his horses. First, there were the financial risks. He never hesitated to pay a great deal for something he saw in a sale if his instinct told him to buy. Neither did he hesitate to cross-breed the most unlikely horses.

He sometimes entertained great hopes of some apparently unknown mare because he knew the pedigree of both his own horses and those of others. Nor did he hesitate to send his fillies away for a change of air, thinking it might do them good if they proved difficult to mate at home. He would never hesitate to send his horses to race even as far as Venezuela where, in a tropical climate, he had managed to create a stud farm as green as any in Normandy, on land where nothing but scrub had grown before.

He also took risks with his gambling, for it was like an incurable disease with him. He used to bet on his own horses, and on others as well, so if he happened to be in England or in America, he would bet by phone. It was his gambling above all that angered his father, and I very soon came to agree with the Aga on this score; for Aly used to swallow up vast sums of money in gambling and I considered the whole thing ridiculous, even sickening at times. But Aly would simply say:

'You don't understand.'

There was nothing to understand, nor even to explain. From his earliest youth Aly had loved gambling for its own sake. He took gambles in his work, he gambled with his life. He was always gambling. He even gambled with friendship, for if he was fond of someone the time would always come when he expected too much from them and would risk losing their friendship. He would become impossible, would worry at them and say the most awful things about them right up to the moment when the friendship was about to break up. It seemed to be a trait of character that he found impossible to alter.

I learnt a great deal from witnessing the annual ceremony in which Aly, Madame Vuillier, Alec Head and Major Hall sat perusing great books full of secrets as they made their plans for mating the different mares. Nothing pleased Aly more than for me to recognize one of his mares in the paddock or notice some fault in a horse.

When Aly saw that I was really interested, he gave me Mr Wonderful, a three-year-old I had got to know at the stud farm and whom I liked very much. But I never saw him run, for a few months later came the accident. My horse's career was unfortunately cut short, after a promising start, by a long illness, and he was later sold in England.

I also owned a mare who is still at Chantilly to this day, the Irish mare everyone rides to the training runs. I went over to Ireland to pick her from the paddocks. She was a handsome hunter, pensioned off several months ago. She had never even been shod, and they brought her back to France especially for me.

I used to go to the races every day and really enjoyed it. Not for the gambling, though. I had never liked gambling. But I did

like the horses and would go in all weathers and even when Aly was away.

I used to describe the races to him on the telephone and he never tired of hearing about his own successes. Even when he had himself witnessed his own victory, he still liked to hear a description of the race he had watched from start to finish.

'Did you see him coming round the bend?' he would ask. 'What sort of a start did he make? What were you thinking? Did you think he'd win? And what about the jockey, at the start... and at the finishing post? He left them all standing! Two lengths! He had the whole thing in his pocket!'

Every race-goer on the course sincerely shared his much applauded successes; the old hands on the track felt they had always known Aly, and treated him as one of the family. I enjoyed mixing with the crowd and quietly listening to their comments and remarks to one another as Aly went by.

'I say, you know, Aly never stops. He's always in a hurry.'

'Gracious, Aly's back! I thought he was in America. He doesn't look well. He needs a rest.'

'Aly looks as young as he ever did! But he has lost a little hair, even so...'

'He's like us, getting older every day!'

'Mummy, where's Aly Khan?' the youngsters would say, tugging at their mother's sleeve.

'He's such a nice man, Aly, he always says good afternoon to me,' the women would exclaim.

And I would be there, right behind them, vastly amused. Whenever Aly had a win or even merely crossed the English or Paris racecourses, people would always shout out: 'Hello, Aly!' 'Congratulations Aly!' and the race-goers would add: 'He's no snob!' a considerable compliment from these crowds of ordinary race-goers. They called him by his first name. 'Aly, are you going to win the next one for us?' Aly was very proud of his popularity, although it did not always please the other owners confined in their enclosures.

I liked watching Aly as he made his way around the track. He dived quickly through the crowd looking like someone who knows where he is going and has a great deal to do, with his binoculars hanging from one shoulder, his tie blowing in the wind, the famous brown hat he always wore as a kind of talis-

man, in his very characteristic way, pulled down a little over his eyes, and his pockets stuffed with programmes or newspapers. There he would go, dispensing tips, smiling, shaking people by the hand, cracking a joke or thanking an unknown spectator for his good wishes, as he walked from the grandstand to the weighing-in tent, then on to the stables where Alec was saddling the next runner, and to the owners' enclosure where the jockeys are briefed.

Then I would catch sight of him at the point where the horses turn before the start, then dashing up the grandstand steps four at a time, where he would stand to watch the race, always superstitiously in the same corner of the passageway, beside his trainer, his binoculars glued to his eyes, creating the impression that he dominated the field.

If he lost, not a single muscle of his face betrayed his disappointment, although perhaps he was a trifle slower in making his way towards the weighing-in tent where they always brought the first four horses. If he had won, he would dash down at breakneck speed to meet his horse and to glean his jockey's impressions at the earliest possible moment.

And all the time he moved about the course like this, Aly never stopped buying and selling. He would make up his mind about the next race or note the latest racecourse gossip. I mean gossip about horses, of course. The swift way he moved from place to place on the course prevented his being importuned by those he did not wish to talk to. Aly's energy seemed to electrify all those around him, and when he had gone, all activity seemed to slow down. The day Saint-Crespin won the Arc de Triomphe Stakes, Aly was in America.

Madame Vuillier had strict instructions to phone him as soon as the race was over. Aly knew exactly when it was to be run and could not bear to wait a single second too many without knowing the outcome. Saint-Crespin was one of his favourite horses of whom he entertained the greatest hopes. But there was an appeal, and they had to develop films of the photo-finish, so it was not for an hour and twenty minutes that the final result was made known.

Meanwhile Aly, thanks to an understanding telephone operator, was sitting with bated breath on the far side of the Atlantic, following every vicissitude of the delayed result in an

agony of suspense. Then, once he was certain his favourite had triumphed in this race that every owner hopes one day to win, he had every detail of the race recounted, first by Alec, then by Madame Vuillier, Robert Muller, the jockey, and by every other owner friend of his who wanted to congratulate him. As for me, I had to describe the race to him three times. On his return to Paris, we had to run the film that finally clinched his victory several times through.

A man who put so much keenness and enthusiasm into something deserved to make a great success of it. His stables were a vast concern whose object was to produce more horses. It was a colossal and costly enterprise, but it was self-supporting. Aly, who was known and recognized as the greatest of all authorities on race-horses, used to plan every detail of it all, wherever he was. He would send instructions about the slightest decision even from Pakistan or America, and would discuss with Alec Head, on the phone from America, what races to put his horses in for.

Aly always sold his stock himself. Any time was the right time for him, and I have often seen him sell some of his yearlings at a dinner party to people who had come without the slightest thought of horses in their minds. Of course his indisputable knowledge did not always stand him in good stead, for sometimes his reputation as a connoisseur would make people suspect that he was selling worthless animals and keeping the good ones for himself. Aly would be deeply upset at this lack of understanding, but thanks to his gifts as a salesman, which he was very proud of, and to his great charm, he was both a good seller and a good buyer. He never stinted when giving advice and liked to help friends less expert than himself.

Aly had already taken over the management of his father's stables for some years, and had become his partner where almost all the Aga's horses were concerned; in other words, he owned a half share in them. And he also had his own horses, whose sole proprietor he was. When he went to see his father they would have long conversations together in which he would explain every decision he had taken to sell and tell him about every race commitment.

When the Aga died, Aly bought out the whole stables and decided to sell many of the horses constituting at that time the

biggest stud farm and stables in the world. It was hard to choose those to sell and necessitated long hours of hard work from Aly and his associates.

One day when Aly was in America, a Californian came to see him, hoping to buy some brood mares. We nicknamed him the Mormon, for he was a strict adherent of the Mormon faith. Several years earlier he had already bought a horse from Aly that had done wonders in America, for it had won all the major races held in the United States and a fortune for its owner. It had been the finest horse of its generation.

The Mormon, full of admiration for Aly's knowledge in these matters, had visions of the same thing happening again, and wanted to begin breeding horses with some of the famous stock from stud farms belonging to the Aga and to Aly. So they drew up a list of about thirty brood mares, and began heated discussions over the price. While Aly had a thousand and one unanswerable arguments to put forward, the Mormon remained disconcertingly calm and obstinate. This important transaction began in California where Aly was spending a few days with Yasmin, but since neither side would make any concessions, it continued in France, then in Egypt, then in France again, finally being concluded in New York a month later.

This was how Aly turned up at the Boulevard Maurice Barrès house accompanied by someone whose appearance never ceased to astonish us in the days that followed. The Mormon was patently American; he both looked and acted exactly like a cowboy from a Western. He was as tall as any tall story, and had to house his outsize legs and interminable body in an armchair, as best as he could, while waiting for Aly, completely silent and totally indifferent to the customary bustle of the household.

When Aly returned from his innumerable appointments, the two of them would shut themselves up in Aly's study and continue their discussion about the price of the brood mares, which had been the sole object of the Mormon's visit. Nothing could distract this strange-looking man, not even the Brigitte Bardot film we took him to see the evening he arrived. I suppose all he could see was his brood mares.

Since the deal had still not been clinched, our American friend accompanied Aly to Egypt, arriving in Cairo early one morning. Aly immediately took him to the Sultans, the friends he always

stayed with, and deposited him in a small sitting-room without a word of warning to his hostess, whereupon he himself went off. Laura Sultan, all unaware, pushed open the door to her boudoir, let out a shriek and rushed out again, terrified at the sight of this huge giant of a man in blue jeans lounging in a little Louis XV armchair. Wherever had this cowboy come from, she wondered? He remained in the same chair for several hours, never twitching a single muscle, and never even noticing that the door was frequently pushed ajar, since everyone in the house was so curious to see him!

He sat there just as silent through all the dinners they ate together on the following days, and after coffee had been served would continue his enthralling discussion with Aly. Once back in America, the matter was all most amicably settled, and the thirty brood mares he had chosen crossed the Atlantic.

If Aly was an excellent salesman, he was every bit as clever a buyer.

He told me that in 1947, a few days before the Grand Prix was run, he discovered an unknown horse at a sale. It had never won a single race, but Aly liked the look of it. He bought the animal for a song and handed it over to Charlie (Charlie Smirke, the famous English jockey). Everyone laughed at Aly, and on the day of the race, Avenger was running 33 to 1. Charlie rode him magnificently and beat them all. Avenger never won another race after that. As Aly said, he had bought him just in time.

Aly loved telling this story. The following year he advised his father to buy My Love from Leon Volterra, who agreed on condition that he retain 50 per cent of any profits his filly might make. My Love ran in the Derby at Epsom and won, and later carried off the Paris Grand Prix.

Then there was the famous Bois Roussel.

That was in 1938 when Aly was twenty-seven. He advised Leon Volterra to buy Bois Roussel from an English owner, and the filly won the Derby; it was the first time this had been achieved for twenty-five years by a French horse.

'It's a gift; either you have it or you haven't; and I have!' Aly would say, adding with a laugh: 'I was born in a stable!'

For horses had indeed played a considerable part in his education.

The first time I ever went to Aly's house in Deauville I realized that horses were of paramount importance to him. Their names meant nothing to me, but I often heard people talking of Rosa Bonheur, for at that time Aly and his trainer, Alec Head, were busy planning 'the Rosa Bonheur business', looking like a couple of conspirators.

It all happened the day before the Deauville Grand Prix. Aly, who never missed any item of news where horses were concerned, heard that a filly called Rosa Bonheur was up for sale. He knew everything about the mare's pedigree and character, and got in touch with the seller through an intermediary. The price asked corresponded with her reputation, which was by no means that of a good mare. For Rosa Bonheur had run many races, mostly unimportant ones, and very rarely won. But Aly, feeling that justice had not been done to her pedigree, carefully studied her record and noticed that she had persistently and courageously always managed to be placed. He bought her immediately, and the following day she ran in the Grand Prix, winning hands down, thus adding still further to her new owner's famous reputation for knowing a good horse when he saw one. It was a double stroke of genius, for the odds had been at 294 francs to 10, and both Aly and other race-goers who had pinned their faith on the red and green colours all came away with a small fortune.

After that race, Rosa Bonheur went off to the stud farm for a well-earned rest, before beginning on her new career of brood mare. I followed her fortunes closely, for after all the mystery surrounding her sale, and the universal surprise caused by her victory, people went on talking about her for quite some time.

Can one fall in love with a horse? Yes, I feel sure one can. Aly had a very special feeling towards Petite Etoile, and I think he was a bit sweet on her. And who could ever have considered this ridiculous? She was an enchanting little grey mare, built just like an athlete, and she possessed the strength of a locomotive with all the grace of a dancer. Her action was so easy that when she was galloping her fastest, she never seemed to be touching the ground. She won everything, and her jockey, always the same Lester Piggott, could hardly contain his enthusiasm every time he brought her back to the weighing tent after coming in first. Her intelligent-looking head was strangely

marked with a small white star. But her name, although it suited her admirably, had been given her purely by chance. Every time she ran, everyone at Noel Murless's stables in England was brimming over with confidence, although it was a confidence mingled with a fear we all shared. For what if this time she were beaten? But she never was. And yet this extraordinary little animal gave Aly one of the greatest frights he ever had in his life.

It was the day of the Coronation Cup at Ascot, when, naturally, all our hopes were centred as usual on Petite Etoile. I was standing with Aly amongst a group of owners, all busy talking about their chances of success, when I caught sight of the trainer coming towards us, pale and trembling. Petite Etoile had just broken loose and was galloping, all unaware, down the road towards the town. Aly dashed for the stables.

Meanwhile Petite Etoile went on delightedly galloping down the road. She was eventually caught after a chase worthy of any Western, running along the railway track several miles from the racecourses. Her usual stable-boy, utterly overcome, brought her back to her loose-box. She had not a chance of winning now, for a gallop like that only twenty minutes before the race would certainly be fatal. The news began to seep through the crowd. I felt easier in my mind, however, when from the grandstand I saw our Petite Etoile setting off for the starting line, looking as fleet of foot as ever. And, as if nothing had happened, with ears pointing forward, which is always a good sign, she won the race, to the great delight of the crowds. That evening after the races, Aly went to see her in her loose-box as he always did, and gave her an even more affectionate pat on the neck than usual.

Aly spoke about his favourite horses as one might do about very dear members of one's family, and in some of his stud farms one can see beautifully kept graves with white tombstones inscribed with the names and dates of his best horses.

He could never be faulted when it came to knowing about the origins of every horse in the family stables, and was equally unbeatable about other people's horses as well. I have often heard him correct another owner whose memory had failed him about one of his own horse's pedigrees.

This man with all his knowledge of horses, this man-cum-

horse in fact, had many successes as a jockey himself. He used to ride in some of the races, after spending a week following his 'jockey diet', which consisted of Turkish baths, massage and fasting, in order to attain the required weight. But he found it was becoming more and more difficult to achieve, and in the end he gave in to his father's entreaties to stop, for the Aga had never liked this dangerous habit of Aly's.

The first time I ever experienced any violent pangs of emotion on a racecourse was watching Aly race.

It was during our first year together, on October 5, 1955, at the Tremblay Gentlemen Riders' Grand Prix.

On that occasion Aly was running against someone who shared the public acclaim with him, namely Group Captain Peter Townsend. Aly was absolutely determined to win the race, so he followed a Draconian diet for a week before the event, which did indeed reduce his weight but also made him much more on edge. When the great day came, Aly looked pale and wan. We went to visit his horse Rey in his stall, then I left him to put on his red and green jacket. Before he went off he handed me his signet ring and his wristwatch; I felt like a medieval lady whose knight was making ready to join battle, and found myself even more worked up than he was.

The bell rang for the race, which was the fifth that day, and everyone rushed towards the paddock to see the horses come out.

Peter Townsend, dressed in white and gold, rode out behind Aly, and a few people shouted 'Good luck, Townsend'; but it was undoubtedly Aly whom they preferred, for the Group Captain's idyll with Princess Margaret left these hardened race-goers more or less cold, whereas they felt that in applauding Aly they were applauding one of themselves.

The Aga Khan and the Begum were there too, and I can still see them leaving before the race began. Perhaps the old man was feeling too tired and had asked to go home, or possibly he had wanted to mark his disapproval of Aly racing.

The horses lined up for the start, and I went up into the grandstand, praying hard for Aly to win. The horses came under starter's orders and the crowd fell silent.

'There they go! They're off!' someone shouted.

The eight horses that made up the field leapt forward, and

Peter Townsend, on Nimrod, immediately went into the lead. But it was to be the only time we saw him, for he was very soon overtaken by his pursuers. My heart was pounding, for now the red and green jacket was in the lead, and Aly was at the head of the field, hanging on to first place for at least five furlongs; as they came into the straight he was still in the lead, and I could hear the crowd shouting:

'Go it Aly, go it Aly!'

My heart was beating faster and faster.

Another horse was coming up on Aly, edging up on him little by little, while the crowd went on shouting for Aly, who by now was lashing out at his horse.

Then a great despairing cry went up: Aly had been pipped at the post by an outsider, Manolo, ridden by L. R. Couetil. But as they walked back to the weighing tent, Aly nevertheless received the greatest ovation, even though his horse, the favourite, had made the punters lose their money.

Townsend came fifth, and his horse created quite a stir by refusing to go back to its stall, probably because it was frightened by the photographers' flashes.

Three years later Aly was to meet Group Captain Townsend again in another race for gentlemen riders. I remember the horses coming out and a small girl waving; it was Yasmin trying to wish her father good luck. The crowd was delighted by this family scene and people shouted on all sides: 'A kiss, a kiss!' But Aly merely smiled at his daughter and patted his horse's neck, as if saying to Yasmin 'Don't worry, it will be all right!'

But Dame Fortune was not smiling on Aly on this occasion either, and neither he nor Townsend won the race.

Afterwards a huge crowd of fans rushed up to them to ask for autographs, but Townsend seemed very aloof and immediately retired to the jockeys' changing room where he changed and then went off. Aly remained to hand out autographs to all who wanted them. Then suddenly it occurred to me that I would go and ask him for one too, so I quietly joined the group of women thronging round him. Aly was taking hold of every sheet of paper they handed to him just like an automaton, and he never noticed me.

When we got home and I told him what I had done, at first

he refused to believe me. But he roared with laughter when I showed him the signature I had obtained.

Aly loved difficult undertakings, so he decided to start a stud farm in Venezuela. He had several brood mares and stallions sent out to this faraway land by plane, the plans drawn up for his stud farm and the Spanish-style house he was going to build were pinned up on his study wall and he discussed his new enterprise with great enthusiasm.

He talked about it incessantly until the day came when we were informed that the house was finished and we set off for Caracas. I was thrilled to be travelling again. The Minister of Agriculture welcomed us most warmly and offered us the use of his house. So while Aly talked business and looked over the new racetrack under construction, and everyone listened religiously to his comments and advices, I spent my time with some of the wives, being shown round the city, which surprised me by its ultra-modern architecture.

We spent several days in Caracas before leaving for the stud farm.

Ever since our arrival we had been accompanied everywhere by one of the Ministers, Bing Crosby's double, the head of the police force, the Minister's brother, a journalist, and some of their friends with their wives. They all came out to the stud farm with us in huge American automobiles of the very latest model.

After driving about 200 miles along a satin-smooth road cut through vast, arid mountains, we finally reached the estate. It was being managed by a young Frenchman who had trained in France. Aly got out of his car and looked with utter amazement at his fields with their white fences, as good as any in Normandy.

All this greenery had sprung from a wild, untamed landscape, never before tilled by the hand of man. The soft green grass must have been kept constantly watered by powerful sprays. An unmade road led up a hill, almost a mountain in fact, where a low-built white house with a pink-tiled roof stood overlooking the valley. It had been built to back on to an imposing mountain chain, facing a limpid blue lake. Its foundations had been laid in solid rock and cactus-bearing scrub, which they had had to blast out with high explosives. And no sooner had the garden

been planned than it was full of cultivated plants and trees that seemed to want nothing better than to grow.

Aly invited all his neighbours to the official opening of his lovely house, and about a hundred landowners and cattle-breeders came over. The luncheon party, with its sprinkling of speeches, was a great success. A typical local orchestra played throughout the meal, and if I closed my eyes I had the impression that I was back at The Horizon during one of the fantastic luncheons Aly would sometimes give in the summer.

The stud manager told us that from the technical point of view everything had been most successful. The brood mares had given birth to offspring that had adapted themselves perfectly well to the torrid climate. So Aly planned a sale when we were back in Caracas, and managed to persuade some of the wealthy Venezuelans to launch out for the first time in their lives into the buying of race-horses.

The Venezuelan stud farm is still there to this day. But unfortunately Aly's grandiose projects had to be put into cold storage after the revolution that took place shortly after our trip. The Minister who had been his partner had to fly the country, and all credits were blocked.

But at the time we were not concerned about these threats. We were flown in a DC_3 towards the South, for our friends wanted to show us something of the magnificent scenery around the Angel Falls from the plane. We flew over a cognac-coloured river full of crocodiles, then over open-cast mines cut into a red mountainside where iron and other minerals were being extracted from the earth. We flew dangerously close to the mountainside before touching down beside an American camp deep in the heart of the jungle. Here the miners found air-conditioning, iced Coke, snack-bars and the latest things in laundries.

We flew still further South, where the last lap of our journey took us to a dam that was being built to make a hitherto totally uncultivated region fertile. By now hundreds of miles of country were under water, and there was no sorrier sight than to see the trees submerged and slowly rotting away. But close beside this desolated land, in sharp contrast, stood an extremely modern agronomical institute, where innumerable teachers and their no less numerous pupils were busy experimenting with new crops.

Aly asked them to explain to him everything they were doing, for he took an interest in everything.

Travelling with Aly was a wonderful experience, for one was always learning something new. But alas, I made all too few trips with him. We had planned many more, but Fate decreed otherwise.

Every year, after the Grand Prix, Aly held a dinner party in honour of the winning owner; by some fantastic feat of ingenuity, the appropriate owner's name and colours were printed on the menus between the time of announcing the winner of the race and the moment Aly received his guests. Days and days of work always went into the organisation of this dinner.

Aly saw to everything. A month beforehand he would discuss the painting to go on the front of the menu with the artist Jacquot, and have a talk to Paul, the head waiter at the Pré Catelan, about the food, the wine and the champagne. Then he engaged a band, or even two, and talked to the bandleader about what tunes he would like them to rehearse; he even lent them records. And sometimes he engaged vocalists or some kind of floor show.

One year he insisted that I should plan the decorations for each table, a job usually entrusted to Madame Magliano, Aly's aunt. It was by no means an easy thing to undertake but I did my best. I ordered some horses made of feathers from Jeannine Janet, the wonderful artist who does the decorations for Balenciaga's boutique and dresses the windows.

Those horses threw a very strange light on certain people for some of the guests stole them on the night of the dinner. And, as they took their leave of Aly I saw some of them trying to shake hands while attempting to hide their ill-gotten loot behind their backs.

This was not to be the only shock of the evening, either. Aly used to give all the ladies a gift from Cartier, but woe betide anyone imprudent enough to go off and dance, leaving her present on the table, for it invariably disappeared, and we could hardly accuse the servants of the theft.

For a whole week prior to the dinner everyone in the Boulevard Maurice Barrès went to bed at five in the morning, for we found it almost impossible to arrange the seating plan. We would

sit there pale and worried, working away on huge boards. We had to be very careful about protocol and yet attempt to seat people near those they got on well with, for Aly wanted his guests to enjoy themselves as much as possible.

The ball given after the Grand Prix was the last of the season, and the women used to keep their finest regalia for it. If any famous actress happened to be in Paris at the time, she was always invited too.

One year Anita Ekberg came, and created a tremendous stir looking like a siren in a skin-tight dress with a very generous *décolleté*. We found ourselves sitting in the deserted garden of the Pré Catelan at six the following morning, eating scrambled eggs. Anita was sitting next to her husband who had had a great deal to drink. She was annoyed by some rather caustic remarks of his and suddenly, beneath our incredulous gaze, took her bowl of scrambled eggs and poured it gently over his knees. He was quite oblivious of what she had done, and Anita went on talking as the eggs trickled slowly down her husband's legs, just like a sequence from a slow-motion picture.

On another occasion Danny Kaye and Elizabeth Taylor were present. She was wearing a queenly diadem. Danny Kaye's wife who is a song writer, seated herself at the piano, while Eddie Fisher sang. Then we had a duet from Danny Kaye and Eddie Fisher, and no one went to bed before eight in the morning.

Aly had managed to instil his passionate feelings about horses into Yasmin, and whenever she was in Paris, Deauville or Cannes, she never missed a single opportunity to accompany her father to the races and proclaim her delight in it all. At an age when little girls are busy asking for dolls, she wanted horses. One day Aly received a letter from Yasmin that I still have with me. It reads thus:

'Dear Daddy, I miss you very much. There is one thing I want. It is a pure black horse. With one white paw. I want to name it Black Beauty. Oh! I forgot something. And a white spot on his forehead. Say hello to the dogs for me and Betinena. I have a different phone number. This is it . . . Love Yasmin Khan.'

I often re-read this note, written in the uncertain hand of a small girl, just as I often talk about Aly with his trainer Alec Head.

Alec had been the Aga's trainer before, and that was how

Aly got to know him. But Alec soon become more to Aly than a colleague: he was a friend. And although Aly must have known thousands of people throughout the world, he had very few true friends. Only today Alec said:

'He was an extraordinary person. Wherever he went he was relaxed. It would have been all the same to him to be eating in the canteen of the Renault works or dining with the Queen of England. It may seem strange, but Aly had all the qualities of a self-made man. His humanity stemmed from his early years, for at that time he was thrown almost entirely on his own resources and simply had to get on as best as he could.'

We talked about how sensitive he was towards other people. 'When he was away from home,' Alec went on, 'if ever I was worried about anything he would know it straight away from the tone of my voice on the telephone.'

Then we talked of the mad trips the Prince used to make here and there, and Alec told me a tale which ran as follows:

'Once we were staying at Ascot. That morning we took a plane to Le Touquet where Aly was running in the first race. I was in fear and trembling throughout the race, for Aly had put on weight and was riding with an extra-light saddle. I was terrified of one of the girths breaking. Aly did not win, but neither did he come off. Then, no sooner had the horses been brought back to the paddock, than we rushed headlong for the airfield next to the racecourse, and took a plane direct to Ostend. There we had a horse running in the third race. We saw that one beaten, and took another plane back to Le Touquet. The last race there was a ladies' race in which the red and green colours were equally unsuccessful. So off we went to Deauville, setting off for Paris at dawn the following morning, in a car this time, with Aly driving at about a hundred miles an hour.'

Alec Head will never forget another express journey they made together.

'It was at the time of the Brussels exhibition. We left Paris in the morning; Aly was driving, though he was very tired, for he had not slept at all the previous night. Every five minutes he would say: "Give me a pinch, I'm falling asleep." He would say this, but still not slow down. When we reached Brussels, we went to the showground, where Aly wanted to go on all the swings

and roundabouts. He went several times down the "River of Mystery"; I could hardly tear him away, for he was enjoying it all as much as a child. Then off we went to Le Zoute where he had a dinner engagement.'

But Alec Head and I talk more about Charlottesville than about anything else.

The day of the Grand Prix, I wanted to go to Longchamp and Marion Shaw, the wife of the author Irwin Shaw, said she would come with me. I did not want to go to see the weighing. For the first time in my life I was seeing the races from the green, and had the impression everything was back-to-front.

One of the spectators lent me a little stool, and I could just see the straight over people's heads. Charlottesville was in the lead, and was going to win, I felt sure. I had only come because I had been sure he would win. Charlottesville passed so close to me that I could hear his laboured breathing as he sped by. But from that moment on I saw no more, for I was too overcome. All around me people were shouting: 'Aly Khan is winning! Go it, Charlie!'

After winning the Jockey Club Stakes, Charlottesville had just carried off the Paris Grand Prix. How delighted Aly would have been! But he had already been gone a month by then.

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One day in the spring of 1957 Aly surprised me by asking whether I would like to go to Syria with him.

Every year he went to the East or to Africa to visit the Ismaili communities, but he had never before taken me with him.

Then he added:

'You see, Syria is just like home to me. I spent almost all the war years with Syrian Ismailis, and they helped me a great deal in my work for the Allied Secret Service. They are very good friends of mine, and I am always happy to visit Selemiya. I would like to be buried there, by the way. You'll see what a lovely village it is, standing there on the edge of the desert. I chose it a long time ago.'

Aly often spoke of Selemiya, the place he had chosen for his last rest. But he spoke of it with no trace of sadness for, like a good Moslem, he had been preparing himself for his end ever since he had reached the age of reason.

But I, as a European, drove this thought from my mind, considering it both gloomy and premature. I was thinking of one thing only, which was that now, for the first time, I was to see Aly invested with his religious functions in an Oriental setting. I was to witness the mysterious side of his life that most of his friends in Paris, London, or New York never even suspected.

I had had many an opportunity to see Aly with the vast numbers of Ismailites who came to see him at Neuilly or at The Horizon. Aly was someone who needed to carry great responsibilities. Since his father's illness, he would often undertake journeys on his behalf, would take his father's place in the Ismaili community and help the Aga in his immense task of being their spiritual leader.

There are about twelve million Ismailis in the world, living principally in about twenty countries. In Africa you find them in Kenya, Tanganyika, Zanzibar, Mozambique and Madagascar. In Asia they are to be found in India, Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan. And in the Near East in Syria and Egypt. They constitute

one of the most attractive and dynamic of all the Islamic communities. They are Shiites who regard the Imamate as hereditary, and recognize the Aga Khan, their Imam, as the spiritual and temporal successor to Mahomet. The Khans are direct descendants of Ali and Fatima, daughter of the Prophet.

It was Aly's father, the third Aga Khan, who gave the community a tremendous boost for, although remaining an Oriental, he had a great regard for Western culture and tried to wield his authority in a progressive and reasonable way. He particularly encouraged women's emancipation and education, and this is why Ismaili women have abandoned their veils in contrast to the great majority of other Moslem women throughout the world.

Ismaili communities form a vast mutual aid society throughout the world. Ismaili banks will lend money at an almost nominal rate of interest, with the result that Ismailis are able to set up in business faster than those who do not benefit from the same concessions. The Aga Khan's fortune derives principally from the tithes the Ismailis pay yearly, each man according to his means, to the chief organizing body of the Ismaili community in every country.

Another source of revenue, the most spectacular of all, is the famous weighing ceremony of the Imam. At the time of his Jubilee, the Imam does not, as is commonly supposed, receive his own weight in silver at the age of forty, in gold at fifty, in diamonds at sixty and in platinum at seventy. He, in fact, is given the equivalent of his own weight of metal or precious stones in the form of ordinary currency or a cheque. The platinum bars visible in the photos taken during the third Aga Khan's Jubilee celebrations in Nairobi had been specially lent by the banks for the purpose, and no sooner was the ceremony over than they were rushed back to the vaults. This fortune, held in trust by the Aga Khan, is invested in business and industry, and the fruit it bears is used to build schools, dispensaries and hospitals. The Aga Khan's hospital in Nairobi is one of the most modern of the entire African continent.

In the most backward of the countries where Ismailis are found, the Imam, whom people may never have set eyes on, is revered even to the point of idolatry. Two years ago Karim Aga Khan IV visited Hunza, in the heart of the Himalayas, on the

frontier between Pakistan, the Soviet Union and China. No Imam had been there for a thousand years and the welcome he was given was quite indescribable.

The Imam will address Ismailis as 'My Beloved Spiritual Children', and in fact every member of the Faithful regards the Aga Khan as his father. He is expected to resolve all the many problems brought to him by Ismailis, even of an intensely personal nature, such as questions of marriage, divorce, succession, every kind of quarrel, and to give medical advice to boot. Aly took over all the responsibilities of leadership.

When he returned from his travels in the East, he would tell me all about what he had done. His letters and phone calls from the heart of Pakistan or Africa would put me in touch with a distant and hitherto unknown world. For I had often sensed, in Aly's silence, in his reactions to events and people, in what he said or did not say, his deep Oriental and religious roots which, in the world I was accustomed to seeing him in, no one would ever have dreamed existed.

I was delighted to be setting off on this journey, and Aly and I, accompanied by one maid, left first for Rome, then flew to Egypt.

Aly left me in Cairo with his friends, the Sultans, while he went off to Pakistan and India. He intended to call back for me before our short trip to Syria, then he was going back to Cairo with me, where once again we would part company. I was to wait quietly for him at The Horizon while he continued his journey on to Zanzibar, Africa and Madagascar.

It was in Egypt that I first discovered the new Aly. He greatly enjoyed the Club with its inevitable bridge parties or games of taola, the thousand-year-old Persian game that gave rise to backgammon here and in America. When we arrived, Aly asked all his friends to do some real Oriental cooking for him, and I found even his gestures and the intonation of his voice had changed.

I was soon caught up in the atmosphere too, and began to take lessons in Arabic. One day my teacher asked me if I would do him the great honour of visiting the school in which he taught. Although a trifle nervous, I agreed to go, and arrived there to find all the little girls wearing their Sunday best and lining the paths to welcome me.

I had visions of myself as a schoolgirl in Elbeuf, when the Academy Inspectors, with their inevitable beards, used to visit the school and have us all quaking with fear. I felt very moved at the thought that it was because they regarded me as Aly's wife that they were giving me this great welcome. So I endeavoured to behave just as I thought he would have liked me to.

As we flew from Cairo to Beirut, Aly said:

'You are going to see the faithful Ismailis of Syria, and you will realize something about me that many people in Europe fail to see: that my life is not spent entirely on the racecourse.'

This I did already know, but even so I was impatient to penetrate this world of Aly's I had still not seen, this world which, in spite of what anyone might say to the contrary, was more important to him than any other.

Our first stop was Beirut, where the plane flew over a white city set deep in red earth and surrounded by the famous cedars that are indeed no mere myth.

One of Aly's friends, Kahil el Koury, son of a former President of the Lebanon, was waiting to greet us as we left the plane. We ate a quick lunch with him and arrived at our hotel during the afternoon.

As we drew up there, about ten or so strapping men in Arab dress rushed towards the car, making it very hard for Aly to get out, and displaying their joy and respect for him with a noisy effusiveness that Aly tried hard to quieten. They prostrated themselves at his feet and kissed his hands in their attempt to express their delight. Aly laid his hands on their shoulders and begged them to get up, for these demonstrations were contrary to the spirit of humility taught by their religion.

He entered the hotel surrounded by these Syrians who had come to join the group that stood waiting more unobtrusively in the entrance hall, and he shut himself away in one of the lounges with them to talk about the community's affairs and offer them a little refreshment. Meanwhile, I went up to my room to recover a little from the excitement of our arrival.

We had planned to set off for Selemiya at noon the following day, and when I went down into the hall, there was Aly standing in the midst of all these men, dressed like an Arab too. They

had slept the night here, lying on benches, in armchairs, or on the carpet.

Aly was absolutely one of them: he was speaking Urdu and looked as much at home in his Arab costume as they did. The European Aly was gone, and he seemed to me to be even more attractive, realizing as I did that this vision of him tallied with all that lay deepest within him.

Several large American cars were standing at the door, one of them reserved for Aly Khan.

I got in with the village chieftain and my maid, feeling a bit overawed. No detail of the journey escaped me, and I caught sight of several American tourists, looking in utter amazement at 'the famous Aly Khan, usually so glamorous, most curiously dressed, and surrounded by Arabs from goodness knows where'.

The exuberant Syrians had stacked themselves as well as they could in the four other cars, and our *cortège* crossed Beirut with Aly's car in the lead, causing considerable astonishment as we went. The journey to Selemiya took four hours and my heart was in my mouth a great deal of the time. Aly, who was driving fast, kept up a running commentary on the countryside, while the broad road passed through villages whose names he would retail to us as we went by.

'People from Beirut spend the summer here because it is cooler ... beyond that bend up there, you will see the most beautiful valley in the whole world ... we are very near Baalbeck.'

After driving for a long time through a stony, desert mountain landscape, I suddenly saw before me a huge rich, gentle valley, all blue-green, overhung by distant mountain chains that stood imposingly over it like a line of sentinels.

'Now we are in Syria,' said Aly.

The road climbed up and up, and meanwhile the cars behind us were playing a very dangerous game. Completely oblivious of how narrow the road was now, they all kept on trying to drive beside Aly, although no one wanted to overtake him out of respect. But these men were in such a euphoric state that they had become totally unaware of danger.

'They're mad,' said Aly angrily.

He kept on making signs to them to slow down, in an attempt to avoid the inevitable accident, until one of the cars struck the side of the road and hurtled to a standstill down a small ravine.

I feared the worst but suddenly six men sprang like jack-in-a-boxes from the overloaded car. Not a single one had been hurt. Nothing bad could have befallen them since they were with Aly. So our Syrians left their car, now a complete write-off, and squeezed into the other cars that formed part of the *cortège*, or clung to their doors from outside.

I was terrified. Aly slowed down to enable these intrepid men to reach their destination without further mishap, and I must admit to hoping we would get there soon.

About six miles from Selemiya we began to see people crowding the roadside: inhabitants of Selemiya and neighbouring villages come to welcome Aly. The motley crowd gradually grew bigger and bigger until all these families who had come down from the mountains completely blocked the road. It was an unforgettable scene. They all rushed out in front of the cars, from old grandmothers to new-born babies borne in their mothers' arms, without the slightest fear of being knocked down. They clung to Aly's car and tried to bring it to a halt, and their enthusiasm bordered on frenzy. Everyone wanted to see Aly, to touch him, and to get him to bless their children.

I could see all these radiant faces close beside us, and these women with the lovely long green Oriental eyes had all put on their most splendid clothes. They wore Turkish trousers and a small round hat to hold their veils in place. The men were tall, often fair-haired, with rough warrior's faces and blue eyes, and were by no means the calmest of people to deal with. Aly seemed worried to see so many demonstrations and I was concerned by the fact that this was only the beginning of our visit.

Night was beginning to fall as the car drove up at last before a small house that looked like a suburban villa. Here was another house of Aly's that I did not know. It looked like a cube with a balcony running round the first floor and an outside staircase. And all round the house was a huge encampment where the mountain people and their families had been living for the past two days awaiting Aly's arrival. I felt a certain horror mingled with admiration for these people in their transports of religious fervour and love for one man.

Then the crowd, grown still more dense, began to surge towards the car, and even climbed up on to the roof.

Aly got out quickly, was swallowed up into the crowd, and

vanished from sight while I, in sheer terror of the milling hordes, clung tightly to my maid. The car roof began to give beneath the weight of those who had climbed up in an attempt to catch sight of Aly.

'Quick, get out of here!' I shouted.

At that moment Aly, who had managed to reach the house, sent some athletic-looking men to force a passageway for us as far as the door.

The house seemed quiet and reassuring, for there were only a handful of Ismaili notables standing round Aly in the big room on the first floor where he was taken. It contained almost no furniture, but thick carpets and cushions. I found it all a strange mixture between a suburban villa and an Oriental encampment. The room was lit by oil lamps.

Then something wonderful began: those thousands of men and women who had come down from the mountains began to chant, grouped round lighted fires, and they sang on far into the night.

When Aly came out on to the balcony to say a few words to them in Arabic, a great shout went up from all sides. Then Aly, who was concerned about the women and children getting enough rest, asked the village chieftains to call for silence throughout the camp with its thousand wood fires.

At last we were alone. That is, relatively alone, for we were all sleeping in the same room, our quarters being separated off from our seven Syrian guards by a mere screen.

On the following day we had lunch with the chief man of the village of Selemiya. It was cold and raining. The village itself struck me as very poor, with tiny low-built houses and streets that intersected at right angles. The banquet was held in a vast room, and people clambered up at the windows to see Aly. I was the only woman present. We were served Egyptian food, including some very strange dishes, and highly seasoned mutton. Then Aly went into conference with the village notables and I was taken off into a neighbouring room where about thirty women, sitting cross-legged on the ground, were waiting for me.

They were talking among themselves but fell silent as I entered the room. One of them made a sign to me to sit down in the huge armchair they had prepared for me in the middle of the room. They all wore expressions of benevolent curiosity, and I

felt they were examining every detail of my dress. I was wearing a pink suit from Balenciaga and they whispered some comments to one another, their eyes full of gentle admiration. They would have liked to have talked to me but were unable to do so, and I could say nothing to them either. So we exchanged broad smiles, an occupation that seemed to go on for a very long time.

Then a fat woman with lovely eyes stepped up to me, and made me a little speech which I understood to be one of welcome from the friendly gestures that accompanied it. Then, with great difficulty, she removed a ring set with two small rubies, such as an old granny would wear, from her very fat fingers and slipped it over one of mine. It was far too big, and I felt both touched and embarrassed by the gift. For whatever could I give her in return? This present had been of considerable value to her, and I felt I must quickly replace her touching sacrifice. So I took off my ring, a platinum one set with pearls that Aly had given me when we were in Cairo, and handed it to her, somewhat regretfully, I must admit. The fat woman seemed delighted, showed it off to all her companions, and went about the whole day long with my ring, which was much too small for her, stuck on the very tip of her little finger which she held pointing upwards all the time.

Once again I thought of Elbeuf, and how far away I was, here, in a world I was trying hard to understand, because it constituted the world of the man I loved.

That evening there was a dinner given by another of the dignitaries, and I found myself seated beside my host who spoke neither French nor English. Aly was amused to see me at the end of the meal struggling with the hookah as it was passed round the table to each guest in turn. First a cloud of smoke seemed to go straight to my brain, but I got used to it after a moment and found it quite pleasant in the end. But I let it go out twice, which is something one must never do. Everyone remained silent during this ceremony. Then Aly and I went off to Damas for the night, and the following morning saw the end of our journey.

When I got back to The Horizon, I placed the Syrian ring in a locked casket to keep it as a souvenir. I had been aware, even during the space of that one brief journey, of all the veneration the Ismailis felt towards Aly.

Aly was their Prince, their spiritual leader. And this was the reason for the secretive, dark side of his character. For the man I loved was at heart a true Oriental and I had just discovered his religious side and the faith he believed in deeply and clung to in spite of having adopted the appearance of a Westerner.

But still I felt a little melancholy when I thought of Aly continuing on his way without me, and visiting Zanzibar which he had always told me was a lovely place.

'I'll take you there when we are married, Zine, my love,' he would say.

'When we are married.' How many a time had I heard that phrase!

My feelings had in no way changed. In Cannes, the first time we ever stayed there, Aly had asked me to give up my job as a model, and had said: 'One day I shall marry you.' And Aly never broke his pledged word. So I was utterly and unshakeably convinced that he would do so, and never did the slightest shadow of doubt cross my mind that one day I would become Aly's legal wedded wife.

But we had to wait for favourable circumstances before we could marry, and those circumstances were a long time in coming, which made me sad.

When I had first met Aly, his divorce from Rita Hayworth had gone through in America, but had still not been registered in France. That was the first obstacle.

The Aga Khan, who was very fond of me, at one time considered arranging for us to marry in Pakistan, which would have made it possible for me to accompany Aly to India.

Then the old Aga died. Then Aly accepted a very important job with the United Nations, which gave him a very great deal of work and many responsibilities.

But Aly had a tremendous instinctive knowledge of what I was thinking, and would suddenly say point-blank:

'You'll see, Zine my love, when we are married.'

To which I would reply:

'I sometimes begin to wonder if we ever will be.'

'But don't you trust me?' Aly said.

'I see the years go by and still you go on saying the same thing.'

'But how could you not believe me? Have I ever made any promise that I have not kept?' he asked.

'No,' came my reply, to which he answered:

'Well then!'

So I had to give in. And I gave in because I knew he loved me and needed me, and that I must trust him.

Whenever we talked horses, he would often say:

'You must choose your colours. When we are married you'll be having horses of your own.'

And when we had the Geneva house built, one day he caught sight of a tiny room and said:

'If we have a child that can be its room.'

For he would have liked to have a child, although for him it would have meant the end of living dangerously and the beginning of another life in which risk-taking and gambling played a much smaller part. But he hesitated before renouncing these things.

And of course he feared finding himself married, thinking it might change our feelings towards one another. Might it perhaps not make me a more demanding woman?

Aly's first marriage took place when he was very young, too young in fact, for he was only twenty-two. Even at that age he was a great charmer and loved to use his powers of seduction.

His wife bore him two sons, a year apart. Then war broke out and he had to go away. But when he came back years later he never went back to his wife.

So there he was, alone and leading a bachelor life that his sons could not share. It was then that the Aga insisted that Karim and Amyn should be brought up at the Rosay School in Switzerland.

Meanwhile Aly was busy dashing from place to place, permanently surrounded by women.

Then he met Rita Hayworth and fell in love with her. He loved her for her great beauty and was also attracted by the aura of glamour surrounding a great film star. But in fact there was an unbridgeable gulf between them, which Aly would sometimes talk about to me.

Rita, like a true American woman, had no intention of being eclipsed by her husband's personality. Merely being Aly's wife

was not enough; she had also to remain Hollywood's biggest star. And she undoubtedly suffered from the ensuing clashes, for she did love Aly.

But her love was that of a jealous woman, even granted that it was hard not to be jealous of Aly. And on this score she never understood the Oriental side of Aly's nature, his ideas about women, and the way he considered certain things to be of little importance.

I was once told about a distressing scene that took place after a big dinner in Cairo. A belly-dancer had been engaged to dance, and she went all out to captivate Aly who was vastly entertained by it all. But Rita went off in tears.

At one time Aly made a considerable effort, an effort that must have cost him dear, to save his marriage with Rita. Yasmin had been born of this marriage and he would have been capable of many a sacrifice to enable him to keep his little girl.

So the day Rita left for America taking her daughter with her was a bitter one indeed for Aly.

The failure of this marriage made him very unhappy, and he sometimes talked to me about this period of his life as if it had been a bad dream. His father had disapproved of the much publicized breach which the newspapers had seized on with glee. So not only did Aly have his own grief to contend with, but had the added sadness of having displeased the Aga.

Aly had never spent much time with his father, but he feared and admired him. I think he always regretted the fact that he and his father had never been closer friends.

During the last years of his life the Aga did seem to draw closer to Aly. He would phone him frequently and whenever we stayed at The Horizon Aly would go up to Yakimour every day to see him and talk about racing, about his plans for buying and selling horses, and about matters concerning the Ismaili communities.

The Aga would receive his visitors with infinite courtesy, sitting in a chair with a cashmere shawl across his knees, by the fireside in the sitting-room during the winter months, or during the summer in a big room whose large expanses of window looked over the most magnificent gardens. He was a fascinating person to talk to, for in spite of the fact that he was both tired and ill he still retained an interest in everything. His comments

were full of common sense and even managed to be tinged with humour.

He loved roses, so I used sometimes to take him a few, and he would smell each bloom and comment on its perfume with a delicate, poetic touch that could only have come from an Oriental. He always had a Persian cat and an Indian Mynah beside him, and lived in his comfortable house surrounded by attentive womenfolk. For, apart from Solomon, an Ismaili who acted as both his secretary and his personal servant and had been with him since time immemorial, and his chauffeur, he wanted nothing but women about the place. And as for the Begum, she showed him utter, never-failing devotion and patience.

I loved going to see him, for he radiated intelligence and humanity, and I had the feeling that in spite of his belonging to a totally different world from mine, he nevertheless liked me.

I remember how deeply touched I was when, one Christmas, he gave me a clip from Cartier. Aly was staggered, for it was the first time the Begum and his father had given a present to the woman he loved. Some time later we were having dinner in Geneva with Sadri, Karim and Amyn, and I was wearing the clip. Aly said to his sons:

'Look, your grandfather gave that to Bettina as a present.'

He felt very proud about it, and I was very touched.

Unfortunately I only came to know the Aga towards the end of his life when he was sick and almost infirm. I would so have liked to have met him earlier, and might have helped his son to draw closer to him, for I feel sure that this would have helped to appease the deep anxiety Aly seemed to have so firmly rooted in his character.

Aly's proud, independent nature, his need to dominate, and his lack of emotional discipline all undoubtedly helped to prevent the two men drawing closer together; perhaps the Aga had never properly understood his eldest son. Perhaps he had not had enough confidence in him. All these things contributed to make Aly profoundly unhappy.

'My father never once said to me: "That's good",' he told me one day in a fit of expansiveness.

And on another occasion he laughingly detailed some of the hereditary family foibles.

'We were in Bombay once, and my father was sitting reading on the terrace. Someone brought him a bundle of newspapers, among them *Paris-Turf*, a newspaper of the day which had been sent specially from Paris. I was twelve at the time and passionately interested in horses, and there was the newspaper lying on the table so temptingly that I could not resist and opened it. I was just about to start reading it with great relish when my father noticed me holding it. He flew into such a rage with me that I can still recall it. I never at any time saw him so angry about anything. He could have killed me. Just think, I had opened his newspaper, I had spoiled it, I had desecrated it!'

But I too had often seen Aly furious because other hands than his had opened his newspapers.

His father and he shared the same passion for horses, a passion that had been handed down through several generations of their family.

In 1956, the year before he died, the Aga came to Chantilly to see the Diana Stakes. He was brought right to the door by car, drawing up beside the track, where he saw one of Aly's fillies win.

He came to Chantilly again the following year but was too ill to attend the races, and so stayed at the house where he had had lunch with us. The Begum, Aly and I were the only people there with him.

In spite of his illness he still very much enjoyed his food, and had asked the chef, who had been his for seven years, to prepare his favourite dishes. Aly waited for his father to arrive, as excited as a small boy, and delighted that he was still capable of evincing some enthusiasm for good food.

The chef put all his considerable skills into the preparation of a calf's head and a strawberry mousse, which the Aga adored.

When the calf's head was carried in, Aly called to mind how once in Bombay he had given a big dinner party to which several maharajas had been invited. There had been some ghastly mistake in choosing the menu, and the servants entered the room bearing a magnificent calf's head with sprigs of parsley sticking out of each nostril, served on a silver dish. A cry of horror went up through the room and one of the maharajas slid under the table in a dead faint.

For it had been the most monumental blunder to offer a

calf's head to people who, for religious reasons, consider the cow to be sacred.

When the maharaja recovered from his faint, it was merely to say:

'It's just as if they had walked in with my child's head on a platter.'

Everyone laughed at this story, and we were glad to see the Aga remained in a good mood. But he scarcely touched his lunch and spent the entire afternoon sleeping on the terrace with a screen round him to keep the draughts off.

A few days later the Aga left the Ritz and returned to Switzerland, where his busy life drew to an end the following month. On July 13, 1957, the day before he died, he said to Aly:

'Tell your wife to come!'

Whenever the Aga talked about me to Aly, he always said: 'Your wife'. Aly phoned me and asked me to bring Yasmin too.

Yasmin and I caught a plane to Geneva that very evening, and Aly came to the airport and drove us straight to his father's house. I crossed the garden where Sadri and Nina, his bride-to-be, were anxiously waiting.

Aly took me to his father's bedside, and the Aga grasped my hand and held it for a long time. Then, in a voice heavy with weariness, he said something to the Begum that quite shattered me. His thought remained lucid but he had difficulty in expressing himself. He told her that I was the perfect wife for his son, that Aly should marry me and that he wished him to.

'Why isn't he married already? Why? He must get married!'

Yasmin knew her grandfather was very ill, and was upset about it, although a little confused for she did not yet fully comprehend the full meaning of sickness and death. She had asked a great number of questions in the plane as we flew down.

This intelligent and charming little girl had very soon won her grandfather's heart. The first time she ever visited Yakimour, she had tea with the Aga and the Begum and had soon realized that she had cast her spell over this new family of hers. Before she went home, the Aga said to her:

'What would you like me to give you?'

And Yasmin pointed to the Venetian chandelier and replied: 'That.'

So the Aga had the chandelier taken down. Obviously we had

not gone off with this very bulky object, but Yasmin was nevertheless delighted to have been given it.

Yasmin was also very proud of her big brothers and would say gravely:

'Karim doesn't want me to talk with an American accent. Karim won't let me eat pork; it's forbidden by our religion.'

And whenever she saw a slice of ham she would say:

'Ugh! We never eat pork meat!'

Karim flew back from Harvard on the very evening he learned of his grandfather's condition. But Amyn, who was sitting an examination at the same university telegraphed he could only arrive the following day.

Aly was furious, but could not understand that if his son did not pass this particular exam he would have to do the whole year over again. So he gave me a job I did not at all like having to do.

Aly spent the night with his father and I had to phone Amyn in America; but all in vain, for he arrived too late, after the Aga had died.

But his grandfather would have been the first to understand Amyn's delay, for he passed his exam brilliantly, and the old man had always taken a deep interest in the education of his two grandsons.

The Aga passed away in the morning with his family gathered about him. Nina and I were waiting in an adjacent room when suddenly we heard sobbing. It was the end. The door, which had been ajar, was closed so that the grief felt by all the family on seeing their leader go – for he had been a wise man, as much respected by those close to him as by the millions of the Faithful – should remain hidden from the sight of strangers.

I felt horribly dispirited, for I knew Aly was going to have to face a serious ordeal and, although he suspected he might not be named his father's successor, as yet he had no certainty that this was to be so.

I myself thought he might well not be. One day the Aga had phoned me from Cannes when I had been ill for a few days in Paris. Aly had gone off, as he did every year, to the East and to Africa, and an article had appeared in an English newspaper about a speech he had made in Pakistan.

The Aga talked about him on the telephone, about the speech,

which he had thought good, and about his fantastic knowledge of horses. Then suddenly he had begun talking about Karim.

'I am very pleased he's had a good education,' he went on. 'That's what Aly lacked. Aly never went to school. Now Karim has received a very full religious training ever since he was a child. He would make good speeches. He's a serious-minded boy, and young, too. He'd make a good Aga.'

Then the old man added:

'Aly is intelligent, but he lives too dangerously. You should stop him.'

I could not have agreed with him more, for I too suffered greatly from Aly's love of taking risks. But I also knew that the time had not yet come to stop Aly living in his own way.

Then the Aga mentioned Karim again, adding, as if to himself: 'But of course when you are my grandson's age you are easily influenced.'

This conversation had left me very uneasy, for it seemed to me to have been a veiled way of telling me that Aly was not to be the next Aga. But I could never bring myself to talk about it to Aly, for he was far too impenetrable about it all. And I also knew how easily he could be made unhappy.

The Aga tried several times himself to warn Aly. He disapproved of his reputation as a playboy, he did not like the way he gambled, and considered that he behaved in an undignified manner.

At the time Aly would beat his breast, and did feel sincerely ashamed and full of remorse. He would swear not to squander any more money as he had done, hand over fist, at the Casino. But the very next day he would begin gambling again.

Aly was not entirely responsible for his own behaviour for it was not his fault that he had been thrown so much on his own resources as a child. It was during this period of his life that he had become so obsessed with women, too.

Then of course the newspapers had made matters worse. One year we saw the New Year in at a restaurant in Eze. We had spent a gay evening there, but in no way a rowdy one. But unfortunately, the following week a magazine printed a photo of Aly blowing a paper trumpet side by side with a photo of Karim's serious face. It was an absurd thing to have done, showing not only bad taste but bad faith to boot. But the maga-

zine fell into the Aga's hands and must certainly have annoyed him.

It is only fair to say that there were many times when Aly had undoubtedly come to blows with his father over a thousand and one minor matters he could well have avoided. And it was undoubtedly to atone for these mistakes that Aly later accepted his post with the United Nations.

Proud of his successes in New York, Aly would often say:

'Wouldn't my father have been pleased to hear that!'

But it was certainly not only Aly's way of life that made his father decide on Karim as his successor. In his will he gave another reason, namely Aly's age.

The Aga had become Imam very early, at the age of seven, and his mother, a true Oriental and a deeply pious woman, had straightaway taken over his education; she had governed him wisely and been a source of strength to him throughout her life. So the Aga had been the spiritual leader of the Ismailis for over seventy years. Thus it was that when he died, his son Aly was already forty-six, and was too old to succeed him even on a spiritual throne.

In any community a change of leadership always brings certain dangers in its train, and the risk of disorders, scissions and schisms amongst the Faithful is greatly increased. So it seemed quite logical that the Aga should have wanted to entrust the fate of these millions of faithful subjects to someone very young who would be capable of ensuring, as he had done, a continuity of rule for many years to come in a world that showed less and less stability with every day that passed.

But to Aly it seemed that his father's preference for his son was a kind of public humiliation for him. He showed great pluck in bowing to his father's will, but was never quite the same from that day on.

His deep sadness took cover beneath a life of still more inhuman activity.

If anyone thought Aly felt the slightest resentment towards Karim, they did not know Aly, for pettiness was something utterly alien to him. Even if he himself was disappointed, he regarded Karim as an utterly worthy successor to the old Aga. But he could evaluate the burdens that were now to fall on the young man's shoulders.

Like most parents, Aly went on treating his sons like small boys even after they were grown up, and they on their side considered that their father was even more of a child than they were, both of which were very healthy and normal reactions.

Aly liked having his sons at home, and spoke with great pride of Amyn's gifted piano-playing, of his sense of humour and pertinent wit. But he would often grow angry too, and exclaim:

'They are a thankless pair, they never write!'

Or else he would be furious that the boys had gone straight from Harvard to Gstaad for their Christmas vacation without coming to see him first at The Horizon. But who could blame them?

Aly's fatherly feelings had developed too late, only after the birth of his daughter. He had been too young when his sons were born, his own personal life taking precedence over his life as a father. He never managed to make up the lost ground where his sons were concerned, and they grew up strangers to their father, which was something Aly deeply regretted.

They totally failed to understand one another over the question of horses. Aly complained because his sons did not share his passion, and tried to drag them to the races with him. Karim and Amyn used to come along without the slightest sign of enthusiasm whenever they were in Deauville, but they would escape from there almost as soon as they had arrived, preferring the Southern sunshine. Aly would have liked to see them as excited about the victory of one of his horses as he or Yasmin were.

One evening we were dining at Testou's, a restaurant on the sea front at Golf Juan, and Aly was talking horses as usual with his friends. His sons were both present but showing little interest in the conversation.

'You must begin to learn something about horses,' Aly told Karim after the meal. 'I could die at any moment and the business is far too big a thing to see frittered away.'

'But, Father, I know nothing whatever about it and I'm not in the least interested,' came Karim's reply.

Aly told me rather sadly what his son had said, for he had never doubted but that Karim would one day cheerfully take over his life's work.

Shortly after the Aga's death Karim came to spend a week at

The Horizon with his father, and I made myself as scarce as possible in order to leave the two of them together as much as I could.

On the very day the Aga's will was read in Geneva, Aly took his son by the arm, placed a hand on his shoulder and said:

'Now you are the leader.'

Three weeks later, after the intense emotions engendered at the time had died down, Karim and Aly met again. Nothing seemed to have changed between them, at least not that one could see.

'Come on, Father, let's have a game of tennis,' called Karim on his first day with us.

And they both went out for a game. Karim was a far better player than his father and had him running all over the court. After a game, they would go for a swim or have long talks together that would often go on late into the evenings as they sat in Aly's study.

I only saw them together during meals. The atmosphere was very relaxed. Aly asked his son about his studies and Karim's replies were always full of verve. He talked about the exams he still had to sit, and about his friends. Then Aly would come back to the attack again:

'You ought to take an interest in horses.'

'But, Father, I'd never dare talk about horses in front of you; I'd be too frightened of seeming ridiculous.'

Both father and son laughed, but Aly remained pensive.

They often recalled the Aga, and their faces grew serious; or they discussed politics. Aly would tell Karim of his travels, and Karim would talk of the journeys he planned to make. There seemed to be difficulties in Syria over the succession. I had heard something about it, for the newspapers had mentioned the fact.

Aly and Karim must also have discussed this problem behind the study doors, for they came to the conclusion that they had better both go to Syria so that Aly could present his son, the new Aga, to the Ismailis gathered together in Selemiya. The Syrian people had hardly ever seen the old Aga, whereas Aly had spent the war years in the Middle East and had used Syrian soldiers to help the British and French Secret Services. After their journey things returned to normal once again.

In spite of the fact that their day-to-day relationship seemed

not to have changed at all, I sensed how delicate a situation had been created by the question of the Aga's succession. And for there to be harmony between them they both needed to bring the utmost sensitivity and intelligence to bear on their relationship.

His grandfather's wishes had made Karim the head of the family, and also spiritual father to his own father. On the human family plane, Aly could expect respect and obedience from his son, whereas from the religious standpoint he had to show Karim, the new Aga, both devotion and respect.

Both were aware of this and seemed determined to avoid the slightest clash that might lessen the bonds that held them together. Karim knew his father well enough to realize that his pride had been hurt, but Aly would have been annoyed to find him specially solicitous towards him. And in addition, every member of this family considered, like all faithful Ismailis, that the Aga's decision on any matter was necessarily the right one.

Fortunately for Aly he had friends. Iskander Mizra who at the time was still President of Pakistan, realizing that Aly needed to take some action against his depression, offered him a job as head of the Pakistani delegation to the United Nations.

For me this represented the certainty of a further separation from Aly. But I urged him to accept the job, realizing that it might well save him from his unhappiness.

And I was right, for at the United Nations, Aly proved to be a great diplomat.

He had a difficult start at the UN, for everyone had their eye on him. They had all been waiting suspiciously for him to arrive, wondering what a playboy like him was doing in so grave an assembly.

But Aly was quick to prove to his denigrators how wrong they had been. He was a real leader, a man who needed responsibilities in his life. And in addition, like his father, he had a keen flair for international politics. Mizra, whom I have seen since, often used to say that Aly had extraordinary gifts in this field.

Aly's first speech caused quite a sensation. He had been busy preparing it day and night for a week, and just before he delivered it, he rang me to tell me how nervous he was.

He was very shy, and for him making this speech was rather like a first examination for a schoolboy.

Later he began to realize to what extent he could act as mediator in the Algerian troubles. At that time France was much criticized at the United Nations, and Aly was one of the few people in the world capable of understanding both sides of the dispute, for he was essentially European and Oriental, both a Moslem and a man whose mind had been formed by Western culture.

At the 1958 session, the FLN emissaries in New York asked for an interview with him, which took place over lunch one day.

'They want me to go to see General de Gaulle as soon as I get back to Paris, to try and reach a settlement,' he confided in me.

He found it a fascinating mission, and got in touch with the President through General Catroux. But de Gaulle considered that the time was not yet ripe and was unwilling to discuss the matter.

Aly's first speech was recorded, but I never dare play it over now, for I am sure that it would upset me far too much. But I can still recall his wonderfully clear voice. One could sense in his very throat the whole burden of hope and goodwill he had thrown into the cause he was defending. He spoke of the countries of Africa and the Middle East that had long lived beneath the domination of a foreign power. He spoke clearly, with his voice pitched a little higher than usual.

How pleased he was to be able to give me those records! I can see him too, as he took me round the United Nations building, constantly greeting people and shaking hands wherever he went. Quite obviously he was extremely popular there.

While Aly was in New York he also wanted to brighten up the Pakistani delegation buildings a little, so in one week he had everything redecorated and new carpets laid. Wildenstein, the art dealer, lent some of his canvases and Aly gave a cocktail party there for a thousand people. Every single person of any importance in New York was invited, from all walks of life, all types of occupation and every social class. The reception was a spectacular success.

When I arrived in New York I immediately realized that Aly was working terribly hard, almost frenziedly.

The nomad had already pitched his tent. He had bought and

Bettina as a designer for 'Bettina' Knitwear

A studio portrait of Bettina Photo Walter Garms

equipped a flat in a most attractive block near the United Nations building on the banks of East River. He had had furniture sent from Paris, and was being looked after by a faithful Irish housekeeper who had been in his service for twenty years; she was called Mrs Donahue, but was known as Mrs D., and very soon became famous in New York for she was a delightful person and ran the house extremely efficiently. Aly had also brought a wonderful cook over from his house in Ireland who had no equal when it came to sweet dishes.

Aly led a totally different life here from the one we led in Paris, and once again I had the impression of finding myself face to face with a different Aly. I was not used to seeing him in these surroundings, either. It was obvious he would never cease to surprise me. This Aly did not belong to me, and I felt very sad at the thought and secretly cursed this Tower of Babel.

He spent all day shut up in that glass house, the United Nations building, that is as big as an entire city. I imagine he must have found it very hard in the early days. I only saw him at mealtimes, and these were always taken in a hurry. He would work late, and often on Sundays too. As he needed to get some fresh air, he would walk to work on Sundays, and I would walk the several miles between our home and the office with him through the New York streets.

Occasionally we managed to visit some of the antique shops together to finish furnishing the flat. And I did some Christmas shopping, which was quite fun. But otherwise I never went out without him and stayed at home, rather drearily watching the television. Sometimes we went to the theatre, but he was always in a hurry and would arrive at the eleventh hour, or if he had to attend a cocktail party I would go and call for him with our chauffeur. And on the evenings when he had to attend official dinners, Mrs D. and I would go to the pictures together.

But one great joy put any feelings of melancholy I had at seeing so little of Aly very much into the background. I had the feeling his position at the United Nations was getting stronger with every day that passed. Thanks to his personality, his moral courage and the influence he had over people, he was enabling Pakistan to play an ever-increasing part in world affairs.

I often wonder how long he would have continued in this

career of his. He frequently said that he did not want to go on living far away from me as he was, and that he would return to Paris and we would get married. I never said anything, but I knew that for his own peace of mind he needed the intense activity involved in performing this new task, which was at last something worthy of his intelligence.

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Aly did not want to go out that evening. For several days he had been saying that he was tired and worried and I was well aware that this was indeed so. The United Nations, from which he had just returned, the racing season that was just beginning, his business affairs, his meetings, the house always full of people, all the comings and goings at Chantilly and Saint-Crespin, those lightning plane trips, everything conspired to wear him out. So his friends had to take second place.

We had been invited out to dinner at Marnes-la-Coquette, to Lorraine Bonnet's, André Dubonnet's daughter. But right up till the last minute, Aly would not commit himself, and only finally decided to accept the invitation that same morning, after much hesitation.

For me that May 12 was a day like so many others. I spent the morning seeing to the house and the dogs. Then in the afternoon I went round the garden before going to the hairdresser's. All unconscious of what awaited me, I let that peaceful day in May, that was so brutally to become my last day of happiness, just slip away.

That evening when Aly arrived home late, as was his wont, I was ready to leave. But Aly still had some business interviews pending and then had to change. How was I to tell him we should have left the house? I was beginning to grow restive in my room. After a while, I went upstairs to remind him about the dinner engagement, but simply could not get him to break off. He was talking horses and giving instructions for the Grand Prix dinner that was to take place several weeks later.

Towards ten o'clock the Bonnets phoned, for they were themselves beginning to grow impatient, to find out what had become of us. They said all their guests had arrived and were only waiting for us before sitting down to the meal.

Aly's secretary replied that he had got home very late, but that we were on the point of leaving and would be with them

almost immediately, which was a considerable exaggeration, since Aly was still in his study working.

But after this telephone call he at last consented to leave his visitors and came downstairs to change, grumbling, and making no particular attempt to hurry.

'Aly, for goodness' sake, hurry up!' I called 'They're all waiting for us!'

'Yes, Zine my dear, I'll just have a quick shave then I'll be down.'

I can still hear the purr of the electric razor just as I had done that first time five years earlier, when, on the occasion of our first outing together, I had had to wait for him for over an hour. Things were still the same. But never mind, we were late, so why worry? I should have been used to it by now.

'Zine, tell Lucien to have the car ready!'

Aly always insisted on his car being ready when he came down, and expected to find the engine already turning over, so that all he had to do was to seat himself at the wheel.

This order boded well, for he nearly always came down one minute later, or rather dashed headlong down the stairs and rushed out to the car, always managing somehow to get there first. Then, as if the chauffeur and I were to blame for the delay, he would call us out by tooting loud and long on the horn, delighted at being in a position to tell us off like this.

That evening everything took place as usual, and he was just tucking the ends of his bow-tie under his dinner-jacket collar when I caught up with him, having run all the way out to the car behind him.

We dived into the brand-new Lancia. Aly was driving. I got in beside him and Lucien the chauffeur sat behind us in the back seat. The chauffeur used to come with us to help on the return journey, when Aly, tired after the evening's activities, would allow himself to be driven.

The Lancia was being run in. Aly was talking to the chauffeur over his shoulder, without turning his head, and I was only half listening to their conversation, for my chief interest in life was not in the flexibility of this engine that Aly seemed so proud of. As we began to climb towards Saint-Cloud, Aly was enthusing just like a child about the car.

'I think I shall keep it,' he told Lucien, 'don't forget to have a cheque sent to the garage tomorrow.'

It was the first time we had been out in the new car, which was now climbing the broad avenue. I thought to myself that here we were, terribly late again. But it was quite impossible to change Aly, who merely laughed at the way I got upset, 'all for nothing', he reckoned.

Then suddenly two headlamps appeared straight ahead.

They came racing toward us, blinding me with their glare. I had just time to shout 'Mind!' then closed my eyes . . . I found myself standing up, with no shoes on, I have no idea how.

Between the moment when the lights came racing towards us and the moment I found myself in the street, there is a complete blank. Whether it lasted a few minutes, or a few seconds only, that I do not know.

It was all so quick.

I can still hear that terrible sound of shattering glass and rending steel, that excruciating whistle that still fills my ears. I can see Aly, motionless, his head fallen forward over the steering wheel. His stillness was striking. A few drops of blood stood out in beads on his forehead and in a flash I knew.

'What about Aly! What about Aly!' I can still hear myself shrieking, in a state of semi-consciousness. The chauffeur was just beginning to stir, and was rubbing his head.

They took me away. I could hear a babble of voices all round me, and someone shouting:

'But for goodness' sake switch off the engine, quick!'

The vision I had of Aly would not leave me. Where *was* Aly? I can see the café where they took me. I had not quite lost consciousness. It was some time before the doctor arrived, and I was still bleeding. Amongst my many confused memories, I can still see a woman, probably the waitress from the café, wiping my face with a cloth.

'It's not serious. She hasn't anything broken,' someone said, 'she can walk back to her car.'

'But you must be mad. She'll have to be carried,' came the reply from the doctor, who lived near by and had heard the noise of the impact.

I went on shouting: 'Aly! Where's Aly?' But no one replied.

It was just as if they could not hear me, as if my lips were moving but no sound was coming out.

I was carried to a police van, and the doctor and another silent man escorted me as far as the hospital operating theatre. The doctor kept his hand on my forehead, pressing on the severed artery.

I had the impression I had become an automaton, for everything seemed empty inside me. Once at the hospital, the doctor quickly sewed up my forehead, for it was not a serious wound.

'Is that everything?' he asked.

'There's another gentleman,' the nurse replied.

The silent man who had been beside me in the police van was now sitting on a chair, looking completely overcome, with his head in his hands.

'Yes, I've been cut on the chin,' he said.

He was the driver of the other car. The doctor wanted to take a blood sample to ascertain whether he were drunk, but the man protested violently.

I felt utterly indifferent to his fate. All I could see was the blinding light, and Aly with his head dropped forward over the steering wheel.

'Aly! Where's Aly?'

No one at the hospital seemed to want to tell me. I had to know. My cotton-wool legs got me as far as the doctor's surgery where I telephoned the Boulevard Maurice Barrès. The chambermaid answered the phone. She apparently knew all about the accident already, no doubt through the chauffeur. But did she know the whole truth? Whether she did or not, she told me nothing, but gave me the Bonnets' telephone number, and I rang them immediately. Then followed a conversation that left me utterly exhausted.

At first the phone was answered by their maid. I asked to speak to Madame Bonnet.

'Just a moment, Madam, I'll go and fetch her.'

There was a minute's pause, then the maid returned:

'Madame wishes me to tell you that she is waiting for you and that they have begun the meal.'

'Tell her to come to the phone. We've had an accident,' I shrieked, 'I must speak to her.'

It seemed an eternity before she came. No doubt they were

talking about us in the dining-room. They must be thinking the accident was just an excuse for our being so late.

Then at last I heard Lorraine's voice, and said:

'Lorraine, you'll have to come over.'

I must have sounded quite shattered. Lorraine realized what must have happened, and a quarter of an hour later she arrived at the hospital with Elie de Rothschild, who was also a guest at the dinner party. They told me they had heard Aly had been taken to the Foch Hospital in Suresnes, but said that 'no further particulars' had been given.

Today I can recall every detail of what went on. I can still hear their voices. Was my mind as clear as that? I am under the impression that a strange mechanism had been set going within me. I seemed to have been severed somewhere and had become my own double. I was aware of the fact that legs would scarcely carry me, and yet my mind was crystal clear, far too clear, and I was registering everything that went on as I had never registered things before. It was as if something had snapped inside me. I no longer knew what was the real world, and all my actions had become purely mechanical.

I felt like ice inside, and completely empty. It is quite impossible to foresee how one will behave in certain situations of extreme gravity. I had never imagined living through anything like this.

Lorraine took me back to her house, and put me to bed in her room. The doctor who had accompanied us gave me an injection to calm me down. But I did not want to sleep.

Then one by one all the dinner guests filed past my bed, smiled at me, but said nothing. I so wanted someone to talk to me about Aly. These people must surely know the truth. I started several times when I heard the phone ring, but could never manage to make out what people were saying; everyone was talking so softly.

Elie de Rothschild came and sat on my bed. I knew he had just been speaking on the phone, for I was sure I recognized his voice.

'What's happened to Aly? Please, *please* tell me!'

Elie took my hand.

'It's nothing. He's in the hospital. He's just having a sleep. Don't worry! You go to sleep.'

And Elie repeated several times: 'Go to sleep.'

Then the injection took effect and I lost consciousness.

I do not know how long I slept for. I only remember seeing the sunshine and the trees in the garden as I woke. As I lay there in bed I could see what looked like countless heads all round me, slowly emerging from a cloud, and tried very hard to identify them one by one. There was my sister Catherine and her husband, and Jeanne de Ganay and Lorraine... there really were a lot of people. The doctor was there too. Nobody said anything, so I began to talk to myself. I can still hear myself talking about how lovely the garden looked, and how I could see the trees. I could not make out at all what I was doing there, and what my sister was doing by my bed, and Dr Laënnec, whom I had asked for the previous day. Doctor Varay was there too.

And as I went on talking, I was aware of various confabulations going on round me.

'We shall have to tell her, we can't go on like this,' I heard someone say.

It was Doctor Laënnec.

In my heart of hearts I knew what they were going to tell me, but I was doing everything I could to delay the moment when they would actually say the words I did not want to hear. So every time anyone moved towards me, I managed to take avoiding action, by telling myself not to let them talk, and by saying anything that came into my head...

'Just look how pretty this room is... how lovely it is outside...'

I was making a tremendous effort. I could hear my own words coming to me from far off, scarcely reaching me through the mists. The sedatives I had been given had by no means lost their effect yet.

Every time anyone started to say anything to me, I managed to forestall them by saying something first. I wanted to put off the moment when I would learn something I did not want to know.

But the truth had flashed intuitively through my brain when I saw Aly so still, with that strangely serene look on his face, and heard the terrible silence after the impact.

Night after night I wake in a cold sweat with that same image

always engraved deeply in my memory. And often when I am driving on my own I have a vision of that moment again, of Aly, of his face... I have to give myself a good shake and try to think of something else... But I shall never forget it.

That vision of Aly in the car could not have lasted for more than a second, and after they had taken me away, the idea that we had been parted for ever vanished from my mind.

So I clung to hope as long as I could.

But then I gave up the struggle. Doctor Laënnec bent down towards me and I never heard myself utter a single word in an attempt to stop him saying what he had to.

'Bettina, you must be very brave, very brave,' Laënnec repeated.

'Where's Aly?'

I clung on for still another second.

'It's all over... he felt nothing.'

All around me people were silently weeping. A feeling of numbness began to steal over me, as another extremely powerful injection began to take effect.

I could not remain indefinitely in the Bonnets' house, so while I slept it was decided to take me back to the Boulevard Maurice Barrès, and the doctors agreed that this was the thing to do.

So half asleep, aching with stiffness, and unable to move a single muscle, I was taken home. My brother-in-law carried me himself as far as the ambulance. There seemed to be a great deal of coming and going all round me, but I could only make out moving shadows: jostling photographers with their flash bulbs.

Ten minutes later in the Boulevard Maurice Barrès the pack of photographers were there again, having laid siege to the house along with a hundred or so bystanders who had gathered out of curiosity outside the garden gate.

Reporters had tried the night before to get into the Bonnets' house, and I subsequently heard that one of them had even managed to break in, only to be thrown out unceremoniously by Elie de Rothschild just as he was about to burst into the room where I lay asleep.

At the time I had been far too unaware of what was going on to have realized all this. I have no idea how many injections I had to be given to help me over the worst of the shock.

I woke up in my own bed in the Boulevard Maurice Barrès, without the faintest idea whether I had been asleep for five minutes, half an hour, or three days. I was totally oblivious of the passage of time. When I opened my eyes, it was dark, then little by little all that had happened began to flood back into my mind. I stammered something. I could hear myself talking but could not make out the answers. I had the feeling of being drowned, or of being wrapped in cotton-wool. There were a lot of people in my room, and I recognized my mother, my sister and the Begum. But I felt alone, terribly alone.

And yet I did not want to see anyone except Karim. I kept on asking for him, and they must have been trying to tell me that he was on his way, but my mind would not register their replies.

Karim's arrival brought me more comfort than anything else in the midst of my distress. For having him there was a bit like having Aly back again.

Everyone left the room and Karim gently took my hand. For the first time since the accident I realized that I was not alone in my grief.

Up till that moment the great sadness of everyone about me seemed to have nothing whatever to do with this catastrophe that had left me so utterly stunned. I found no consolation in the understanding and devotion with which I was surrounded. But Karim seemed so completely lost and overcome that he made me want to console him, and his solemn words made me forget my own grief for the moment.

'It's a terrible thing... Terrible for you, but for me too. I am all alone now. I have lost both grandfather and father in so brief a space... I am young, and have to bear their great responsibilities... and now there is no one to whom I can turn for advice.'

Karim's presence, and the feeling of emptiness he felt, and made me feel too, did something to revive me. For his loneliness was mine, and this comforted me a little.

Then friends began to file past. There must have been hundreds of them outside my room. Aly's death had been a catastrophe for many of his friends, but in my self-centred misery I could not always identify their grief with mine. All these sorrow-stricken faces leaning over my bed, all these compas-

sionate looks, all the handkerchiefs drawn from handbags, they all seemed to me so pointless.

Today I have no doubts about the genuine grief felt by those who came to see me, and without them my ordeal would have been still more terrible. But since my grief could not be theirs, I felt more and more of a stranger to them. The real word kept on escaping me, and my mind could not take in the fact that Aly was dead and that my life had collapsed about me.

Aly's body was brought from the hospital to the house, and was laid out in the drawing-room on the first floor, the drawing-room he had been so fond of.

As soon as I knew he was there I realized that this evening would be the last I would ever have him to myself.

I summoned up enough energy to get up. Night had fallen, and the house was deserted. Only the Begum and my mother were there looking after me, and seeing me staggering down the stairs clutching at the banisters, they realized where I was going. They tried to stop me, but I screamed and struggled, and begged them to let me go. I fought them with every vestige of energy I could summon, and in the end they gave up their attempts to stop me.

I spent that night beside Aly, obsessed by my vision of the accident. Aly had not changed. His face looked even more relaxed than before and seemed almost to be smiling. I felt I wanted to talk to him, that I was living through some terrible nightmare. All this simply could not really have happened.

My mother and the Begum placed a sofa beside the bed on which Aly lay, and I slept there till the morning, one hand resting on his arm.

I was never to see Aly again. The next day he no longer belonged to me. They embalmed him, and the Ismaili Imams came to the house to say prayers over him. Soon the drawing-room was full of flowers and people. It was all so formal, so well organized and so impersonal that I no longer felt I could cross the threshold into the room.

I wandered about the corridors, caring nothing for the buzz of conversation and the groups of people standing talking in low voices. From the bathroom to his study, all the old familiar objects lay about in the same untidy state as if he had just gone out. I knew that looking at these things would make me still

more unhappy, if indeed that were possible, but an irresistible force urged me on to do myself still further hurt. No one dared interfere with me, except my maid, who tried very sweetly to stop me going into the dining-room.

There I saw Aly's dinner-jacket and trousers lying across a chair, with his shoes on the floor beside them, as if he had just taken them off a moment earlier. Aly had been wearing these clothes on the night of the accident, but when I first set eyes on them there, I did not associate them with the idea of death; for me, these familiar clothes were no more than the outward sign of his physical presence.

I went up to my room again, holding back the tears that choked me. There my mother took me in her arms. I seemed to alternate between a state of prostration and one of over-excitement, from the nightmare to the reality I still refused to accept. I kept on finding Aly again, only to lose him even more cruelly the very next second.

Several times I asked to see the papers. I wanted to know. But all in vain, for they would not let me see them, fearing the terrible effect they might have on me.

I remained in this state for three days and three nights, unaware of what went on around me, indifferent to it all, and saying things that seemed to come from someone else. I felt sure I would see Aly again. I could not reconcile myself to his having gone.

I was beginning to feel a little stronger again. My mother and the many friends who came to the house, seeing me staggering round the house, suggested I might like to go for a walk with them. They thought I ought to get out of this emotional atmosphere for a while and take a walk in the Bois de Boulogne.

So after lunch – lunch was a big word for it, I could not swallow a thing – I went out with three friends: Jeanne de Ganay, Suzette Ménache and Ping Lawrence, who between them surrounded me with affection.

As I was leaving by the back door, to avoid the crowds of onlookers and photographers, four men in black entered the other door carrying the coffin.

This strange trick of fate came as a terrible shock to me. So Aly really was dead; this meeting had given substance to it all. This really was the end of everything.

And yet at the same moment I felt a certain lucidity deep

down inside me, a fund of energy that has never ceased to surprise me.

I was going to need a great deal of strength to face the tribulations to come.

First there was the inventory, a necessary formality, but how ever did I manage to bear it? The entire house, with all its furniture and fittings, had to be gone through. Everything was written down by a very understanding gentleman, but to me he seemed so totally inhuman. Nothing escaped his scrutiny, even bottles of perfume and my lipsticks were listed.

'That is Madame's... No, that belongs to the Prince. That belongs to Madame,' the chambermaid would insist.

I wept bitterly throughout it all, for, although it was simply the normal routine under the circumstances, it seemed an appalling thing to be doing. I said nothing. Sometimes the chambermaid, who had been with us for only two years, would make a mistake, for how could she be expected to know? It all seemed so futile now.

There were still hordes of people in the house. Aly's death was a disaster for all these visitors, bowed down as they were with grief. It was even for those who did not know him. My friends and family brought me comfort and I needed them and their friendship.

Naturally enough, every disaster attracts a certain type of person who is brought to the scene by morbid curiosity and the need to witness someone else's grief, for social or publicity reasons. They want to have been there, to have seen and heard everything, to be in the know, so that they can make drawing-room conversation about it afterwards.

But all this seemed of so little importance at the time, that the presence of strangers in the house, on the look-out for any intimate titbits that might come over their way, only fills me with disgust now that it is all over. I never even attempted to have all the strangers who had managed to get in driven from the house, and they wandered from room to room as if in a museum; nor did I bother with the English chauffeur we had sacked years before, who took upon himself the job of keeping the press informed of what was going on.

I was unable to participate in anything, but seemed to be

someone else, a tougher me, watching myself going about my business and talking to people without really being involved in it all. I felt cold, and nothing affected me any more. So I just kept a firm hold on myself and waited for the moment when I could be alone. I wanted to go away, and never have to take any decisions again.

Before being finally laid to rest far away in Syria, Aly's body was to be temporarily interred at the Château de l'Horizon at Cannes. A great crowd of people, relatives, friends, Ismailis, and mere onlookers came that morning to see him taken away for the last time.

This was the most appalling experience I had to undergo. As I came down from the second floor towards the drawing-room I heard a litany being chanted. The Ismailis were singing most movingly in unison, as they bore the coffin on their shoulders slowly down through the crowd, who stood overcome at the thought of this death in which they still found it hard to believe.

I too moved on through the crowd, looking at all the faces without seeing them. I was afraid I might lose courage and be unable to go on, and found myself wishing it would all stop. I had just left my mother, overcome at the thought of the terrible journey I was about to make. I must not cry. The knowledge that Elie de Rothschild and General Bonafé were close beside me gave me strength enough to reach one of the cars. I climbed in and sat down beside Princess Andrée; then, feeling utterly lost, I clasped her hand.

Sadri, in spite of his own great grief, managed to find all the right words and do all the right things to comfort me. The *cortège* wound on towards the Bois de Boulogne railway station, and all along the way the road was lined with unknown people, on whose faces I could read the same sorrow. It was then that I realized that Aly would not be forgotten.

The train journey down to Cannes was long and distressing. Karim, Amyn, who also showed me a great and tender solicitude, Sadri and I were in the same compartment. Since this was a special train, all other trains took precedence over ours and we had to face interminable delays at many stations. We spent twelve hours in that carriage. I was given sedatives, and the movement of the train kept me in a state of somnolence until one of the frequent halts woke me with a jolt. I found it impos-

sible not to torment myself with the memory of other journeys South, and of our exuberant delight as Aly and I finally used to shut our suitcases – late as usual – before catching plane or train by the merest skin of our teeth. And I found it impossible ever to forget that Aly lay in the very next coach.

We reached Cannes in the middle of the night, and I was taken to Princess Andrée's house. Then the next day I crossed the threshold of The Horizon, where I had lived so happily, but now, for the first time, it was without Aly.

The sky was overcast and everything about me seemed so gloomy. Later I learned of the great grief of an unknown woman, whose husband, a member of the State Security Police, had been posted on the railway line where it runs along beside the grounds of The Horizon, to prevent people from peering in, and had been killed by a passing train.

Aly's grave had been dug in the middle of the lawn, right beside the study where he had always spent the greater part of each day. Only those very close to him attended the burial ceremony, while friends who had accompanied us to The Horizon remained in the drawing-room.

Standing before the grave, Karim, the head of the family, recited the Moslem prayers with his palms turned towards heaven. Ismaili officiants gave the responses. The green and white Pakistani flag covering the coffin was removed, then slowly, Aly left us for ever.

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I still found it impossible to admit the fact of Aly's death, although he had so often spoken to me about it. I could not believe that life would go on without him. And although I did not rebel, I nevertheless refused to face up to reality. I thought about the countless times Aly had said: 'When I am dead... When I die.' I knew that death to him as a Moslem was an ever-present reality.

I had come to know the way he had of entrusting himself to the divine will on all important occasions. Yet even so, it still seemed impossible that I was never going to see him again. I went on performing the actions of living with the impression of being separated from everyone else by an aquarium wall; the world around me seemed all hazy. I scarcely heard what was being said to me. This was how it had been ever since the day they had told me of Aly's death at Lorraine Bonnet's. I felt frightened to drive alone at night, for I kept on seeing those lights, the accident and Aly's face.

Aly's family and friends could hardly have been kinder to me. They told me the houses were mine to stay in whenever I liked and for as long as I wanted. I needed peace. I seemed to need people around yet wanted to be alone. Karim suggested I might like to go to Geneva.

I did think I could indeed take refuge in the house Aly had built for us both, but in fact I soon found it had not been a good idea. It was far too unnerving an experience, one I was by no means ready to take in my stride yet.

The house was exactly as it had been before, and yet I was about to leave it for ever. Everything was in its customary place, but Aly would never come back to it. I had never begun to imagine how terrible I would feel there. After a couple of days a friend, Françoise de Langlade, came and joined me there. I was terribly depressed. I suddenly felt a complete stranger in the house, alone there without Aly and I began to hate the place and to feel most unhappy.

Then there were the journalists lying in wait all the time behind a hedge, trying to take shots through their telephoto lenses. I had become a curiosity, and felt I was being pursued every time I had to cross the threshold. Once Françoise was there, I never left the house.

Then she went away and Denise Prouvost took her place for a few days. Her husband, Jean Prouvost's son, had died the week after the accident. He had been a great friend of Aly's and had been very ill at the time; the news of Aly's death had come as a terrible blow to him. Denise, like me, needed solitude and rest. Then I returned to Paris although I was not at all keen to do so fearing the realities of the life that awaited me there.

There, too, I had invitations to go and stay from a great number of my friends, who were frightened at the idea of my living alone. But I thought it wiser to bow to the new discipline of a henceforward solitary existence. I told myself that a respite would not make things any easier and that I must struggle on alone to regain my former equilibrium. I felt ill, and abandoned by Aly, which made me feel bitter towards him.

Without going back to the Boulevard Maurice Barrès, I went straight to a flat in the Rue de Longchamp that Geneviève Fath had lent me. Geneviéve had filled it with flowers and put pretty sheets on the bed to welcome me, and Doris Brynner, Yul Brynner's wife, and my maid, together had moved my dogs and all my personal things over for me.

I felt very depressed at having to arrange all the things I was so used to seeing in other surroundings, in this strange, rather dark flat that looked out over a courtyard. My dogs lay cowering in their basket. They seemed as miserable as me, as the house, and as the weather. There was nothing I wanted to do, only not to have to take any decisions; I wanted someone to look after me, to decide things for me, to reorganize my life. I would have liked to have slept for a long, long time. I tried to react against these feelings, to fight my desire to give up, and every morning I would set myself tasks; but I did not believe in them, and all my activity seemed so pointless.

I was in need of a mental holiday, but had chosen to take up the threads of day to day existence again. I had to stick to my resolution and make every possible effort to counteract any attempt to let things slip. My obstinate nature helped me here.

After the hundreds of telegrams I received during those first few days, still innumerable letters continued to pour in from all corners of the globe, some from people I knew, and others from strangers. The injustice of Aly's death seemed to have stirred everyone's heart, and even those who had never known him had the impression they had lost a friend. Aly was still alive in men's thoughts and they all wrote the most touching letters, from the Emperor of Abyssinia to a stable-boy in Ireland. It is a wonderful thing to realize that in times of great sorrow men are not as indifferent to one another as one might have thought. Aly had been an object of fascination to everyone for years, but when he died, each one did his best to express his sympathy.

Along with all these letters of comfort came a handful of anonymous ones too, but who cared? This type of letter counts for nothing, it is soon forgotten. Incredible things must go on in the minds of some people, things one only becomes aware of in a situation like this. I received quite a number of letters from raving lunatics, and a family in Algeria sent me a whole list of things they wanted me to send them, including 'a sewing-machine for Granny, a Vespa scooter for our little brother and a few well-made dresses for our big sister.' The letter ended: 'Thanks in advance.'

Many people rang me or sought me out, hoping that by doing so they might give themselves something to talk about, if they were able to do something to look after me. This I realized only too well on seeing the looks of disappointment that stole over some of their faces when Aly's will was made public and it was realised that 'poor Bettina' had by no means been left high and dry. They immediately lost interest.

In July my friends the Lawrences took me to Holland for a week to see some of the museums there and attend some of the festival concerts that were being given at the time. This trip both did me good and depressed me. I no longer knew what to do.

But I did go down to the South all the same, to stay with friends who had a house at Gassin. The Montbrizons had often invited me there, and when we got back from Holland I realized I could not remain in Paris, so I phoned them. The Aix Festival was in progress at the time, and we went to several concerts.

I still have only a hazy memory of this period of my life. At

one time I wanted to go far, far away for a long time, to do something, anything, in a hospital, for I needed to look after someone else to take my mind off myself. I felt terribly ill at ease.

Ping Lawrence said:

'Wait a little; things will change. The trouble with you at the moment is your state of mind. Don't come to any hasty decision.'

One of Aly's friends, Charles de Breteuil, suggested I might like to do some charitable work for Moslems living in France. I was on the point of agreeing when Charles suddenly died of a heart attack. The loss of this friend put an end to all those plans.

But what was I to do? Travelling did not seem to help.

After spending some time in the South, I decided to spend August in Deauville, as Aly and I had done every year. I did not want to stay in Paris all alone. So I went to the Hotel du Golf, but this also turned out to be a bad idea.

Deauville was full of memories of Aly, for it was the place he enjoyed staying at more than anywhere else during the racing season. And part of his childhood, perhaps the happiest years of all, had been spent there. He and I had had some very happy times here together.

The Ganays, the friends I had gone to see there, wanted to take me to the races, but although I agreed to go once, no sooner had I arrived than I had to rush away again, wondering what on earth I had gone there for. On another occasion Maurice Druon and Doctor Varay and his wife invited me to the theatre. I used to go every summer to see the Cuevas Ballet. But once again, no sooner had the curtain risen, than I dashed out of the theatre. Maurice Druon came with me and we walked up and down the beach for ages.

I felt grateful for the fact that his friendship had survived the test of time and absence. I had not, in fact, seen him during the whole time I lived with Aly. But now, when things were going badly for me, there he was again.

'Come on now,' he said, 'let's go and have some prawns in Honfleur.'

Everything in the harbour seemed to be asleep and it all looked very pretty in the moonlight. We sat down at a café table with

our prawns and some calvados. Everyone had gone by now for it was late.

That evening did me good, but I felt I could not stay in Deauville for long, seeking a life that was past and gone. So I and Harvey, my dog, fled back to the South after a week, having first phoned Paul-Louis Weiller from whom I also had an invitation to stay.

Everywhere I went I found I wanted to be somewhere else. I thought things would be better elsewhere and nothing ever seemed to satisfy me. Never had I experienced so strong a desire to flee. It was not me at all.

Once back in Paris, I thought of getting a job of some sort, for people often said one needed some work to do in a situation like mine. But I was still not well enough to begin a new job and the kind of things ladies who had nothing to do occupied themselves with did not tempt me in the slightest. I listened carefully to every suggestion that was made to me, but could never come to any decision. What seemed to matter to me more than anything else was to discover new foundations on which to base my life, to create a home somewhere which would be a true refuge.

For some time articles kept on appearing in the papers stating that I was about to open an art gallery, or go into business, or become the manageress of a couture house or take up modelling again, even that I was to become the manager of a theatre.

In fact an American magazine did suggest I might do a series of photos of dresses I could select myself after the collections had been shown. But I felt too tired and not sufficiently glamorous to undertake anything of that kind; it would have required a great deal of energy. But I did have some contact at that time with the firm that had been manufacturing Bettina pullovers since 1954.

I also had a brief, strange introduction to the theatre, thanks to Simone Berriau. She was famous throughout the theatre world for her business acumen and skill in matters of publicity, and I had not seen her for years. Then she suddenly suggested I might like to come along to the rehearsals of a play by Marcel Achard called *L'Idiote*.

'Marcel would be delighted if you came; he's a friend of yours,'

she said, 'and you'd be interested to meet Girardot. And then, you never know in the theatre . . . !'

Why not go, I asked myself. It was the last week of rehearsals and I went along every day. I would arrive at approximately three o'clock and watch with a certain astonishment while actors and producer alike moved from the deepest gloom through terrible doubts to a feeling of hope, all in the course of a single afternoon's work.

Naturally enough I felt a stranger to their pre-occupations but I enjoyed watching them. These people seemed so full of life to me who was so nearly dead.

Simone Berriau gave great publicity to my presence there. The first day I attended the rehearsals, to my considerable surprise, I found she had called in photographers and people from the world of radio and television and invited us all to lunch. I was bombarded with questions.

'Are you interested in the theatre?'

'Would you like to act?'

'Would you like to have something to do with the running of a theatre?'

I gave them evasive answers while Simone implied by what she said that yes, perhaps I was interested. It did not seem to matter one way or the other to me, and after Simone Berriau's first night success she completely vanished from my life once more.

Nothing that happened to me at this time ever seemed to lead anywhere, although at the time I never even noticed the fact.

The only thing I did manage to do was to make a short film for the television second channel from a script by Françoise Giroud and Frederic Rossif. The film was made for a television woman's magazine in the 'luxury class', a kind of television Harper's Bazaar or Vogue, created by Pierre Lazareff. It was an attempt to show everything beautiful and poetic a stranger might find in Paris. First it showed the city itself, and the Seine, night time in Paris with lovers wandering through the streets, and the Paris lights; this was followed by the 'fashion' section, in which I was asked to model a Dior suit, some shoes by Roger Vivier and some jewellery. The filming took three days and did help to still my grief a little.

But three days are soon gone and I fell back into my former state of torpor.

If I found myself deluged with offers of work, I was even more overwhelmed with offers of marriage. A great number of these came from America, and were often accompanied by a photograph, not, I must admit, very persuasive. I could have taken my choice between a farmer, a doctor, a dentist, a student, a painter or garage proprietor. I could have gone to live in Germany, Italy or Brazil, in fact, a regular matrimonial world tour.

I was even offered the title of Duchess; this time the suggestion was made to me in person at Maxim's. But I turned down this well-endowed coat of arms that belonged to a Duke who could have been my father.

Then I received a quite unexpected invitation. Elizabeth Taylor and Eddie Fisher were passing through Paris on their way from London after Elizabeth's first serious illness there, and insisted that I should accompany them to Palm Springs, where they had rented a house. They planned to leave the very next day and I was tempted by the haste of it all and the idea of distant lands. There was nothing to keep me in Paris and my papers were in order, so I left with them.

Elizabeth had remained a friend of mine through all her marriages. After my first meeting with her in California, I saw her again in Paris when she was married to Mike Todd. She had seemed radiant, loaded with gifts, and utterly dependent on her husband who made all the decisions.

This square-set little man never seemed to stop, and his brain was in a permanent ferment, looking for ideas about films or publicity. He was for ever buying things: a huge Rolls Royce with a bar inside, or a diamond diadem for Elizabeth. He used to smoke the very biggest imaginable cigars and would rent the very best house on the Côte d'Azur at Cap Ferrat.

His luncheon parties would see a gathering of every celebrity along the Riviera. Elizabeth would never come down from her room before three or four in the afternoon and their guests, by then nearly dead with hunger, would welcome her with an attempt at a smile.

Aly liked Todd, but found him exhausting. He had found someone stronger than he was in the field of action.

Elizabeth alternated between playing at being the great star – and Mike always managed to throw her act into sharp focus –

and being a spoilt little girl, but she never took herself seriously and people forgave her many a caprice because of her sense of humour.

Elizabeth and Mike used to have the most beautifully worked-out quarrels that would go on until they began to hurl abuse at one another. The uninitiated thought they were witnessing the break-up of the Todd marriage, until a great burst of laughter would put an end to the game.

Mike's death must have left a great gap in Elizabeth's life, even if appearances seemed to lead people to believe the opposite. One day in July when I was at The Horizon, I saw Elizabeth on the steps of the Carlton Hotel in Cannes. She had just married Eddie Fisher. I phoned her immediately and invited her to the house, and she came over with Eddie and a great deal of luggage, delighted to be able to escape the pack of photographers who had been laying siege to her room.

I had met Eddie and his wife Debbie Reynolds when Aly had invited them and Mike Todd and Elizabeth to the Epsom races. Mike treated Eddie like a son, and the Fisher ménage was far from perfect.

Liz told us how, after Mike's death, she had felt so desperate that she had fled Hollywood and come to Paris. On the way she stopped in New York where by chance she ran into Eddie, who was also alone and depressed about his marriage. So Liz's journey had ended there. Their solitude had brought them together and the result was a marriage that astonished the whole world, followed by their trip to Cannes.

When sorrow came to my life too, the letter Liz wrote me was one of the nicest and most touching one woman could possibly have written to another, and greatly strengthened my friendship with her.

So I was delighted to set off with her and Eddie and Kurt Frings, Elizabeth's agent. Our journey to Palm Springs was nothing but one long photographic session. Elizabeth, an expert in her role of film star, was photographed as we left in Paris, in New York where we stayed at the Airport Hotel and in Los Angeles. She was capable of remaining perfectly calm and collected while scores of reporters fired questions at her, as she stood there dazzled by flashbulbs and blinded by television lights.

I watched these scenes from afar and did my utmost to keep out of these inhuman free-for-alls.

Compared with the journey over, the Palm Springs house with its swimming pool seemed a real haven of rest.

Every day was peaceful there, although unfortunately Elizabeth and I never kept the same hours. Liz was convalescing and used to sleep practically all day long. Occasionally, however, I did catch sight of Eddie at the luncheon table.

I spent my time there reading, watching television or swimming whenever it was warm enough, but it was not at all hot. Our evenings were quiet family affairs in which we played gin rummy and backgammon.

One day, in a fit of unaccustomed activity, Elizabeth and Eddie took me to play a game of golf. I rather liked the idea of walking several miles in the open air but I was sadly disappointed. There was a small car no bigger than a toy to carry the players from one green to the next.

Tony Curtis was my partner, and we met him there. Elizabeth was wrapped in a muslin scarf and was not playing. Our game was by no means a serious one, for Tony, dressed in a yellow shirt and sky-blue trousers, was more interested in making me laugh than in scoring. Everyone we saw was going about in identical little cars, and we would sit there in the middle of the course, between two holes, and gossip with Peter Lawford, President Kennedy's brother-in-law, just as if we had been in a drawing-room.

I could easily have let time slip by in this pleasant pointless way, but was suddenly seized with a feeling of anguish. Why, I wondered? I had nothing particular to do in Paris and there was no one expecting me, and yet I felt an imperative need to get back there. Now it all seems so stupid when one looks at it in perspective.

Once back in Paris, my inner turmoil, that only my close friends could sense, seemed even worse than it had been before. I wanted to be alone, and yet at the same time I felt I wanted to see new faces around me. I wanted to lead a different kind of life from the one I had hitherto been leading.

So I began to go out every night, taking refuge with a band of night-birds. I met Jacques Chazot, Françoise Sagan, Jean-Paul Faure, Bernard Franck and Paola Sangust at the Epi-Club. I

danced very little but would sit there till dawn sipping crème de menthe as the hours ticked by. Then I would return home to sleep, exhausted. And at least while I was asleep I could not think.

Sometimes Françoise Sagan and I would go on to the Mars Club afterwards. This was the great meeting-place of singers and musicians on their way through Paris. There the two of us would sit in the shadows with a bottle of champagne or a glass of whisky and listen to the music.

We talked about ourselves and our lives and sometimes about Guy Schoeller, her former husband. I felt very close to Françoise and found her friendship and affection most touching. I had great difficulty in expressing my deepest feelings and liked her sensitive nature and her intelligence. We never had to explain anything to one another; she always grasped what you were trying to say immediately.

She realized I was lonely and lost, and she herself must have felt just as helpless for she had no particular reason for going home either. I was prepared to follow her till all hours.

I sometimes had lunch with her, and the meal was always interspersed with fits of giggling, triggered off by something ridiculous, some triviality. We sometimes rang one another in the middle of the night.

'Are you asleep?'

'No.'

'Well then, come and have a drink.'

I introduced her to Jacques Prévert, who had not met her before, and when she told him that she had been expelled from her school because they had caught her reading his book *Paroles*, he was absolutely delighted.

I also took her to meet my great friend Serge Poliakoff the painter, and we saw the Russian New Year in there, surrounded by guitars, vodka and abstract paintings.

This night life did me good until the day I began to tire of it. All of a sudden I realized that this kind of existence bore absolutely no relation to my true character.

I made an immense effort to get back into contact with reality, for ever since Aly's death there seemed to have been another person living in my place, and this could not go on for ever. I had to snap out of it, and snap out of it I did.

I looked for a flat, and began to take notice of the world

around me. I discovered Paris again, Paris, my city. I don't like living anywhere else. I like the people in the streets here, and all the different faces one sees. I like the humour of the passers-by, the Parisian sense of humour, even people's bad moods. I like the elegant, aristocratic buildings. Everything seemed entertaining or touching, from the policeman on point duty who wrapped his cape around a woman in a summer dress, to shelter her from a shower, to those romantic-looking courtyards that you just glimpse through a half-open doorway, and the black cat that skulks out from behind a pile of dustbins.

I chose my flat on the left bank, where I had never lived before. Maurice Druon had told me about it and I devoted two years to getting everything in it just as I wanted.

Shortly afterwards I bought some land in Sardinia with the intention of building another house on it. This was a good omen, for never before had I felt this desire to build something. Was it not perhaps a precursory sign of my getting to grips with life once more?

From then on all I had to do was to let time and fate play their part.

I would hasten nothing, wish for nothing; I would not force the hand of destiny, but would merely allow life to lay claim on me again.

Conclusion

The green exercise book is finished. The house in Sardinia has been built. I have created, at one and the same time, both a book, and a house, and into each I have put the experience of a lifetime, and have guaranteed that my future existence shall be similar to the one I have led up to now.

This I am certain of. Now I know I shall never change, because up till now I have tried, in all circumstances, to remain faithful to myself.

The enrichment brought to me by those five years spent in the company of the man I loved will not be wasted.

I have no husband; I have no child, and after the accident I found myself torn from my familiar surroundings. But I did begin to feel the need to build myself a home for the first time in my life. I had to have an anchorage so I began with my Paris flat, for Paris is my city and I felt at home there. Then I felt the need for a house on the Sunny Isle, where I could find solitude and rest.

One of the cruel ironies of life was that now, at last, I had found the peace Aly and I had so needed, our dream we had in vain pursued in Geneva. But now Aly was no longer with me.

As I stand face to face with the uncertainties of this new life, I no longer feel I have no roots, for now I have ties that bind me to life.

During the time I lived with Aly, who was himself so conscious of his responsibilities towards others, I gradually became aware, as I carried out my duties as his heart's companion, of the whole point of my life. My meeting with Aly had brought me permanent happiness. But if it was the hand of fate that had made us meet once, and again later on, it was our similarity of taste and outlook that constantly drew us closer to one another.

Aly never gave me the thing I wanted more than anything else in the world; he never made me his legal wedded wife. But as I have said, never once, during those five years, did he fail to

treat me as a wife. And when he died, his family and friends did not separate us.

I feel I have never cheated with life. I have always tried to act with the greatest possible sincerity, and the least possible hypocrisy. People often seem to compromise in an attempt to find excuses for their behaviour. As for me, I have always wanted to remain clear-headed and have tried to preserve the moral freedom which I have held dear ever since I was a child.

I have no religious faith, and have sometimes regretted the fact, but that was not how I was brought up. I have never compromised with the moral principles my mother inculcated in me.

What is known as moral freedom is the freedom to decide how one is to behave towards material possessions, fear and loneliness.

I have never known fear, probably because I have excellent nerves. Nor do I dread loneliness. This is very fortunate, for how many men and women are prepared to succumb to almost any temptation in order to escape from loneliness!

People's feelings are never simple, so why go out of one's way to make them even more complex? I have attempted to simplify life, and perhaps because I was brought up in the country, I am also able to feel my closeness to nature; the mere sight of a tree or a flower fills me with delight and I am capable of spending whole days without talking to anyone. I feel no need to talk, and am never bored with my own company.

Perhaps because of my education, perhaps on account of my natural laziness, I have never considered social ambition of any importance. It never mattered to me all that much whether or not I had a car, or jewellery, or a bank account. The mere acquisition of these things did not in itself spell success.

Neither is success to be equated with the list of famous people one happens to know, but rather the knowledge that one has done one's duty towards oneself and others in one's private life as well as in one's work.

What is important is not to own things, but to make proper use of what one has. Aly and I were in complete agreement over this most basic of issues, for although he had so many possessions himself, his tastes remained simple.

Occasionally while living with Aly I almost found myself wishing I were poor, and this was not something I talked about

without really knowing what I was saying. For I had been poor, and it had never hurt me.

I think that had Aly been poor he would have faced adversity with extraordinary courage. For him it was quite natural to be wealthy but poverty would have brought him greater strength.

I have tried to live according to my own conscience and I like to succeed in whatever I undertake to do.

I think I can say without false modesty that where Aly was concerned I did feel to a certain extent responsible for him from the moment we met. He needed me and it was this certainty that gave me such patience and that made it possible for me to go on waiting for the day when he would finally decide to marry me.

The world and all its pomp never won my heart, for although I always enjoyed an elegant dinner party, enjoyed wearing a dress I liked, and knowing I looked attractive, these things never became of paramount importance to me.

I was a success in my job as a cover-girl, and I owe that success more to an expressive face than to my good looks. I consider that there is nothing more dull than to spend one's whole time looking after oneself, and that the more one can forget one's face, the longer one will remain young.

Women who live in an agony of apprehension about losing their youth will lose it ten times quicker than those who don't. It is not their bodies they should be attending to, but their souls.

I have never considered myself beautiful, although in my job beauty and stylishness were very important. I had what it takes to be a mannequin but never considered that this was an extraordinary gift. I may seem very indifferent about these things but I am equally unconcerned about myself too.

When I was seventeen, back in Elbeuf, I knew I was the prettiest girl in the district, but soon realized that there were many, many lovely women in Paris; this fact did not make me unhappy, for I never envy other people their good looks.

The things that never perish, that defy the ravages of time, are the feelings one develops by living in depth. After the shock of Aly's death I began little by little to discover myself as all those years had made me, and I am even more convinced than I was before I had lived through all that grief and loneliness, that a woman's true role in life is the one Aly assigned to her.

I have never felt so completely myself as when I knew I was indispensable to the man I loved.

A woman's freedom becomes useless from the moment she falls in love, for it is in her very nature to be faithful and seek the protection of her beloved. A woman's independence is no more than a makeshift arrangement and never brings happiness in its train. To love and understand a man is the only way to fulfil one's destiny harmoniously. I both loved and understood Aly and it was with him that I found what I had been seeking my whole life long: inner peace.

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Bettina modelling a mole hat