

is not afraid. He is young and strong, and he has had a lot to drink. He calls to the stranger.

"Sir, if you are a thief, go home. I don't have any money."

"Officer Phoebus de Châteaupers, I don't want your money. I know you're going to meet a girl at seven o'clock," the mystery man in the long black coat says.

"How do you know my name and my plans? Are you a sorcerer?" Phoebus asks. Then he takes out his knife and says, "Leave or fight."

"Sir," says the priest, "have you forgotten your meeting with the beautiful gypsy girl? We can fight tomorrow, or next week. But first, meet your girl."

Phoebus is really quite a stupid young man and quickly forgets about fighting. "You're very kind, sir," he says. "I don't want to miss this girl. Goodbye."

"Wait! Where are you going to meet her?" asks the priest.

"On the Saint-Michel bridge, then I'll take her to a small hotel. I can pay the old woman for an hour for one of her dirty little rooms." Then Phoebus checks his pockets. "Oh, no. I've spent my last penny."

"I'll give you the money," the priest says, "if you do something for me."

"What do you want?" Phoebus asks.

"I'm looking for a gypsy girl. I want to hide in the hotel room and see your girl. Maybe she's the one I'm looking for," explains the priest.

"All right. Give me the money and we'll be friends for tonight," agrees Phoebus.

The men go to Madame Falourdel's small hotel and pay for a room. The priest hides in the closet and waits.

Soon the door opens and the two young people walk in. Father Claude watches everything through a hole in the rough closet door. The picture in front of him makes his heart burn.

Phoebus sits next to Esmeralda on an old sofa near a broken window. The river runs below the window. The soldier looks very handsome in his fine clothes. Esmeralda is nervous and very excited about this meeting.

"At last we're alone, my pretty one," says Phoebus.

"Are you happy with me?" asks the girl.

"Of course!" says Phoebus. "You're wonderful!"

"No, I'm not. I will break a promise tonight," says Esmeralda. She touches the little bag she wears around her neck. "But if I have you, I won't need a mother or a father."

"I don't understand you," Phoebus says.

"Oh, sir, I love you! You saved my life. You're good and brave and strong. I love your name, too. My dear Phoebus, do you love me?" asks the girl.

"Of course I love you, dear girl. My body, my heart, my blood—all belong to you. I have loved nobody except you." Phoebus says these words very easily because he has said them to many girls before. But Esmeralda believes every word.

"I want to die at this minute," she says.

Phoebus sees how happy she is. He steals a kiss.

"Die!" he cries. "No, Esmeralda... excuse me, your name is difficult for me. No—now is the time to live!"

As he talks about his love for her, Phoebus tries to take off Esmeralda's belt and then her little jacket.

"What are you doing?" she asks him.

"You're with me now. You don't need these strange gypsy clothes," says Phoebus.

"I'm with you," says Esmeralda dreamily. She touches the little bag at her neck and says, "Take all of me. I'm yours."

Phoebus puts his arm around her waist and kisses her again.

The priest can see Esmeralda's beautiful shoulders and he can see the light of love in her eyes. He has never touched a woman, and this is making him crazy.