



WES GOODWIN

At Chez Doris

By David Tipmore

PARIS—At the moment Doris Seiden, the expatriate, is not quite sure she is equal to the task of moving into her new apartment on Montmartre's Rue Tourlaque. She has done this number *once* in New York, she is saying, sanded the floors before, dealt with recalcitrant plumbers, discovered the faulty wiring, told the funny how-I-renovated-my-loft-and-lived-to-tell-about-it stories over the phone. In English. On Mercer Street. At the moment Doris is putting an ice pack on her eye where the kitchen cabinet just fell off the wall and hit her in the face. Not at all funny, she is saying—about as funny as the sudden lack of hot water, or the fact that, last night, when she was *completely* alone, she tried to replace a burned-out kitchen light bulb and it exploded in her face.

"I could have been killed!" she says, standing in the middle of her unsanded floor. "I could have been maimed for life! I don't know about this expatriate stuff. Let me tell you a little story about the electricity here. Horrifying! Never—even in New York! The man next door has had no electricity for four days! And he's 98!"

Doris, a painter of means, calms herself by rolling her long brown hair into a bun. She moves her easel a little to the left, at a better angle to the light, and begins the story about her *frigo*.

"That's French for fridge. I get this *frigo* at the Salle Vente, which is like a Unique Clothing Warehouse for *everything*. I buy the *frigo* plus a huge armoire for 300Fr. That's about \$75. I would never have bought the armoire, except Gloria begged me to because it came with a beautiful desk she wanted. Gloria tells the deliverymen to deliver the things at ten the next morning. And to assemble it. The next morning the men deliver the things, for an extra 40Fr, and when I ask them to assemble the armoire—with grammar sounding something like, "You be putting that thing together there,"—they refuse! They say it's *tres simple*. Well, the *last* thing this armoire is is *tres simple*. It's about the size of Versailles and, once I get it in my bedroom, I realize it is *much* too big. The more I look at it, it looks like a piece of junk. One of the doors is terribly warped, and the key to the center part, which is locked, doesn't fit at all! Junk! Have you ever tried to break into an armoire? Impossible!"

Doris has already, after only a month, picked up the French manner of speaking, which, for women, requires a lowering of the voice to a rich, fruity, nasal growl, a careful upward inflection of each phrase, and a pair of demonstrative hands. Doris excels at the hands.

"So, then I go to the *frigo*, plug it in, and blow every fuse in the apartment! Unbelievable!"

Doris picks up the hem of her flannel nightgown (for it is very early in the morning), sighs grandly, and crosses the unsanded floor of a huge empty room. She takes a peach from a bowl on top of the broken *frigo*, looks at it, kicks it, and continues.

"The next morning two Algerians appear at my door, calling themselves electricians. They say they have been sent by the *concierge*. After I tell them what has happened and tell them expressly not to plug the *frigo* into *anything*, they plug the *frigo* into the only working outlet! *Quel desastre!* Then

they tell me the problem is the *frigo!* For that discovery I pay 60Fr. After an hour or two they restore the lights—except the light in the bathroom. They leave. The next morning the little one returns and fixes the light in the bathroom. He leaves, giving me his card, which says his name is Smail Adrar and that he is an interior decorator! Can you believe it? An hour later, the big Algerian, Smail's buddy, appears at my door all in white. He asks if Smail has been there. I tell him Smail left about an hour before and that it is very difficult to speak French in the morning. 'Difficult in the morning? Oh, non,' he says with too much sympathy and starts kissing me in the doorway. I say, 'Non,' he says, 'non?,' I say, 'Non!' and he says, 'okay,' and walks out. Like that!"

Doris snaps her fingers with a great deal of irritation, goes to her bathroom, stands in the open doorway, and brushes her teeth without ever stopping talking; *ever*, a difficult thing to do if you haven't tried. Doris has these things very well in control.

"The next morning the Algerians return to fix the *frigo*, which they do. About a half an hour after they leave and I pay them 120Fr, I am in the kitchen and the lightbulb pops. Thinking I need a new one, I stand up on the sink to change it and, in France, since you have to push and twist and *then* pull the bulb, I got as far as the pushing and the entire fixture blows off the wall! Which means that the electricity does not work, *again*, nor does the hot water, since it's connected to the electricity! I just went downstairs to call Smail Adrar and his wife answered the phone and demanded to know where I had gotten her husband's phone number, and that if I wanted what she thought I wanted, I could just go elsewhere! So I came up and just finished writing a note to the *concierge*, in French, which sounds like I'm an absolute dope. Here. Read it."

"A Little History of the Electricity at My House"

By Doris Seiden

The beginning was good. And I still like the apartment. But I find that the electricity in one of the circuits of the apartment is very dangerous and it is necessary to examine it and possibly change it. There is no electricity in the kitchen, in the bathroom, and in the little room, and there is no hot water. It is dangerous for the fire and the health, and I refuse to pay for this. It is the responsibility of the landlord, surely. You are on vacation, but I need electricity. And, afterward, I telephone the electricians to discover the problem. If it is small or big; it doesn't matter to me. You will receive notification for the services of Mr. Smail Adrar.

Impatiently Doris puts on a pot of tea in her little kitchenette. The problems of expatriation seem to be getting the better of her. It is raining again. It has been raining in Paris all summer. Under the starkness of the gray morning light streaming in through her curtainless window, Doris wonders if Hemingway ever had to put up with this, or Gertrude Stein, or Scott and Zelda in their little *pied a terre* in the Mairais. She sighs, once, hugely, and then opens a can of Kitty Luxe for her new Siamese cat.