

The Promise Land

by John Riley

Perhaps it was worth it, this night of frolic, Count M____ thought as he stepped into the creaking elevator, a night of dancing until his weary feet could but shuffle off the dance floor, hours of the waltz, the redowa and the newest craze from America with the comical name foxtrot, and later drinks at the expensive restaurant, money disappearing from his pockets so fast they felt dry as vast deserts as he searched with barely contained panic for enough coins to pay for his round; my piggy bank is depleted he whispered as the elevator came to a stop with a bump, and smiled at yet another Americanism; yes, the Americans with their healthy, well-fed faces and poorly concealed fear of embarrassment; the eager Americans who seemed to be everywhere, the pockets of their freshly pressed suits filled with more money than he could dream of; the shy wives blushing when asked to dance, the daughters almost giddy at the opportunity to meet an actual count; the sly young widow who whispered her room number while slipping her card into his waistcoat's fraying pocket.

