

# BARCELONA CON AMORE

*by* Robert Crisman

The fog drifted in, wreathing the woman in undulate shadows as kleigs danced in wind and ships moaned.

Souchet had come through the Barrio Chino to stand on the pier at the hour when dead cease their ramblings and sleep. Stilitano had said that the woman would be here, that she was a Comintern agent--and who would know better than he who tailed her through rubble the week before Franco rolled into Madrid and killed hope in Europe forever.

Stilitano carried a fondness for men he imagined could kill him in crumbling hotels or in alleys that snaked past the piers.

He lost to Souchet playing dice, every last peso and then some. Souchet smiled and shrugged and bought Stilitano a meal, then talked with him long into night.

Souchet was a silvered knife of a man, his smile a promise of wonderful things and cold death. Stilitano told him every last secret and prayed for a night with this man at his throat and a swift, bloody end before morning.

Souchet shot him dead as he begged and went down to the pier to wait for the woman, whose name was Marlena Sedova.

She came and walked to pier's edge and lit a Gauliose, and looked at the water that lapped as ships groaned and bounced in accord with the rhythms that govern fogged nights on the piers when wartime takes over and Corsicans wander with truncheons, thieves' leaded deaths on their minds.

Souchet crept closer, gun down at his side, and she turned his way, and just for a second, a kleig swiped her features, except for her eyes--the fog held her eyes--and he froze, and all the air that he'd ever breathed went away from the Earth like a fist when you open your hand.

Her red lips parted. And then she smiled, a smile of incisors, of blood meant for love under white chandeliers in Parisian hotels.

The smile notwithstanding she knew that he'd come here to kill her.

He felt her smile in his sex and the strangest white noise cupped him now. And he dropped his gun, and through the white noise and the groans of the ships and the creak of the ropes, the lap of the water and sway of the wind, he heard the click of her heels on concrete as she started toward him with measured progression that nonetheless tapped out the needs of a woman engulfed in an era of flames.

Her strike took his eye and her smile widened, her eyes now ripped free of fog, and all the languages Babeling the Earth came to rest in his throat and died there like that and unmourned.

How can eyes taken as his were shed tears for sorrows no longer aroil? Her lips brushed his cheek and the war fell away, though no further than gunshots raking the Barrio Chino. She kissed him and slowly his eyes came fully alive, and the two lovers danced to the sway of the wind, and took Paris with them into the shadows and bled.

