

Like Win Eckert, Brad Mengel (our first Australian author!) chose 1946 Paris as his stage; a post-war Paris transformed by the Cold War into a shadowy world of espionage, a city of Folies Bergères and murderous back alleys where East meets West, a theater of femmes fatales, secret agents and desperate interlopers. Smell the Gauloises and hear the sound of the blues as we enter the smoke-filled rooms of one of the City of Light's best-known cabarets...

Brad Mengel: All's Fair...

Paris, 1946

Pigalle sang like an angel and had a body to match. Admirers flocked to the backstage of the *Picratt's* in Montmartre where she sang to mostly male audiences. No one in Paris could compare to her beauty. Some admirers were there to just be a little closer to the raven-haired siren. Others, if they were lucky enough to catch the eye of this goddess, were granted an audience.

James was lucky enough to catch her eye this night. Pigalle didn't know what it was that caught her eye; the Naval Commander was certainly handsome but so were many other of her admirers. Perhaps it was the cruelty she saw in his eyes, or the scar on his cheek which lent him the air of a pirate. Whatever it was, many had fallen for it before and most likely many more would fall for it in the future.

Pigalle dispatched her current "husband," Maurice Champot, a.k.a. *La Grammaire*, to invite the dashing Commander to dinner with her. *La Grammaire* was currently trafficking in information, often blurted out on his wife's satin sheets, and looked upon Commander Bond merely as a juicy morsel. He returned with the news that the dashing Englishman would be delighted to join his wife for supper—and a reminder that she had already made other plans...

Frédéric-Jean Orth was waiting in the bar where he had arranged to meet Pigalle the night before. As *L'Ombre*, he had recently been all too busy avoiding the attentions of Commissaire Voisin and a night on the town with a pretty companion was a welcome diversion.

Whilst waiting for his date, he had struck up a conversation with a wealthy Louisiana planter, Hubert Bonisseur de la Bath. Orth liked Americans; they were always full of energy and filled with hope. Young Hubert was no different. They spent a pleasant hour discussing President de Gaulle's resignation and the first meeting of the U.N. Then, Hubert explained he had a previous engagement and insisted on paying for the drinks.

Orth smiled as he watched the young American leave. It was then that Maurice arrived and advised him that Pigalle sent her regrets.

Hubert Bonisseur de la Bath was under no illusions about Maurice *La Grammaire*. He knew the man pimped out his wife to compromise wealthy Americans who, later, could be blackmailed by his Soviet paymasters. His own boss at the OSS had briefed him adequately, before sending him into Pigalle's arms. After all, two could play the game...

OSS 117 knocked eight times, then once, then three times at the discreet metal door in the alley behind the cabaret. Maurice opened the door.

"I'm here to see P'Gell," the young American said.

"Of course you are," said Maurice. "This way, please."

Hubert's sense of alarm alerted him a bit too late; he had already stepped halfway into the broom closet when he was shoved inside and he heard the door locked behind him.

L'Ombre laughed as he pulled off the wig, tore off the latex and wiped off the make-up that had enabled him to impersonate Maurice so convincingly. "Now *à nous deux*, my dear Pigalle," he thought.

Orth crossed a small courtyard and stepped through the *sortie des artistes* door and into the bustling backstage area of the *Picratt's*. But suddenly, he stopped. At the other end of the cabaret, he had just spotted his nemesis, Commissaire Voisin, accompanied by two Inspectors and the Manager.

“Our anonymous tipster said *L’Ombre* is here,” said the Policeman. “I want the place searched from top to bottom.”

Orth decided to forego the pleasures of a night with Pigalle and, almost blending in with the darkness, disappeared in the darkened alley.

James Bond smiled as he saw the adventurer beat a hasty retreat. *L’Ombre* was well-known to MI6, of course, and as soon as he had spotted him, he had taken steps to eliminate the competition. A quick phone call to the Police Judiciaire had produced the anticipated visit by the uniformed men which had sent the mysterious Mr. Orth (not even M knew his real name) packing.

The Commander proceeded towards Pigalle’s dressing room, a bottle of Veuve Clicquot Ponsardin under his arm, when he saw *La Grammaire*, rubbing a pronounced bump on the back of his head, amble towards him.

“Is Mademoiselle Pigalle in, Monsieur Champot?” asked Bond.

“*Mais non*, Commander Bond,” replied the Frenchman with a forlorn air. “She just left with the other gentleman, the one with the Jewel of Gizeh.”

Swearing under his breath, Bond burst through the door.

He was greeted by a note written in lipstick on the mirror of Pigalle’s dresser.

“All’s fair in love and war,” and it was signed with a haloed stick figure.