

***RANDALL
PARRISH***



***THE CASE AND
THE GIRL***

Randall Parrish

The Case and the Girl

EAN 8596547223566

DigiCat, 2022

Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



TABLE OF CONTENTS

[CHAPTER I](#)

[CHAPTER II](#)

[CHAPTER III](#)

[CHAPTER IV](#)

[CHAPTER V](#)

[CHAPTER VI](#)

[CHAPTER VII](#)

[CHAPTER VIII](#)

[CHAPTER IX](#)

[CHAPTER X](#)

[CHAPTER XI](#)

[CHAPTER XII](#)

[CHAPTER XIII](#)

[CHAPTER XIV](#)

[CHAPTER XV](#)

[CHAPTER XVI](#)

[CHAPTER XVII](#)

[CHAPTER XVIII](#)

[CHAPTER XIX](#)

[CHAPTER XX](#)

[CHAPTER XXI](#)

[CHAPTER XXII](#)

[CHAPTER XXIII](#)

[CHAPTER XXIV](#)

[CHAPTER XXV](#)

[CHAPTER XXVI](#)

CHAPTER XXVII

CHAPTER XXIII

CHAPTER XXIX

CHAPTER XXX

CHAPTER XXXI

CHAPTER XXXII

CHAPTER I

Table of Contents

THE LADY IN THE LIMOUSINE

West, still attired in khaki uniform, but wearing the red chevron of honourable discharge on his left sleeve, sat in the Club writing room, his feet comfortably elevated, endeavouring to extract some entertainment from the evening paper. The news was not particularly interesting, however, and finally, obsessed with the feeling that it would soon be time for him to seriously contemplate the procuring of suitable employment, the young man turned the sheet about rather idly, and ran his eyes down the columns devoted to classified advertising.

Half way down the first column, under the head of "miscellaneous," he paused and read a paragraph with some interest; then read it over again, emitting a soft whistle between his teeth.

"Well, by Jove!" he said to himself slowly, "That doesn't sound so bad either; out of the ordinary, at least. Say, Thompson," and he turned to a tall young fellow busily writing at the adjoining desk, and shoved the paper under his eyes, pointing at the paragraph which had attracted attention, with one finger, "What do you make out of that, old man?"

The other, rather sober-faced, and slow of speech, read the advertisement word by word, with no change of expression.

"Rot," he said solemnly. "Either a joke, or some scheme on. Why? interested in it?"

"In a measure, yes. Sounds rather business-like to me. I've got a good mind to answer, and take a chance."

"You're a fool if you do, Matt," decisively, and turning back to his writing. "That is some game being pulled off, and the first thing you know, you'll be in bad. Likely as not it means blackmail. Besides there is no address."

"That's one thing I like about it," retorted the other. "They are in earnest, and taking no chances of having their purpose guessed at. There is a way to reach them, if the one answering is sufficiently in earnest. By Jove, I don't see how any one can get in bad, merely by finding out what it all means."

"Well, do as you please; you would anyhow. Only you have my advice."

West read the item again. He had been eighteen months in France, and his discharge from the army had left him bored and dissatisfied with the dull routine of civil life. He dreaded to get back into the harness of a prosaic existence; even his profession as a civil engineer had somehow lost its charm. He had tasted the joy of adventure, the thrill of danger, and it was still alluring. This advertisement promised a mystery which strangely attracted his imagination.

"Wanted: Young man of education and daring for service involving some personal peril. Good pay, and unusual

reward if successful. May have to leave city. Purpose disclosed only in personal interview."

As Thompson had pointed out, this was not signed, nor any address given.

West crossed over to an unoccupied desk, and wrote a reply, changing the wording several times, and finally making a clean copy. Thompson glanced across at him, but said nothing. The answer read:

"To Advertiser: Am 26; late captain of Engineers; University graduate adventurous disposition. Would be glad to consider your proposition. Address, Box 57, University Club."

He placed this in an envelope, called a Club messenger, and, handing the boy a sum of money, sent him over to the newspaper office.

Two days elapsed before an answer appeared in his box; a small envelope, addressed in a lady's handwriting apparently, and mailed from one of the sub-postoffices. West tore it open rather eagerly, and read the contents with surprise. The words within had been written by the same hand which appeared upon the envelope, but the language used gave him no clue to the purpose of the writer. The brief note read:

"Box 57 University Club.

"Your answer to advertisement makes a good impression, and I am willing to put you to the further test of a personal meeting. If you are in earnest in this matter, and quite prepared to assume the necessary risk, you will be at the north-west corner of Spaulding Park at 5:30 to-morrow afternoon. Do not come in uniform, but it will be well to

bring evening clothes in a bag. Be sure of yourself, and be prompt.

"Very truly yours,

"The Advertiser."

West read this over, again and again, smoking furiously, and endeavouring to weigh each word. He saw Thompson in the other room, but decided not to submit the epistle to his criticism. The letter sounded honest and sincere; the writer evidently had a purpose in view, and was selecting an agent with great care and secrecy. No hint as to what that object was would be revealed blindly—he must be tried in every way first; thoroughly tested as to both character and courage. Undoubtedly steps had already been taken to do this. The delay in reply would have afforded opportunity for some investigation, as his address would give the necessary clue to his identity. The request for evening clothes, however, rather reassured him; evidently his first plunge into this mystery was not to occur in any stratum of low society; no vast amount of personal danger could be involved in such preliminaries. The truth was, the note only increased his former interest in the case, and his determination to probe more deeply into its mystery. So the advertiser was a woman! This fact also stimulated his imagination, and rendered him the more eager. By Jove! he would see the thing through!

His decision was reached, yet West, although still young and adventurous, had received the rigorous training of the soldier, and learned lessons of discretion. He would go, but would make every effort to protect himself against any possible treachery. He had a room at the Club, and wrote a

letter or two before proceeding to dress, arranging for their personal delivery in case he failed to return at a designated time; carefully examined his service revolver, and deposited it in the pocket of the business suit he decided to wear. Satisfied with these arrangements, he dressed rapidly, and then packed his bag, bearing it in his hand as he departed in ample time for the point of rendezvous. A cab took him to the place designated, and he found himself alone in a rather desolate spot, with which he was in no way familiar. No doubt he had passed there again and again, as a boulevard extended along one side of the small park, yet his memory retained no clear recollection of the place. There were a few small stores opposite, while the park itself was well kept, and populated almost entirely by nursemaids, judging from the number of baby carriages trailing along the walks. Back of the curb were a few benches, but West chose to remain outside, depositing his bag in plain view of any one passing, and then walked back and forth somewhat nervously. He was there several minutes ahead of time, and compared his watch by a clock in a church tower a block away. He had no knowledge of how he was to be approached, or identified, but his being requested to bring a bag containing evening clothes, somehow suggested riding, rather than walking, and consequently his eyes followed more or less intently the constant stream of automobiles.

He grew restless, and more doubtful as the moments slipped past. Surely he could not have mistaken the place of appointment or the hour? He glanced at the scene to again reassure himself. No, that was impossible; the park name was plainly decipherable beside the entrance, and his watch

coincided exactly with the clock in the tower. He stood beside his bag, staring up and down the boulevard, permitting his eyes to occasionally wander to the scene within the enclosure. Nothing rewarded his scrutiny. Then suddenly, without slightest warning, a black limousine whirled in alongside the curb, and came to a stop immediately in front of where he waited. The chauffeur, dressed in plain dark livery, stepped out, and threw open the rear door, without asking so much as a question. Except that the fellow stood there, looking directly toward him, his fingers on the latch, expectantly, West would not have known that he was wanted. Yet it was all so obvious he could not question. Silently he picked up his bag, and stepped forward. He saw no one within, but firm in the belief that the chauffeur must have his orders, he entered blindly, the door closing instantly behind him. The curtains were drawn, the interior gloomy and indistinct, and the driver had resumed his seat, and started the motor, before West realized that he was not alone. In one corner of the wide back seat, drawn back from any possible observation from without, sat a woman.

At first glance he could only barely distinguish the outlines of her figure, dimly discernable against the dark background of the upholstery, but, as his eyes accustomed themselves to the faint light, her features also became dimly visible—enough so, at least, to convince him that she was young. Neither spoke for some moments, while the automobile gathered speed, and West had an uncomfortable feeling that the lady was watching him with great intentness. Slightly embarrassed, and uncertain as to his

best course of action, the young man remained silent, his eyes on the burly back of the chauffeur, revealed through the front glass. He could only quietly await her explanation of this strange situation. The delay was not a long one. She laughed, nervously perhaps, yet with a sense of humour at the awkward position.

"Quite melodramatic, is it not, Captain West?" she asked, in a decidedly pleasant voice. "I trust it appeals thoroughly to that disposition for adventure of which you wrote. I assure you I have arranged the details to the best of my ability."

"Nothing more could be desired, I am sure," he confessed, surprised at her tone, and glancing toward her. "I certainly am left completely in the dark, unable even to clearly distinguish my mysterious companion in adventure."

"And there really is no longer any occasion for such concealment." She lifted the heavy curtain beside her, permitting the grey light to rest upon her face. "I preferred not to be seen at the park for obvious reasons; but here, alone with you, such precaution is quite unnecessary. We are to be either friends, or enemies, so frankness is the best course."

He saw the face of a young woman of twenty-four, or five, with dark eyes and hair, her cheeks flushed with health and excitement, her lips smiling. It was a face of unusual attractiveness, not regular, perhaps, in any of its features, yet filled with character, and glowing with life. It was to him a totally unfamiliar countenance, but one which as instantly awakened his interest. He liked the girl, and believed in her.

"I can only thank you," he said, rather lamely. "Although I do not understand now how we could ever become enemies. Surely, that is not a threat?"

"Oh, no, it is far too true. You have yet to learn what I require. Yet that was very nicely said. I take it to mean your first impression of me is not unfavourable?"

"Very far from it. I am already deeply interested in my task. If I lacked an incentive before, you have furnished it. I am only too glad I was the fortunate volunteer."

She laughed again softly, her eyes still on his face.

"Really, I had not anticipated such a sincere compliment. No doubt you learned these delightful speeches in France," she answered, a very faint tinge of sarcasm in the words. "However, this is a very serious matter, Captain West, and really has nothing to do with my personal appearance. I am, of course, being a woman, glad that I please you, but we must consider this particular affair from an entirely different standpoint. I am seeking neither flirtation nor compliment; merely a trustworthy agent. First of all, it is necessary that you comprehend this."

He bowed, impressed by her manner, and somewhat ashamed of his impetuosity.

"I accept the reproof," he said quietly, "and will endeavour henceforth not to offend in any way. I am entirely at your service."

"There is no offence; I merely thought it best there should be no misunderstanding. Now, I am sure, we can proceed intelligently. Indeed, I am going to frankly confess, I also like your appearance. This mutual liking ought to be

half the battle. We have quite a ride before us yet; you may question me if you wish."

CHAPTER II

Table of Contents

A SUDDEN ENGAGEMENT

West gazed out through the window, wondering where they were. In his interest in his companion, he had until this moment, taken no note of things without, nor did his eyes rest now upon any familiar scene. They were swiftly, and noiselessly, passing blocks of respectable residences, none of these particularly distinguished. Her sudden invitation rather startled him.

"You mean I am to question you freely."

"Assuredly; while I am to remain quite as free in my answers. That is perfectly fair, is it not?"

"At least, it sounds so. Where am I being transported then? And why the dress-suit?"

His questions evidently amused, for her eyes sparkled.

"Naturally that query comes first; and especially the dress-suit. You have the prejudices of your sex, I see, and without regret. I shall endeavour to reply catagorically, yet with reservations. We are going to a country home, where we dine, in company with a few guests."

"I see; I am first of all to be projected into society. Are any of these guests known to me?"

"God forbid; and I may even venture to predict that you will never care to know any of them again. You are to be present as my guest, and will so be welcomed."

"I feel the honour; but would it not be well under these circumstances for me to know more clearly whose guest I am? Suppose, for instance, I had to refer to our long friendship, it would be extremely awkward not to even be able to mention your name."

"My name! Why, of course, you do not know what it is. Well, really I am not altogether certain that I do either. We will therefore compromise on the one I am known by; which will be safer. Allow me, Captain West, to present to you Miss Natalie Coolidge."

She held out frankly a neatly gloved hand, which he as instantly took, and retained in his own, the girl making no immediate effort to withdraw it.

"This is very kind of you, Miss Coolidge," he acknowledged, adapting himself to her present mood. "But it seems there is no necessity for me to present myself. Apparently my identity is already known."

"Otherwise you would not be among those present," she admitted frankly. "You must surely realize that I needed, at least, to have some information relative to a man in whom I expected to confide. Telling secrets—especially family secrets—to strangers is not my specialty."

"Then, I judge you have not accepted me blindly?"

"No, I have not," earnestly, and now releasing her hand. "I do not think we ever really know any one except through personal intercourse; but I do know who you are, and something of what your life thus far has been. It was two

days after I received your answer before I replied to it. This time was devoted exclusively to making me somewhat better acquainted with my correspondent."

"But how could you? I signed no name."

She smiled, again quite at her ease.

"The box number at the Club was amply sufficient. I have friends there; once possessed of your name and army rank, the department records at Washington furnished all further information. A Senator kindly attended to that end, and was also able to supply a little additional gossip through one of his Southern colleagues. So you perceive, Captain, I am not altogether reckless. Are you interested in learning what I know?"

"I am; both from records and gossip. Will you tell me?"

"Willingly," and she checked the points off on her gloved fingers. "You are Matthew West, the only son of Judge Robert Peel West, of Atlanta, Georgia. Your mother, who was of the well-known Bullock family, died when you were about fifteen, and her widowed sister has since been the house-keeper. You are a graduate of the university of Virginia, being fourth in your class in Scholarship. Your engineering course was completed in Massachusetts, and you later became connected with the Wyant Contracting Company, of Chicago. You were here, however, only a very brief time, making but few acquaintances, when the War broke out. You immediately entered the first officers' training school at Fort Sheridan, graduating with the rank of First Lieutenant, and were assigned to a regiment of Engineers, among the earliest to sail for France. While there you were wounded twice, and cited once for special gallantry in the rescue of a

seriously injured private. Your last wound caused your return to the United States on a special mission, and also won you the rank of Captain. Since then you have been honourably discharged, but have made no effort to resume professional work. You are twenty-six, and unmarried. Is there anything else you care to know?"

"I think not; really your agency has been most efficient. Could you tell me also if I have ever been in love?"

"In love! Really I made no inquiries, as that did not interest me in the least. I am prepared to be confessed to, however, if you feel it necessary."

"I may have to confess later. Just now it might be better to let matters remain as they are. And so this review satisfied you that I was really the man you sought?"

"No, it did not wholly satisfy, but it looked promising. You were evidently courageous, and a gentleman. These qualities were essential; whether in other respects you measured up to my purpose, could only be ascertained through a personal interview. There was no other way."

"And now?" he persisted.

"Still encouraging. I must admit, although the test is not yet complete.

However, we are now approaching the end of our journey. Before we turn in

I am going to ask a favour of you—call me Natalie."

"Natalie; that will be easy."

"And also forgive me if I fail in always addressing you formally as

Captain West. I presume your friends say Matt, do they not?"

"Some have that habit."

"Then I claim also the privilege."

She bewildered him, left him in wonderment as to what she would do next, but there was scarcely time in which to answer before the speeding limousine turned abruptly into a private drive-way, curving gracefully to the front of a rather imposing stone mansion, set well back from the road. West caught a glimpse of a green lawn, a maze of stables at the rear, and a tennis-court with several busily engaged players. Then they were at the side entrance, and a servant, in the same unobtrusive livery as the chauffeur, was quietly opening the door. He turned and helped his companion to emerge.

"Take the gentleman's bag to the Blue Room, Sexton," she said calmly, "and then lay out his evening clothes."

"Yes, miss."

"I will be in the hall when you come down, Captain, but there is no hurry."

West followed the servant up the softly carpeted stairs, finding the apartment assigned him not only extremely comfortable, but even elegant in its furnishing. He stood at the window looking down on the tennis court, while Sexton opened the bag, and spread out the required garments on the bed. Evidently he was in a home of wealth and refinement. The grounds outspread before his eyes were spacious and attractive; in the distance he even perceived an artificial lake with paths winding enticingly along its shore, and through strips of woodland. Who could this strange girl be? this Natalie Coolidge? And what could she possible desire of him? These questions remained

unanswered, yet continually tantalized. He could not even grasp her personality. In spite of her apparent friendliness, her irresistible smile, her lack of conventionality, there remained a certain reserve about the young woman he felt quite unable to penetrate. Whatever game she was playing she kept the cards securely in her own hands. He was not yet admitted to her confidence. He stood there immersed in these thoughts still, when Sexton spoke.

"Shall I assist you, sir?"

"No; it will not be necessary. You have laid out everything?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well; that will do, at present. What is the hour for dinner?"

"Seven o'clock, sir."

"I have ample time then. That will be all." The man retired noiselessly, closing the door after him, and West began slowly to dress, rather amused at the care he took, that all details should be as correct as possible. Unquestionably the girl interested him oddly. She was original, a new type, and he made no effort to drive her from his imagination. He had not been long back from the war zone, his acquaintance in the city was extremely limited, and consequently this girl, thus suddenly brought into his life, had made a far greater impression than she might otherwise. Yet under any conditions, she would have proven noticeable, and attractive. He endeavoured to analyse what constituted this peculiar attractiveness, but without arriving at any definite conclusion. She was young, of course, and undeniably pretty, with eyes really

remarkable, and a smile not to be easily forgotten. She possessed a sense of humour, and had left upon him a strong impression of frank sincerity. Yet in these qualities she did not differ so greatly from others he had known. Perhaps mystery had much to do with her power of enticement—a continual wonderment as to what she might do next. Then she was so self-poised, so confident of herself, so naturally informed. All these things had their charm, and, coupled with her undoubted beauty, left his brain in a whirl.

He was satisfactorily dressed at last, although obliged to switch on the lights before this was accomplished. The reflection of himself in the pier glass quite met his deliberate approval, and he glanced inquiringly at his watch, rather eager to delve deeper into this adventure. It was a few moments of seven, and she would undoubtedly be waiting for him in the hall below. He descended the broad stairs, conscious of a thrill of expectancy; nor was he doomed to disappointment.

Miss Coolidge met him in the dimly lighted vacancy of the hall, with smiling eyes of welcome. They were mocking, puzzling eyes, the depths of which he could not fathom—they perplexed, and invited at the same instant. She was in evening dress, a creamy satin, revealing white shoulders, and rounded, beautifully mounded arms, visible beneath folds of filmy lace. If he had dreamed the girl attractive before in the plainness of street costume, he now beheld her in a new vision of loveliness. His heart throbbed at the sight, every nerve tingling to the intimate tones of her voice. And she met him in a more delightful mood of informality than had found expression even during their

afternoon ride. She was apparently in the highest spirits, eager to overstep all conventionality.

"Again you please me," she said, surveying him critically. "Really this is too much, the wonderful way in which you meet every test."

"You mean in clothes?"

"In everything, so far. Clothes—yes; do they not reveal the very soul of a man? I hardly think I could ever have forgiven if you had come down not looking the part you are to play."

"Nor could I have forgiven myself, if I am to enjoy the pleasure of taking you in to dinner."

"That privilege is yours even without the asking. But," quizzically, and glancing up frankly into his eyes, "You may not care when the time comes. For the great test arrives first. So, buck up, Captain, for you are going to have the shock of your life. Whatever you do, even if you feel that you are about to faint, don't, for my sake, let your face show it."

"But," he protested, "give me some warning, some opportunity to prepare for such an emergency."

"No," she laughed gaily, "there is no time; it is ordained to fall upon you like a thunder-bolt. They are all in there waiting for us now. You will offer me your arm."

He accompanied her, amused, yet bewildered, through the wide archway into the more brilliantly lighted drawing-room. It was a magnificent apartment, containing a half dozen people. The one nearest the entrance was a man of middle age, exceedingly pompous and dignified, who

immediately arose to his feet, expectantly. Miss Coolidge cordially extended her hand in greeting.

"So glad to learn you could be out, Judge," she said, the least perceptible hesitancy in her voice. "Permit me to present Judge Cable, of the Supreme Court; Captain West, my fiancé."

CHAPTER III

Table of Contents

THE COOLIDGE HOME

For an instant West was absolutely helpless to assert himself. The calm assurance of the girl's voice in this unexpected introduction left his brain paralysed with bewilderment. Yet his features did not betray his condition, nor did he entirely lose control over himself. His fingers met the outstretched hand of the Judge, and he seemed to gaze calmly into the latter's searching eyes. Fortunately he was not compelled to speak, as Cable voiced his own surprise fluently.

"Well, well," he exclaimed. "This is certainly startling, Natalie. I am, indeed, bereft of words, yet I congratulate you, sir. Captain—Captain West, I think was the name? You are then in the service, sir?"

"Discharged from the Engineers."

"Ah, exactly. I can hardly adjust myself. Friends, come forward. I have to make an announcement extraordinary. It seems this sly minx has arranged a surprise for all of us. Perchance this was the purpose of our little dinner party?"

"Oh, no, Judge," protested Miss Coolidge, her cheeks flushed, yet otherwise perfectly cool and self-possessed. West ventured to glance aside into her face, surprised at the

quietness of her voice. "Really, this was unexpected, even to myself. I was not so much as aware that Captain West was in the city until a very short time ago. I am sure he will bear me out in this statement."

"I could not do otherwise, and be truthful," West felt compelled to admit. "The announcement was quite unexpected."

"But what is this all about?" asked a female voice eagerly. "Remember we have not heard, Judge Cable."

"It is my pleasure then," he said gallantly, bowing, and at once instituting himself as master of ceremonies, "to introduce to you, Miss Natalie's fiancé, Captain West—Mrs. Lonsdale, Professor Scott, Miss Margaret Willis, Colonel LeFranc, Mrs. Wilber Somers. Possibly there may be no necessity of my presenting the next gentleman—Mr. Percival Coolidge."

"Oh, but there is," the last mentioned interposed, a tall rather portly man, with grey hair and moustache, "I must confess this is as much a surprise to me as to any one present. However," he grasped West's hand with apparent cordiality, "I hasten to add my congratulations, and to wish Natalie all the happiness possible."

The group slowly broke up, the members still discussing the undoubted surprise of this announcement, Miss Coolidge talking animatedly with Mrs. Lonsdale, and seemingly having forgotten West's presence in the room. He was utterly unable to even catch her eye, and finally found himself confronting Colonel LeFranc and Percival Coolidge, the latter instantly engaging him in conversation, evidently seeking more definite information.

"This engagement with my niece," he said uneasily, "must have been rather sudden? Even your name is quite unfamiliar to me."

"It was, indeed," admitted West, who had now completely recovered his nerve, and even begun to enjoy the situation. "Since my return from abroad."

"You were with the army in France?"

"In an Engineer Regiment. I have been in America only two weeks."

"Ah, indeed. And this is your home?"

Realizing that the elder Coolidge was diligently searching for information, West decided the best method would be a full confession.

"Oh, no," he said candidly, "I am from the South—Atlanta, Georgia. My father is a District Judge, Robert Peel West, quite widely known, and my mother belonged to the Bullock family. I am a graduate of the University of Virginia, and also of the Massachusetts Polytechnic. Before the war I was connected for a short time, with a well-known firm of Engineers in this city, but, since my return, I have not resumed professional work. Having been wounded in France, I have felt entitled to a little rest after my return."

"Quite interesting, I am sure," Coolidge turned to the Colonel. "You are Southern also, I believe?"

"Very much so," was the quick response. "And I chance to know the name of Judge West rather well. I congratulate your niece on her choice of a life companion. There is no better blood in Georgia. I would be very pleased to hear

more of your father, Captain West. I have not met him for several years."

West, by this time, thoroughly impressed with the spirit of the occasion, passed the ensuing evening rather pleasantly, although obliged to be always on his guard against any incautious remark, and keenly interested in all that was occurring about him. He found the company rather pleasant and entertaining, although not quite able to gauge the real feelings of Mr. Percival Coolidge, who he imagined was not altogether satisfied with the state of affairs just revealed. The gentleman was outwardly cordial enough, yet his manner continued distinctively reserved, and somewhat cold. West, however, attributed this largely to the nature of the man, and finally dismissed the thought from his mind altogether. The person who continued to puzzle him most was Natalie Coolidge, nor was he able to approach her in any way so as to obtain a whispered private word of guidance. The girl unquestionably avoided him, easily able to accomplish this by devoting her entire attention to the other guests.

She appeared in excellent humour, and there was laughter, and brilliant conversation wherever she paused, but not once could he encounter her glance, or find her for a moment alone. Nor dare he ask questions of those he conversed with, so as to gain any fresh insight into this mystery. He ventured upon thin ice once or twice most carefully, but the information obtained was infinitesimal, although it bore to some extent on the problem confronting him. The Colonel innocently lifted the veil slightly, permitting him to learn that this was a week-end party, and