

Mr. Debonair

*By Marilyn Reeves*

She sat wistfully gazing out at the setting sun gilding the sea in reflective waves of red and gold ... watching the pretty sailboats as they lazily made their way back to shore. From the dining balcony where she was seated, she kept wishing that John were here to enjoy this experience with her. During the last ten years of their marriage they had set up a special account for this long-awaited trip to the Mediterranean. Neither could have anticipated the sudden heart attack that took him from her ... too soon. Much too soon! Oh, how she missed him! But after she retired, she decided to take this special trip after all, on her own. It's what he would have wanted.

She glanced up as a distinguished looking gentleman was being seated at the table next to hers. My, how handsome he was! He reminded her of that famous actor – what was his name? She blushed when he caught her looking, and now she felt uncomfortable. Why did he have to sit so close? There were plenty of other tables.

While he was waiting for his order he looked over at her and asked, "How was your dinner? Is the food here as good as they say?"

"Oh, very good, thank you. The swordfish was excellent."

Then the man stood and said, "Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Mark Sinclair. I'm surprised to see a lady as lovely as yourself sitting alone."

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Sinclair. I'm Alice Buford." They shook hands and he sat back down at his table. But he continued to talk with her, telling her bits and pieces about himself, asking if she'd seen this place or that. After he had eaten, she invited him to sit with her to help finish off the bottle of expensive wine she had ordered.

They sat and talked well into the evening. She felt self-conscious about her age, but he kept reassuring her, telling her how lovely she looked.

Then he said, "I'm driving to Rome tomorrow morning. Will you come with me?" She was amazed by his invitation and utterly delighted to accept.

He picked her up in a red convertible and they drove to Rome, where they spent the day wandering around viewing all the ancient, historic sights.

As daylight dwindled into dusk they found a quiet restaurant set back away from the crowds, where they feasted on gourmet Italian food and glass after glass of vintage wine.

But when they had finished, the waiter tapped him on the shoulder and whispered something in his ear. He flushed red and said, "Apparently my card didn't go through. I can't believe it's over limit! Someone must have stolen my identity."

She could see by the expression on his face how embarrassed he was, so without hesitation, she pulled a card from her purse. "Let's use mine. It's the least I can do to repay you for such a wonderful day."

Alice handed the card to the waiter and then excused herself to go to the ladies' room. When she returned to the table, it had already been cleared. Mark was gone, and so was her credit card.

Lesson learned: Beware of Mr. Debonair! Thank God she'd brought along another credit card. She caught the red-eye home.