

Pink Frosting

Sharon Collins

THE YEAR WAS 1944, and the world was at war with Germany and Japan. People read the headlines and front pages of a newspaper instead of turning to the society and sports pages. War Bonds were plentiful, nylons were not, and new words had found their way into the American language. There were ration books and a shortage of materials of all kinds. However, one Madame Gabrielle, a clever French-milliner, continued to find enough material, flowers, and feathers to create her original hats in her small salon on 5th Avenue.

This is the story of a hat as it touched the lives of three women. It was not an ordinary hat, not at all. It was the newest creation of Madame Gabrielle. It had clusters of pink camellias resting on a crown of pink straw surrounded by pink tulle. Madame named each of her creations, and this one she named Pink Frosting.

One warm March morning Madame Gabrielle walked from the back workroom into the front of her salon of grey blue velour and oval mirrors. She had the Pink Frosting resting on the finger tips of her right hand.

"Marie! Marie, come here!" Madame's tall, thin figure stopped in the middle of the salon. She viewed in the mirrors the hat that she was holding.

"Marie! Where is that girl?"

"*Oui, Madame?*" A small dark girl hurried out from behind the heavy drapes that hid the disorder of the workroom from the eyes of the customers.

"Marie, is this not the most beautiful of all my creations?"

"*Mais oui, Madame!*"

"I call it Pink Frosting, Marie. Come, let's put it in the window."

She and Marie moved to the window, and Madame Gabrielle fitted the pink hat on a hatless plaster head that was centered under the gold lettered name: Madame Gabrielle Salon. Although the shop was small, the stately, black-haired French woman had gained a name for herself because of her genius in creating a hat to suit the personality of each of her patrons. Madame never created two hats alike; each was exclusive for that customer. But this new hat was an exception. She had fashioned this hat with no one person in mind.

Perhaps it was the influence of Spring—she had not decided. Or it might have been the inspiration of the young girls' faces that stopped to gaze into her window every day.

"Oh, it is so good to see bright, gay Spring hats in the window again! Do you think my patrons will like my Pink Frosting, Marie?"

"Certainement, Madame!"

"I hope so. But now you have work to do, and customers may be coming in soon."

"Oui, Madame." Marie went to the back of the shop, and Madame Gabrielle moved to the window to watch the shoppers hurrying along the street in front of her shop. She enjoyed watching women and even a few men stop by her window to gaze at her latest creation.

This morning as she watched, she saw a tall blonde girl pause at the window and rest her eyes critically on the pink hat.

"Ah," thought Madame Gabrielle, "this girl is a model. The grace with which she carries herself could mean nothing else."

The girl turned away from the window and pushed open the heavy glass door. Madame Gabrielle smiled at the tall blonde and walked forward to meet her.

"Good morning, Mademoiselle. May I help you?"

"Why yes. That hat—the pink one. I'd like to see it."

"Ah, to be sure. My Pink Frosting. I will get it for you."

Madame Gabrielle moved to the window, lifted the pink hat from the plaster curls of the dummy and returned to the girl.

"If you will take this chair by the mirror, I will fit it for you."

The tall blonde sat down on a small plush-covered chair in front of the mirror. Madame fitted the hat over her honey-colored hair and chignon and stood back to admire the hat. She tilted her head from one side to another and smiled at the girl's reflection in the mirror. The girl was busy viewing herself from all angles and tucking stray strands of hair into the chignon. Her face ran the gamut of expressions as she turned her head from side to side.

"Ah no, Mademoiselle. This hat is not for you. It does not fit your personality. One moment, I think I have one that becomes you better."

"No, no wait. I like this one. Yes," the blonde replied slowly, "I think this hat will suit my purpose perfectly."

The girl pushed back the chair and viewed herself in the full-length mirror. Then her face softened into a smile, and she glided toward Madame Gabrielle.

"This hat will do very nicely," decided the girl as she opened her soft suede purse. "I'll take it."

"Oui, Mademoiselle." Madame Gabrielle shrugged her shoulders. "As you wish."

The blonde inquired as to the price, took a bill from her purse and handed it to the French milliner. Madame disappeared behind the drapes at the back of the shop and reappeared in a moment with a black and white striped hatbox with *Madame Gabrielle* scrawled across the black top. Madame handed the girl her change and the hatbox.

"I hope Mademoiselle will be happy with her new hat." Madame smiled at the girl and walked to the door with her.

"Yes, I think I shall, thank you. Good-bye."

The glass door opened, and the high heels clicked on the pavement until the door had closed and shut out the sound.

Madame Gabrielle sat down at her desk, and a sad look came into her eyes.

"It is such a pity," Madame said half aloud, half to herself, "that one cannot refuse to sell a hat because it does not fit a personality. But then that would not be good for business. That girl was much too cold to wear my warm, gay, pink hat. I do not think she appreciated it. My hat will never suit the purpose for which she wanted it. Of that I am sure. Madame," she chided herself, "you are too sentimental!"

All that night and the next morning when she opened her shop, Madame Gabrielle was disturbed about having sold her Pink Frosting to the tall model.

As she finished an order for a customer, the heavy glass door opened. She turned to see the same tall blonde girl that had bought the pink hat the day before. The look of surprise on Madame's face became a smile as she walked toward the girl.

"Good morning, Mademoiselle."

"Good morning, Madame Gabrielle. I have come to return your hat, if I may."

"You do not like my hat?"

"No, Madame. It's not that I don't like your hat. It's just not the hat for me. You were right when you said that it didn't fit my personality. I'm glad I finally realized it before I made a big mistake for that special occasion. I'm afraid that orchids are more my type than pink camellias. I haven't worn the hat, so I would appreciate it if you would take it back."

"Oh, to be sure, Mademoiselle. It makes me unhappy when my hats do not fit the personality. One moment, I will give you the money for it."

Madame Gabrielle beamed as she hurried to the back of the salon. Once more she had her creation in her shop. She returned shortly with the money.

"Perhaps, Mademoiselle," she suggested, "I might be able to make one to suit you?"

The girl yielded to the suggestion and seated herself in the same plush-covered chair before the mirror. With excited gestures, Madame Gabrielle traced lines in the air close to the model's head as she described the hat to the girl.

"How does that sound to you, Mademoiselle?"

"Yes, I think that will suit me."

"I will have it for you tomorrow, Mademoiselle. I am sure you will like it."

"I'm sure I will." The blonde girl smiled as she pushed back the chair and moved toward the door.

"Thank you, Madame Gabrielle. I will be in tomorrow."

As the door closed, Madame hurried to the window and replaced her precious pink hat on the head of the dummy. As she smoothed the tulle over the camellias on the brim, she was conscious of a pair of eyes watching her. She looked up and saw the chic figure of a woman of perhaps fifty looking at the pink hat. She smiled at the woman in her embarrassment and gave the tulle a last affectionate pat. The woman smiled back at her and turned in the direction of the heavy glass door of Madame's salon. Madame Gabrielle moved from the window toward the glass door and greeted her stately customer.

"Good morning, Madame. May I help you?"

"Yes. I was interested in the pink hat in your window."

"Ah yes, Madame, that is my Pink Frosting hat." Madame Gabrielle hesitated. She had just gotten the hat back and was reluctant to sell it to another person whom it did not fit.

She asked slowly, "You are looking for a hat for yourself, perhaps?"

"Yes, Madame Gabrielle. I want to see that pink hat."

Madame reluctantly went to the window and brought back the pink creation.

"Oh, it is beautiful!" murmured the stately woman.

"But, Madame, would you not like me to fashion a hat to fit you?" suggested Madame Gabrielle.

The woman took the hat and walked to one of the mirrors and tried it on.

Madame Gabrielle followed the woman to the mirror and excitedly began to wave her arms.

"But Madame, perhaps a hat that"

"No. This is the hat I want. I knew it the moment I saw it in the window. I must have it!"

"*S'il vous plaît, Madame,*" pleaded Madame Gabrielle, "allow me to make you a hat that is more becoming to your age—I mean"

"Do not apologize, Madame. I know what you mean, and I also know what I am doing. You see I had a hat very much like this many years ago, and no other hat that you could make would do."

She inquired the price of the hat and handed the money to Madame Gabrielle.

"If Madame insists. The hat is yours."

The French woman tried to smile as she went to the backroom for a box.

"It is a shame that the wrong people want my hat," thought Madame Gabrielle. "But the lady is so insistent—well, maybe I am not making a mistake after all."

She returned to the front of the salon, handed the woman her change, and gave her the black and white hatbox.

"I hope, Madame, that you will enjoy my Pink Frosting."

"Thank you, Madame Gabrielle." The older woman opened the door and smiled back at the milliner as the heavy door closed behind her.

"Ah, my Pink Frosting is not only a beautiful hat, but a busy one," Madame Gabrielle thought to herself.

The next morning after she had opened her salon, she gave Marie some last minute instructions concerning an order.

"Now, Marie, do you understand about that order for Mrs. Courtney? I left her address on the table by the telephone. You are to send the Ivy Cap to her this afternoon."

"*Oui, Madame.*"

"And Marie—"

"*Oui, Madame?*"

"Don't forget that hat that Mrs. Harrington ordered early this morning."

"No, Madame."

Madame Gabrielle turned and started toward the front of the salon when she saw the door open. It was the woman who had come in the day before; she had the black and white hatbox with her.

"Oh," thought Madame, "my hat has failed again."

"Good morning, Madame Gabrielle. I brought your pink hat in hopes you might take it back."

"Oh, I'm sorry to hear that." But Madame was glad to get her precious hat back.

"I'd appreciate it if you would let me return it," the woman said quietly. "I see you were right. I should never have bought such a youthful hat."

"I should not take it back if you've worn it because I make my hats to preserve individuality and . . .," the French woman began.

"I realize that, but let me tell you my story first."

"*Oui, Madame.*"

"Do you remember yesterday that I told you I had a pink hat once long ago that resembled this one? I bought such a hat as this about thirty years ago, shortly after I was married. My husband liked

it very much, which was unusual for him. I thought maybe with a hat that resembled it so closely, I could bring back the love that my husband once had for me. But it was a very foolish thing to do. People can't expect to bring the past into the present. I tried it on before a mirror, and it was then I realized that I no longer even looked like the young girl who had worn a beautiful pink hat before. So now you see why I can't keep it."

"*Oui, Madame*, I see. I would not want you to keep it then. But I would like to design a hat especially for you if you like."

"Oh, thank you, *Madame Gabrielle*. I will phone you for an appointment."

After the money and hat had been exchanged, the woman left the salon. As the door closed behind her, *Madame* looked at her pink hat.

"Ah, my little pink hat. I have you back again. On the shelf with you! You have made too many mistakes already."

Madame went to the back of her shop and placed the hat on a shelf among her other hats. She returned to the front of the salon and saw a small, dark, young girl peering around the room at the hats resting on the plaster dummies arranged on pedestals around the wall of the salon.

"Oh, good morning, *Mademoiselle*. I am sorry. I did not hear you come in. May I help you?"

"You are *Madame Gabrielle*?"

"*Oui, Mademoiselle*, you are looking for a hat?"

"Yes, I'm looking for a very special hat for a very special occasion. My soldier will be home the day after tomorrow, and we are going to be married in three days and four hours!" The girl's dark eyes danced as she talked.

"*Oui, Mademoiselle*," laughed the milliner, "a *very* special occasion, indeed."

The dark-eyed girl continued. "I'm going to have a very simple wedding—the war you know. I intend to wear a pink suit with blue accessories, and I want a perfect hat."

"Let me see, if you are going to have blue accessories you might want a blue hat to match them."

Madame Gabrielle tilted her head to one side and looked at the girl.

"*Mais non*. That would not provide enough contrast to your dark hair. Perhaps a color that would harmonize well——." *Madame's* eyes opened wide and a smile lighted her face.

"*Mais oui!* I have a hat, just the hat for your wedding. I should have thought of it immediately! If you will sit over there by the mirror, I will bring it to you."

Madame hurried to the back of the shop. She took the pink hat from its place on the shelf and straightened the tulle on the brim.

"Ah, my little hat, I have at last found the girl to wear you."

Madame Gabrielle walked gayly back to the girl who was seated before an oval mirror.

"Here, Mademoiselle, is the hat!" she announced with a note of triumph in her voice.

The girl turned to look at the hat before Madame fitted it on her head.

"Oh, Madame Gabrielle. It— It's beautiful!" she gasped.

"It is one of my newest creations. Youth and Spring inspired me to create it, and now I've found the only person who could possibly wear it. That is you, Mademoiselle."

Madame carefully fitted the pink hat over the short dark curls of the young girl. The girl excitedly reached for the hand mirror on the table near her. She viewed herself from all the angles that the mirrors would permit.

"It's absolutely beautiful! It's out of this world! I've never seen such a hat. And I'm sure that Don will like it."

"*Oui, Mademoiselle*, it is perfect on you. Perfect!"

The excited girl got up from the chair and viewed herself in the full-length mirror. Suddenly she began to giggle.

"Something is wrong, Mademoiselle?" asked Madame Gabrielle with a troubled expression on her face.

"Oh, no. Nothing is wrong."

"Ah, I am relieved, Mademoiselle."

The dark girl continued, "I was just thinking. When Don wants to tease me, he calls me 'Angel Cake.' And now I'll be his 'Angel Cake' with Pink Frosting."

"*Oui, Mademoiselle*, Pink Frosting."

"Shush,"—The New Password

Kenneth Hopkins

ESTIMATES OF THE intelligence of the average American range from very low to a little higher than very low, depending upon the amount of cynicism or the rosiness of the rose-colored glasses of the person computing the averages. These surveys may be well founded or they may be final semester theses knocked out by advanced students in pursuit of masters' degrees in psychology. In either case, and in direct and naive opposition to these averages, I am sometimes quite well impressed that the average American is rather intelligent and strives to keep himself well informed.