

# CHATTING By Mary Biehn

## Spanish Siesta Makes Long Day for the Waiting Wives

**● MORE ABOUT** our Mediterranean trip . . . . . Loathe as I was to leave Lisbon, the prospect of seeing Madrid and a bit of Spain was exciting. . . . .

The flight from Lisbon to Madrid took three hours. There wasn't a cloud in the sky, so we had a good view of the country we were flying over. I had my nose glued to the window all the way, and from what I could see, I'd say we were flying over a flying, not driving over that barren, brown, mountainous terrain. Approaching Madrid, the mountains disappeared, and the land levelled out, but still looked anything but lush.

**● IT WAS SUNNY** and cool in Madrid that early May day. Hotel room came as a shock after the opulence of the Ritz in Lisbon. It was comfortable enough, but extremely small. Asked for a larger room, but no luck. The hotel was jammed to the rooftop. However, as it turned out, the room was quiet, situated on the side away from the street — great for sleeping.

Sleeping was farthest from my thoughts tho, just after our arrival. I could hardly wait for our baggage to come up, before setting out to explore Madrid. Waiting impatiently at the curbside to hail a taxi, we noted that here, as in Lisbon, the taxis were all Mercedes Benz. And when we paid our fare, we noted another similarity. Here too, taxis were ridiculously cheap.

Getting our bearings as we drove down town, we judged that our hotel was situated on one of the main traffic arteries — a six lane thoroughfare with a broad strip of treed parkland separating the two streams of traffic. Several outdoor cafes with colourful umbrellas under the trees had caught our eye in passing. It was lunchtime, so we had the taxi drop us at a cafe located on the edge of the main business area.

**● IT WAS PLEASANT** sitting outdoors, relaxing, and soaking in the sun, while we accustomed eye and ear to the unfamiliar sights and sounds around us. Directly across the road were several imposing, ornate stone buildings — the city hall and post office. Looking up in the opposite direction, we could see the stores of the main shopping area. The buildings were grey stone with some ornamentation, grey roofs, and a rather over-all heavy look. This was relieved by graceful wrought iron balconies on many and by the trees planted all along the sidewalks. They were just coming into leaf.

**● ALL AROUND US,** of course, was the sound of Spanish being spoken. So we were a bit startled to hear someone addressed us in English. "You Americans?" asked a gal who was an absolute double for Imogene Coca. And believe it or not, her husband-in-law resembled Sid Caesar. And the real comedians could have used the ensuing little scene verbatim, for one of their sketches. Talking non-stop, "Imogene" told us they had flown over the night before, were on a real bargain-rate tour, that their hotel room didn't have proper beds, just thin mattresses on the floor, that she hadn't slept a wink for thirty-six hours and didn't expect, or want to sleep much for the two weeks they were spending in Spain, and what they were planning to see and do that day, and what were we planning to see and do that day, etc., etc. I had thought I was an enthusiastic traveller, but I seemed positively apathetic compared to Imogene. I was tired out just LISTENING to her! Anyway the remark about their hotel made me thankful for our accommodation, imperfect though it was.

Afterward, we strolled up to the main shopping area, only to find everything closed up tight. It was siesta time. And the Spanish don't fool when they take a siesta. It lasts from 12 to 4 o'clock. Most of the stores then stay open till 9 or 10 o'clock.

**● HOWEVER, WE** window-shopped — merchandise attractive — especially shoes and suede coats. Prices on these are much lower than at home. Dresses are priced about on a par with ours. Again, as in Lisbon, people-wise, we could have been walking down a street in Toronto. No really Spanish looking scenes and scenerias. A puzzlement were the little kiosks dotted all along the sidewalk. Found out later these were stands for selling lottery tickets.

**● NEXT DAY WAS** reserved for sight-seeing with our tour group. First place of interest was the world-famous Prado museum and art gallery. Had an excellent guide who took special pains to explain the masterpieces by Goya, Velasquez and El Greco. The museum is so vast, a guide is a necessity.

**● NEXT, HE TOOK** us to the King's Palace, to tour the 25 reception rooms open to the public. In all, there are 2,000 rooms in the palace. It is a tourist attraction not easily forgotten. I'm sure the most magnificent furniture, tapestries and glass chandeliers in the world have been collected here. Every room is a masterpiece of combining taste, beauty and priceless art treasures. But surprisingly enough, not in the Spanish-style. It is French. The walls of many of the rooms are 'papered' with silk brocade and velvet. Most magnificent room of all was the state dining room, where 20 huge crystal chandeliers shone down on a polished banquet table set with gold plate for 200.

**● OUR TOUR** allowed us to glimpse the narrow streets of Madrid's "old town". We stopped briefly at its threshold — the ancient Mayor's Square — the colonnaded and bordered now with boutique-style shops on ground level, and fashionable town houses above. The buildings surrounding the Square all have wrought-iron balconies, which are often used to view events such as open-air operas, concerts, etc., still staged in the Square.

**● WENDING OUR** way back to the hotel, we drove thru a large park. Other than an artificially-created lake, the park consisted solely and completely of a wooded area. Our guide told us people come from hundreds of miles around, just to see and enjoy those trees, they are such a rarity in the countryside around Madrid. And in times of drought — which is practically every summer — no matter how scarce the water — the trees are always watered.

Had lunch in the early afternoon at the Spanish equivalent of a "Fran's" restaurant, just down the street from the hotel. The bar (beer 18c) was full of men standing and chatting animatedly on their siesta 12-4 break. Couldn't help wondering about their wives who might live in a Madrid suburb. What a long lonesome day they must put in with husbands gone from 8 in the morning till 11 at night.

**● THAT EVENING,** we had tickets to a night club called the Zambra. En route there, we passed several of the city's many beautiful illuminated fountains. Enjoyed the flamenco dancers at the club. They performed for nearly two hours. The dances were so strenuous, some of the dancers looked exhausted afterwards. The room was filled to capacity — no space left for the guests to dance. The evening was more like a concert than our idea of a night club . . . but well worthwhile. We were supplied with a program giving us the interpretation of each dance. Every area in Spain has its own special flamenco style, costume, and story.

A part of Spanish culture we didn't choose to see were the bull fights. However several of our group did. I don't think they enjoyed it much . . . too gory.

**● AN EXPEDITION** everybody enjoyed, however, was our drive to the most ancient city in Europe — Toledo. Over 2000 years old, the only people who live there now, are its famous artisans who specialize in gold inlaid jewellery.

**● TO REACH** Toledo, we drove 60 miles over a brick road, thru flat arid country, with hardly a shrub, let alone a tree. The over-all effect was a monotone of brown, accented by the orange-coloured clay soil. Passed by several tiny Spanish villages . . . Houses were one storey white-washed cubicles with two small windows, one on each side of the front door. Narrow clay roads separated them, and there wasn't a blade of grass or tree in sight. In front of one village, we saw a group of black-clad, long-skirted women doing their family laundry in a large pool.

As we neared Toledo, the soil became more fertile looking, and the now slightly rolling countryside had silver-leaved olive orchards on the hillsides.

of high hills tiered with red-tiled roofs and girded about with the fortress wall, rose up like a mirage ahead of us. We crossed over a river and entered thru heavy gates with turreted watch-towers on either side. Into the town we drove, over the narrow cobblestoned roads, thru the twisting streets, up hill and down dale. The cream-coloured stucco, three-storeyed houses crowded the roadside without benefit of sidewalks. They were a colourful sight with their graceful wrought-iron balconies spilling over with flowers and greenery.

We paused in our meanderings to look thru El Greco's home. We stood in the small studio where he created many

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of his famous paintings, his walled courtyard ablaze with flowers.

**● THRU THE** narrow streets we walked, to the other side of town, where, on the top of one of its high hills, we entered a most beautiful cathedral. Once inside its massive portals, vistas of white marble, gold leaf, and crystal chandeliers opened out into seemingly endless infinities.

Crowning the outermost hill, the highest vantage-point of the town, is the old palace-fort of Alcazar. A forbidding building, outside and in, it has been the scene of much violence over the centuries.

**● OUR SIGHT-SEEING** at an end, down the precipitous road we drove, and out the gates at the bottom of the hill. As they swung shut behind us, we felt we were leaving a dream world. But it's one which the Spanish government has taken very practical steps to insure will remain for years to come. They have made it a national museum.

## Retarded Institute Tour Impresses Kinette Group

Past Presidents' Night, March 11th, for the Kinette Club, took the form of a bus trip to York University to tour the Kinsmen National Institute for the Mentally Retarded Building. Six past members, three Kin wives, four guests and eight Kinettes made the trip.

W. Gamble, managing director, outlined the history of the building which had been occupied since June 1st, 1970. The Institute eventually will become the National Information and research centre dealing with mental retardation.

The highlight of the tour was the viewing of a movie — "Flowers of Hope" Campaign, May 9 - 15, emphasizing the theme "they thought we couldn't do it."

### BRIDGE CLUB

There were fifteen tables of duplicate bridge playing in the Legion auditorium on Tuesday, March 16. North-South winners were Mike Lorusso and R. Prust, first; J. Kall and W. Wandel, second; Vi Naylor and Duke Wilson, third; J. Inglis and Sydney Shaw; with Lillian Lawrence and W. Hamilton, fifth.

### SPECIAL OLYMPICS FILM

To round out the evening, everyone enjoyed dinner at Lichee Gardens.

was filmed at the 1969 Canadian Special Olympics held in Toronto.

Each person felt that the National Association of Kinsmen had launched a very worthwhile and gratifying project of which they can be proud in years to come.

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