



The Illusionist

Françoise Mallet-Joris

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Bored and lonely, 15-year-old H el ene decides to pay a visit to her father's mistress. Within days, she is captivated by Tamara, a Russian  migr e whose arts of enchantment include lingering kisses, sudden dismissals, and savage, rapturous reunions. As long as she submits to Tamara, H el ene is permitted to stay near her: reading forbidden novels, meeting Tamara's bohemian friends, and learning more "refinements of depravity" than the gossiping matrons of her provincial French town could imagine existed. Flemish writer Fran oise Mallet-Joris was 20 years old in 1951 when her first novel, *Le Rempart des Beguines* ? published in English as *The Illusionist* ? created a sensation in France. This contemplative, beautifully written book, with its dark undercurrents of desire, has its origins in *Madame Bovary* and the novels of Colette, and was a precursor to Fran oise Sagan's similarly themed *Bonjour Tristesse*.

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