> fire upon him in regard to his novels, which they praised in a manner that was unendurable to the sensitive author. Fortunately the train entered a tunnel and in the darkness the novelist, who understood women, lifted the back of his hand to his lips and kissed it soundingly. When light returned he found the two women regarding each other in icy silence, and, addressing them with great suavity, he said, "Ah! madames, the regret of my life will hereafter be that I shall never know which one of you it was that kissed me." ("Kissing in a Tunnel" 1903)

Many modern readers will be familiar with the following version—still popular today. It apparently began to circulate in the Second World War. I have found no example earlier than 1942:

> A young woman, her mother, an Italian officer, and a Nazi trooper were in an Italian train. It came to a tunnel. As soon as darkness enveloped the compartment a kiss was heard—followed by a hard slap. When the train emerged into sunlight, the passengers' thoughts were these. The Nazi: "Those mad, romantic Latins. How dare he kiss that girl. How cowardly to try it only in the dark." The Girl: "The nerve of him trying to kiss my mother. I am glad she was able to defend herself." The Mother: "So they'd my kiss daughter, eh? Well, I brought her up properly, and I'm glad she took proper action." The Italian: "It was worth kissing my hand, just for chance of slapping that Nazi." ("Day by Day" 1942)

66. THE VANISHING LADY

Summary: Mother and daughter go to a hotel; in the morning the mother has vanished, and the hotel insists that she was never there. Earliest Attestation: 1897. Motif: N/A. Secondary Literature: N/A.

The journalist covering this remarkable story for *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1913 only needed to summarize the narrative in "a few brief sentences" as "by this time everyone knows the story" ("Disappeared" 1913). Indeed, "Over the dinner-table last night and at luncheon again to-day all London has been discussing it."

> An Englishwoman and her daughter on the conclusion of a tour in the Near East, arrived at a Paris hotel at the time of the Exhibition. They were given separate

> rooms, one above the other. After resting a few hours the daughter went to see her mother. Her room was empty and entirely altered. In great agitation, she called the maid and then the manager. "You are under a delusion," he told her, "when you arrived at this hotel you were quite alone." "But," said the bewildered girl, "we signed our names in the visitors' book, my mother and I." The visitors' book was brought. Above the daughter's name, where the mother had signed, was the signature of an entire stranger. Not till a year after did the daughter learn that her mother had died suddenly of plague, and that in order to save Paris from unutterable panic and the Exhibition from absolute ruin it was hurriedly agreed by the authorities that the death should be completely hushed up, and that the daughter should be made to believe, by the repeated denials of hotel servants, hotel manager, and cabman, and by the proofs of the changed room and the altered visitors' book, that her unfortunate mother never reached the hotel. ("Disappeared" 1913)

The Exhibition in question was presumably the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris. But it could have been the 1889 Paris world fair. One-time prime minister Arthur Balfour (1848–1930) was said to have "guessed the solution" as soon as he had heard the first part. How? It was suggested that "he had heard something about it when he was in office" ("Disappeared" 1913). Balfour was "in office" in both 1889 and 1900. And was the story true? One collector believed it to be true "because it is very much easier to believe that it happened than to suppose that it was invented" ("Disappeared" 1913). A dangerous sentiment where legend is concerned.

The story itself is certainly older than 1913. Bonnie Taylor-Blake and Garson O'Toole have traced it back to 1897 (Taylor-Blake and O'Toole 2010; Taylor-Blake and O'Toole 2011).[40] In November 1897 "Dropped out of Existence; A Strange and True Mystery of the French Capital" appeared in the American Press, and it was associated with a minor American author and journalist, Nancy Vincent McClelland. The only important difference from the story above is that in McClelland's version there are *two* daughters, the family is American, and the legend is presumably told in relation to the 1889 Exposition Universelle. There is also, in what appears to be McClelland's original, a forthright claim: "Editor's Note. The following remarkable story is true. The writer is personally acquainted with the persons [the daughters?] who participated in the scenes which are described" ("A Mystery of Paris" 1897; this Utah version is also credited to Nancy V. McClelland; see Taylor-Blake and O'Toole 2010, 9). "Alternatively, [McClelland] may have used the powerful skills of invention displayed in her short stories and her later successful careers to craft the compelling tale" (Taylor-Blake and O'Toole 2010, 10). Twentieth-century versions tend to have one surviving relative, which is more successful in narrative terms because it