

Ecole des Soeurs



By Lance-Corporal D. M. SAKER

★ This sketch was awarded second prize in its section in the recent Services literary competitions.

SHE WAS waiting; continually her dark eyes sought the gates to the playground, while her foot shaped a useless pattern on the gravel. When the nun spoke to her she glanced up with an eye which was resentful and sullen.

"You, Arlette, must lead the altos, and make sure, you others, that you keep in time with her, over the 'vole, vole, vole.'" The girl nodded.

"Oui, ma soeur." Then she glanced at the gate and at the ground again. Taller than any of the others, she had a poise which did not quite belong to the schoolgirl. She had southern beauty—dark skin, soft brown hair, and eyes that flickered in a brown lustre, like pools of a river. Moreover, she was conscious of her beauty, and often her delicate fingers would stray to a curl that had escaped under her broad-brimmed hat. But her maturity went no deeper than her looks, since she obeyed the black-gowned nun blindly, and, when she moved, she moved as a child, loosely and diffidently.

"We'll try it again, then," said the nun, and, raising her hand in the air, she gave them the first note of the song. It was barely finished when a small khaki van edged through the gate and rolled across the playground. Obviously, the girl had but waited for this. The faint creak of the brakes as the van paused at the gate had first drawn her attention; now she did not take her eyes away. As it rolled nearer, she examined the two men in the front seat, but, apparently unsatisfied, she searched the back, and

when, after a moment or two, two men jumped down, she gave a scarcely audible sigh, and, unwittingly, her left hand began to toy with a string of beads over her bodice.

The younger girls flocked round the van, gazing curiously at the large packing-cases which held the recording unit of the nearby army base. The men in the unit had come to make a recording of the French children singing. With the van came the two officers of the unit, and two others, one a driver, and the other an interpreter—this latter being hardly more than a boy. The two officers climbed out, and one commenced to open up the boxes containing the apparatus, whilst the other came up with the interpreter, who asked the nun whether they might see the Sister Superior.

"Mais oui, attendez un moment," she replied, tilting her white panama back wearily. "Arlette, watch the children for a moment, while I go and get the Sister Superior."

"Oui, ma soeur." The girl had never taken her eyes away from the young interpreter; she spoke meekly, with a fulness of tone, which showed the volume of her emotions. Happening to glance up, he caught her eye, and smiled swiftly. She blushed under her brown skin, and turned away to her companions, who whispered, "C'est lui, n'est-ce pas?" She said nothing. Her thoughts fled tumultuously back to her first meeting with