



U M B E R T O E C O

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THE PRAGUE  
CEMETERY

*Translated from the Italian by*

Richard Dixon



HOUGHTON MIFFLIN HARCOURT

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First American edition

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Since these episodes are necessary, indeed form a central part of any historical account, we have included the execution of one hundred citizens hanged in the public square, two friars burned alive, and the appearance of a comet—all descriptions that are worth a hundred tournaments and have the merit of diverting the reader's mind as much as possible from the principal action.

— CARLO TENCA, *La ca' dei cani*, 1840

# **1. A Passerby on that Gray Morning**

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A passerby on that gray morning in March 1897, crossing, at his own risk and peril, place Maubert, or the Maub, as it was known in criminal circles (formerly a center of university life in the Middle Ages, when students flocked there from the Faculty of Arts in Vicus Stramineus, or rue du Fouarre, and later a place of execution for apostles of free thought such as

hardly seemed old)—so if someone, taking a perverse fancy to one of those shameful remnants of past ~~distraints on the possessions of destitute families, and finding himself in front of the highly~~ suspicious proprietor, had asked the price, he would have heard a figure that would have deterred even the most eccentric collector of antiquarian teratology.

And if the visitor, by virtue of some special permission, had continued on through a second door, separating the inside of the shop from the upper floors of the building, and had climbed one of those rickety spiral staircases typical of those Parisian houses whose frontages are as wide as their entrance doors (cramped together sidelong, one against the next), he would have entered a spacious room that, unlike the ground-floor collection of bric-a-brac, appeared to be furnished with objects of quite a different quality: a small three-legged Empire table decorated with eagle heads, a console table supported by a winged sphinx, a seventeenth-century wardrobe, a mahogany bookcase displaying a hundred or so books well bound in morocco, an American-style desk with a roll top and plenty of small drawers like a *secr*

## 2. Who Am I?

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24th March 189

I feel a certain embarrassment as I settle down here to write, as if I were baring my soul, at the command of—no, by God, let us say on the advice of—a German Jew (or Austrian, though it's all the same). Who am I? Perhaps it is better to ask me about my passions, rather than what I've done in my life. Whom do I love? No one comes to mind. I know I love good food: just the name Tour d'Argent makes me quiver all over. Is that love?

Whom do I hate? I could say the Jews, but the fact that I am yielding so compliantly to the suggestions of that Austrian (or German) doctor suggests I have nothing against the damned Jews.

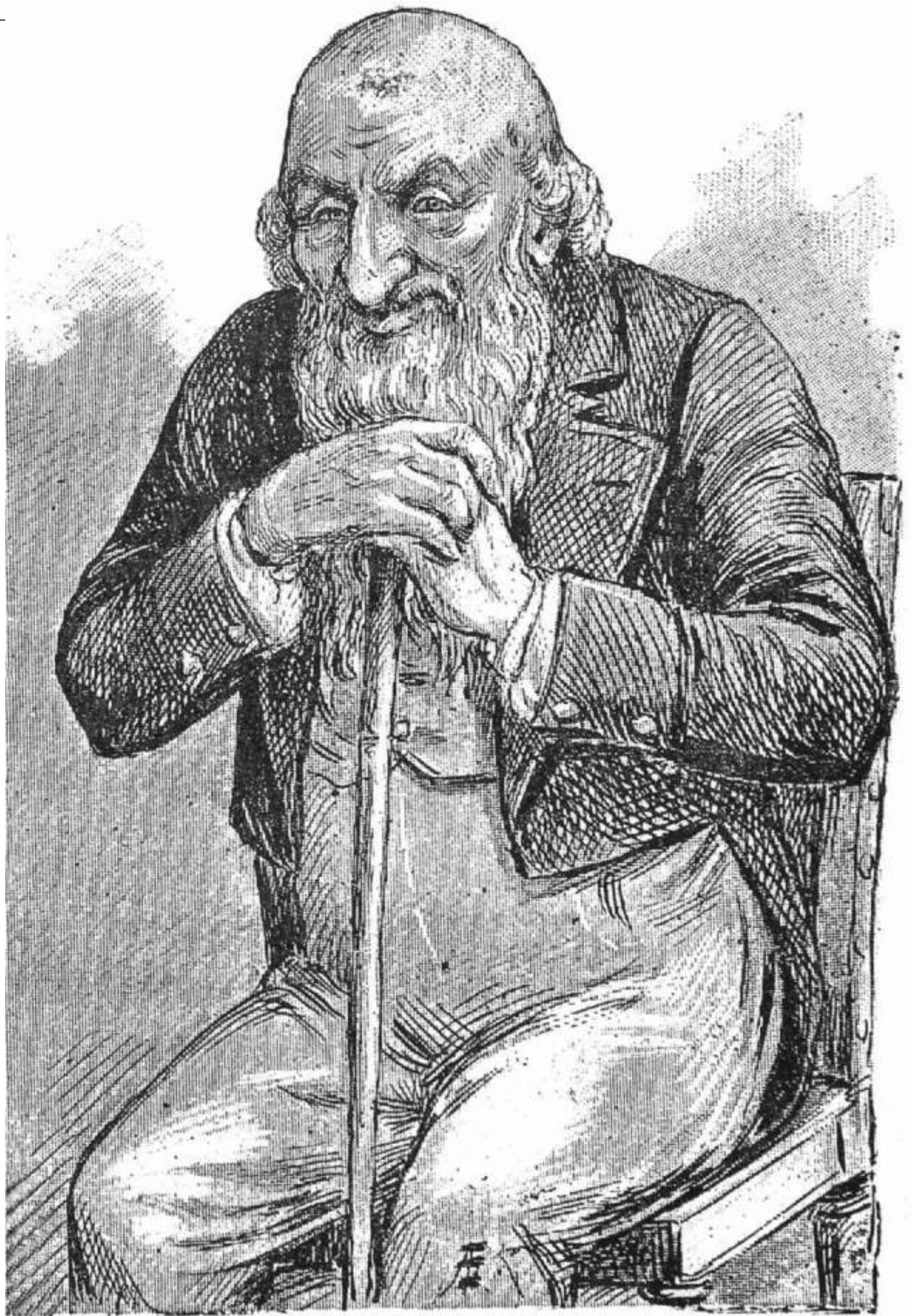
All I know about the Jews is what my grandfather taught me. "They are the most godless people he used to say. "They start off from the idea that good must happen here, not beyond the grave. Therefore they work only for the conquest of this world."

My childhood years were soured by their specter. My grandfather described those eyes that spy on you, so false as to turn you pale, those unctuous smiles, those hyena lips over bared teeth, those heavy, polluted, brutish looks, those restless creases between nose and lips, wrinkled by hatred, that nose of theirs like the beak of a southern bird...And those eyes, oh those eyes...They roll feverishly, their pupils the color of toasted bread, indicating a diseased liver, corrupted by the secretions produced by eighteen centuries of hatred, framed by a thousand tiny wrinkles that deepen with age, and already at twenty the Jew seems shriveled like an old man. When he smiles, my grandfather explained, his swollen eyelids half close to the point of leaving no more than an imperceptible line, a sign of cunning, some say of lechery...And when I was old enough to understand, he reminded me that the Jew, as well as being as vain as a Spaniard, ignorant as a Croat, greedy as a Levantine, ungrateful as a Maltese, insolent as a Gypsy, dirty as an Englishman, unctuous as a Kalmyk, imperious as a Prussian and as slanderous as anyone from Asti, is adulterous through uncontrollable lust—the result of circumcision, which makes them more erectile, with a monstrous disproportion between their dwarfish build and the thickness of their semi-mutilated protuberance.

I dreamt about Jews every night for years and years.

Fortunately I have never met one, except for the whore from the Turin ghetto when I was a boy (though we exchanged only a few words) and the Austrian doctor (or German, though it's all the same).





I have known Germans, and even worked for them: the lowest conceivable level of humanity. A German produces on average twice the feces of a Frenchman. Hyperactivity of the bowel at the expense of the brain, which demonstrates their physiological inferiority. During times of barbarian invasion, the Germanic hordes strewed their route with great masses of fecal material. In recent centuries, French travelers knew immediately when they had crossed the Alsace frontier by the abnormal size of the turds left lying along the roads. As if that were not enough, the typical German suffers from bromhidrosis—foul-smelling sweat—and it's been shown that the urine of a German contains twenty percent nitrogen, while that of other races has only fifteen.

The German lives in a state of perpetual intestinal embarrassment due to an excess of beer and the pork sausages on which he gorges himself. I saw them one evening, during my only visit to Munich, in those species of deconsecrated cathedrals, as smoky as an English port, stinking of suet and lard, sitting in couples, him and her, hands clasped around those tankards of beer which would alone be enough to quench the thirst of a herd of pachyderms, nose to nose in bestial love talk, like two dogs nuzzling each other, with their loud ungainly laughter, their murky guttural hilarity, translucent with a perpetual layer of grease smeared over their faces and limbs, like oil over the skin of athletes from an ancient arena.

They fill their mouths with their *Geist*, which means spirit, but it's the spirit of the ale, which stultifies them from their youth and explains why, beyond the Rhine, nothing interesting has ever been produced in art, except for a few paintings of repugnant faces and poems of deadly tedium. Not to mention their music: I'm not talking about that funereal noise-monger Wagner, who now drives even the French half crazy, but from the little I have heard of them, the compositions of their Bach too are totally lacking in musicality, cold as a winter's night, and the symphonies of that man Beethoven are an orgy of boorishness.

Their abuse of beer makes them incapable of having the slightest notion of their vulgarity, and the height of this vulgarity is that they feel no shame at being German. They took a gluttonous and lecherous monk like Luther seriously (can you *really* marry a nun?) only because he ruined the Bible by translating it into their own language.

Who was it said that they've abused Europe's two great drugs, alcohol and Christianity?

They think themselves profound because their language is vague—it does not have the clarity of French, and never says exactly what it should, so no German ever knows what he meant to say, and mistakes this uncertainty for depth. With Germans, as with women, you never get to the point. Unfortunately, when I was a child, my grandfather (not surprisingly, with his Austrian sympathies) made me learn this inexpressive language, with verbs you have to search out carefully as you read, since they are never where they ought to be. And so I hated this language, as much as I hated the Jesus who came to teach it to me, caning my knuckles as he did so.

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*They took a gluttonous and lecherous monk like Luther seriously (can you really marry a nun?) only because he ruined the Bible by translating it into their own language.*

Since the time when that man Gobineau wrote about the inequality of the human races, it seems that

someone speaks ill of another race it is because he regards his own to be better. I have no bias. As soon as I became French (and I was already half French through my mother) I realized that my new compatriots were lazy, swindling, resentful, jealous, proud beyond all measure, to the point of thinking that anyone who is not French is a savage and incapable of accepting criticism. I have also understood that to induce a Frenchman to recognize a flaw in his own breed, it is enough to speak ill of another, like saying "We Poles have such and such a defect," and since they do not want to be second to anyone, even in wrong, they react with "Oh no, here in France we are worse," and they start running down the French until they realize they've been caught out.

They do not like their own kind, even when advantage is to be gained from it. No one is as rude as a French innkeeper. He seems to hate his clients (perhaps he does) and to wish they weren't there (and that's certainly not so, because the Frenchman is most avaricious). *Ils grognent toujours*. Try asking him something. "*Sais pas, moi*," he'll respond, and pout as if he's about to blow a raspberry.

They are vicious. They kill out of boredom. They are the only people who kept their citizens busy for several years cutting each other's heads off, and it was a good thing that Napoleon diverted their anger onto those of another race, marching them off to destroy Europe.

They are proud to have a state they describe as powerful, but they spend their time trying to bring it down: no one is as good as the Frenchman at putting up barricades for whatever reason and every time the wind changes, often without knowing why, allowing himself to get carried into the streets by the worst kind of rabble. The Frenchman doesn't really know what he wants, but knows perfectly well that he doesn't want what he has. And the only way he knows of saying it is by singing songs.

They think the whole world speaks French. That's what happened a few decades ago with that fellow Lucas, a genius who forged thirty thousand documents, stealing antique paper by cutting the endpapers out of old books at the Bibliothèque Nationale, and imitating various kinds of handwriting though not as well as me...I don't know how many he sold at an outrageous price to that fool Charles (a great mathematician, they say, and a member of the Academy of Sciences, but a blockhead). And not just he, but many of his fellow academicians took it for granted that Caligula, Cleopatra and Julius Caesar would have written their letters in French, and Pascal, Newton and Galileo would have written to each other in French, when every child knows that educated men in those days wrote to each other in Latin. French scholars had no idea that other people spoke anything other than French. And what's more, the false letters told how Pascal had discovered universal gravitation twenty years before Newton, and that was enough to trick those *sorbonnards* who were so eaten up by national self-importance.

Perhaps their ignorance is a result of their meanness—the national vice that they take to be a virtue and call thrift. Only in this country has a whole comedy been devised around a miser. Not to mention Père Grandet.

You can see their meanness in their dusty apartments, in their threadbare upholstery, bathtubs handed down from their forebears, those rickety wooden spiral staircases constructed to ensure that no space is left unused. Graft together a Frenchman and a Jew (perhaps of German origin), as you do with plants, and you end up with what we have now, the Third Republic.

If I have become French, it's because I couldn't bear being Italian. Being Piedmontese (by birth), I felt I was only the caricature of a Gaul, but more narrow-minded. The people of Piedmont flinch at the idea of anything new. They are terrorized by the unexpected: to get them to move as far as the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies (though very few of Garibaldi's men were Piedmontese) required two Ligurians, a hothead like Garibaldi and an evil character like Mazzini. And let's not mention what I discovered when I was sent to Palermo (when was it? I'd have to work it out). Only that conceited fool Dumas loved those people, perhaps because they adored him more than did the French, who always

regarded him as a half-caste. He was liked by the Neapolitans and Sicilians, who are mulattos themselves, not through the fault of a strumpet mother but through generations of history, born from the interbreeding of faithless Levantines, sweaty Arabs and degenerate Ostrogoths, who took the worst of each of their hybrid forebears—laziness from the Saracens, savagery from the Swabians, and from the Greeks, indecision and a taste for losing themselves in idle talk until they have split a hair into four. In any event, it's quite enough to see the guttersnipes in Naples who fascinate foreigners by gulping down spaghetti, which they stuff into their gullets with their fingers, spattering themselves with rancid tomato. I've never seen them do it, but I know.

The Italian is an untrustworthy, lying, contemptible traitor, finds himself more at ease with a dagger than a sword, better with poison than medicine, a slippery bargainer, consistent only in changing sides with the wind—and I saw what happened to those Bourbon generals the moment Garibaldi's adventurers and Piedmontese generals appeared.

The fact is that the Italians have modeled themselves on the clergy, the only true government they've had since the time that pervert the last Roman emperor was buggered by the barbarians, because Christianity wore down the pride of the ancient race.

Priests...How did I come to know them? At my grandfather's house, I think. I have a vague memory of shifty looks, decaying teeth, bad breath and sweaty hands trying to caress the back of my neck. Disgusting. They are idle and belong to a class as dangerous as thieves and vagrants. They become priests or friars only to live a life of idleness, and idleness is guaranteed by their number. If there were, say, one priest for every thousand people, they'd have so much to do that they couldn't lazily lounge about eating capons. And from the most unworthy priests the government chooses the stupidest, and appoints them bishops.

You have them around as soon as you are born, when they baptize you; you have them at school if your parents have been so fervent as to send you to them; then first communion, catechism, confirmation; there's a priest on your wedding day to tell you what to do in bed, and the day after at confession to ask you how many times you did it, so he can arouse himself behind the grille. They talk with horror about sex, but every day you see them getting out of an incestuous bed without so much as washing their hands, and they eat and drink their Lord, then shit and piss him out.

They keep saying that their kingdom is not of this world, then take everything they can lay their hands on. Civilization will never reach perfection until the last stone of the last church has fallen on the last priest, and the earth is rid of that evil lot.

The communists have spread the idea that religion is the opium of the people. That's correct, because it is used to keep a lid on people's temptations, and without religion there would be twice the number of people on the barricades, whereas during the days of the Commune there weren't enough, and they could be gunned down without much trouble. But after hearing that Austrian doctor talk about the advantages of the Colombian drug, I would say religion is also the cocaine of the people, because religion has always led to wars and the massacre of infidels, and this is true of Christians, Muslims and other idolaters. And while the Negroes of Africa confined themselves to massacring each other, the missionaries converted them and made them into colonial troops, ideally suited to dying on the front line and raping white women when they reached a city. People are never so completely and enthusiastically evil as when they act out of religious conviction.

Worst of all, without a doubt, are the Jesuits. I have the feeling I have played a few tricks on them, or perhaps it's they who have done me wrong, I'm not sure which. Or perhaps it was their blood brothers the Masons. They're like the Jesuits, only more confused. The Jesuits at least have their theology and know how to use it, but the Masons have too much of it and lose their heads. My grandfather told me about the Masons. Along with the Jews, they had cut off the king's head. And they created the

Carbonari, who are more stupid than the Masons—once they got themselves shot, and later on they had their heads cut off for making a mistake in producing a bomb, or they became socialists, communists and Communards. All up against the wall. Well done, Thiers!

Masons and Jesuits. Jesuits are Masons dressed up as women.



I hate women, from what little I know of them. For years I was obsessed by those *brasseries à femmes*, the haunts of delinquents of every kind. They are worse than brothels, which are hard to set up because the neighbors object. Brasseries, on the other hand, can be opened anywhere because, as they say, they are just places for drinking. But you drink downstairs and the prostitution goes on upstairs. Each brasserie has a theme, and the girls are dressed accordingly: in one place you have German barmaids; the waitresses opposite the law courts wear lawyers' gowns. Elsewhere the names are enough, like the Brasserie du Tire-cul, the Brasserie des Belles Marocaines or the Brasserie des Quatorze Fesses, not far from the Sorbonne. They're nearly always run by Germans—here's a way of undermining French morality. There are at least sixty of them between the fifth and sixth arrondissements, and almost two hundred throughout Paris, and all are open even to the young. You go there first of all out of curiosity, then out of habit, and finally they get the clap, if not worse. When the brasserie is near a school, the pupils go there after classes to spy on the girls through the door. I go there to drink...and to spy from inside, through the door, at the pupils who are spying from outside. And not just at the pupils—you learn a great deal about the customs and habits of adults, and that can always be useful.

What I most enjoy is spotting the various kinds of pimps hanging around the tables; some are husbands living off the charms of their wives: they hang about, well dressed, smoking and playing cards, and the landlord or the girls refer to them as the cuckolds' table. But in the Latin Quarter many are failed ex-students, always worried that someone is going to make off with their source of income and they often draw knives. Calmest of them all are the thieves and cutthroats, who come and go because they need to keep a low profile and know the girls won't betray them—otherwise they'd end up next day floating in the Bièvre.

There are also the inverters, busy looking for perverts of either sex for the most lurid services. They pick up clients at the Palais-Royal or the Champs-Élysées and attract them using a coded sign language. They often get their accomplices to turn up at their room dressed as policemen, threatening to arrest the client in his underpants, who then begs for mercy and pulls out a handful of coins.

When I enter these whorehouses I do so with caution, because I know what might happen to me. If the client looks as though he's wealthy, the landlord makes a sign, a girl introduces herself and gradually persuades him to invite all the other girls to the table and to order the most expensive things (but they drink *anisette superfine* or *cassis fin* so as not to get drunk, colored water for which the client pays dearly). Or they get you to play cards, and of course they exchange signs, so you lose and have to buy dinner for everyone, including the landlord and his wife. And if you try to stop, they invite you to play not for money but so that for every hand you win a girl takes off a piece of clothing...And each item of lace that falls reveals that disgusting white flesh, those swollen breasts, those dark sweaty armpits that unnerve you...

I've never been upstairs. Someone said that women are just a substitute for the solitary vice, except that you need more imagination. So I return home and dream about them at night—I'm certainly not made of iron—and then it is they who've led me on.

I've read Doctor Tissot, and I know they harm you even from a distance. We do not know whether animal spirits and genital fluid are the same thing, but we know that these two have a certain similarity, and after long nocturnal pollutions, people lose energy and the body grows thinner, the face turns pallid, memory becomes blurred, eyesight misty, the voice hoarse; sleep is disturbed by restless dreams, the eyes ache and red blotches appear on the face. Some people spit out a limy matter, feel palpitations, choking, fainting, while others complain of constipation or increasingly foul-smelling emissions. In the end, blindness.



Perhaps these are exaggerations. As a boy I had a pimply face, but that seems normal at such an age, or perhaps all boys indulge in such pleasures—some excessively, touching themselves day and night. Now I know how to pace myself. My dreams are disturbed only after I have spent an evening in a brasserie, and I don't get an erection every time I see a skirt in the street, as many do. Work keeps me from moral laxity.

But why philosophize instead of piecing together events? Perhaps because I need to know not only what I did before yesterday, but also what I'm like inside—that is, assuming there is something inside me. They say that the soul is simply what a person does. But if I hate someone and I cultivate this grudge, then, by God, that means there is something inside! What does the philosopher say? *Odi erga sum*. I hate therefore I am.

A while ago the bell rang downstairs. I thought maybe it was someone fool enough to want to buy something, but the fellow told me that Tissot had sent him—why did I ever choose that password? He wanted a handwritten will, signed by a certain Bonnefoy in favor of someone called Guillot (which was certainly him). He had the writing paper that Bonnefoy uses, or used to use, and an example of his handwriting. I invited Guillot up to my office, chose a pen and the right ink and wrote out the document perfectly without making a draft. Guillot handed me a payment proportionate to the legacy as if he knew my rates.

So is this my trade? It's a marvelous thing creating a legal deed out of nothing, forging a letter that looks genuine, drafting a compromising confession, creating a document that will lead someone to ruin. The power of art...to be rewarded by a visit to the Café Anglais.

My memory must be in my nose, yet I have the impression that centuries have passed since I last savored the aroma of that menu: *soufflés à la reine, filets de sole à la vénitienne, escalopes de turbot au gratin, selle de mouton purée bretonne...* And as an entrée: *poulet à la portugaise, or pâté chaud de cailles, or homard à la parisienne, or all of them, and as the plat de résistance, perhaps canetons à la rouennaise or ortolans sur canapés, and for entremets, aubergines à l'espagnole, asperges en branches, cassolettes princesse...* For wine, I don't know, perhaps a Château Margaux, or Château Latour, or Château Lafite, depending on the vintage. And to finish, a *bombe glacée*.

I have always found more pleasure in food than in sex, perhaps a mark left upon me by priests.

I feel as if my mind is in a continual cloud that prevents me from looking back. Why, all of a sudden do memories resurface about my visits to Bicerin in Father Bergamaschi's robes? I had quite forgotten about Father Bergamaschi. Who was he? I'm enjoying letting my pen wander where my instinct takes it. According to the Austrian doctor, I ought to reach a point where my memory feels true pain, which would explain why I have suddenly blotted out so many things.

Yesterday, which I thought was Tuesday, the 22nd of March, I woke up thinking I knew perfectly well who I was—Captain Simonini, sixty-seven years old, but carrying them well (I'm fat enough to be described as a fine-looking man). I assumed the title of Captain in France, in remembrance of my grandfather, making vague references to a military past in the ranks of Garibaldi's Thousand, which in this country, where Garibaldi is esteemed more highly than in Italy, carries a certain prestige. Simonini, born in Turin, father from Turin, mother French (a Savoyard, but when she was born, Savoy had been invaded by the French).

I was still in bed, allowing my thoughts to wander...With the problems I'd been having with the Russians (the Russians?), it was better not to be seen at my favorite restaurants. I could cook something for myself. I find it relaxing to labor away for a few hours preparing some delicacy. For

example, *côtes de veau Foyot*: meat at least four centimeters thick—enough for two, of course—two medium-size onions, fifty grams of bread without the crust, seventy-five of grated gruyère, fifty of butter. Grate the bread into breadcrumbs and mix with the gruyère, then peel and chop the onions and melt forty grams of the butter in a small pan. Meanwhile, in another pan, gently sauté the onions in the remaining butter. Cover the bottom of a dish with half the onions, season the meat with salt and pepper, arrange it on the dish and add the rest of the onions. Cover with a first layer of breadcrumbs and cheese, making sure that the meat sits well on the bottom of the dish, allowing the melted butter to drain to the bottom and gently pressing by hand. Add another layer of breadcrumbs to form a sort of dome, and the last of the melted butter. Add enough white wine and stock until the liquid is no more than half the height of the meat. Put the dish in the oven for around half an hour, basting now and then with the wine and stock. Serve with sautéed cauliflower.

It takes a little time, but the pleasures of cooking begin before the pleasures of the palate, and preparing means anticipating, which was what I was doing while still luxuriating in my bed. Only fools need to keep a woman, or a young boy, under their bedcovers so as not to feel alone. They don't understand that a salivating mouth is better than an erection.

I had almost everything I needed in the house, except for the gruyère and the meat. For the meat on any other day I could go to the butcher in place Maubert—goodness knows why he closes on Tuesday. But I knew another one, two hundred meters away on boulevard Saint-Germain, and a short walk would do me no harm. I dressed and, before leaving, stuck on my usual black mustache and fine beard at the mirror over the washstand. I then put on my wig and made a part in the center, slightly wetting the comb. I slipped on my frock coat and placed the silver watch into my waistcoat pocket with its chain clearly visible. While I'm talking, in order to give the appearance of a retired captain, I like to fiddle with a tortoiseshell box of licorice lozenges, a portrait of an ugly but well-dressed woman on the inside lid, no doubt a deceased loved one. Every now and then I pop a lozenge into my mouth and pass it with my tongue from one side to the other. This allows me to talk more slowly—the listener follows the movement of your lips and doesn't hear what you're saying. The problem is trying to keep up the appearance of someone of less than average intelligence.

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I went down to the street, turned the corner, trying not to stop in front of the brasserie, where the raucous voices of its fallen women could be heard from early morning.

Place Maubert is no longer the court of miracles it was when I arrived here thirty-five years ago. Then it teemed with sellers of recycled tobacco, the coarser variety obtained from cigar stubs and pipe ash, and the finer variety from cigarette butts—coarse tobacco at one franc twenty centimes a pound, fine at between one franc fifty and one franc sixty (though the industry had hardly ever been profitable, and once they'd drunk away most of their profits in some wine cellar, none of those industrious recyclers had anywhere to sleep the night). It teemed with pimps who, having lazed about until at least two in the afternoon, spent the rest of the day smoking, propped against a wall like respectable pensioners, then going into action at dusk, like shepherd dogs. It teemed with thieves reduced to stealing from each other because no decent person (except for the occasional idler up from the countryside) would have dared to cross the square, and I would have been easy prey if it were not for my military step and the way I twirled my stick. And, in any event, the pickpockets of the area knew me, and now and then one of them would greet me, addressing me as Captain. Apart from that, they thought I belonged in some way to their underworld, and dog does not eat dog. It teemed with prostitutes whose beauty had faded—for those who were still attractive would have been working in the *brasseries à femmes*—and they therefore had no choice but to offer themselves to rag-and-bone men, petty thieves and foul-smelling secondhand-tobacco sellers. On seeing a respectably dressed gentleman with a well-brushed top hat, they might dare to sidle up to you or take you by the arm,

coming so close that you could smell their terrible cheap perfume mixed with sweat, and this would have been too appalling an experience (I had no wish to dream of them at night), so when I saw one of them approaching I would whirl my stick full circle, as if to form an inaccessible area of protection around me, and they understood at once, since they were used to being ordered about and knew how to respect a stick.

Last of all, place Maubert teemed with police spies who were there to recruit their *mouchards*, or informers, or to gather valuable information about villainies that were being hatched and which someone was whispering too loudly to someone else, imagining his voice would be lost in the general din. They were immediately recognizable by their exaggeratedly sinister manner. No true villain looks like a villain, but they do.

Nowadays, tramways pass through the square and it no longer feels like home, though there are still some useful people around if you know how to spot them, leaning in a corner, at the entrance to Café Maître-Albert or in one of the adjacent passageways. All in all, Paris isn't what it used to be, even since that pencil sharpener, the Eiffel Tower, has been sticking up in the distance, visible from every angle.

Enough. I'm no sentimentalist, and there are plenty of other places where I can find what I need. Yesterday morning I wanted meat and cheese, and place Maubert still served my purpose.

Having bought the cheese, I passed the usual butcher and saw he was open.

"Open on Tuesday? How come?" I asked as I went in.

"Today is Wednesday, Captain," he answered with a laugh. I felt confused, and apologized, saying that you lose your memory with age. I was still a young lad, he said, and it's easy for anyone to lose track of what day it is when you get up in a hurry. I chose my meat and paid without asking for a discount (the only way of gaining respect from tradesmen).

I returned home, still wondering what day it was. I removed my mustache and beard, as I do when I am by myself, and went into the bedroom. Only then was I struck by something that seemed out of place. A piece of clothing was hanging from a hook by the chest of drawers, a cassock that undoubtedly belonged to a priest. Moving closer, I saw on top of the chest a light brown, almost blondish wig.

I was wondering what third-rate actor I might have taken in over the past few days when I realized that I too had been in disguise, since the mustache and beard I'd been wearing were not my own. Was I someone, then, who dressed alternately as a respectable gentleman and as a priest? But how had I blotted out all recollection of this second part of me? Or maybe for some reason (perhaps to avoid an arrest warrant) I had disguised myself in mustache and beard and at the same time had given hospitality to a person dressed as an abbé? And if this fake abbé (a true abbé would not have worn a wig) had been staying with me, where did he sleep, considering there was only one bed in the house? Or perhaps he wasn't living here and, for some reason, had taken shelter here the day before, then rid himself of his disguise to go God knows where to do God knows what?

My mind was a blank. It was as if I knew there was something I ought to recall but couldn't—I mean, something that was part of someone else's recollections. Talking about someone else's recollections is, I believe, the right expression. At that moment I felt I was another person who was watching, from the outside—someone watching Simonini, who, all of a sudden, did not know exactly who he was.

Calm down, I told myself, let's think. For someone who forges documents under the pretext of selling bric-a-brac, and who has chosen to live in one of the less desirable districts of Paris, it was not improbable that I had given protection to a person caught up in some shady machinations. But not to remember to whom I had given protection didn't seem normal.

I looked around, and suddenly my own house seemed strange, as if it were someone else's house as if perhaps it held other secrets. Leaving the kitchen, to the right was the bedroom, to the left the living room with its usual furniture. I opened the drawers of the writing desk containing the tools of my trade—pens, bottles of various inks, sheets of paper from different periods, white or yellowing. On the shelves, in addition to books, there were boxes holding my papers and an old walnut tabernacle. I was trying to recall what purpose this served when I heard the doorbell ring. I went downstairs to turn away any unwelcome visitor, and saw an old woman whom I seemed to recognize. "Tissot sent me," she said, and so I had to let her in. Goodness knows why I chose that password.

She came in and unwrapped a cloth she was clutching to her chest, showing me twenty hosts.

"Abbé Dalla Piccola told me you'd be interested."

"Certainly," I replied, puzzled by my own response, and asked how much.

"Ten francs each," said the old woman.

"You're mad," I said, out of a tradesman's instinct.

"It's you who are mad—you and your black masses. You think it's easy going into twenty churches in three days to take communion, trying to keep my mouth dry, kneeling with my head in my hands, trying to get the hosts out of my mouth without wetting them, putting them into a purse I carry in my breast, and without the curate or anyone else noticing? Not to mention the sacrilege, and the hell that awaits me. So if you please, two hundred francs, or I'll go to Abbé Boullan."

"Abbé Boullan's dead. Evidently you haven't been getting hosts for some time," I replied almost automatically. Then, confused, I decided to follow my instinct without much further thought.

"Never mind, I'll take them," I said, and paid her. I realized I had to place the consecrated wafer in the tabernacle, awaiting the arrival of some regular customer. A job like any other.

In short, everything seemed normal, familiar. And yet I sensed there was something sinister happening around me which I couldn't identify.

I went back up to my office and noticed a door at the far end, covered by a curtain. I opened it, knowing that I would enter a corridor so dark I would need a lamp to walk along it. The corridor was like a store for theatrical props, or the back room of a junk dealer in the Temple Quarter. Hanging from the walls were clothes of all kinds—for a farmer, coal merchant, deliveryman, beggar, a soldier's jacket and trousers—and beside each costume the headgear to complete it. On a dozen stands, carefully arranged along a wooden shelf, were as many wigs. At the far end was a *coiffeuse*, similar to one in an actor's dressing room, covered with jars of whitener and rouge, black and dark blue pencils, hares' feet, powder puffs, brushes, hairbrushes.

At a certain point the corridor turned a corner, and at the far end was another door leading into a room that was more brightly lit than mine, since it overlooked a street that was not the narrow impasse Maubert. In fact, looking out from one of the windows, I could see rue Maître-Albert below.

There was a stairway leading from the room down to the street, but nothing else. It was a one-room apartment, somewhere between an office and a bedroom, with plain dark furniture, a table, a prie-dieu and a bed. There was a small kitchen by the entrance and, on the stairway, a lavatory with a washbasin.

It was obviously the pied-à-terre of a clergyman with whom I must have been acquainted, since our apartments were connected. And though it all seemed familiar, I felt I was visiting the room for the first time.

I approached the table and saw a bundle of letters in their envelopes, all addressed to the same person: the Most Reverend, or the Very Reverend, Abbé Dalla Piccola. Next to the envelopes were several handwritten sheets of paper, penned in a fine, graceful, almost feminine hand, very different from mine. Drafts of letters of no particular importance, expressing thanks for a gift, confirming an appointment. The sheet on top of these was written carelessly, as if the writer were making notes of

points for further consideration. I read it with some difficulty:

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Everything seems unreal. It is as though someone is watching me. Write it down to make sure it's true.

Today is the 22nd of March.

Where is my cassock, my wig?

What happened last night? My mind is confused.

I couldn't remember where that door at the end of the room led.

I found a corridor (never seen?) full of clothes, wigs, creams and greasepaint as used by actors

A good cassock was hanging from a peg, and on a shelf I found not only a good wig but also fake eyebrows. With a foundation of ocher, a little rouge on both cheeks, I have returned to how I think I am, pallid and slightly feverish in appearance. Ascetic. This is me. But who am I?

I know I am Abbé Dalla Piccola. Or rather, the person everyone knows as Abbé Dalla Piccola. But clearly I am not, given that I have to dress up to look like him.

Where does that corridor lead? I'm frightened to go as far as the end.

Reread the above notes. If what is written is written, then it has actually happened. Believe in what is written.

Has someone drugged me? Boullan? He's perfectly capable of it. Or the Jesuits? Or the Freemasons? What have I to do with them?

The Jews! That's who it must have been.

I don't feel safe here. Someone could have broken in during the night, stolen my clothes and, worse still, rummaged through my papers. Perhaps someone's wandering around Paris making people think he is Abbé Dalla Piccola.

I must hide at Auteuil. Maybe Diana will know. Who is Diana?

Abbé Dalla Piccola's notes stopped here, and it was strange he hadn't taken with him a document as confidential as this—a clear indication of his state of anxiety. And all I could find out about him ended here.

I returned to the apartment in impasse Maubert and sat at my desk. In what way did Abbé Dalla Piccola's life cross with mine?

Naturally I was unable to avoid making the most obvious conjecture: that Abbé Dalla Piccola and I were the same person. If that were so, it would explain everything—the two connecting apartments, how I had returned dressed as Dalla Piccola to the apartment of Simonini and how I had left the cassock and wig there and then fallen asleep. Except for one small detail: if Simonini was Dalla Piccola, why did I know nothing at all about Dalla Piccola? And why didn't I feel I was Dalla Piccola who knew nothing at all about Simonini? (In fact, to find out about Dalla Piccola's thoughts and feelings I had to read of them in his notes.) And if I had been Dalla Piccola as well, I should have been at Auteuil, in the house about which he seemed to know everything and about which I (Simonini) knew nothing. And who was Diana?

Unless I was sometimes Simonini who had forgotten Dalla Piccola, and sometimes Dalla Piccola who had forgotten Simonini. That would be nothing new. Who was the person who told me about cases of double personality? Isn't this what happens to Diana? But who is Diana?

I decided to retrace my steps. I knew that I kept an appointment book, which is where I found the following notes:

*21st March, Mass*

22nd March, Taxil

23rd March, Guillot for Bonnefoy will

---

24th March, to Drumont?

I have no idea why I had to go to Mass on the 21st. I don't think I'm a believer. A believer believes in something. Do I believe in something? I don't think so. Therefore I'm not a believer. This is logical. Besides, sometimes you go to Mass for all sorts of reasons, and faith has nothing to do with it.

What I felt more sure of was that the day, which I thought was Tuesday, was in fact Wednesday, the 23rd of March, and that Guillot did in fact come for me to draw up the Bonnefoy will. It was the 23rd and I thought it was the 22nd. So what happened on the 22nd? And who or what was Taxil?

The idea of having to see that fellow Drumont on Thursday was now out of the question. Not knowing who I was, how could I meet someone? I had to hide until I had worked it all out. Drumont... thought I knew who he was, yet if I tried to think about him, it was as if my mind was clouded by wine.

Let's consider other possibilities, I told myself. First, Dalla Piccola is someone else, who for whatever mysterious reasons often comes to my apartment, which is linked to his by a more or less secret corridor. On the evening of the 21st of March he returned to my place in impasse Maubert, left his coat (why?), then went to sleep in his own apartment, where he woke the following morning, having lost his memory. And I woke two mornings later, also having lost my memory. In that case, what could I have done on Tuesday the 22nd if I had woken on the morning of the 23rd with no memory? And why did Dalla Piccola have to undress here, then, with no cassock, go to his place—and at what time? I was struck with dread at the thought that he had passed the first part of the night in my bed...My God, it's true that women fill me with horror, but with a priest it would be much worse. I am celibate but not a pervert...

Otherwise Dalla Piccola and I are the same person. Since I found the cassock in my bedroom, after the day of the Mass (the 21st) I would have been able to return to impasse Maubert dressed as Dalla Piccola (if I'd had to go to a Mass, it is more credible that I'd have gone as an abbé), before taking off the cassock and wig, then later going to sleep in the abbé's apartment (and forgetting that I had left the cassock at Simonini's). The morning after, Tuesday, the 22nd of March, waking up as Dalla Piccola, not only would I have found myself with no memory, but I wouldn't have been able to find the cassock at the foot of the bed. As Dalla Piccola, with no memory, I would have found a spare cassock in the corridor and would have had as much time as I needed to escape the same day to Auteuil, only to change my mind by the end of the day, steel myself and return to Paris later that evening, to the apartment at impasse Maubert, hanging the cassock on the hook in the bedroom, and waking up with no memory once again, but as Simonini, on the Wednesday, believing it was still Tuesday. Therefore, I reasoned, Dalla Piccola loses his memory on the 22nd of March and remains amnesiac the whole day, finding himself on the 23rd as an amnesiac Simonini. Nothing exceptional after what I had learned from—what's his name?—that doctor at the clinic in Vincennes.

Except for one small problem. I reread my notes. If that was how things had happened, Simonini would have found in his bedroom, on the morning of the 23rd, not one cassock but two—the one he had left on the night of the 21st and the other he had left on the night of the 22nd. Yet there was only one.

But no, what a fool I am. Dalla Piccola had returned from Auteuil to rue Maître-Albert on the evening of the 22nd, put down his cassock, then gone to the apartment in impasse Maubert and slept there, waking the following morning (the 23rd) as Simonini, to find only one cassock on the rack. It is true that, if events had taken that course, when I entered Dalla Piccola's apartment on the morning of the 23rd, I should have found the cassock that he'd left there on the evening of the 22nd, but he could

have hung it back up in the corridor where he had found it. All I had to do was check.

~~I went along the corridor, with lighted lamp, feeling a certain trepidation. If Dalla Piccola and I were not the same person, I told myself, I might have seen him appear at the other end of that passageway, he too perhaps carrying a lamp in front of him...Fortunately that didn't happen. And I found the cassock hanging at the far end of the corridor.~~

And yet, and yet...if Dalla Piccola had returned from Auteuil and, on leaving the cassock, walked the whole length of the corridor to my apartment and happily gone to sleep in my bed, it was because at that point he knew who I was, and knew that he could sleep here just as well as in his own place, seeing that we were the same person. Dalla Piccola had therefore gone to bed knowing he was Simonini, whereas, the morning after, Simonini had woken not knowing he was Dalla Piccola. In other words, Dalla Piccola first loses his memory, then regains it, then goes to sleep and passes his loss of memory on to Simonini.

Loss of memory...This phrase, meaning nonrecollection, opens a gap in the mist of time that I had quite forgotten. I remember talking about people with memory loss at Chez Magny, more than ten years ago, with Bourru and Burot, with Du Maurier and with the Austrian doctor.

### 3. Chez Magny

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25th March 1897, at day

Chez Magny...As far as I can recall, it used to cost no more than ten francs a head at that restaurant in rue Contrescarpe-Dauphine, and the quality matched the price. I'm a lover of good food, I know, but you can't eat at Foyot every day. In years gone by, many used to go to Magny to catch a glimpse of famous writers like Gautier or Flaubert or, earlier still, that consumptive Polish pianist kept by a degenerate woman who went about in trousers. I looked in there one evening and left right away. Artists are insufferable, even from afar, always looking around to see whether we have recognized them.

Then the "great men" stopped going to Magny, and moved on to Brébant-Vachette, in boulevard Poissonnière, where you ate better and paid more, but evidently *carmina dant panem*—poetry does give you bread. And once Magny had been purged, so to speak, I started going occasionally, starting the early '80s.

I saw men of science there, including eminent chemists such as Berthelot and many doctors from the Salpêtrière. The hospital isn't exactly close by, but perhaps the clinicians find pleasure in taking a short walk in the Latin Quarter rather than eating at the filthy *gargotes* where the patients' families go. Since medical discussions invariably relate to the infirmities of others, and since at Magny, to compete with the noise, everyone talks loudly, a trained ear can usually pick up something interesting. Listening doesn't mean trying to understand. Anything, however trifling, may be of use one day. What matters is to know something that others don't know you know.

While the writers and artists had always sat together at long tables, the men of science dined alone, as I did. But after sitting at neighboring tables on several occasions, I became familiar with a few medical men. My first acquaintance was Doctor Du Maurier, a man so loathsome that I wondered how a psychiatrist (which he was) could inspire the trust of his patients with such an unpleasant face. It was the pale, envious face of one who thinks he is destined always to remain in second place. He was, in fact, the director of a small clinic for nervous illnesses at Vincennes, but knew full well that his institute would never enjoy the fame and prosperity of the clinic run by the more renowned Doctor Blanche—though Du Maurier used to mutter sarcastically that one of Blanche's patients thirty years before had been a certain Nerval (according to him, a poet of some merit) who had been driven to suicide after being treated at his famous clinic.

Another two table companions with whom I became familiar were Doctors Bourru and Burot, unusual fellows who looked like twin brothers, both dressed in black with almost the same cut of coat, the same long black mustaches and clean-shaven chins, with collars slightly grubby, inevitably, as they were in Paris as travelers, since they practiced at the École de Médecine at Rochefort and came to the capital for only a few days each month to follow Charcot's experiments.

"What, no leeks today?" Bourru asked one day, irritated. And Burot, scandalized: "No leeks?"

While the waiter apologized, I interposed from the next table: "But they have excellent wild salsify. I prefer it to leeks." Then, with a smile, I softly sang: "*Tous les légumes, / au clair de lune, / étaient en train de s'amuser / et les passants les regardaient. / Les cornichons / dansaient en rond, / les salsifis / dansaient sans bruit...*"

Persuaded, the two table companions chose *salsifis*. And from there began a cordial acquaintance on two days each month.

"You see, Monsieur Simonini," Bourru explained, "Doctor Charcot is studying hysteria, a form of neurosis that manifests itself in various psychomotor, sensory and vegetative symptoms. In the past it



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