



VINTAGE

**THE PRAGUE
CEMETERY**
UMBERTO ECO

CONTENTS

Cover

About the Book

About the Author

Also by Umberto Eco

Illustrations

Title Page

Epigraph

1. A Passerby on that Grey Morning
2. Who Am I?
3. *Chez Magny*
4. In My Grandfather's Day
5. Simonino the Carbonaro
6. Serving the Secret Service
7. With the Thousand
8. The *Ercole*
9. Paris
10. Dalla Piccola Perplexed
11. Joly
12. A Night in Prague
13. Dalla Piccola Says He Is Not Dalla Piccola
14. Biarritz
15. Dalla Piccola Redivivus
16. Boullan
17. The Days of the Commune
18. The Protocols
19. Osman Bey

20. Russians?
21. Taxil
22. The Devil in the Nineteenth Century
23. Twelve Years Well Spent
24. A Night Mass
25. Sorting Matters Out
26. The Final Solution
27. Diary Cut Short

Useless Learned Explanations
Copyright

About the Book

Nineteenth-century Europe, from Turin to Prague to Paris, abounds with the ghastly and the mysterious. Conspiracies rule history. Jesuits plot against Freemasons. Italian priests are strangled with their own intestines. French criminals plan bombings by day and celebrate black masses at night. Every nation has its own secret service, perpetrating forgeries, plots, and massacres. From the unification of Italy to the Paris Commune to the Dreyfus Affair to the notorious forgery *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, Europe is in tumult and everyone needs a scapegoat.

But what if, behind all of these conspiracies both real and imagined, lay just one man? What if that evil genius created the most infamous document of all?

About the Author

Umberto Eco has written works of fiction, literary criticism and philosophy. His first novel, *The Name of the Rose*, was a major international bestseller. His other works include *Foucault's Pendulum*, *The Island of the Day Before*, *Baudolino*, *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* and *The Prague Cemetery*, along with many brilliant collections of essays.

ALSO BY UMBERTO ECO

Fiction

The Name of the Rose
Foucault's Pendulum
The Island of the Day Before
Baudolino
The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana

Non-fiction

Faith in Fakes
Five Moral Pieces
Kant and the Platypus
Serendipities
How to Travel With a Salmon and Other Essays
On Literature
On Beauty
Turning Back the Clock
On Ugliness
The Infinity of Lists

ILLUSTRATIONS

- [1.](#) *Victory at Calatafimi*, 1860 © Mary Evans Picture Library / Archivi Alinari.
- [2.](#) Honoré Daumier, *Un jour où l'on ne paye pas* (Members of the public at the Salon, 10, for *Le Charivari*), 1852 © BnF.
- [3.](#) Honoré Daumier, *Et dire qu'il y a des personnes qui boivent de l'eau dans un pays qui produit du bon vin comme celui-ci!* (*Croquis parisiens* for *Le journal amusant*), 1864 © BnF.
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Umberto Eco

**THE PRAGUE
CEMETERY**

*Translated from the Italian
by Richard Dixon*



HARVILL SECKER · LONDON

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 which 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)

A PASSERBY ON THAT GREY MORNING

A PASSERBY ON that grey 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 centre 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 Étienne Dolet), would have found himself in one of the few spots in Paris spared from Baron Haussmann's devastations, amidst a tangle of malodorous alleys, sliced in two by the course of the Bièvre which still emerged here, flowing out from the bowels of the metropolis, where it had long been confined, before emptying feverish, gasping and verminous into the nearby Seine. From place Maubert, already scarred by boulevard Saint-Germain, a web of narrow lanes still branched off, such as rue Maître-Albert, rue Saint-Séverin, rue Galande, rue de la Bûcherie, rue Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre, as far as rue de la Huchette, littered with filthy hotels generally run by Auvergnat hoteliers of legendary cupidity, who demanded one franc for the first night and forty centimes thereafter (plus twenty sous if you wanted a sheet).

If he were then to turn into what was later to become rue Sauton but was then still rue d'Amboise, about halfway along the street, between a brothel masquerading as a brasserie and a tavern which served dinner with foul wine for two sous (cheap even then, but all that was affordable to students from the nearby Sorbonne), he would have found an impasse or blind alley which already by that time

was called *impasse Maubert*, but up to 1865 had been called *cul-de-sac d'Amboise*, and years earlier had housed a *tapis-franc* (in underworld slang, a tavern, a hostelry of ill fame, generally run by an ex-convict, and the haunt of felons just released from gaol), and was also notorious because in the eighteenth century there had stood here the laboratory of three celebrated women poisoners, found one day asphyxiated by the deadly substances they were distilling on their stoves.

At the end of that alleyway, quite inconspicuous, was the window of a junk shop which a faded sign extolled as *Brocantage de Qualité* – a window whose glass was now covered by such a thick layer of dust that it was hard to see the goods on display or the interior, each pane being little more than twenty centimetres square, all held together by a wooden frame. Beside the window he would have seen a door, always shut, and a notice beside the bell-pull announcing that the proprietor was temporarily absent.

But if, as rarely happened, the door was open, anyone entering would have been able to make out in the half-light illuminating that dingy hovel, arranged on a few precarious shelves and several equally unsteady tables, a jumble of objects which, though attractive at first sight, would on closer inspection have turned out to be totally unsuitable for any honest commercial trade, even if they were to be offered at knock-down prices. They included a pair of fire dogs that would have disgraced any hearth, a pendulum clock in flaking blue enamel, cushions once perhaps embroidered in bright colours, vase stands with chipped ceramic putti, small wobbly tables of indeterminate style, a rusty iron visiting-card holder, indefinable pokerwork boxes, hideous mother-of-pearl fans decorated with Chinese designs, a necklace that might have been amber, two white felt slippers with buckles encrusted with Irish diamante, a chipped bust of Napoleon, butterflies under crazed glass, multicoloured marble fruit under a once-transparent bell,

coconut shells, old albums with mediocre watercolours of flowers, a framed daguerreotype (which even then hardly seemed old) - so that if someone, taking a perverse fancy to one of those shameful remnants of past restraints 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 antiquarial 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 side-long, one against the next), he would have entered a spacious room which, 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 leather, one of those so-called American-style desks with a roll top and plenty of small drawers like a secretaire. And if he had passed into the adjoining room, he would have found a luxurious four-poster bed, a rustic *étagère* laden with Sèvres porcelain, a Turkish hookah, a large alabaster cup, a crystal vase and, on the far wall, panels painted with mythological scenes, two large canvases representing the Muses of History and Comedy and, hung variously upon the walls, Arab barracans, other oriental cashmere robes, an ancient pilgrim's flask; and then a washstand with a shelf filled with toiletry articles of the finest quality - in short, a bizarre collection of costly and curious objects which perhaps indicated not so much a consistency and refinement of taste as a desire for ostentatious opulence.

Returning to the first room, the visitor would have made out an elderly figure wrapped in a dressing gown, sitting at a table in front of the only window, through which filtered what little light illuminated the alleyway, who, from what he would have been able to glimpse over that man's shoulders, was writing what we are about to read, and which the Narrator will summarise from time to time, so as not to unduly bore the Reader.

Nor should the Reader expect the Narrator to reveal, to his surprise, that this figure is someone already named, since (this being the very beginning of the story) no one has yet been named. And the Narrator himself does not yet know who the mysterious writer is, proposing to find this out (together with the Reader) while both of us look on inquisitively and follow what he is noting down on those sheets of paper.



... I dreamt about Jews every night, for years and years....

[\[see here\]](#)

WHO AM I?

24th March 1897

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 spectre. 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 colour 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 shrivelled 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 Kalmuck, 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 faeces 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 faecal material. Even in recent centuries, French travellers knew immediately when they had crossed the Alsace frontier by the abnormal size of the turds left lying along the roads. And if that were not enough, the typical German suffers from bromidrosis - foul-smelling sweat - and it's been shown that the urine of a German contains twenty per cent 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 those 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, even 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 sniffing 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 sends 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 only took a gluttonous and lecherous monk like Luther seriously (can you *really* marry a nun?) 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 that 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 Jesuit who came to teach it to me, caning my knuckles as he did so.

Since the time when that man Gobineau wrote about the inequality of the human races, it seems that if 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 realised 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. But I have also understood that to induce a Frenchman to recognise 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 realise they've been caught out.



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

[\[see here\]](#)

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*" and he'll 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 onto 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 Chasles (a great mathematician, they say, and a member of the Academy of Sciences, but a blockhead). And not just him, but many of his fellow academicians took it for granted that Caligula, Cleopatra or 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 which 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 terrorised 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) it needed 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 the French, who always regarded him as a half-caste. He was liked by the Neapolitans and Sicilians, who are mulattoes themselves, not through the fault of a strumpet mother but through generations of history, born from the inter-breeding 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 the 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 modelled 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, let us say, one priest in a thousand people then they'd have so much to do that they couldn't laze 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 baptise 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 the day of your wedding to tell you what to do in bed, and the day after at confession to ask you how many times you did it, so that 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 even 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. Civilisation 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 hold 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 rather 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 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 neighbours 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*, but almost two hundred throughout Paris, and all are open even to the very youngest. Youths 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 in through the door. And not just at the pupils - you learn a great deal about the customs and habits of adults, and that can always be useful.



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

[\[see here\]](#)

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 cut-throats, 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 invert, 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, coloured water for which the client pays dearly). Or they get you to play cards, and of course they exchange signs so that 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 Dr 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 it is certain that these two fluids have a certain similarity and, after long nocturnal pollutions, people not only lose energy but 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 philosophise 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 ergo 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 straight away that Tissot had sent him - why did I ever choose that password? He wanted a handwritten will, signed by a certain Bonnefoy in favour 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 into my office, I 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 marvellous thing, creating a legal deed out of nothing, forging a letter which 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 savoured 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 *entremet*, *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 sex - perhaps a mark left upon me by priests.

I feel as if my mind is in a continual cloud which 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. Simone 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 around at my favourite restaurants. I could cook something for myself. I find it relaxing to labour away for a few hours preparing some delicacy. For example, *côtes de veau Foyot*: meat at least four centimetres thick - a quantity for two, of course - two medium-sized onions, fifty grammes 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 grammes of the butter in a small pan. Meanwhile, in another pan, gently melt 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 sticks well to 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. Sprinkle with white wine and stock, up to no more than half the height of the meat. Put it all in the oven for around half an hour, continuing to baste with 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 as I still luxuriated in my bed. Only fools need to keep a woman, or a young boy, under their bedcovers not to feel alone. They don't understand that a watering mouth is better than an erection.

I had almost everything in the house, except for the Gruyère and the meat. For the meat, on any other day there was the butcher in place Maubert - goodness knows why

he closes on Tuesday. But I knew another one, two hundred metres away on boulevard Saint-Germain, and a short walk would do me no harm. I dressed and, before leaving, stuck on my usual black moustache and fine beard at the mirror over the washstand. I then put on my wig and combed it with a central parting, slightly wetting the comb. I slipped on my frock coat and placed the silver watch into my waistcoat pocket with its chain well visible. While I'm talking, in order to give the appearance of a retired captain, I like to fiddle with a tortoiseshell box of liquorice 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 - and 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.

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