

Against Nature

by Temenuga Trifonova

33 Isabella street, ap.1210
Toronto, ON M4Y2P7, Canada
Email: Nushito@yahoo.com

FADE IN:

TITLE: 1868

INT. CHÂTEAU DE LOURPS - DINING ROOM - EVENING

GASPARD DE RONSARD, 10, pale and sickly-looking, is having dinner with his parents, DUKE PHILIPPE DE RONSARD, stylish, aloof, late 40s, and THE DUCHESS, LAETITIA DE RONSARD, fragile, with a melancholy face. The curtains are drawn. They eat in silence. The Duke puts down his fork.

PHILIPPE

I am afraid I have to go back to Paris tonight.

He walks over to his wife and awkwardly kisses her on the cheek. On the way out he distractedly pats his son on the head. The Duchess touches her forehead with the back of her hand. Gaspard drags his fork across the plate.

LAETITIA

Please don't do that, mon cheri. You know I have headache.

Gaspard stops playing with the fork and stares at his plate.

INT. CHÂTEAU DE LOURPS – SITTING ROOM – DAY

The Duchess is lying on the sofa, one arm over her face. Gaspard sits on the floor, playing unenthusiastically with glass marbles and glancing at his mother, who doesn't seem to notice him. He walks over to the sofa and stands by her side. She opens her eyes and looks past him. Gaspard walks back to the window, draws up the curtains and returns to the sofa. She closes her eyes again. Somewhere in the house a clock strikes.

EXT. JESUIT SEMINARY - DAY

TITLE: 1874

The seminary crowds itself into the nooks and crannies of an ancient abbey, a three-story structure that serves as a study hall and dormitory, and two houses near the main property. THE FATHER RECTOR, a portly man in his 60s, is taking a walk around the seminary, accompanied by the Duke.

RECTOR

You've made the right decision in bringing your son to us. A royal college is no place to be for a young Christian. You can never be too careful with these Voltairian sceptics, with their vicious habits and loathsome morals. Students come out of their college

spiritually and intellectually malnourished, glorifying incest, adultery, and revolt.

The Duke mumbles something incoherent. The two resume walking.

RECTOR
(pompous)

Rhetoric is the core of our curriculum. *Ad perfectam enim eloquentiam informat.* The gentlemanly accomplishments—music, drawing, fencing—are taught only during times of recreation.

The Rector shows the Duke several of the classrooms. The Duke is distracted but pretends to be interested.

EXT. JESUIT SEMINARY – DORMITORY - DAY

A young seminarian, PIERRE, dressed in a black frock coat walks through the dormitory. Gaspard, now 16, walks at a distance behind him.

PIERRE

You get up at 5am. You have an hour and a half of study before attending Mass, followed by breakfast at 7:30 and recreation until 8. The rest of the morning is taken up with study until lunch at noon, followed by recreation, then the rosary and study at 1:30. In the afternoon there is another class, a half hour of recreation, ten minute reading of a religious book, study until 7:20, supper at 7:30, and at 8:15 night prayers and bed. Any questions?

Pierre turns around. Gaspard is lying on one of the beds, one arm over his face. Pierre frowns.

EXT. JESUIT SEMINARY COURTYARD - DAY

Gaspard stands in the middle of the empty courtyard, looking after his father's carriage until it disappears in the distance, raising a lot of dust in its wake.

BLACK. COMPLETE SILENCE. A LEGEND APPEARS: AGAINST NATURE

FADE IN:

INT. JESUIT SEMINARY – CLASSROOM - MORNING

A DOZEN STUDENTS are seated at their desks. Gaspard sits at the back of the room and stares out the window, oblivious to everything around him. Every student is dressed in the seminary plain school uniform—a dark blue frock coat and a pair of dark pants. The Rector and the PREFECT, a tall man with a gaunt face, stand in front of the students.

RECTOR
(conceited)

Mundus transit et concupiscentia ejus: qui autem facit voluntatem Dei manet in ceternum. Mes enfants, the college must seem to you like a sad prison. But we are not jailers. Although we are charged with teaching you, the name we seek above all is the name of Fathers. Obey us, respect us, but do so as children. Despite all the care with which your previous upbringing was surrounded, the very air breathed in this century, so charged with insubordination and pride, has perhaps touched even you.

The Rector surveys the room and notices Gaspard is not paying attention.

RECTOR (cont.)
(staring at Gaspard)

You have to obey. It is the very law of your age, of your weakness, of your inexperience.

INT. SEMINARY DORMITORY – EVENING

Several students are praying the rosary. They begin by making the cross and proceed to say the Apostles' Creed. Gaspard keeps forgetting the words.

GASPARD

I believe in God, the Father Almighty...his only
Son....conceived...suffered...crucified, died and...descended into
hell...

Pierre makes a last round of bed checks, turns off the lights and leaves. Gaspard lies in bed, eyes open, hands clasped on his chest, like a dead man.

INT. JESUIT SEMINARY CLASSROOM – DAY

A dozen students sit at the simple wooden desks, staring down at their notebooks. At the very back of the room Gaspard stares out the window as usual. FATHER CHARLES, a puny old man with white hair sticking to his scalp, walks back and forth at the front of the room, his hands clasped behind his back.

FATHER CHARLES

Which one of you will tell us about the doctrine of ontologism?
Gaspard?

Gaspard doesn't respond. Father Charles walks over to him and stands by his desk. After a few moments Gaspard becomes aware of his presence and looks up.

GASPARD

What was the question?

FATHER CHARLES

The question was about ontologism, though I seriously doubt your current ontological state allows you to speak with any authority on the subject.

A few students giggle. Gaspard's face does not show a trace of emotion. He speaks in an automated voice, enunciating every word.

GASPARD

The General published a directive forbidding the basic propositions of ontologism...

FATHER CHARLES

...which Benoit will now read to us.

BENOIT, an obese boy with a sleepy face, wakes up from a nap. He looks around confused, unsure what is expected of him. The student sitting next to Benoit shows him the passage he is supposed to read.

BENOIT

God, as simply being, is every existent being.
Also, outside of and besides God, nothing is...nothing....
Nothing is. Being...when being...when being exists, it could never be said to be...or not....it cannot be...

Father Charles motions to him to stop and reads the rest of the passage himself.

FATHER CHARLES

Being, as being, exists in such a way that it could never not be.

Gaspard raises his hand. Father Charles frowns but motions to him to speak up.

GASPARD

What does 'being could never not be' mean? Does it mean I am immortal?

Father Charles tries, in vain, to hide his irritation.

FATHER CHARLES

I'm afraid there is no time to discuss immortality or to analyze the arrogance of your question. Now, I want everyone to turn to page three of Feller's *Philosophical Catechism*.

The students open their books. Gaspard goes back to staring out the window.

INT. SEMINARY DINING HALL – DAY

Students line up in silence and take their simple meal. Father Charles walks around the table, reading out loud passages from Feller's *Philosophical Catechism*. Gaspard scornfully observes the faces of the students sitting across from him. They are all absorbed in their meals, their hands moving up and down in unison.

FATHER CHARLES (O.S)

Our knowledge of our Lord, the supreme master and creator of this world, is the first principle and the end of everything that exists. What is the basis of such a profound and magnificent truth? It is based on reason's illuminating light, on the sentiments most natural to the human heart, and on the testimony of our senses through which we know the beauty, the order, and the innumerable wonders of this world...

Gaspard empties his glass of watered down red wine and switches his glass with that of the student sitting next to him. He drinks it slowly, savouring every sip.

FATHER CHARLES (cont.)

I will now demonstrate to you the existence of our Lord...

INT. SEMINARY DINING HALL – DAY

Lunch is over. Gaspard stands before Father Charles and the Prefect. The Prefect is holding a wooden plaque in his hands. Father Charles looks pleased.

PREFECT

Do you understand the nature of your transgression, my son?

Gaspard remains silent. Father Charles looks at him coldly.

FATHER CHARLES

You shall wear the signum for the remainder of the day and think about what you did during lunch. If you happen to catch another student in violation of some rule, you must pass the signum to him. You may not, under any circumstances, pass it off to a friend if he is stupid enough to offer to relieve you of your punishment.

Father Charles hangs the signum over Gaspard's neck. Gaspard's face remains expressionless.

EXT. SEMINARY COURTYARD - DAY

Gaspard comes out of the dining hall. The signum hanging from his neck keeps swaying from side to side. He walks to the end of the building and goes around the corner. Now that he is finally alone, he sits down, removes the signum, and takes out a little bottle out of his pocket. It's filled with wine. He takes a sip.

INT. SEMINARY DORMITORY – DAY

Gaspard lies in bed, dressed in the school uniform. Pierre walks in.

PIERRE

Gaspard De Ronsard: your father is here.

He looks at Gaspard's frock coat disapprovingly.

PIERRE

Button up.

EXT. SEMINARY COURTYARD – DAY

The Duke paces nervously. He smiles awkwardly when he sees his son.

PHILIPPE

Your mother is not feeling well. She sends her love.

Gaspard looks distractedly in the distance. The Duke forces himself to appear interested but he can't seem to find the right tone of voice, making the conversation even more awkward.

PHILIPPE

The Prefect tells me you are making progress in Latin but you seem to show no aptitude for living languages.

The Duke looks around, as if searching for help. He wipes his forehead with a silk handkerchief.

PHILIPPE

I'm on my way to Paris. I am glad you are doing well. Your teachers seem pleased with you... Be good. Work hard.

He pats Gaspard on the shoulder and climbs back into his carriage. Gaspard goes back into the dormitory before the carriage has left the courtyard.

INT. SEMINARY CLASSROOM - DAY

Father Charles leads the class in Latin translation. Gaspard is secretly reading a little volume of Baudlaire's poems. Father Charles's voice echoes through the classroom while Gaspard whispers the lines of Baudlaire's "Joyful Corpse." The two texts are heard simultaneously as the camera moves out of the classroom and roams through the green seminary grounds and, beyond them, between the broken tombstones and sinking graves of the seminary's cemetery.

FATHER CHARLES (V.O.)

Doctus quisque his ipsis studiis suum animum alere debet.
Illi fortunati olim suam patriam dilexerant nam ea multa bona
capita creabat et divitias eorum alebat.

GASPARD (V.O.)

In a rich fertile loam where snails recess
I wish to dig my own deep roomy grave
There to stretch out my old bones, motionless
Snug in death's sleep as sharks are in the wave.

INT. SEMINARY LIBRARY – AUTUMN - DAY

TITLE: 1878

It's a bright, crisp day. Gaspard, now twenty, is reading Schopenhauer's *Studies in Pessimism*. He hears STEPS and quickly hides the book he is reading under Feller's *Philosophical Catechism*. The Prefect places his hand on Gaspard's shoulder. He leaves an envelope on the table and walks away without saying a word. Gaspard opens the envelope. The letter begins: "Dear son, I am afraid I have some bad news. Last night your mother..."

Gaspard stops reading and looks out the window: in the courtyard TWO STUDENTS are fencing. He resumes reading: "There was nothing we could do for her. Doctor Bauchet is of the opinion that exhaustion was the cause of death. I have arranged..."

He carefully folds up the letter, puts it between the pages of Schopenhauer's book and closes the book.

INT. SEMINARY CHAPEL – CONFSSIONAL

Gaspard brings his face very close to the black curtain separating him from Father Charles, who remains invisible.

FATHER CHARLES (O.S.)

The death of a loved one is never easy but it's easier to forbear
when the Lord is with you.

GASPARD

I find more consolation in Schopenhauer. At least he never claimed a God who aids the stupid, crushes infants, cretinises the old and punishes the innocent is supremely good.

FATHER CHARLES (O.S.)

My son, I know it's your grief speaking, not you.

Gaspard sneaks out of the confessional. Father Charles continues talking. His words sound muffled through the curtain separating him from the empty confessional.

FATHER CHARLES (O.S.)

Son, forsake thyself and thou shalt find me. Stand without choice and without all manner of self and thou shalt win. Forsake thyself, resign of thyself and thou shalt enjoy great peace. Give all for all, seek nothing, ask nothing...

EXT. JESUIT SEMINARY– DAY

The sky is overcast with clouds. It's drizzling. A carriage waits in front of the seminary gates. The Father Rector and the Duke stand next to it. The Father Rector steps forward: Gaspard instinctively steps back but not in time to prevent the Father Rector from embracing him.

FATHER RECTOR

God be with you, my son.

The Duke and Gaspard climb into the carriage. Gaspard looks back: the seminary grows smaller and smaller in the distance.

INT. CARRIAGE - SAME

For a while father and son travel in silence. Philippe checks his watch and sits back comfortably.

PHILIPPE

We're invited to dinner tomorrow night. Your uncles have been asking about you.

GASPARD

I am not in the mood.

PHILIPPE

(aloof)

If your mother could hear how you speak to me...

GASPARD

(emotional)

My mother...

He looks out the window. When he finally resumes speaking there is no trace of emotion in his voice.

GASPARD

My mother is dead.

PHILIPPE

Tomorrow night at dinner I want you to...

Gaspard looks at him with barely disguised resentment.

GASPARD

...spend a crushingly dull evening, while my aunts gossip about heraldic crescents and outdated ceremonials, and my uncles tell each other the same dull stories, the only ones imprinted on the soft pulp of their aged brains...

PHILIPPE

That's enough!

The Duke wraps himself in his coat and closes his eyes. Gaspard stares at the bleak landscape outside.

INT. CHÂTEAU DE LOURPS – DINING ROOM - DAY

Gaspard wanders aimlessly through the room, picking up different objects, as though he is doing an inventory of the place. He stops in front of a glass case filled with miniature china figurines of girls, boys, kittens, and puppies. He opens the case and takes out the figurine of a little schoolboy. He holds it up and lets it drop to the floor. It breaks into little pieces.

INT. CHÂTEAU DE LOURPS – SITTING ROOM - SAME

Gaspard stands in front of a big mirror. He opens his mother's box of make-up, closes his eyes and smells it. He picks up her hairbrush and walks over to the sofa. He raises it against the light: his mother's hairs are still stuck in the brush. MARIE, the maid, comes in. She opens the window and starts dusting the furniture. Only now she notices Gaspard.

MARIE

I am sorry, Monsieur. Your father told me to clean the room. He is expecting guests.

Gaspard stands up. Before leaving the room, he turns around.

GASPARD

Please close the window and draw the curtains when you are done.
It looks like a storm.

Puzzled, Marie looks out the window at the clear blue sky.

EXT. CHÂTEAU DE LOURPS – BALCONY – EVENING

Gaspard is smoking. The sky is full of stars. There is a knock on the glass door behind him. Gaspard doesn't turn around.

MARIE (O.S.)

Monsieur, dinner is served. Shall I call your father?

GASPARD

I will.

He continues smoking.

INT. CHÂTEAU DE LOURPS – THE DUKE'S STUDY

Gaspard stands in the doorway. The Duke is sitting in one of the chairs, with his back to the door. On the desk there are envelopes, blank sheets of paper, and an inkwell. His right hand, holding an ink pen, hangs over the chair.

GASPARD

Dinner is served.

The Duke does not respond. Gaspard comes closer to the desk and bends over his father: he is not breathing. Gaspard walks away. At the door, he turns around and looks back at his dead father. The ink from his pen is dripping down on the carpet. Gaspard closes the door behind him.

INT. CHÂTEAU DE LOURPS – DINING ROOM

Gaspard arranges the napkin on his lap. Marie puts a fruit plate on the table.

MARIE

Will the Duke be joining you for dinner, Monsieur?

GASPARD

He seems to have lost his appetite.

Gaspard starts eating.

GASPARD

The carpet in the study looks like it hasn't been cleaned in a long time.

Marie blushes and pours wine in Gaspard's glass.

EXT. CHÂTEAU DE LOURPS - DAY

Gaspard comes out of the castle. A SERVANT finishes loading Gaspard's bags in the carriage. Marie stands on the side, watching. Her eyes are red. Gaspard gets in. The carriage leaves. Gaspard turns around: the servant and Marie wave goodbye. He puts down the curtain and stares straight ahead.

EXT. PARIS STREETS – SUMMER - DAY

TITLE: 1888, TEN YEARS LATER

Various views of Paris: wealthy residential districts in western and central Paris, broad straight boulevards and huge department stores, the working class banlieues where the city merges with the countryside, the Left Bank, which includes the bohemian Latin Quarter and the aristocratic Faubourg Saint Germaine, the Rue de la Paix and the Rue Castiglione, the center of the fashion industry. There are many shops carrying the most expensive perfumes, silks, jewels, furs, hats and lingerie, all lavishly displayed in the store windows.

EXT. GASPARD'S APARTMENT - DAY

Gaspard, now 30, wearing a moustache and a pointed beard, comes out of his apartment building. He is transformed into a consummate dandy: his long waistcoat is fastened very high by the top of twelve buttons and negligently gaping lower down to reveal a fine white shirt with pleated cuffs; his tight trousers are fastened under patent-leather shoes; he is wearing pale pink gloves. He walks down the street, smiling confidently at the women passing by.

INT. GASPARD'S APARTMENT – TRADESMEN ROOM – DAY

A DOZEN TAILORS and BOOTMAKERS sit in a row of church pews. Gaspard enters the room and climbs a magisterial pulpit. He addresses the tradesmen like a priest addressing his congregation.

GASPARD

To do the job I have hired you to do properly, that is, to my satisfaction, you must understand one thing: you are not only tailors, you are artists. Therefore, you must study art.

The tailors exchange puzzled glances. Gaspard surveys their faces sceptically.

GASPARD (cont.)

I ask that you listen carefully to my directives in all matters of style. If you fail to follow to the letter the instructions contained in my monitories, you will suffer pecuniary excommunication. All tailors: come with me. I will see the bootsmen tomorrow.

He climbs down from the pulpit. The tailors gather around him and show him their designs.

INT. CHAPELLE NOTRE-DAME DE LA MEDAILLE MIRACULEUSE - DAY

The PRIEST reverences the altar and begins the Mass. The church is almost empty. Gaspard is sitting at the back, reading *La Mode*.

PRIEST (O.S.)

My God, I do not know what must come to me today, but I am certain that nothing can happen to me that you have not foreseen, decreed, and ordained from all eternity.

EMILE and ALFONSE, aristocrats in their early thirties, sit on either side of Gaspard. Alfonse notices Gaspard's book and looks at him disapprovingly. Gaspard returns his look calmly and continues reading Balzac's "Treatise on the Elegant Life."

CLOSE ON the text:

"There are three classes of modern beings:

The man who works

The man who thinks

The man who does nothing

They have, respectively, three forms of existence:

The busy life

The artistic life

The elegant life."

PRIEST (O.S.)

Amen. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

EVERYONE

And also with you.

EXT. CHAPELLE NOTRE-DAME DE LA MEDAILLE MIRACULEUSE – DAY

Gaspard stands opposite the chapel, *La Mode* under his arm. He is looking at a beautiful YOUNG WOMAN standing nearby, inspecting her physical attributes with a predator's look on his face. Alfonse and Emile walk out of the church and approach him.

ALFONSE

Did you like the service? I hope I didn't disturb your reading with my singing.

Bored and irritated, Gaspard starts putting on his gloves.

GASPARD

(condescending)

I don't understand why you get so excited over a fake Mass. The ingredients they use in religious services are completely debased. They mix holy oils with chicken fat, candle wax with calcinated bones, incense with cheap resin and old benzoin. The wine is diluted with elderberry, alcohol, salicylic acid and lead oxide. Wholesalers are now making almost all their hosts out of potato starch. Gentlemen, do you really expect God to manifest himself in potato starch?!

Gaspard lights a cigarette and smiles suggestively at the woman he was observing earlier. She blushes.

EXT. PARIS CAFE - DAY

Gaspard is sitting at a table, writing in his journal, but is distracted by the WOMEN walking past the cafe. He focuses on specific parts of their anatomy (wrist, hair, neck, ankle, knee, elbow).

GASPARD (V.O.)

With young girls Nature seems to have had in view what, in the language of drama, is called a coup de théâtre.

Gaspard imagines himself crossing a grand hall, wine glass in hand. A fancy-dress party is in full swing. TWO WOMEN approach him. They are dressed in striking though not entirely accurate foreign costumes (Japanese kimono, Indian sari). They look at him shyly.

At the end of a long hallway he comes to a door. He opens it and stands at the doorway to a parlour. THREE BEAUTIFUL WOMEN sit around the table drinking tea, talking, showing off their jewellery to one another, playing the piano, embroidering.

GASPARD (V.O.) cont.

For a few years she dowers them with a wealth of beauty and is lavish in her gift of charm, at the expense of the rest of their life, in order that during those years they may capture the fantasy of some man to such a degree that he is hurried into undertaking the honourable care of them, in some form or another, as long as they live—a step for which there would not appear to be any sufficient warranty if reason only directed his thoughts.

EXT. PARIS - THE SEINE - DAY

A young woman, ADÈLE TREMBLAY, strolls along the embankment. Her face is not visible. The long streamers of her seaside hat blow gently in the wind. Gaspard stands in her way, looking out at the water. As she walks by, he steps aside to let her pass and glances at her seductively. Embarrassed, she looks away but then returns his look.

INT. GRAND HOTEL HALLWAY - EVENING

Gaspard walks down the hallway and stops in front of a room. He takes off his gloves and opens the door.

INT. GRAND HOTEL ROOM - SAME

Adele Tremblay stands by the window, with her back to the door. When she hears the door open, she turns around.

INT. GRAND HOTEL HALLWAY – LATER

Gaspard opens the hotel room door and steps out in the hallway. Adele stands behind him, framed by the open door. He puts on his gloves and walks down the hallway without turning back.

INT. PARIS OPERA – GASPARD’S PRIVATE BOX - EVENING

Gaspard looks through his opera glasses, surveying the women sitting in the box opposite his. A voluptuous woman in her 30s catches his attention. She is MADAME EMMANUELLE MENARD. She is also using her opera glasses to inspect the men in the audience. Their eyes lock.

INT. MADAME MENARD’S BEDROOM – EVENING

Madame Menard lies in bed, naked. The walls are lined up with gorgeous mirrors in gilded frames. Parts of her naked body are reflected in the different mirrors. Half-naked, Gaspard walks around the room, touching different parts of the mirrors. Every time he touches the reflection of a particular part of Madame’s body, the corresponding real part of her body responds to his touch. Gaspard smiles—a sensuous, possessive smile. He lights a cigarette and blows out the smoke at the mirror: Madame’s reflection disappears in the smoke.

EXT. BOIS DE BOLOGNE – SUMMER – DAY

Gaspard and Madame Menard walk through the park. They sit down on a bench. Not too far away Gaspard notices a fine carriage: a woman’s naked arm, wearing several bracelets, hangs

over the door. TWO MEN stand by the carriage, talking to the woman inside. One of them slips money into the woman's hand. The door opens and MADAME LAURE, a high-class courtesan, dressed in flashy clothes, steps out. She notices Gaspard looking at her and raises her skirt exposing her legs.

EXT. BOIS DE BOLOGNE – EVENING

The sun is setting down over the park. Gaspard stands by Madame Menard's carriage.

MADAME MENARD

Until tomorrow.

He kisses her hand. Her carriage drives away. Another carriage passes by and stops in front of Gaspard. A naked arm wearing several bracelets reaches out and motions to him to get in. He does.

INT. MADAME LAURE'S BROTHEL – EVENING

Madame Laure shows Gaspard into the brothel. The place is lavishly decorated. THREE COURTESANS are lounging about, dressed in risqué clothes that don't leave much to the imagination. Gaspard approaches each girl in turn and walks around her, inspecting her face, arms, and back. He signals to one of them and she follows him into another room behind a curtain. In a few seconds he comes back and signals to the other two girls to join them.

INT. PARIS BROTHEL PRIVATE ROOM - SAME

One of the girls sits on a sofa, smoking. The other two, half-naked, approach Gaspard and start undressing him.

FATHER CHARLES (O.S.)

I call desolation the darkness of soul, disturbance in it, movement to things low and earthly, the unquiet of different agitations and temptations...

He kisses one of the girls and then pushes her away. As she steps back the girl 'morphs' into Madame Menard, 'morphs' into the other brothel girl, 'morphs' back into Madame Menard, and then morphs into another brothel girl.

INT. GASPARD'S APARTMENT – EVENING

Gaspard and Madame Menard dance. They turn faster and faster. Gaspard's perception of Madame disintegrates into a series of overlapping images of fragmented mirror reflections of different parts of her body.

FATHER CHARLES (O.S) (cont.)

...moving to want of confidence, without hope, without love, when one finds oneself all lazy, tepid, sad, and as if separated from...

Gaspard closes his eyes. He is gradually engulfed by darkness.

INT. PARIS CAFE – EVENING

Gaspard is surrounded by three dishevelled men, ALAIN, MARCEL and STEPHANE. They speak over each other and smoke furiously. They are the anarchists. Alain is reading aloud Josphe Déjacque's letter to Proudhon.

ALAIN

Listen to this: "I would like to see the question of the emancipation of women treated by a woman of proletarian stock, for she is more likely to see through the secret life of a noble lady than a woman of the salon is capable of fathoming the life of a daughter of the people. But in the absence of this anarchic daughter, I—a member of the male sex—shall stand up against you, Proudhon, the ass..."

MARCEL and STEPHANE

The ass! The ass!

Alain hushes them and continues reading, gesticulating furiously.

ALAIN (cont.)

"Your intelligence, virile and complete when it comes to men, is as if castrated—castrated—when it comes to women..."

Gaspard gets up and starts putting on his gloves.

STEPHANE

Are you leaving?

MARCEL

Perhaps he doesn't find the subject of women interesting!

The men laugh. Gaspard observes them scornfully.

GASPARD

I'd rather enjoy women than discuss their social status. Only a man whose intellect is clouded by his sexual impulses could give the name of 'the fair sex' to that undersized, narrow-shouldered, broad-hipped, and short-legged race. It'd be more accurate to call them 'the unaesthetic sex'. Even Rousseau recognized women will always remain thorough-going philistines, quite incurable

really. Now, if you'll excuse me, my mistress—I mean, one of them—is waiting for me.

Gaspard leaves. The men look after him with a mixture of envy, resentment and respect.

INT. GASPARD'S APARTMENT – EVENING

Gaspard and two other aristocrats, FRANCOIS and GILBERT, are smoking opium. The room is barely visible through the smoke.

FRANCOIS

I got a letter from Gilles last week. Apparently the Austrian Alps are the place to be: magnificent peaks, horrifying abysses, the smell of fir-trees, the crisp air stinging your cheeks...

GILBERT

Sounds sublime.

Gaspard waves his hand in front of him, trying to penetrate the curtain of smoke separating him from the others. His eyes are glazed over and his forehead is covered with sweat.

GASPARD

I'm sick of this obsession with 'Nature'!

Gaspard inhales deeply and lies back on the sofa. He can barely keep his eyes open.

GASPARD (cont.)

What you call 'Nature' is just a monotonous storehouse of meadows and trees. Put together some artificial scenery flooded with electric light, some papier-mâché rocks, some flowers made of taffetas and delicately painted papers: *voilà*, the forest of Fontainebleau in the moonlight. Just spare me all this talk of the lush verdure of the country and the sublime snow-capped peaks of the Alps...

His face disappears completely in the smoke.

GASPARD (cont.) (O.S)

...The Alps don't compare to the charm of the sickly, pathetic vegetation that sprouts up in the wastelands of the suburbs.

His voice fades away.

EXT. PARIS CAFE – EARLY EVENING

Gaspard is sitting at a table with Francois and Gilbert. They are playing baccarat and drinking absinthe. Gaspard looks bored and doesn't pay attention to the game. He is distracted by a WOMAN sitting at the next table.

GILBERT

No, no, you have to deal the third card face up...

FRANCOIS

And where did you read that? In your copy of Virgil?

GILBERT

Leave Virgil out of this. You've always been too thick-skulled to appreciate poetry...

GASPARD

(still looking at the woman)

One of the dullest bores antiquity has ever produced! What has he ever given us, other than some scrubbed and powdered shepherds emptying whole pots of sententious verse over our heads!

GILBERT

Whatever you say of his verse...

Gaspard's attention shifts back to his companions.

GASPARD

You mean those tiny hexameters that reverberate like a hollow can? They sound as if they were cut by machine, always, I swear, always stunched at the end by the clash of a dactyl against a spondee.

FRANCOIS

Horace, on the other hand...

Gaspard waves his hand dismissively.

GASPARD

A hopeless blockhead. A lecherous old clown.

FRANCOIS

Cicero?

GASPARD

Who can stand his boastful addresses and patriotic clichés?!

FRANCOIS

There's no one left. Titus Livius?

GASPARD

Sentimental and pompous!

GILBERT

Seneca?

GASPARD

Turgid and pallid!

Across the street TWO BOYS, around 10, are fighting fiercely, rolling on the ground, sand in their hair and snot under their noses. Gaspard observes them.

GASPARD

(disgusted)

Look at these brats! It'd have been better if their mothers had never given birth to them.

Gilbert and Francois drop their cards and look at the boys.

GASPARD (cont.)

What could they expect but fevers, measles and slaps during their early years; kicks and mindless chores up to the age of thirteen; deception by women, disease and cuckoldry once they reach manhood; and towards the end, infirmity and death in a poorhouse or an asylum.

One of the boys, trampled to the ground, is crying while the other one continues kicking him and throwing stones at him.

GASPARD

To be fair, it's the same for everyone. With the rich, it's the same passions, the same anxieties, the same pains and the same illnesses, the same mediocre pleasures—alcoholic, literary or carnal.

A WAITER approaches their table carrying a tray covered with food. Gaspard looks at the meat on the plate and his face twists in disgust.

GASPARD

Throw this to those boys murdering each other.

The waiter walks over to the boys. They stop fighting and throw themselves at the food. Gaspard observes them scornfully. Francois deals Gaspard another card. Gaspard doesn't pick it up.

FRANCOIS

Bank wins 7 against 3!

GILBERT

What do you mean?!

FRANCOIS

You have a total of 3 and you just drew a 7. That's a total of zero!

Gaspard picks up his cards but he is distracted by a conversation at a nearby table.

FIRST MAN (O.S.)

The market is strong. The auction totalled \$5.6 million, just shy of the high estimate!

SECOND MAN (O.S.)

And the top seller?

FIRST MAN (O.S.)

The name escapes me. There were more than thirty bidders fighting over that painting. It sold for \$1.2 million.

SECOND MAN (O.S.)

\$1.2 million! Including the commission?!

Gaspard frowns. With one sweeping movement of his hand he pushes all cards off the table.

GASPARD

Gentlemen, all bets are withdrawn!

GILBERT

What are you doing?!

Gaspard nods at the two men at the neighbouring table.

GASPARD

This city is done for. The bourgeois are lording it over everyone, counting their money, stuffing themselves out of picnic paper bags. Intelligence, honesty, art: it's all gone!

Gaspard starts coughing. He has another shot of absinthe.

GASPARD (cont.)

It's the vast warehouse of America transported right here, to Europe.

Gilbert shakes his head as if he has heard this one before.

GILBERT

Society is crumbling.

Intoxicated, his eyes burning, Gaspard raises his glass.

GASPARD

Let it crumble! Let it die!

Gilbert and Francois start picking up the cards from the ground. Gaspard sits back, exhausted. His eyes wander across the street. A man, in his late 20s, dressed modestly, comes out of an office building. He is THEO. The sign on the building reads “Laurent & Moreau.” AN OLDER MAN, dressed like an accountant, comes out of the building. Theo bows obsequiously to his superior. The older man nods, without even looking at the man, and continues on his way.

GASPARD

(scornful)

God, the immensurable vulgarity of the self-made man, grovelling
on his belly!

Now Gilbert and Francois look at Theo, who is unaware that he has become the center of their attention. Before he turns the corner Theo turns back a few times, as if he is afraid he is being followed. Gaspard gets up.

FRANCOIS

We haven't finished the game!

GASPARD

No, we haven't.

Gaspard leaves his bewildered companions and follows the man.

EXT. PARIS STREETS – SAME

Thee walks fast, occasionally turning back to look over his shoulder. Gaspard turns left and walks down another street. When he comes to the end of it he stops and hides in the shadows. He waits for Theo to come up the other street. At the top of the street Theo stops. He peers anxiously through the darkness behind him, takes out a cigarette and tries lighting it but the paper has split. Theo swears and keeps striking matches but they won't light.

GASPARD (O.S.)

Need a light?

Gaspard comes out of the shadows. Theo turns around abruptly. Gaspard looks him up and down.

GASPARD

What are you doing here so late?

THEO

Just got off work. *Laurent & Moreau.*

Gaspard has never heard of the firm.

THEO

I am a bookkeeper there.

Gaspard offers him a light.

GASPARD

Do you want to have some fun tonight? I'm paying.

Gaspard walks away. Theo hesitates but then follows him.

INT. PARIS - MADAME LAURE'S BROTHEL – EVENING

Madame Laure, heavily made up and wearing a revealing gown, opens the door. She smiles coquettishly at Gaspard.

MADAME LAURE

Monsieur Gaspard! We thought you had forgotten us!

She notices Theo and smiles at him suggestively. Gaspard casually slips money in Madame's revealing décolleté.

MADAME LAURE

Monsieur is very generous.

She shows them in. Theo stares at TWO YOUNG PROSTITUTES lounging on the sofa. One of them is BLANCHE, a strikingly beautiful brunette wearing turquoise earrings and a hat decorated with green feathers. She approaches Theo and touches his cheek gently. Madame Laure and Gaspard watch from the other end of the room.

MADAME LAURE

Where the devil did you pick up this kid?

GASPARD

In the street.

MADAME LAURE

You like to have them young, don't you?

GASPARD

That's not it at all.

Gaspard walks over to Theo and places his hand on his shoulder.

GASPARD

Go on, make your choice. It's my treat.

Blanche caresses Theo and feels his thighs. The blood rushes to his cheeks. She takes him by the hand and the two of them disappear down the hallway.

EXT. MADAME LAURE'S BROTHEL – LATER

Gaspard and Theo come out of the brothel, faces flushed, shirts unbuttoned.

GASPARD

Did you enjoy that?

Theo nods. Gaspard draws closer to him.

GASPARD

I have a surprise for you. You can come back here every week. You don't have to pay a sou to Madame Laure. I've arranged everything.

Gaspard casually takes out several banknotes from his pocket. Without counting the money he slips it in Theo's hand.

GASPARD

Do me a favour. Buy yourself a nice shirt and a cravat.

Theo stares at the money.

GASPARD

Go home now. And remember: do unto others what you wouldn't want them to do unto you.

Theo walks away. Gaspard calls after him.

GASPARD

And don't be ungrateful! Let me hear news of you in the newspaper crime reports!

Gaspard is about to walk away but remembers something and turns around.

GASPARD

You never told me your name.

Gaspard peers through the darkness. There is no answer.

INT. PARIS CAFE – EVENING

Gaspard, Francois and Gilbert are sitting at a table, playing baccarat and drinking absinthe. Francois puts down his cards.

FRANCOIS

You paid that boy 500 francs?!

GASPARD

I did not pay him. I paid Madame Laure.

GILBERT

Why?!

Gaspard slowly lights a cigarette.

GASPARD

I am simply trying to train a murderer.

Gilbert and Francois laugh. Gaspard ignores them and plays with the cards on the table, arranging them in stacks.

GASPARD

Gentlemen, I would like to propose a bet.

Francois deals and they start a game. While they are playing Gaspard explains his plan.

GASPARD

The boy's a virgin. He could have just run after the little girls of his neighbourhood, amusing himself but still remaining decent, having his little share in the monotonous happiness reserved for the poor. I want him to get accustomed to pleasures he cannot not afford to enjoy. I want the thought of a regular life, working in an office for his daily bread, to start to oppress him. According to my calculations, it will take three months for those pleasures—some of which he enjoyed for the first time last night—to become absolutely indispensable to him. At the end of the third month, I'll cut off the little allowance I gave Madame Laure.

Gaspard makes a dramatic pause, enjoying his companions' anticipation.

GASPARD

Gentlemen, I bet you the boy will go to any lengths—steal, even kill—to roll on that sofa again.

Gilbert and Francois smile. They finally get it.

GILBERT

Beautiful!

FRANCOIS

Diabolical!

Gaspard looks down at his cards. He sees them as if through a fog.

INT. MADAME MENARD'S BEDROOM – EVENING

Gaspard is distracted: he walks around the room, picks up various objects from the mantelpiece, pieces of garment lying on the floor, paying no attention to Madame Menard who is lying in bed, wearing a night-gown provocatively open in the front. Gaspard stands by the window, with his back to her. Madame Menard gets up and approaches him.

MADAME MENARD

You are in a strange mood tonight. What's the matter?

She touches his face.

MADAME MENARD

Won't you tell me?

GASPARD

Le secret d'être ennuyeux, c'est de tout dire.

She starts caressing and kissing him. He pulls back abruptly and looks down at her gown.

GASPARD

What are you wearing?

MADAME MENARD

Do you like it?

GASPARD

I can't stand to touch it.

She feels her gown, hesitates, then takes it off. Wearing only lingerie she embraces him again. He responds mechanically to her advances. The more passionately she kisses him, the more aloof he grows. She pulls him toward the bed. Suddenly his face changes: he looks determined. He pushes her down and kisses her. She is pleased with his sudden passionate outburst. His passion transforms into disgust. Madame whispers seductively in his ear.

MADAME MENARD

Tell me what you want.

He pushes her away and gets up. Without looking at her he gets dressed and leaves. Confused, she sits up in bed and looks at herself in the mirror.

INT. GASPARD'S APARTMENT – BEDROOM – NIGHT

Gaspard lights a candle and sets in motion a silver cage hanging over his bed. He lies down in his bed, watching the cage, and the cricket inside it, endlessly reflected in the play of mirrors, until it seems to his dazed eyes that the cage is not moving at all, but that the whole room is reeling and turning.

INT. PARIS BATHS – CHANGING ROOM - DAY

Wearing only a towel around his waist, Gaspard stands in the middle of the empty changing room. His vision is blurred. He looks down at his hands: they are shaking.

INT. PARIS BATHS – POOL - DAY

Gaspard takes off his towel and lies down in the tub. He sinks his hands in the water: they are still shaking. His face twitches. Powerful jets of water slap against his spinal column. A NURSE comes in. She helps Gaspard sit up in the tub and starts massaging him energetically with a horsehair glove. He grabs her hand.

NURSE

I'll be right back.

She helps him lie back in the tub and leaves. He clasps his hands together under the water, trying to control the shaking.

INT. THE SEINE - EVENING

Francois, Gilbert and Gaspard stand at the edge of the embankment, staring at the muddy water. Gaspard looks thinner and paler than usual.

GILBERT (O.S.)

... and just like that he collapsed. Right in front of the Grand Palais!

FRANCOIS (O.S.)

The risk in the city is especially high.

Gaspard's hands are shaking. He squeezes them into fists and puts them in his pockets. His companions don't notice anything. Francois lights a cigarette.

FRANCOIS

Our vital energy is depleted. Everything we do requires an effort of the nervous system. Every line we read or write, every face we see, every conversation we have sets in activity our sensory nerves and brain centers. You can change a normal man into a hysteric simply by tiring him.

GASPARD

In that case, I must be going insane.

The men laugh at his joke. Gaspard laughs as well but his laughter is forced, anxious.

INT. GASPARD'S APARTMENT – SITTING ROOM - DAY

Gaspard and his banker, MONSIEUR BASSET, a tiny old man wearing a moustache, sit at the table across from each other.

BASSET

I was surprised to get your letter. Are you really thinking of leaving Paris?

Gaspard does not respond. There are dark shadows under his eyes and his hands are shaking as he pours himself more coffee.

BASSET

I've drawn up an account of your finances. I don't think it is news to you that through foolish extravagance you've squandered the greater part of your patrimony.

GASPARD

I was under the impression I had some money invested in some lands somewhere.

BASSET

The amount of money these investments are bringing you is negligible.

Gaspard walks over to the window and looks out. It's a gloomy day.

GASPARD

Sell the chateau.

BASSET
(shocked)

Sell the chateau? But Monsieur...

GASPARD

If you sell the chateau and all my other assets and then buy government stocks, what will that do for me?

Gaspard walks back to the table. Basset looks through his papers.

BASSET

50 000 francs annually, give or take, and an additional lump sum.

GASPARD

Sell the chateau and buy a small villa, somewhere near Paris. Now leave me alone.

Gaspard lies on the sofa and closes his eyes. Basset starts collecting his papers.

EXT. VILLA NEAR FONTENAY-AUX-ROSES – DAY

Gaspard walks through a little garden and enters the house.

INT. VILLA – SITTING ROOM - SAME

Gaspard walks around the room, carefully inspecting the walls. The painting contractor, BOUCHER, approaches him.

BOUCHER

I would suggest going with some gentle pink or light green: either one will bring out the expressiveness of the colors...

GASPARD

I spend most of my waking life at night. I could care less that by the light of day the colors look insipid or crude, as long as they are expressive by the artificial light of my lamp. Fournier, when does a man like you usually go to bed?

BOUCHER

With all due respect, Monsieur, my name is Boucher...

Gaspard ignores him. He stands by the window with his back to Boucher.

GASPARD

Nothing compares to the pleasure of being in an amply illuminated room, the only person up and about, surrounded by the sleeping shadows of the neighbouring houses. There is nothing quite like drawing aside the curtain and realizing that everything around you is dark, silent, dead.

Gaspard takes out a dozen cards from his pocket, each a different colour. He begins walking in circles, speaking very fast and pointing to the cards.

GASPARD

I assume you are familiar with Goethe's theory of colors.

Boucher is about to say something but Gaspard ignores him.

GASPARD

There is an almost mathematical harmony between the sensual nature of a truly artistic individual and the color his eyes perceive in the most unique and vivid fashion. I'm not talking about the majority of men: their gross retinas don't perceive the cadence peculiar to each color or the mysterious charms of their gradations and nuances. And I'm not talking about the bourgeois: their eyes are insensible to the pomp and splendour of strong vibrant tones. I'm talking about people with refined pupils cultivated by literature and art.

Gaspard selects three cards from the pack: a blue, a red and an orange one. Boucher is by now completely lost. Gaspard shows him the cards, one by one.

GASPARD

The eyes of those who dream of ideal beauty, who demand illusions, are generally fond of blue and its derivatives. Red-blooded, sturdy males who disdain rules of decorum and half-measures and charge unthinkingly into things are attracted to yellows and reds. The enfeebled and the nervous, the overwrought and the hypochondriac, those who crave foods that have been smoked or pickled, are attracted to orange.

Gaspard holds up the orange card.

BOUCHER

What an irritating color!

GASPARD

(determined)

Orange it is!

He walks out of the room, leaving Boucher completely puzzled.

INT. VILLA – BEDROOM – DAY

Gaspard and the house contractor, FOURNIER, walk around the empty bedroom.

FOURNIER

Would Monsieur care to look at some of the samples I've prepared? I would suggest something contemporary...

Gaspard cuts him off and continues to inspect the walls and the windows.

GASPARD

There are only two ways of styling a bedroom, Boucher.

Fournier interrupts him meekly.

FOURNIER

It's Fournier, Monsieur...

Gaspard gesticulates broadly, pointing at the empty room.

GASPARD

You can either turn it into an exciting bedchamber, a backdrop to nocturnal amusement. The eighteenth century was unique in understanding how to envelope a woman in an atmosphere of depravity, shaping the very furniture in the form of her charms, imitating the contractions of her pleasures and the convolutions of her spasms in the undulations and curves of wood and copper...

Fournier listens to Gaspard in awe.

GASPARD (cont.)

However, I've chosen the second alternative. I want my bedroom to be a place of solitude and repose. A warm, comfortable cell. I want it to look like a cell, without actually being one. Do you understand?

Fournier nods but it's clear he hasn't the slightest idea.

INT. VILLA – STAIRS - DAY

Gaspard climbs the stairs followed by two domestics, MONSIEUR and MADAME MOREL, both in their 60s.

INT. VILLA – SERVANT QUARTERS

Gaspard and the domestics stand in the middle of a sparsely furnished room. Gaspard points to a chest.

GASPARD

Inside you will find everything you need, including several pairs of thick felt slippers. I expect you to wear those at all times. Also, as we discussed earlier, you'll put silencers on your doors—make sure they are always well-oiled. And don't forget to cushion the floorboards with heavy rugs.

The domestics nod and exchange puzzled looks.

INT. VILLA – SITTING ROOM

The domestics follow Gaspard into the room. He picks up a book from the desk.

GASPARD

Once a month you'll leave the book of accounts on this desk, while I am taking a nap. I'll inspect it and then leave it here, in exactly the same place, for you to pick up.

Gaspard takes a piece of paper from the desk and gives it to Monsieur Morel.

GASPARD

I've developed a system of bell rings. You'll find the meanings of the different chimes recorded here—according to their number, their brevity, or their length. Memorize them. Madame Morel, please come with me to the kitchen.

INT. VILLA – KITCHEN

Gaspard and Madame Morel stand in the middle of the kitchen. Gaspard shows her a sheet of paper.

GASPARD

This is the timetable for meals. Do not deviate from it.

Madame Morel nods and motions to leave but he stops her.

GASPARD

One more thing. From time to time you'll probably have to walk past the house to reach the woodshed. I don't want to be distracted by your shadow when you're passing by. One of my tailors made a costume of Flemish faille for you; it comes with a white bonnet and a large black hood pulled over it. You'll find it hanging over a

chair in your room. I want you to wear it every time you go to the woodshed.

Madame Morel nods. Gaspard looks at her as if he doesn't quite trust her.

INT. VILLA – DINING ROOM – DAY

Gaspard is having breakfast. A large samovar is steaming on the table. He walks over to the aquarium and pours in drops of coloured essences. The water acquires an opaline tone. He bends down and inspects closely the mechanical fish clinging to the artificial seaweed inside. He picks up a bottle—labelled “Tar”—and sprays it around him. He closes his eyes and breathes in the odour.

EXT. BRIG AT SEA - DAY

Gaspard stands between decks looking out to the sea. The wind ruffles up his hair. He is the only man on board. As far as he can see he is surrounded on all sides by sparkling turquoise water.

INT. VILLA – DINING ROOM – DAY

Gaspard opens his eyes. One of the mechanical fish is stuck in the artificial seaweed. He frees it.

INT. PARIS PHARMACY – DAY

Gaspard stands in front of the counter, watching the PHARMACIST mix sodium sulphate, hydrochlorate of magnesia and lime in a small bottle. The pharmacist attaches a label to the bottle: “salt water.” He hands it to Gaspard who smells it and nods approvingly.

INT. PARIS WAREHOUSE – DAY

Gaspard walks through the warehouse accompanied by the ROPE MANUFACTURER. The man points to different types of rope piled up on both sides of the warehouse. He picks up a ball of twine and hands it to Gaspard. Gaspard smells it.

EXT. PARIS STREETS – DAY

Gaspard wanders aimlessly through the streets. He stops in front of a shop window: behind the window there is a tortoise in a tank. He is fascinated by it.

INT. VILLA – BATHROOM – EVENING

Gaspard is taking a bath. The SOUND OF SEAGULLS AND WAVES lapping against the shore is heard throughout the scene. He reaches over to a side table and picks up the bottle with the label “salt water.” He sprinkles some of it in the water, picks up a box from the side table, takes out a small piece of rope and holds it under his nose. He picks up a guide book lying on the table and reads the description of a seaside resort:

GASPARD

“The gentle surf, combined with sandy beaches and near-perfect weather year-round, make this resort a wonderful getaway. Antique lovers will enjoy the many quaint antique shops on the island...”

He stops reading and pulls out a photograph slipped in-between the pages: it’s a photograph of the resort he is reading about. The wind groans outside. Gaspard submerges his head under the water.

INT. PARIS JEWELLERY SHOP – DAY

Gaspard bends over the counter. The JEWELLER shows him different precious stones.

JEWELLER

If Monsieur doesn’t want diamonds, may I suggest oriental emeralds or rubies?

Gaspard shakes his head.

JEWELLER

Pearl?

GASPARD

Banal.

JEWELLER

What about topaz? Burnt or raw?

GASPARD

It’s the stone of lower middle-class women.

JEWELLER

Amethyst?

GASPARD

I don’t want anything that you can see on the stubby fingers of a butcher’s wife.

JEWELER

Sapphire?

GASPARD

That must be the last stone that still has a touch of nobility. Does it sparkle under artificial light?

JEWELLER
(impatient)

I've never tested it.

Gaspard buries his hand in the box of jewels. Various bizarre looking stones of different colors and size trickle through his fingers.

INT. PARIS - A LAPIDARY'S WORKSHOP – DAY

The LAPIDARY sits at his desk. In front of him lies a sketch. Gaspard points to various parts of the sketch.

GASPARD

The leaves should be green: asparagus green crysoberyls, leek green peridots, and olive green olivines. For the flowers isolated from the stem and distant from the base of the sheaf use occidental turquoises. The petals of the flowers blooming in the center of the bouquet should be entirely of Ceylon cat's eye crysoberyls, cymophanes and sapphirines.

The lapidary takes note of the places where the stones are to be inlaid.

LAPIDARY

What about the edge?

GASPARD

Hyacinth of Compostella, aquamarine, balas ruby and, if you have it, Sudermanian ruby.

INT. VILLA – STUDY – DAY

Gaspard is bent over something in front of him. He stands up and takes a few steps back, revealing a golden shield encrusted with precious stones. The shield sways and lifts itself up a little: a tortoise stretches out its head from underneath.

INT. VILLA – BEDROOM - DAY

Gaspard is getting dressed in front of the mirror. He turns around, inspecting carefully the pleats in his waistcoat. He rings the bell four times, waits and rings it three more times. Beat.

Madame Morel walks in, carrying a tray with blank sheets of paper and an inkstand. She puts it down on a little side table.

GASPARD

What is this?

MADAME MOREL
Monsieur requested letter paper.

Gaspard stares at her. Madame Morel grows more and more uncomfortable.

GASPARD
I do not recall requesting letter paper.

MADAME MOREL
Monsieur rang the bell...

GASPARD
True. I did ring the bell.

Madame Morel relaxes for a moment. Gaspard walks around the room, his hands in his pockets. He seems to be thinking about something very hard. He stops by the window and turns around. It looks like he is going to say something rather important.

GASPARD
Madame Morel, I wonder if you can answer a question for me.

Madame Morel wipes the sweat off her face.

GASPARD
What do four rings, followed by three rings, signify?

Madame Morel raises her hand to her mouth.

MADAME MOREL
I'm sorry, Monsieur! I will tell my husband to prepare the carriage right away.

Embarrassed, she picks up the tray and rushes out of the room.

EXT. GREENHOUSE IN FONTENAY - DAY

The greenhouse owner, MONSIEUR LAVAL, is showing Gaspard the flowers on sale. They stop in front of the orchids.

LAVAL
What do you think of these?

GASPARD
I've always liked orchids.

LAVAL

They look real, don't they?

Gaspard takes a closer look at the flowers.

GASPARD

I don't want fake flowers that look real. What I am interested in, Monsieur Laval, are natural flowers that look artificial. Do you have anything to show me?

INT. VILLA – HALLWAY– EVENING

Gaspard stands by the door to the sitting room, a list in hand, calling out the plants one by one and checking off his order. Monsieur Morel carries the plants, one by one, into the sitting room.

GASPARD

Virginale, Albano, Madame mame, Bosphorus, Aurora, Borealis...

MONSIUER MOREL

Monsieur, did Laval warn you these plants are poisonous?

GASPARD

(ignoring him)

Anthurium, Amorphophallus, Echinopsis, Nidularium, Encephalartos horridus, Cibotium spectabile, Antilles fly trap...

Gaspard takes the pot with the Antilles fly trap and turns it in his hands. The plant is secreting digestive fluid. It is armed with interlocking short spines forming a grill inside which a small insect lies imprisoned.

INT. VILLA – SITTING ROOM – SAME

Exhausted, Morel waits by the door, breathing heavily. Gaspard walks around the room and bends over the various pots, examining each plant with awe.

GASPARD

Horticulturalists, Morel, are the only true artists. Nature is incapable of producing such perverse and unhealthy species.

Gaspard inhales deeply each plant's distinct smell. Monsieur Morel covers his nose.

INT. VILLA – SITTING ROOM - MORNING

Dishevelled and pale Gaspard stumbles into the room. The plants are gone.

INT. VILLA – KITCHEN - SAME

Gaspard walks unsteadily into the room. His hands are shaking and his face twitching. He leans against the wall and wipes the cold sweat off his face. Madame Morel and ONDINE, a girl in her twenties, are cooking.

GASPARD

Where is the Drosera? The Sarracena? What have you done with them?!

Madame Morel stops slicing potatoes.

MADAME MOREL

Monsieur, they were poisonous. When Doctor Gautier came to examine you, he ordered us to remove them immediately. You don't remember?

Gaspard is about to scream but manages to control himself. He speaks slowly, trying to sound calm.

GASPARD

What day is it?

MADAME MOREL

Sunday, Monsieur. You've been in bed for three days.

Only now Gaspard notices Ondine. She bows to him.

GASPARD

Who is this?

MADAME MOREL

Ondine. You hired her to help me around the house. She arrived this morning while you were sleeping.

He looks at Ondine as if he does not remember any of this. He walks away. At the door he turns around.

GASPARD

Make sure she gets a pair of slippers.

INT. VILLA – STUDY – DAY

Gaspard is looking through a book of reproductions of prints and etchings by Goya: *The Caprices, The Proverbs* and *The Carroted Man*.

Suddenly, he notices the tortoise in the corner. He has completely forgotten about it. He walks over to the corner and bends over the tortoise: it's dead. The precious stones on its back sparkle in the dark. He rings the bell twice. Monsieur Morel appears at the door.

GASPARD

Take this outside and bury it in the garden.

INT. VILLA – BEDROOM – DAY

Gaspard sits in bed, reading Dickens's *Dombey and Son*. He closes the book and looks out the window. It's raining. He rings the bell. Monsieur Morel appears at the door.

GASPARD

Prepare my luggage. I am going to London.

INT. VILLA – SITTING ROOM – DAY

Gaspard paces feverishly up and down the room. Monsieur Morel walks in with two suitcases. He nods at the rain outside.

MONSIEUR MOREL

What weather!

GASPARD

(pleased)

Perfect London weather, isn't it?!

Excited, Gaspard rubs his hands and sits down in front of an assortment of socks that has been spread out fan-wise. He hesitates over the shade. Finally, he chooses a pair and hurriedly slips them on. He puts on a grey suit, a bowler hat and envelopes himself in an Inverness cape.

INT. PARIS - GALIGNANI'S MESSENGER BOOKSHOP - EVENING

Gaspard is sitting in one of the chairs, flipping through a collection of London travel guides. He stops on a page in the Baedeker describing the museums of London.

EXT. GALIGNANI'S MESSENGER - SAME

Gaspard comes out of the bookshop, a travel guide under his arm. He looks around, undecided what to do next. Across the street there is a bodega.

INT. BODEGA – LATER - SAME

Gaspard finishes his meal, takes a deep breath and leans back in his chair. He lights a cigarette and pours whiskey into his coffee. An ENGLISHMAN is sitting at the next table.

GASPARD

Where are you travelling?

ENGLISHMAN

Amsterdam. It's my first time leaving London.

GASPARD

An Englishman! Well, let me tell you: if your idea of Holland comes from the Dutch school of paintings at the Louvre—you know, all those rustic houses, the village greens strewn with wine barrels, the dancing peasants, the dirty children, the fat old crones with their pendulous tits and distended bellies, the lustful young whores eager to satisfy all your wishes—if that's your idea of Amsterdam...

The man looks at Gaspard with curiosity.

ENGLISHMAN

Where are you travelling to?

GASPARD

London.

ENGLISHMAN

Are you catching the 10 o'clock train? You'd better hurry.

Gaspard turns up his collar and takes another sip of his wine. The rain keeps coming down. He closes his eyes and dozes off.

Time passes. A familiar voice wakes him up.

ENGLISHMAN (O.S.)

Your train is leaving in ten minutes.

Gaspard looks at his watch.

GASPARD

I won't make it.

ENGLISHMAN

Yes, you will. If you hurry up...

GASPARD

If I hurry up I'd have to dash to the ticket-barrier, jostle through with my luggage. God, how tedious!

ENGLISHMAN
(bewildered)

So you are not going to London?

Gaspard gets up and puts on his cape.

GASPARD

In any case, the pleasure of travelling only exists in retrospect. I've experienced and seen all I wanted to experience and see. I've been saturated with English life ever since I left home. I would be a fool to go and risk losing these unforgettable sensations. No, I think it's time to go home.

Gaspard walks out. The Englishman shakes his head and motions to the waiter to bring him another drink.

INT. VILLA – HALLWAY – NIGHT

Monsieur Morel opens to door. He is surprised to see Gaspard.

GASPARD

Put the kettle on. I'm exhausted.

MONSIEUR MOREL

Monsieur didn't go to London?

GASPARD

Now that the hazards of travel have become a possibility, I can really appreciate my comfortable life here. You can put away my suitcases. I won't be travelling anywhere any time soon.

Gaspard walks up to his bedroom. Morel starts bringing in Gaspard's luggage.

INT. VILLA – BEDROOM – MORNING

Gaspard wakes up. He lies in bed for a while, sniffing the air. He gets up and walks around the room. He inhales deeply and almost chokes. He rings the bell. Madame Morel comes to the door.

GASPARD

Do you smell anything?

Madame Morel sniffs the air and shakes her head.

GASPARD

You don't smell it?

She walks over to the window and opens it wide.

MADAME MOREL

Some fresh air will do you good.

Gaspard stumbles toward the window, coughing uncontrollably.

GASPARD

Close it! I can't breathe!

Confused Madame Morel helps him get back in bed and closes the window. Still coughing, he points to a side table.

GASPARD

Jasmine...

Madame Morel looks at what he is pointing to: on the table stands a little bottle of perfume.

MADAME MOREL

Monsieur wants...perfume?

Gaspard nods, his face red from choking. Madame Morel picks up the bottle and brings it up to his nose. He inhales, his face relaxes and he stops coughing. Madame Morel observes his swift transformation with an incredulous look on her face.

INT. VILLA – BEDROOM – DAY

DOCTOR GAUTIER feels Gaspard's pulse and checks his tongue. Monsieur Morel appears at the door with a small jar containing a yellowish liquid. The doctor lifts it up to his eyes and examines it carefully.

GAUTIER

See these white stripes? This is one of the indicators.

GASPARD

What does it indicate?

The doctor puts the jar down and starts writing a prescription.

GAUTIER

Neurosis. (to Morel) For a week you will bring him a nourishing peptone enema. He has to repeat the procedure three times every 24 hours.

MONTAGE SEQUENCE: Monsieur Morel administers the enema every day. Much to Morel's surprise, Gaspard enjoys the procedure.

GASPARD (V.O.) (feverish)

Food consumed this way is the ultimate deviation one can possibly commit. What a saving of time, what a radical deliverance from the aversion that meat inspires in those who lack appetite, what an absolute release from the boredom that always results from a necessarily limited choice of dishes, what an emphatic protest against the vile sin of gluttony, what a decisive insult hurled in the face of old mother nature whose monotonous demands would be silenced forever!

INT. VILLA – BEDROOM - LATER

Gautier is examining Gaspard. Monsieur and Madame Morel wait by the door, anxiously looking in. Gautier takes off his glasses. He looks concerned.

GAUTIER

Monsieur, only distraction, amusement and pleasure can make an impression on your illness now. The best thing you can do is go back to Paris.

Gaspard sits up in bed.

GASPARD

Paris?! What would I do there? All the hooray Henry's I used to know have already bored themselves to death in their drawing rooms and their gaming tables or ruined themselves in the arms of whores.

Gautier collects his belongings.

GAUTIER

You can't continue living in self-exile.

Gaspard tries to get out of bed but he is too weak.

GASPARD

Many people live alone, without speaking to anyone, apart from the world. Convicts in solitary confinement. Trappists. There's nothing to prove they become madmen or consumptives.

Gautier puts on his coat.

GAUTIER

(indignant)

I'm giving you my professional opinion. Of course, you are free to disregard it at your own risk. But I am warning you: a radical change of lifestyle is a question of health or insanity, followed shortly by tuberculosis.

The domestics escort Gautier to the door. Gaspard slowly gets out of bed and walks over to the mirror. He can barely recognize himself: his face is a sickly yellow colour, his eyes are burning, and his sweaty hair is sticking to his scalp.

EXT. PARIS - THE SEINE - DAY

Gaspard is walking by the river. The muddy embankment is covered with decomposing leaves. He bends down and breathes in their wretched smell. A HOMELESS MAN is sleeping on the ground. On top of the brown bag next to his head there is a piece of meat covered with maggots. Holding his nose with his gloved hand, Gaspard bends over the piece of meat and watches the maggots' incessant movements. Suddenly, the homeless man opens his eyes and looks at Gaspard without saying anything. Gaspard stares back at him. The homeless man closes his eyes and goes back to sleep.

EXT. PARIS BANLIEUE – STREETS - DAY

Gaspard wanders down the street. He is now in one of the poorest parts of the city. The streets are dirty. A rat runs between his feet. A child is CRYING in one of the houses he passes by. He stops in front of the house. A young prostitute, badly made-up, leans against the wall. When she sees him, she smiles at him seductively and raises her skirt above her knee. She is ALBERTINE.

ALBERTINE

Is Monsieur looking for anything special tonight?

INT. PARIS BANLIEUE - BROTHEL – SAME

Gaspard stands in the middle of a dimly lit, cheaply furnished room. Albertine walks toward him, awkwardly caressing her pale, transparent skin and smiling wearily. She lets her long hair down: it looks like it hasn't been washed for a while. Her face is expressionless and she looks malnourished. Her chest is flat. She motions to him to come closer. He does. She starts undressing him. Gaspard pushes her on the bed and lies on top of her. He lifts up her dress and starts caressing her thin legs. She lies there obediently without moving. He continues to slide his hand over her leg mechanically, as if he were rubbing an object.

He stops rubbing her leg. He is distracted by a painting on the wall, a reproduction of Ingre's *The Grand Odalisque*. He looks at it for a long time, in a sort of reverie. Suddenly he feels the girl's hand on his crotch. She tries to smile seductively and puts his hand on her non-existent breasts.

He doesn't respond. Unsure what to do, she tries to kiss him. He doesn't respond to her kiss either.

ALBERTINE

Does Monsieur have any special requests?

He continues to look at her, growing increasingly bored. She is now uncomfortable.

GASPARD

Bring me some absinthe.

The girl seems relieved. She gets up quickly.

ALBERTINE

I'll be right back...

She leaves the room. He gets dressed and walks over to Ingre's painting. He closes his eyes, raises his hand and feels the surface of the painting, his fingers gliding over the white skin of the naked odalisque. Suddenly his senses are awakened. He seems to fall into a sexual rapture.

The couple in the next room are going at it. Their vulgar laughter takes him out of his reverie. He picks up his coat and opens the door, nearly pushing over the naked Albertine carrying a bottle of absinthe. He pushes her aside and runs down the stairs.

EXT. PARIS STREETS – EVENING

Gaspard staggers down the street, overwhelmed by all the different noises: horses neighing, drunken screams, women's vulgar laughter, street vendors' cries. He recoils from the people around him: close ups exaggerate their ugly, twisted faces. Big-bellied, bewhiskered bourgeois and moustachioed men in uniform pass him by, holding their faces up, looking self-important.

A man walks, eyes closed, with an obnoxious learned air about him. Another one smiles at his reflection in a shop window. A third one walks slowly, his head buried in a newspaper. Gaspard leans against a building, turns towards the wall and vomits.

PROSTITUTE (O.S.)

(apathetic)

Looking for love, Monsieur?

Gaspard turns around slowly. Out of the shadows emerges a VERY YOUNG PROSTITUTE with a worn out face. She is practically a child. He turns around, puts up the collar of his coat and trudges through the mud.

He starts walking faster until he finds himself in front of the Paris Bourse. A NEWSPAPER BOY crosses the street, yelling at the top of his lungs.

NEWSPAPER BOY

Le Figaro! All the latest crime stories! First-hand witness accounts! The Phantom Killer strikes again!

Gaspard stops his ears and starts walking faster. He turns randomly into a large courtyard. He finds himself in front of an old building. He looks up: the sign reads “Salpêtrière Psychiatric Ward.”

INT. LA SALPÊTRIÈRE – PSYCHIATRIC WARD - SAME

Gaspard rests his burning forehead against the cold marble of a column. He notices a poster on the wall opposite him: *Professeur Charcot. Leçons du Mardi. Grand Auditorium.*

INT. LA SALPÊTRIÈRE – GRAND AUDITORIUM - SAME

There are about a DOZEN people in the circular auditorium. Gaspard stands by the door, craning his neck to get a better view of the stage. The podium in the middle of the auditorium is brightly illuminated as if for a theatrical performance. CHARCOT, French neurologist and professor of anatomical pathology, in his 60s, dressed in a black suit, his white hair sticking to his scalp, is in a middle of a demonstration. He addresses a patient, JACQUE, standing in the middle of the stage.

CHARCOT

Shut your eyes, Jacques.

Jacques does as he is told.

CHARCOT

Imagine you are extending and flexing your left hand.

Beat.

JACQUES

I can't do it.

CHARCOT

Imagine: you are playing the piano with your right hand. It's a very complicated piece of music. Can you do that?

Jacques nods.

CHARCOT

Now, do you feel your left hand?

JACQUES

I can't feel it.

Charcot addresses the audience.

CHARCOT

Gentlemen, the idea of movement, in the course of being executed, is already movement; the idea of the absence of movement, if strong, is already the realization of motor-paralysis. The only conclusion we can draw is that hysteria is a mental, not an organic disorder.

MURMURS in the auditorium. Charcot motions to silence the audience. Fascinated by the demonstration, Gaspard moves closer to the stage.

CHARCOT

Let me tell you a little story. One of my patients, a traveler by rail, was imprudent enough to attempt changing carriages while the train was still in motion. While he was on the step outside the train, he noticed the train was about to enter a tunnel. Hanging on with his right hand and foot, he expected that his left side would be crushed against the arch of the tunnel. He fainted, but was hauled in, uninjured, by his traveling companions.

Gaspard looks around. Some of the men in the audience are taking notes. Charcot crosses the stage a few times, seemingly lost in thought. He comes close to the edge of the stage, right where Gaspard is standing. He stares at Gaspard without actually seeing him. Suddenly he remembers where he is and continues the lecture.

CHARCOT (cont.)

Yet in due course he developed a paralysis of the entire left side of his body. Here we have a case of a hysterical symptom developed subsequent to a purely psychic trauma, but in accordance with the specific injury the patient expected to receive but which, in fact, he escaped. Gentlemen, note the lapse of time between the original trauma and the emergence of the hysterical symptom. It took two weeks—14 days!—of mental elaboration for this particular trauma to be worked up! In some cases, it takes even longer.

Charcot turns on a bright light and directs it at Jacques.

CHARCOT (cont.)

Now, it's well known that in certain circumstances an idea may produce a paralysis. Conversely, an idea may cause it to disappear. This leads me to the second subject of my lecture today: the use of hypnosis in treating hysteria. (to Jacques) Focus on the bright light.

Jacques does as he is told. Using his fingers, Charcot applies pressure on Jacques's eyeballs.

CHARCOT

Ten, nine, seven....four, three, two, one.

Jacques falls under hypnosis. His eyes are closed. Charcot opens them.

CHARCOT

The patient has now entered the cataleptic phase. If I place his arms in a position of prayer, and I let them stay for a certain time, he will think only of praying. (to the patient) Where are you right now?

JACQUES

In church.

As Charcot continues speaking, he arranges the respective parts of Jacques's body to illustrate his argument.

CHARCOT

If I incline his head forward and bend his arms, he will feel his spirit invaded by ideas of humility and contrition; if I tilt his head high, he will have feelings of pride. An initial stimulus, such as putting the hands into a position of prayer, activates a reflex system so that other muscles are drawn into the praying attitude. All of this has been brilliantly explained by Monsieur Duchenne de Boulogne, who will be lecturing here next week. I will now put the patient into somnambulism. (to Jacques) Your shoulder is paralyzed.

JACQUES

No, it's not.

The audience laughs. Charcot ignores them.

CHARCOT

Yes, it is.

JACQUES

I am telling you it isn't.

CHARCOT

Your shoulder is paralyzed.

Charcot pushes Jacques's shoulder joint: it's completely stiff.

CHARCOT

The shoulder joint is now completely immobile. However, the patient is still able to move elbow, wrist and fingers quite freely.

Jacques moves each of the body parts Charcot mentions. Charcot takes out a pin, shows it to the audience, then turns to Jacques and pricks his shoulder, chest and upper arm.

CHARCOT

I am now going to induce paralysis of the elbow.

Jacques's elbow becomes paralyzed. Charcot touches it to demonstrate its immobility.

CHARCOT

Finally, the wrist. Note that the fingers retain voluntary mobility. And now, gentlemen, compare this patient's symptoms, produced, as you all saw, *artificially*, with the hysterical symptoms of this patient.

CHARCOT'S ASSISTANT brings forward ANOTHER PATIENT, whose right hand, arm, shoulder and part of the chest are paralyzed. Charcot points at the two patients.

CHARCOT

The symptoms are in all respects identical.

Charcot undoes the symptoms, proceeding by segments upward from Jacques's hand and verifying at each stage the corresponding retreat of the anesthesia. Gaspard watches his every move with great interest.

The demonstration is over. Charcot parades smugly across the stage. The audience applauds. Gaspard feels weak and dizzy. The room is reeling and turning. He stumbles toward the exit.

EXT. PARIS STREETS - EVENING

Gaspard walks down narrow, labyrinthine streets and has to stop several times because he has trouble breathing. He stumbles a few times; at the end of a street he falls down unconscious.

INT. GASPARD'S APARTMENT – SITTING ROOM - EVENING

Gaspard wakes up. Doctor Gautier is standing by the side of the bed. Gaspard tries to get up.

GASPARD

I didn't write to you.

GAUTIER

You didn't. Please lie down.

GASPARD

I am fine.

GAUTIER

I beg to differ.

Gautier starts examining him methodically.

GAUTIER

So how do you like Paris?

GASPARD

A real bore. I mean until yesterday. I was at the Salpêtrière...

GAUTIER

(surprised)

What were you doing there?

GASPARD

I attended an interesting demonstration by a Doctor Charcot...

Gautier frowns scornfully.

GAUTIER

That charlatan!

GASPARD

You should have seen that ‘charlatan’! The man is capable of producing—and I mean artificially—any emotional states or thoughts he wants simply by manipulating the posture of his patients! It’s nothing short of incredible witnessing one man in full control of the body and mind of another. Just imagine the possibilities!

Gautier is visibly irritated by Gaspard’s infatuation with Charcot’s work.

GAUTIER

And what might those be?

Gaspard grows more and more excited, oblivious to Gautier’s irritation.

GASPARD

I don’t know...Let’s say, for instance, you wanted to turn an atheist into a believer. All you’d have to do is force him to assume ‘the praying attitude’.

GAUTIER

(resentful)

Do you know where Charcot finds his so called ‘case studies’?

Gautier presses down on Gaspard’s chest.

GAUTIER (cont.)

Jail or the vaudeville house! That’s right. His ‘patients’ are murderers or actors.

The examination is over. Gautier takes off his glasses.

GAUTIER

I don’t see any medical reason for this kind of exhaustion or for the loss of weight. How are you feeling now?

Gaspard lies down. His excitement has subsided.

GASPARD

My body feels strange. Empty.

Gautier starts getting his things together.

GAUTIER

Don’t go out for a while. You need to rest.

GASPARD

I thought you recommended distraction and amusement.

GAUTIER

Sadly, they don’t seem to agree with you.

Gautier leaves. Gaspard waits a few moments and gets up. He takes out a cigarette from the bedside table and looks for matches. He can’t find any.

EXT. GASPARD’S APARTMENT - EVENING

The streets are deserted and dark. The only light Gaspard sees is that of the building across the street: a modest hotel, Hotel L’Etoile. Holding an unlit cigarette in hand, Gaspard crosses the street.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY - EVENING

The RECEPTIONIST, a very old man, is reading a newspaper article titled “Who Is the Phantom Killer?” Gaspard approaches the counter.

GASPARD

Do you have a light?

The receptionist looks up from the paper and smiles pleasantly.

RECEPTIONIST

Good evening, Monsieur.

He offers Gaspard a light.

RECEPTIONIST

At what time would Monsieur like to have his breakfast tomorrow?

Gaspard is confused. Moving very slowly, the receptionist places a hotel key on the counter. Gaspard hesitates.

We move back to a long shot of the scene from an unidentified point of view of someone standing outside the hotel.

We return to Gaspard's point of view. He picks up the key.

RECEPTIONIST

Does Monsieur like his new job?

Gaspard stares at him.

RECEPTIONIST

(obsequious)

I don't mean to intrude... Monsieur mentioned he had just started a new job at an accounting firm.

GASPARD

I am quite happy with the job, thank you.

The receptionist looks at Gaspard's fancy clothes.

GASPARD

(pointing to his clothes)

I am in an amateur dramatic society.

Gaspard picks up the key and walks towards the stairs.

RECEPTIONIST

Monsieur!

Gaspard stops and takes a deep breath. He turns around.

RECEPTIONIST

Breakfast at 10 o'clock as usual?

Gaspard nods.

GASPARD

As usual.

The receptionist writes something down. Gaspard checks the number on the hotel key: room 12. He walks up the stairs.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - SAME

Gaspard walks over to the window. To his surprise, his apartment, now completely dark, is right across from the room. He surveys the room: there are no personal belongings except for a nondescript pair of shoes. Gaspard opens the closet: inside there are three pairs of suits, all identical. He picks up one. He changes into the hotel guest's clothes, folds up his own and puts them at the bottom of the closet. Something is lying on the floor. He picks it up: a notebook. He flips through it: it's filled with names, abbreviations, addresses, numbers, dates and times.

INT. HOTEL ROOM – MORNING

There is a knock on the door. Gaspard wakes up and looks around, not sure where he is.

BELLHOP (O.S.)

Your breakfast, Monsieur.

Gaspard opens the window but immediately steps back: down in the street Madame Menard approaches his apartment building. He hides behind the curtains and continues watching her. She goes into his building. After a while she comes out and looks up at his apartment window. She hesitates for a moment before walking away. Gaspard sits at the table and opens the notebook he found the night before. The first entry at the top of the page reads "corner of Rue du Saint Eloi and Rue du Saint Sacrement, July 17, 7 o'clock in the evening."

EXT. CORNER OF RUE DU SAINT ELOIS AND RUE DU SAINT SACREMENT - EVENING

Gaspard walks up and down the deserted street. Suddenly, there is a GUN SHOT followed by a SCREAM. Gaspard runs around the corner. He catches a glimpse of a MAN turning around the corner at the opposite end of the street. Somewhere, a window is SHUT closed. In a dark alley nearby Gaspard sees ANOTHER MAN slump to the ground.

Gaspard approaches the dead body. He searches his pockets and finds identification papers: they belong to one 'Theodore Blanc'. Gaspard bends over the body and picks up a gun lying next to it. A policeman comes running. He is CAPTAIN BOILEAU.

BOILEAU
(to Gaspard)

Stay here.

The captain checks the street: there is no one around. He comes back.

BOILEAU
Are you the only witness?

Gaspard extends his hand, holding the gun, to the policeman. He looks Boileau straight in the eyes.

GASPARD
No one saw me.

INT. POLICE PRECINCT – SAME

POICCARD, the head of the precinct, sits behind a desk. He is going over the report on Gaspard's arrest. Captain Boileau waits by the side. Gaspard is seated in a chair across from them. He is listening to a conversation in the adjacent office.

DOCTOR GIRARD (O.S)
Kleptomania and exhibitionism: seven cases. Sexual perversions, alcoholism, and drug addiction: twenty three cases. Psychosis: two cases. Persecution delirium: one case. Hysteria: thirty two cases. The alcoholics and the drug addicts go to Bicêtre, the rest to Salpêtrière.

Gaspard looks at the paperwork scattered all over the desk. Closer to him, he can see a long list of names, in alphabetical order. Boileau looks up from the report.

BOILEAU
Name?

Gaspard pauses. He reads a name off of the list.

GASPARD
Polgar. Jacques Polgar.

BOILEAU
Occupation?

GASPARD
No occupation at the moment. I do have some preoccupations if you'd care to hear them.

Boileau is visibly annoyed by Gaspard's nonchalance.

BOILEAU
(through his teeth)

Monsieur, may I remind you that you are a suspect in a murder case. Earlier this evening you were walking along Rue du Saint Elois and Rue du Saint Sacrement. Is that correct?

GASPARD

Yes.

BOILEAU

Upon being apprehended you confessed to murdering a man near the corner of these two streets, a little before midnight.

GASPARD

Correct.

BOILEAU

Did anyone force you to confess?

GASPARD

Do I look like a man who can be forced into doing something?

Boileau's face grows read. He walks over to Gaspard and bends over him.

BOILEAU

Do I look like a man who gives a damn about how you look?

Poiccard signals to Boileau to calm down.

POICCARD

What is your relationship to the victim?

GASPARD

I never saw him before.

POICCARD

So you murdered a stranger. Why?

Gaspard remains silent.

POICCARD

Monsieur Polgar, I urge you to take a little more interest in the proceeding. Your own life is at stake.

GASPARD

Monsieur, dozens of crimes are being committed in Paris as we speak. Instead of dispatching your people to all four corners of the city, you choose to ask me inane questions despite the fact that I have already confessed and assumed full responsibility for this crime. I have told you the time, the day, the circumstances. I've described in great detail how I murdered the victim yet for some unfathomable reason you deem all of this insufficient. What would it take to convince you that things are exactly as they appear to be?

BOILEAU

We do not need to be 'convinced' of anything.

Poiccard shoots Boileau a stern look.

POICCARD

For the last time, why did you murder this man?

Gaspard looks out the window as if he is really thinking about the question. He looks back at Poiccard.

GASPARD

His sartorial taste offended me.

INT. PARIS - ASSIZE COURT - DAY

The court is almost empty except for A FEW MEN AND WOMEN of the Paris high society. The JUDGE, an old man with rough features, sits behind a massive desk. The trial begins with the INVESTIGATING MAGISTRATE reading out the indictment. Gaspard sits in the front, guarded by a POLICEMAN.

INVESTIGATING MAGISTRATE

Your Honour, the defendant is Jacques Polgar, age 30, occupation unknown, residence unknown. On the night of July 17, the defendant attacked and murdered the victim, Theodore Blanc. The bullet that killed Blanc matches the gun found on the defendant. On another note, we have now established that the bullets that killed the last two victims of the "Phantom Killer" came from the same gun.

CRIES of excitement in the court.

INVESTIGATING MAGISTRATE (cont.)

The defendant has since shown no sign of remorse. In the course of my preliminary investigation I found him to be a vain, idle man

of a brooding temper, given over to unwholesome and dangerous introspection, and prone to analyzing his feelings to a confusing and unnecessary extent. Doctor Girard will now present his medico-legal report.

DOCTOR GIRAR, an unpleasant man with a disproportionately small head, takes his place in the witness-box.

DOCTOR GIRARD

Your Honour, gentlemen of the jury. The defendant exhibits strong flat affect, possibly a reaction to the crime he committed. During the initial interrogation he alternated between a calm, rational state and an irritable, narcissistic one, answering my questions with a subtle but unmistakable whiff of superiority. When I mentioned to him the lack of witnesses might work in his favour he anxiously claimed full responsibility for the crime. He seemed almost desperate at the prospect of being found non-guilty. It remains to be established whether he is dissimulating for the purpose of mocking us or there is a real reason for his behaviour, possibly a lesion of the brain.

Girard wipes his forehead with a handkerchief. Gaspard observes the proceedings with a sly grin on his face.

DOCTOR GIRARD (cont.)

The defendant does not exhibit a disequilibrium of the mental faculties. There is no doubt in my mind that he is intellectually capable of perceiving the difference between right and wrong. The only explanation he gave for murdering the victim was, I quote, "His sartorial taste offended me." I trust no further comment is necessary to establish the defendant's high degree of moral imbecility.

Prolonged stir in court. Someone in the back opens a bottle of champagne. The judge brings his fist down.

JUDGE

Silence! May I remind you that the court is not a theatre and the popping of champagne corks is incompatible with the sobriety of a legal proceeding. (to Gaspard) Why did you murder that man? To rob him?

GASPARD

Certainly not.

JUDGE

From motives of revenge?

GASPARD

Perhaps.

JUDGE

Monsieur, it is in your interest to enlighten us.

ATTORNEY

If I may, your Honour, the defendant has already confessed to the crime, indicating his desire to be sentenced.

JUDGE

He has indicated a desire to be sentenced, not a desire to be judged. His refusal to participate in the interrogation can be interpreted as contempt of court. (to Gaspard) Monsieur, do not destroy the goodwill the jury may be disposed to show towards you. For the last time, why did you murder this man?

Gaspard looks at the judge calmly.

GASPARD

I wanted to experience the sensations of an assassin in order to analyze them.

INT. ASSIZE COURT - LATER

The trial continues. The judge addresses the JURY, made up of TWELVE MEN.

JUDGE

Gentlemen, you will now hear the closing remarks of the prosecutor and the defence counsel. I urge you to consult your conscience and consider only the facts of the case.

The PROSECUTOR stands up and starts pacing in front of the jury. During his speech, he gesticulates a lot and raises his voice to underscore significant points.

PROSECUTOR

Gentlemen of the jury, born criminals are easily recognizable by certain physical traits—asymmetrical face, prominent ears, abnormally long arms, insensibility to pity, lack of affect. They are destined by their innate qualities to a life of crime. As you can verify for yourself, Jacques Polgar exhibits all of these characteristics.

The members of the jury crane their necks to get a good look of Gaspard.

PROSECUTOR (cont.)

Born criminals represent a case of atavism, a throwback to an earlier stage of primitive human development. There is no other way to account for the defendant's appalling moral insensibility, in which he seems to take a perverse pleasure. There is only one 'treatment' for criminals like him: the guillotine.

The prosecutor returns to his seat. Gaspard leans over and whispers to him.

GASPARD

Very impressive: succinct and eloquent.

The prosecutor is shocked and slightly embarrassed. Gaspard's ATTORNEY approaches the jury.

ATTORNEY

Gentlemen, the prosecution's account of criminality makes the idea of individual moral responsibility seem irrelevant and the idea of punishment outmoded. If offenders were predestined to a life of crime, it would be meaningless to speak of punishment. The truth is the social milieu is the mother culture of criminality; the microbe is the criminal, an element which gains significance only at the moment when it finds the broth that makes it ferment.

Gaspard yawns. The attorney is somewhat embarrassed by his client's indifference but he tries to compose himself.

ATTORNEY (cont.)

Jacques Polgar committed this crime under the influence of extreme cerebral excitement. His reason seems to have been temporarily affected by the action of acute mental distress on a highly sensitive temperament. Hence the flat affect. This man belongs in a mental asylum.

JUDGE

Monsieur, if there is anything you'd like to say in your defence...

GASPARD

(smiling pleasantly)

I really can't think of anything, your Honour.

Gaspard stands up and turns to the policeman.

GASPARD

Shall we?

INT. LA SALPÊTRIÈRE – PSYCHIATRIC WARD – DAY

A CHAPLAIN escorted by a WARDEN walk down the hallway. They stop in front of Gaspard's cell. The chaplain goes in. The warden locks the door behind him.

INT. PRISON – GASPARD'S CELL - SAME

Gaspard is sitting on the ground. He is examining critically his prison clothes.

GASPARD

(pointing at the pants)

Horrible, don't you think? Just look at the legs. I could recommend some talented tailors if you want.

CHAPLAIN

I am not here to judge you. Only the Lord can do that.

Gaspard rolls up his sleeves, then unrolls them again.

CHAPLAIN

My son, you have committed a sin.

Gaspard looks up. He is baffled by the chaplain's words.

CHAPLAIN

(explaining)

You have taken another man's life.

Gaspard looks him up and down.

GASPARD

How likely is it for a holy man to have a cigarette?

The chaplain smiles sorrowfully and clasps his hands together.

CHAPLAIN

What is sin? Sin is an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience. It is a revolt against God through the will to become like gods, knowing and determining good and evil. Sin is love of oneself even to contempt of God.

Gaspard looks out the window. He starts counting the bricks of the opposite wall.

CHAPLAIN

Do not despair, my son. Let him who is in desolation consider how the Lord has left him in trial in his natural powers, in order to resist the different agitations and temptations of the enemy...

GASPARD

...six, seven, eight, nine...

CHAPLAIN (cont.)

...since he can with the Divine help, which always remains to him, though he does not clearly perceive it: because the Lord has taken from him his great fervour, great love and intense grace, leaving him, however, grace enough for eternal salvation. Let us pray.

GASPARD (cont.)

...eighteen, nineteen...I don't remember how.

CHAPLAIN

My son, one doesn't forget how to pray. Put your hands together like this. Incline your head forward. Can you not feel your soul invaded by ideas of humility and contrition? Repeat after me: I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth...

While the chaplain is praying he seems to forget that Gaspard is there. Suddenly, the chaplain opens his eyes and is startled to see Gaspard standing very close to him.

GASPARD

Have you looked at a newspaper recently? What do you find on the back pages? Advertisements for corn cures made by priests. The monasteries are now factories producing herbal remedies and liqueurs. The Cistercian order, chocolate. The Trappists, semolina. The Marists, medicinal chalk. The Dominicans, an anti-apopleptic elixir. The disciples of Saint Benedict, Benedictine. The monks of Saint Bruno, Chartreuse.

The chaplain doesn't quite know how to respond to this so he continues praying.

CHAPLAIN

...and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate..

Gaspard whispers in the chaplain's ear.

GASPARD

Abbots are now confectioners. Lay brothers are pharmacy assistants.

The chaplain is trying hard to remain focused.

CHAPLAIN
...was crucified, died, was buried and...

GASPARD
(loudly)
Descended into hell.

The chaplain walks backward to the door. Once outside the cell, he turns around and looks at Gaspard.

CHAPLAIN
(under his breath)
And the third day He arose again from the dead.

INT. LA SALPÊTRIÈRE – PSYCHIATRIC WARD – NIGHT

Gaspard is asleep. In his sleep, he sees the corpse of the man he did not kill, lying in a pool of blood. He turns over the corpse on his back and steps back horrified: it's a mannequin.

INT. CHARCOT'S OFFICE – DAY

Gaspard walks into the room. Captain Boileau and Poiccard sit behind the desk. Poiccard motions to Gaspard to take a seat.

POICCARD
Good news. You have received a full pardon.

GASPARD
I don't understand.

Boileau, who obviously doesn't think this is good news, is about to explode but Poiccard motions to him to compose himself.

POICCARD
Several witnesses, including the receptionist at your hotel, have come forward to testify that you are, in fact, Theodore Blanc, bookkeeper, currently residing at Hotel L'Etoile. Now, I do not claim to understand why you assumed a different name or why you claimed responsibility for a murder you did not commit. All I

know is that since Theodore Blanc—that is, you—is not dead, we are left with no other choice but to release you immediately.

Gaspard is not at all pleased to be informed of his impending release. Boileau cannot restrain himself any longer.

BOILEAU
(indignantly)

Monsieur, you've made a mockery of the court, the police and the church! (to Poiccard) He made atonement for a crime he did not commit!

Gaspard looks at Boileau scornfully.

GASPARD

It is you who's making a mockery of faith. Do you mean to tell me God's forgiveness can be given out by mistake and then withdrawn? Perhaps you'd like me to murder someone to justify my atonement?

POICCARD

Gentlemen, this is neither the place nor the time to discuss matters of religious doctrine. Theodore Blanc is not dead. The case is closed.

GASPARD

With all due respect, Monsieur, you seem to be forgetting that you still have a corpse in the morgue.

BOILEAU

We are perfectly aware of that. Although you might find it surprising, we do not believe ourselves obliged to inform you of the next stage of our investigation!

POICCARD

You are a free man, Dubois. Try to see this as a good thing.

Boileau looks at Gaspard with resentment as he is escorted out of the room.

INT. HOTEL LOBBY – EVENING

Gaspard walks into the lobby. The receptionist is reading a newspaper article titled "The Phantom Killer...Still a Phantom."

RECEPTIONIST

Good evening, Monsieur Blanc.

Gaspard approaches the counter. The receptionist puts the hotel room key on the counter.

RECEPTIONIST

There is no need to thank me. I only did what anyone else in my place...

Gaspard ignores him. He picks up the key and walks up the stairs.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - LATER

Gaspard sits at the table, writing in his journal: "My investigation has come to a nought. Theodore Blanc remains as much of a mystery as he was when I first became him."

He puts the journal aside and opens Blanc's notebook. He checks the next entry, whose format is similar to that of the previous entry: "rue d'Orsel and rue de Ronsard, August 11, 8 o'clock, evening, Marquis Leveque."

EXT. CORNER OF RUE D'ORSEL AND RUE DE RONSARD - EVENING

Gaspard walks up and down the deserted street. A GUN SHOT is heard. Gaspard turns around: at the opposite end of the street the shadow of a MAN disappears down a dark alley. Gaspard waits. He starts walking slowly down the street. At the end of the street he stops: in front of his feet lies the body of a young man. From his clothes it is obvious he is an aristocrat.

Gaspard bends over the body and lifts it up slightly: underneath he finds what he is looking for, a gun. A policeman comes running: it's Boileau again. When he recognizes Gaspard, the captain grins.

INT. LA SALPÊTRIÈRE – EXAMINATION ROOM

Gaspard and A FEW PATIENTS line up in front of a PHOTOGRAHER. They take turns being photographed.

DOCTOR GIRARD (O.S.)

I want detailed records of the proportions and shape of the average maniac, hallucinatory, idiot, imbecile, and epileptic head. When you are done, send the results to Brussels and London to see if they match ours.

We see several individual patients being photographed. This is followed by a montage of photographs in quick succession. The photographs change faster and faster until it's difficult to distinguish individual physiognomies.

CLOSE ON: Hospital Records

A hand is recording the following: “Number 12. Head circumference 52. Pulse 110. Number 13. Head circumference 48. Pulse 98...”

INT. ASSIZE COURT – DAY

The courtroom is half-empty. Captain Boileau stands in the back, following the trial with great interest. The attorney, the judge and the prosecutor are the same as in the first trial. Gaspard sits in the defendant’s chair. His face is inscrutable. The judge looks at him for a long time as if he is trying to remember something.

JUDGE

It seems to me the defendant was already tried by this court.

The prosecutor approaches the judge.

PROSECUTOR

Your Honour, the defendant confessed to another crime of the same nature as the crime for which he was earlier tried and acquitted.

The judge frowns.

JUDGE

(to Gaspard’s attorney)

Have you spoken to your client and advised him of the best course of action?

ATTORNEY

I have, your Honour.

Gaspard’s attorney approaches the judge.

ATTORNEY (cont.)

My client insists that he committed the murder. In the interest of protecting his right to claim responsibility for his own acts, it is my duty to demonstrate that my client is as guilty as he claims to be.

PROSECUTOR

Your Honour, as we discovered during his first trial, the defendant is a pathological liar. I believe his confession is part of an elaborate delusional system of belief which would require further medical investigation.

The judge appears to have difficulty understanding the rationale behind either man’s statement. He waves his wrinkled hand in front of their faces.

JUDGE

Proceed.

The attorney returns to his seat and whispers something in Gaspard's ear. The prosecutor turns around, facing the courtroom.

PROSECUTOR

I call to the stand Doctor Girard. Using a new and exciting scientific method, he will prove that the defendant's confession is utterly unfounded.

Doctor Girard approaches the stand. He is carrying a thick bundle of papers which he proceeds to unroll on the desk in front of the judge. He speaks passionately and gesticulates widely.

DOCTOR GIRARD

Your Honour, we have recently adopted a reliable method for eliciting the principal types of insanity by methods of optical superimposition of the portraits of the insane. The composite portrait enables us to obtain with mechanical precision a generalised picture, one that represents no man in particular but portrays an imaginary figure possessing the average features of any given group of men, whether epileptics, hysterics, or what have you. It is mathematically true that deviations from the average man are indistinguishable from error. It follows logically that...

JUDGE

The average man?

Girard produces a number of photographic portraits of various men. He spreads them out in front of the judge as if they were cards. He points to individual photographs while he is talking.

DOCTOR GIRARD

The average man is in society the analogue of the center of gravity in matter. He is a fictional being in regard to which all things happen in accordance with average results obtained for society.

Girard picks up a few of the photographs and walks back and forth in front of the jury showing them each photograph.

DOCTOR GIRARD (cont.)

Here we have an example of a composite portrait of hysterical and delusional patients. In the last year, we have seen an inordinate increase in the number of such cases. This portrait was obtained

from the photographs of all patients in this class, including the defendant.

Girard walks back to the judge's desk and shows him the portrait. He then approaches Gaspard and holds the composite portrait next to his face.

DOCTOR GIRARD

You will no doubt notice the portrait bears a striking resemblance to the defendant.

The judge looks at the portrait, then at Gaspard, then at the portrait again. He nods.

DOCTOR GIRARD

To verify our results, we conducted another, parallel study.

Girard produces another set of photographs and shows them to the jury and the judge.

DOCTOR GIRARD

This is a composite portrait of an average murderer produced from individual photographs of all murderers currently serving their sentence in the Paris prison.

Girard walks over to Gaspard and holds the composite portrait next to Gaspard's face.

DOCTOR GIRARD

Note that the defendant's face represents a significant deviation from the composite portrait.

Once again, the judge nods in agreement.

JUDGE

What did you conclude on the basis of this impressive research?

The prosecutor stands up and addresses the judge and the jury.

PROSECUTOR

On the basis of the scientific evidence presented here, as well as on the results of the defendant's first trial, we believe that Theodore Blanc suffers from an unknown kind of mental disturbance, which forces him to claim responsibility for random acts that cannot, in fact, be attributed to him.

Furious, Gaspard jumps to his feet.

GASPARD

How does your 'scientific research' account for the stiff body lying in the morgue as we speak?!

The policeman in charge of Gaspard forces him down in his seat. The judge gives Gaspard a harsh look and stands up.

JUDGE

The defendant shall refrain from speaking up unless he is invited to. This court is adjourned. The verdict will be pronounced tomorrow.

Frustrated, Gaspard watches the judge leave. The prosecutor walks past Gaspard with a satisfied grin on his face.

EXT. LA SALPÊTRIÈRE – PSYCHIATRIC WARD – DAY

Gaspard walks out of the building. The door closes behind him. He is no longer wearing a patient's outfit. He is dressed in Blanc's clothes again.

EXT. THE SEINE - DAY

Gaspard walks by the river and sits on a bench. A MAN is standing by the river, looking out in the distance. Gaspard's POV: The man is spying on Gaspard. We leave Gaspard's point of view: the man is simply looking at the water. Clearly, Gaspard is imagining things.

EXT. THE SEINE – EVENING - LATER

Gaspard sits on a bench by the river, staring at the muddy water. He notices an old homeless man standing by the water with his back to Gaspard: it's the same homeless man he met earlier. Gaspard observes him for a while. Nearby Gaspard sees another MAN walking back and forth, occasionally looking at this watch.

Gaspard casually walks over to the homeless man and stands behind him. Beat. Gaspard pushes the man into the river. Everything happens so fast that the man doesn't even scream. He drowns. Gaspard starts running.

MAN (O.S.)

Murderer! Help! Murderer!

A POLICEMAN appears around the corner and runs after Gaspard. Gaspard slows down to let his pursuer catch up with him. The policeman grabs him from behind and handcuffs him.

INT. ASSIZE COURT - DAY

The court hearing is under way. The same judge presides. The same prosecutor stands up and addresses the judge.

PROSECUTOR

Your Honour, the defendant is familiar to us: Theodore Blanc, two prior murder convictions, acquitted twice. Last night he was apprehended after allegedly committing another criminal act of the same nature.

Utterly indifferent, the judge slowly puts on his glasses.

JUDGE

(weary)

Would the defendant please state his name for the court?

GASPARD

Theodore Blanc.

JUDGE

Financial status?

GASPARD

Comfortable.

JUDGE

Education?

GASPARD

Literate.

JUDGE

(to prosecutor)

Proceed.

PROSECUTOR

Monsieur Blanc, please describe what happened on the evening of August 19.

GASPARD

I was sitting on a bench by the river. I noticed a man. He appeared to be homeless.

PROSECUTOR

What was he doing?

GASPARD

Nothing. He was staring at the water.

PROSECUTOR

Like you.

GASPARD

Yes.

PROSECUTOR

What happened then?

GASPARD

I walked over to him. He didn't see me. I pushed him in the river.

PROSECUTOR

Why?

GASPARD

I had a headache. And he was obstructing my view.

JUDGE

Monsieur Blanc, I'm warning you: you will be held in contempt of court if you continue in this manner.

GASPARD

What I said is true.

PROSECUTOR

(smugly)

That might very well be. But is it statistically true? Your Honour, I call to the stand Monsieur Lambert.

LAMBERT, a middle aged man with sharp, piercing eyes sits in the witness-box. He addresses the audience in a pleasant, calm voice.

LAMBERT

Your Honour, esteemed members of the jury: did you know that in Paris, in ordinary times, the number of letters at the Dead Letter Office is remarkably stable from one year to the next?

The judge appears surprised and intrigued by this piece of information.

LAMBERT

What does this tell us? It tells us that every year, all other things being equal, the same number of deaths are registered in Paris. Every year we witness the same crimes reproduced in the same order and bringing with them the same penalties in the same proportions. We can enumerate in advance how many individuals will stain their hands with the blood of their fellow creatures, how many will be forgers, how many prisoners, pretty nearly as one can enumerate in advance the births and deaths which must take place.

Lambert is pleased with the effect his words have produced. He looks around triumphantly. As Gaspard listens to Lambert's speech, he appears increasingly alarmed.

LAMBERT (cont.)

Your Honour, to understand crime, we have to understand the laws and customs of society, not the caprices of individuals. Individuals are too variable and inconsistent to serve as the basis of the moral sciences. Often we do not understand why they do what they do. But the average man we can understand. In the average, everything exceptional balances out. Once we adopt the statistical approach and seek causes whose effects can be discerned in large numbers, it becomes immediately clear to us that the moral order falls within the domain of statistics.

MUMURS in court. Someone applauds, then stops.

LAMBERT

The first thing to be established in a case like this is the defendant's propensity to crime. Supposing men are placed in like circumstances, the propensity for crime is the greater or lesser probability of committing a crime.

As he continues talking, Lambert draws diagrams and formulas on a large sheet of paper. Intrigued, the judge leans forward.

LAMBERT

After considering a large enough number of cases, I was able to come up with a very simple empirical formula, which can be used to calculate the propensity for crime, taking into consideration the specific information available in the defendant's record:

$$Y = (1 - \sin X) \frac{1}{1+m} \text{ supposing } m = \frac{1}{2x - 18}$$

The degree of the propensity for crime Y is expressed as a function of age X. It is necessary to take for the axis of the

abscissas the quarter of the circumference rectified and divided according to decimal division.

Lambert holds up the sheet of paper. The prosecutor stands up and approaches the jury.

PROSECUTOR

Using Monsieur Lambert's formula, we were able to establish a statistical profile for our murderer. We then compared the defendant's profile to the murderer's profile.

The prosecutor produces a sheet of paper containing a statistical table and shows it to the judge.

PROSECUTOR (cont.)

This table shows the defendant's propensity to crime to be close to 0. Taking into consideration his education, marital status, age, birth place, time of the crime, place of the crime etc., we conclude that all his claims to the contrary, the defendant did not, in fact, murder the victim.

Gaspard jumps up.

GASPARD

That my actions are statistically improbable does not make them unreal! A corpse is a corpse regardless of its statistical improbability!

The policeman forces him back into his seat.

PROSECUTOR

Your Honour, the document before you shows the latest suicide statistics in Paris. As you can see, the two most common methods of Parisian suicide are drowning and charcoal. By contrast, Londoners, for example, prefer to hang themselves or use a gun. Our victim clearly fits the statistical profile for a Parisian suicide.

Gaspard stands up again.

GASPARD

That man did not commit suicide!

PROSECUTOR

Even without resorting to statistical tables, it is easy to see why a man in the victim's situation—miserable, poor, homeless, with no family, etc—would find death a welcome solution.

Gaspard manages to free himself from the clutches of the policeman and walks over to the prosecutor, who steps back, unsure if he should defend himself.

GASPARD

That man was free to choose whether to continue living his 'poor, miserable life' or kill himself. He might have killed himself but it is equally likely that he chose to continue living.

The policeman grabs Gaspard and pushes him back in his seat.

PROSECUTOR

Your Honour, it is a statistical law that a certain proportion of the people in Paris will commit suicide in a given year. Then it is not true of each Parisian that he or she is free not to commit suicide. If each person were free to do so, then it might have happened that none did so, and hence that would not have been a statistical law about the population, which is absurd!

The judge nods in agreement.

INT. MADAME LAURE'S BROTHEL – PRIVATE ROOM - EVENING

Gaspard lies in bed, fully clothed. A PROSTITUTE walks up to the bed and starts to undress very slowly. He looks at her indifferently.

JUDGE (V.O.)

After careful consideration of the evidence presented in the case against Theodore Blanc, the court has reached the conclusion that, while his motivation for claiming responsibility for the murder remains unclear, the defendant's propensity to crime is as minor as to be virtually negligible.

The woman lies next to Gaspard and starts embracing and kissing him. He remains unresponsive.

JUDGE (cont.)

The court therefore orders that the defendant be released immediately.

INT. MADAME LAURE'S BROTHEL – MAIN ROOM - LATER

Gaspard, followed by the prostitute he was with, walks into the room. Madame Laure walks up to him. She seems to remember something and motions to him to wait. She goes into an adjacent room. When she comes back she is holding a black cravat in her hand. She steps closer to Gaspard and tries to put the cravat around his neck. Gaspard steps back.

GASPARD

It's not mine.

MADAME LAURE

Monsieur forgot it in the room with Natalie last night.

Gaspard stares at her.

GASPARD

(tense)

The last time I was here was several months ago.

Madame Laure senses the tension and backs off.

MADAME LAURE

How about a glass of wine?

She puts the cravat down and walks over to the table to pour the drinks. Unnerved, Gaspard sits down on the sofa. The prostitute who was just with him sits next to him and puts her hand on his thigh. He doesn't react. She continues moving her hand over his body, rubbing it and caressing it. He listens distractedly to a conversation between TWO OTHER PROSTITUTES putting on makeup in front of the mirror.

FIRST PROSTITUTE (O.S.)

What kind of man is Monsieur De Ronsard? Is he as mysterious as everyone says?

SECOND PROSTITUTE (O.S.)

A real gentleman! And so handsome!

The two prostitutes finish applying their make up and walk past Gaspard on their way to the back of the house. Stunned by what he has just heard he studies their faces: he is shocked when they don't recognize him.

GASPARD

(to his prostitute)

Who were they talking about?

PROSTITUTE

Another client.

She continues to caress and kiss him. Gaspard pushes her away and stands up. Madame Laure walks up to them holding two glasses of wine. He slips a few banknotes into her décolleté and rushes out the door.

MADAME LAURE

Monsieur Blanc!

INT. HOTEL ROOM - EVENING

Gaspard stands by the window, looking across the street at his apartment. The window is dark. He is about to turn around when a light flickers in the darkness: a candle. Gaspard freezes. A hand emerges from the darkness and moves into the candlelight. Gaspard instinctively steps back and hides behind the curtain.

He spends the rest of the night staring at his apartment window. Eventually he falls asleep at the table.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Gaspard wakes up. The curtains in his apartment across the street are slightly parted. Gaspard can now see the figure of a man moving across the room: he is wearing what we recognize as Gaspard's clothes. Gaspard cannot make out the IMPOSTOR's face. The impostor walks toward the door. Realizing that the man is leaving the apartment, Gaspard grabs his coat and runs out of the hotel room.

INT. HOTEL FOYER - LATER

Gaspard watches the entrance to his apartment building. The impostor comes out of the building and walks down the street. Still unable to see the man's face, Gaspard follows him discreetly.

EXT. PARIS STREETS - DAY

Gaspard follows the impostor around Paris.

EXT. PARIS CAFE - DAY

The impostor goes into a cafe: it's the same cafe where Gaspard used to play cards with Gilbert and Francois. Gaspard looks through the window and is shocked to see Gilbert, Francois and the man sitting around a table, talking. Gilbert starts dealing cards. The waiter comes to their table and puts down several glasses of absinthe. Gaspard leans against the building and waits.

EXT. PARIS STREETS - DAY

The impostor leaves the cafe. Gaspard follows him. The impostor stops in front of several cafes and stores to check his reflection in the window. Finally he goes into one of the buildings. Gaspard steps up to the window and looks inside: Gaspard's tailor is making corrections to a grey waistcoat the impostor is wearing.

EXT. PARIS STREET - DAY

The impostor leaves the tailor's shop. Gaspard emerges from the shadows across the street, where he has been hiding; this time he does not follow the impostor.

EXT. PARIS STREET – NIGHT

Gaspard stands in front of the tailor's shop: it's now closed. He walks around to the back and finds a small window through which he manages to climb into the shop.

INT. TAILOR'S SHOP - SAME

Inside it's dark. The tables are covered with pieces of fabric, coats, shirts and trousers. Gaspard finds the grey waistcoat the man was wearing earlier. A little piece of paper attached to it reads 'Monsieur Gaspard De Ronsard'. Gaspard tries to put on the coat: to his surprise, it is too small for him. He looks around and finds a shirt and a pair of trousers with the tag 'Monsieur Gaspard De Ronsard'—a shirt, trousers, shoes. He tries them on. None of them fit him.

INT. HOTEL FOYER – DAY

The hotel receptionist is reading the newspaper. He looks over the edge of the paper at Gaspard, who is standing outside the hotel observing his apartment building across the street. The impostor comes out of the building and walks down the street. Gaspard follows him.

Suddenly Gaspard notices Madame Menard walking straight towards them from the opposite side of the street. When the impostor notices her he sneaks into another building. Gaspard doesn't have time to hide from his former lover. She passes right by him without noticing him and walks into his apartment building. In a few moments she comes out of the building and looks up at Gaspard's apartment window. She walks away in the opposite direction, again ignoring Gaspard. When she is gone, the impostor emerges from his hiding place and continues on his way. Gaspard follows him.

EXT. PARIS STREETS – DAY

Gaspard follows the impostor down different streets. Eventually they arrive at the Salpêtrière hospital. The impostor walks straight towards the psychiatric ward. Gaspard stops at a distance from the entrance. He watches the impostor exchange a few words with a DOORMAN: the doorman lets him pass. The doorman now notices Gaspard.

DOORMAN

How many times do I have to tell you: the entrance is at the back!

Confused, Gaspard hesitates for a moment but then walks to the back of the building. One of the doors is open. He walks in.

INT. SALPÊTRIÈRE HALLWAY - LATER

FIVE PATIENTS, all wearing white robes, wait in the hallway. The GUARD watching over them notices Gaspard.

GUARD

Where have you been?!

The guard throws Gaspard a parcel. Gaspard opens it: inside he finds is a patient's white robe.

INT. SALPÊTRIÈRE – HALLWAY - SAME

Gaspard comes out of an adjacent room: he is now wearing the white robe. He lines up behind the other patients.

INT. SALPÊTRIÈRE – AUDITORIUM - SAME

The patients are sitting obediently in the center of the stage. Gaspard looks at their expressionless faces, then down at his own white robe. Doctor Charcot walks back and forth across the stage, lecturing; however, Gaspard does not hear anything (this part of the scene is silent). Gaspard searches the audience but there is no trace of the impostor.

Charcot turns toward Gaspard and motions to him to approach him. The sound returns. Gaspard walks over to the chair in the middle of the stage. Charcot steps up to him and slowly raises his hands. Gaspard looks around the auditorium one final time: suddenly he sees a shadowy figure rise from one of the seats in the back and walk toward the exit. At that moment, Charcot bends over Gaspard, closes his eyes and applies pressure to his eyelids. Gaspard hears Charcot's voice: it sounds as if it's coming from far away.

CHARCOT (O.S.)

If I show a hypnotized subject an imaginary snake or lion on the completely empty floor, the subject will immediately display all the signs of terror, but if I tell him the next instant that it is a humming bird, he will admire and caress it. Gentlemen, once plunged into sleep, the brain of the subject may be considered absolutely blank and incapable of any will of its own...

Gaspard falls under hypnosis.

INT. SALPÊTRIÈRE – AUDITORIUM - SAME

Gaspard opens his eyes. He is blinded by a bright light directed at him. He closes his eyes. When he opens them again, Charcot is standing on his left side. The audience APPLAUDS. Gaspard looks at the seat up in the back of the auditorium. The seat is empty.

INT. SALPÊTRIÈRE – HALLWAY – LATER

Gaspard, now changed back into Blanc's clothes walks down the hallway. Someone runs after him.

CHARCOT'S ASSISTANT

Did you forget something?

Gaspard turns around. Charcot's assistant extends his hand: he is holding several banknotes. Gaspard stares at the money, then quickly slips it in his pocket and walks away.

INT. HOTEL ROOM – DAY

Gaspard sits by the window, observing his apartment across the street. Blanc's notebook lies on the table in front of him. He opens it to the page with the notes on the first two murders. Something has been scribbled at the bottom of the page. He barely makes it out: "Duchenne, Salpêtrière, 7 o'clock."

INT. HOTEL ROOM - EARLY EVENING

Slumped in his chair, Gaspard is sleeping. All of a sudden, his dark apartment across the street is illuminated by a candle. Gaspard stirs in his sleep. One by one he unfolds his limbs and lifts up his head, like a marionette suddenly come alive. He looks at the window across the street. The shadow of a man moves across the room. The candle goes out.

EXT. PARIS STREET – LATER

The impostor comes out of the apartment building. A few moments later Gaspard comes out of the hotel and follows him.

EXT. PARIS STREETS

Gaspard follows the impostor around Paris.

EXT. PARIS CEMETERY

Gaspard stands outside the entrance. In the distance before him, the impostor walks between two rows of graves.

EXT. PARIS CEMETERY - GRAVE

The impostor stands in front of a tombstone. Hiding behind another large tombstone Gaspard observes him. Nothing stirs. Beat. The impostor bends down and places something on the grave. He leaves. Gaspard waits until the man is far enough and approaches the tombstone: a single rose lies over the name 'Laetitia De Ronsard'. Gaspard violently sweeps the rose off the tombstone.

INT. HOTEL ROOM – DAY

Gaspard is spying on his apartment as usual. The impostor comes out of his apartment building and walks down the street. Gaspard waits until he turns around the corner, opens the closet and rummages through his old clothes at the bottom of it. He finds what he is looking for: a key.

EXT. PARIS STREET – SAME

Gaspard crosses the street and walks into his apartment building.

INT. GASPARD'S APARTMENT BUILDING – LOBBY – SAME

The concierge looks up from the pornographic pictures he has been looking at and hides them under the counter. It is clear to Gaspard the man does not recognize him.

CONCIERGE

Can I help you?

GASPARD

I am looking for Monsieur Gaspard De Ronsard.

CONCIERGE

The Duke just left. Would you like to leave a message for him?

GASPARD

Monsieur De Ronsard told me to wait for him upstairs.
I am managing his accounts.

The concierge hesitates but then lets him in. Gaspard walks up the stairs.

INT. GASPARD'S APARTMENT – SAME

Gaspard takes out a key from his pocket and opens the door. He walks through the apartment. Everything looks exactly as he left it. On the table by the window there is a pair of binoculars. He looks through them and sees his hotel room across the street. He puts down the binoculars and picks up a notebook. It looks like a journal. He opens it to a random page but before he has a chance to read anything he hears a noise behind him and turns around: there is an envelope under the door. He waits a few moments before picking it up. It's not sealed. Inside there is a note: "Duchenne's lecture Friday evening, 7 o'clock." Gaspard puts the note back in the envelope and the envelope back on the floor. He leaves the apartment, locking the door behind him.

INT. HOTEL ROOM – EVENING

Someone slips an envelope under the door. Gaspard picks it up. Inside he finds a hotel bill. The outstanding balance is several hundred francs. A short letter enclosed with the bill specifies that no payments have been made since Blanc moved into the hotel.

Gaspard searches the room for money, to no avail. He notices Blanc's notebook lying on the table. He opens it. The first two entries are crossed out: we recognize them as the addresses where the two murders for which Gaspard was tried (and acquitted) took place. The third entry reads "rue de Fleurs and rue de l'Espoir, 8 o'clock, September 2."

EXT. PARIS STREET – DAY

A NEWSPAPER BOY walks down the street, carrying a pile of newspapers under one arm and waving a single newspaper in his other hand.

NEWSPAPER BOY

(yelling)

The Phantom Killer strikes again!

INT. SALPÊTRIÈRE AUDITORIUM - EVENING

Gaspard, dressed as a patient, sits in the examination chair. He searches the auditorium but the man from his apartment is nowhere to be seen. DUCHENNE DE BOULOGNE, a neurologist, is in the middle of his lecture. He is a bald man with long sideburns and unruly eyebrows. Charcot is sitting close to the stage, taking notes.

Duchenne bends over Gaspard and starts attaching electrodes to his face, stretching his facial muscles in several directions.

DUCHENNE (to the audience)

I will now produce the expression of glee by stimulating the greater zygomatic muscle with electric current.

The audience exclaims with surprise and pain, uncomfortable at the sight of Gaspard's face.

DUCHENNE

To complete this expression, the muscles of both sides must be excited, in connection with the orbicular fibres of the lower eyelids, which contract in a horizontal depression beneath the eyes. Note that this is missing in a false or simulated mirthfulness.

Duchenne proceeds to faradize Gaspard's muscles into an expression of glee. When he is done he stands beside him, letting the audience enjoy the view.

DUCHENNE

Similarly, we can produce the expression of aggressive malignity by means of electric contractions of the pyramidalis nasi. What is interesting in the case of this patient is that the development of the pyramidal muscle is so full that its isolated contraction under the rheophores gives a dramatic play of cruel instincts, which his will has no power to evoke and which are only latent in his character. I have observed the same phenomenon in a great number of subjects, which leads me to the conclusion that the aggressive muscle of malignity is one of those which least obey the will, and that it is put in action only by the instinct or mode of passion of which it is the essential agent of expression.

Duchenne points to Gaspard's face stretched out in a terrifying grimace.

DUCHENNE

(triumphant)

Gentlemen, what is this but a foresight of Nature, forbidding us easily to dissemble or to mimic those expressive lines by which man can distinguish his friends from his enemies!

Duchenne walks over to a table and ruffles through the papers piled on top of it. He picks up a photograph of Gaspard (we recognize it as one of the photographs used in Gaspard's first trial) and shows it to the audience.

DUCHENNE

This photograph renders the maximum of hatred and wickedness this patient's pyramidalis are capable of expressing. This is the more singular as he possesses extraordinary power over his eyebrow muscles. He can give his eyes varied expressions and move them in contrary directions. But his will does not exert the least action over his pyramidalis. He cannot, by any effort, give to his countenance the expression of hardness, of aggression, or wickedness. This patient is of a very gentle character; had he become the prey of evil passions, their gymnastic exercise would have very soon developed his pyramidalis, and changed the habitual expression of his countenance.

Duchenne's demonstration is over. The audience APPLAUDS. He removes the electrodes from Gaspard's face. Gaspard shakes his head and touches his face as if to check it is still there. Duchenne is standing with his back to Gaspard, talking to someone. When the conversation is over Duchenne turns around. Gaspard gasps: Duchenne is not Duchenne but the man living in Gaspard's apartment. Gaspard looks around: all men in the audience are copies of the impostor living in his apartment.

Duchenne sits down and Charcot comes up on the stage.

CHARCOT

(to the audience)

Allow me to draw your attention to an aspect of my studies that clearly runs counter to Monsieur Duchenne's theory. I should like to demonstrate the extent to which subjects can be compelled by the hypnotist to commit acts foreign to their natural inclinations in the waking state.

Charcot approaches Gaspard. Gaspard steps back in horror: Charcot is Gaspard's impostor. Charcot motions to his assistant for help. While the assistant holds down Gaspard, Charcot proceeds to put Gaspard in a state of somnambulism by rubbing the top of his head lightly with the palm of his hand and talking to him in a soothing voice. All of a sudden, Gaspard becomes extremely agitated. He paces the stage, gesturing wildly, shooting, stabbing and poisoning imaginary enemies until he finally collapses on the stage. Charcot bends over him and talks to him in the same soothing voice. In a few moments Gaspard comes to his senses and gets up.

CHARCOT

Gentlemen, although you can't see it, this room is littered with corpses.

Unnerved, Gaspard looks around him. The audience APPLAUDS. Charcot appears satisfied.

MALE VOICE (O.S)

How do you know the patient is not dissimulating?

Something in the voice makes Gaspard jump in his seat. He searches the audience but cannot identify the speaker. Charcot cannot either, so he addresses no one in particular.

CHARCOT

The desire to deceive without purpose, by a kind of disinterested worship of art for art's sake, is a common enough experience, particularly in hysteria. But let me assure you, very few simulators have the intelligence to combine and display, with the object of deceit, all the symptoms that belong to the natural history of the illness, without taking from or adding in any way to this group of symptoms. They overelaborate.

A man in the back of the auditorium stands up and walks toward the exit. Gaspard stands up to get a better view of the man but Charcot's assistant pulls him back and escorts him off the stage.

INT. SALPÊTRIÈRE HALLWAY – LATER

Charcot's assistant pays Gaspard. Gaspard puts the money in his pocket. Charcot comes out of the auditorium and pats Gaspard on the shoulder.

CHARCOT

That was quite impressive!

Charcot continues on his way. Gaspard glances at Charcot's assistant, who goes back into the auditorium without saying a word.

INT. MADAME LAURE'S BROTHEL – EVENING

Gaspard slips several banknotes into Madame Laure's décolleté and signals to one of the prostitutes to follow him to the private rooms in the back. Madame Laure counts the money.

MADAME LAURE

Monsieur is paying only for one hour?

Gaspard turns back and looks at her with resentment. He pushes the prostitute away from him and walks back to Madame.

GASPARD

My payment is based on the quality of the product, which does not encourage me to make use of her services the entire evening.

He motions to leave but changes his mind and turns around. He walks back to Madame Laure and retrieves his money from her décolleté.

INT. GASPARD'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Gaspard unlocks the door to his apartment. He searches the apartment but except for a couple of small bills he does not find any money. Suddenly he catches a glimpse of himself in the mirror. This is the first time he actually sees himself dressed in Blanc's clothes. He is not satisfied with what he sees. He opens the closet and looks at his fancy shirts, waistcoats and pants. He hesitates for a moment and then quickly starts undressing.

He stands in front of the mirror again: he is wearing a chic dark blue velvet tunic and a beautiful cream shirt. He puts on a cravat and examines his reflection. On one of the side tables there is a little box: inside he finds precious stones of all kinds. He pours the whole box in his pocket. Before he leaves he grabs a few pieces of clothing from the closet.

INT. GASPARD'S APARTMENT BUILDING– LOBBY – MOMENTS LATER

The lobby is empty. Gaspard runs through it and then across the street to the hotel.

INT. HOTEL ROOM – SAME

Gaspard throws the clothes he took from his apartment on the bed and lies down, exhausted. He slips his hand in his pocket and takes out the precious stones. He holds them against the

candlelight. There is a knock on the door. Gaspard does not respond. The knocking continues, louder.

MALE VOICE (O.S.)

Police!

Gaspard drops the precious stones on the floor. Captain Boileau and ANOTHER POLICEMAN storm in. Boileau notices the fancy clothes on the bed and the precious stones on the floor. A malicious grin enlivens his face.

BOILEAU

Theodore Blanc, you are under arrest for murder, or should I say 'murders'.

Boileau motions to put the handcuffs on Gaspard. This time, however, Gaspard resists and the other policeman has to step in and help Boileau.

GASPARD

(aloof)

I was acquitted on all counts. You have no right...

Boileau interrupts him.

BOILEAU

A witness, who shall remain anonymous, has come forward and advised us to search these premises. Our witness seems to think we might find something relevant to the most widely discussed case of the year. I presume you've heard of the 'Phantom Killer'?

Boileau searches the room. Gaspard glances at his apartment across the street: the window is dark. The captain picks up Blanc's journal and flips through it. He walks back triumphantly to Gaspard and holds the journal in front of his face.

BOILEAU

How do you explain the fact that your journal contains a list of the exact dates, times and locations not only for the first two murders for which you were tried—and mistakenly acquitted—but also for a dozen other murders still under investigation?

Gaspard looks at the captain scornfully.

GASPARD

I am warning you: your insinuations directed at someone of my rank...

Boileau stares at Gaspard for a moment. Then he bursts into laughter.

BOILEAU

Someone of your rank?!

GASPARD

A Duke. Gaspard De Ronsard.

BOILEAU

I suppose there is no point hiding this from you any more. It was indeed Monsieur De Ronsard who led us to you.

GASPARD

I am Gaspard De Ronsard. The man who ‘led you to me’ is an impostor.

BOILEAU

An interesting story. Nothing the mind of a madman could not produce.

Boileau continues searching the room. At the bottom of the closet he finds a bundle of clothes. He holds them in front of Gaspard: Gaspard is shocked to see a patient’s hospital white robe with the faded initials “TB.”

EXT. PARIS STREETS – DAY

A newspaper boy runs down the street waving a newspaper.

NEWSPAPER BOY

Le Figaro! The latest crime reports! The Phantom Killer arrested!

Gaspard’s impostor stops the boy to buy a paper. When he turns around we finally see his face: he is the same young man Gaspard took to Madame Laure’s brothel, the bookkeeper Gaspard made a bet on.

INT. SALPÊTRIÈRE – PSYCHIATRIC WARD - DAY

Gaspard is sitting alone, staring at the floor. He is wearing the patient outfit with the initials TB.

INT. GASPARD’S APARTMENT - DAY

A point of view shot of the hotel room across the street, now dark.

EXT. SALPÊTRIÈRE

Various day and night shots of the hospital.

INT. SALPÊTRIÈRE - CHARCOT'S OFFICE - DAY

Gaspard sits across from Charcot. Charcot studies his face without saying a word. There is a knock on the door: Charcot's assistant walks in, carrying a small suitcase. He leaves it on the floor next to Gaspard.

CHARCOT

All your belongings are inside, including the two items you requested.

Gaspard opens the suitcase and looks inside: among his personal belongings there is a black notebook, Blanc's journal, and a patient's white robe with the faded initials "TB."

The door opens and Gaspard's impostor walks in: he is dressed in one of the most extravagant suits we have seen Gaspard wear before he moved to the hotel. Gaspard recognizes him as the impostor living in his apartment, but not as the young man he once took to Madame Laure's brothel. The impostor and Charcot shake hands. Charcot introduces the impostor to Gaspard.

CHARCOT (addressing Gaspard)

Monsieur Blanc, meet Monsieur Gaspard de Ronsard.

The impostor extends his hand. Gaspard stares at the hand for a long time. Finally, he shakes it. The impostor sits down across from Gaspard, crosses his legs and takes off his gloves.

CHARCOT

(to Gaspard)

Monsieur Blanc, please wait outside my office.

Without a trace of emotion on his face Gaspard leaves the room.

IMPOSTOR

Does he have any family?

CHARCOT

Both of his parents are dead.

IMPOSTOR

Did he have an occupation of some sort?

CHARCOT

I believe he used to be a bookkeeper before he turned into a criminal. You know how it is with men like him. Once they get a taste of the good life, it's hard to make them give it up.

IMPOSTOR

Perhaps he wouldn't have to.

Charcot raises an eyebrow.

IMPOSTOR (cont.)

I haven't yet told you the reason for my visit. I suppose it's unnecessary to tell you that I find your work absolutely fascinating. As a matter of fact, you've inspired me to design an experiment of my own. You see, I'm wondering if one could 'reform' a criminal type like Monsieur Blanc, the 'Phantom Killer' as I believe you call him, by developing his higher aesthetic inclinations.

Charcot assumes a pedantic, self-important attitude.

CHARCOT

I am sorry but existing protocols do not allow me...

The impostor smiles pleasantly.

IMPOSTOR

Monsieur Charcot, *you* are the head of this ward. *You* make the protocols!

Charcot tries to say something but the impostor interrupts him again. He stands up and approaches Charcot.

IMPOSTOR

I suppose your hospital wouldn't be interested in a fairly substantial donation...for research purposes?

Charcot pretends to be shocked by the proposition.

CHARCOT

Monsieur, if I didn't know better, I would think you were trying to buy my patient!

The impostor is not deceived by Charcot's attempt to sound indignant. Charcot starts sweating.

CHARCOT
(embarrassed)

You realize you are putting me in an awkward position.

The impostor waits patiently.

CHARCOT

How much do you suppose such a, eh, donation would...

IMPOSTOR

10,000 francs.

Charcot takes out a handkerchief and wipes the sweat off his face. He thinks about it. Finally he nods. The impostor extends his right hand.

IMPOSTOR

It's a pleasure doing business with you.

Charcot opens the door and signals to someone outside. His assistant escorts Gaspard back into the room. Charcot walks over to his desk and picks up several sheets of paper. He scribbles down something and gives the papers to the impostor to sign.

CHARCOT

(to Gaspard)

Monsieur Blanc, as you might have guessed you are leaving the ward. Monsieur De Ronsard has been generous enough to offer to be your benefactor...for the time being.

Gaspard steps back from Charcot.

GASPARD

Who are you? Who let you in here?

CHARCOT

You know very well who I am. I am Doctor Charcot. (to the impostor) We've been through this twice this morning.

Gaspard continues walking backwards.

GASPARD

Liar! What have you done with Doctor Charcot?!

Charcot takes the impostor by the arm and walks with him to the opposite side of the room.

CHARCOT

(whispering)

He is quite the performer, isn't he?

IMPOSTOR

What do you mean?

CHARCOT

Some of the criminals I work with become—how should I put it—
'over-invested' in the role of the patient they happen to be
playing.

GASPARD

What kind of patient did he play last?

CHARCOT

It's a new type of paranoia. We still know very little about it. As
in all cases of paranoia the patient believes someone is after him.
But he is convinced his pursuer assumes different identities. He
imagines everyone else except him is an impostor.

IMPOSTOR

How do you treat him?

CHARCOT

How do you run away from a phantom unless you become a
phantom yourself?

They walk back to Gaspard. He has calmed down.

GASPARD (to the impostor)

I know who you are.

The impostor looks at Charcot, then back at Gaspard.

IMPOSTOR

Who am I?

GASPARD

You should know.

CHARCOT (to the impostor)

At least he trusts you.

The impostor walks towards the door. Gaspard observes his every move with suspicion.

INT. VILLA – KITCHEN - DAY

Madame Morel is reading a letter: “I arrive tomorrow. I will be accompanied by Monsieur Blanc, whom I have taken in my care. Monsieur Blanc has no family and no means to support himself. More importantly, he was just released from the hospital. Needless to say, his physical and mental health is quite fragile at the moment. He shall be staying with me for an indefinite period of time. Duke Gaspard De Ronsard.”

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE – DAY

A carriage is travelling through the countryside.

INT. CARRIAGE – SAME

Gaspard and the impostor are sitting across from each other. Gaspard is dressed in Blanc’s clothes. The impostor is wearing Gaspard’s dark blue velvet waistcoat and cream shirt. Gaspard stares at the rolling hills outside.

IMPOSTOR

Are you familiar with the countryside?

Gaspard shakes his head.

IMPOSTOR

It’s good to be leaving that infested city, isn’t it?

Gaspard doesn’t respond. The impostor rearranges the pleats in his coat.

IMPOSTOR

(disgusted)

As far as I am concerned, Paris is done for! The bourgeois are lording it over everyone, counting their money, stuffing themselves out of picnic paper bags.

When he hears these words Gaspard slowly turns away from the window.

IMPOSTOR (cont.)

What do we have in painting now? A deluge of lifeless inanities, that’s what! In literature? Stylistic vapidness and intellectual cowardice!

Gaspard is unnerved to hear the impostor repeat words he himself said once, a long time ago. The carriage stops. Gaspard looks out the window and is shocked to see his villa. Monsieur and Madame Morel are waiting in front of the entrance.

EXT. VILLA – DAY

Monsieur Morel is bringing boxes and cases from the carriage into the house. Gaspard watches him closely, waiting for the servant to acknowledge him. Morel appears not to recognize Gaspard. Gaspard walks over to Madame Morel. She bows and takes his coat.

MADAME MOREL

How was your trip, Monsieur Blanc?

He searches her face for any signs of recognition: nothing.

GASPARD

Long, as usual.

MADAME MOREL

Has Monsieur travelled in these parts before?

GASPARD

I used to come here a lot. How long have you lived here?

MADAME MOREL

We arrived soon after Monsieur De Ronsard moved in.

GASPARD

Working here must be challenging. I imagine the Duke is a difficult man to please.

Madame Morel seems embarrassed by the direct question.

MADAME MOREL

Some might find his tastes eccentric but he is a fair man. If you'll excuse me, Monsieur Blanc, I have to start preparing dinner.

She walks back into the house. Gaspard looks up at what used to be his bedroom window. It seems to him there is a slight movement behind the curtains. Gaspard walks into the house.

INT. VILLA – HALLWAY – DAY

Gaspard stands by the window: outside the impostor is explaining something to Monsieur Morel. He points to Morel's feet. Morel appears embarrassed. The impostor holds up a pair of slippers, exactly like the ones Gaspard once asked his domestics to wear. Morel kneels down and puts on the slippers.

INT. VILLA – SITTING ROOM – EVENING

Gaspard is lying on the sofa, pretending to be asleep. Through his half-closed eyes, he watches the impostor, who is writing at the desk. Madame Morel peeks into the room.

MADAME MOREL

Should I bring a bowl of soup for Monsieur Blanc?

The impostor motions to Madame Morel to come closer. Gaspard watches them through his half-closed eyes.

IMPOSTOR

He will have foie gras. Is there any champagne left in the cellar?

MADAME MOREL

Monsieur, the foie gras will take a long time. The onion soup is ready. If I warm it up a little...

The impostor waves his hand impatiently.

IMPOSTOR

Hunger has nothing to do with it! Right now he is anticipating the meal.

The impostor looks over at Gaspard. Gaspard closes his eyes.

IMPOSTOR (cont.) (O.S.)

He is probably dreaming about it right now, feeling the fatty warmth spill over his whole tongue. Do you want to take away the pleasure he is experiencing right now by filling his stomach with a bowl of soup?! His palate is pure. We cannot imagine what an impression your foie gras will make on someone used to mouldy bread and watered down wine. Soon he'll be able to reach the peak of gastronomic sublimity.

Madame Morel stares at the impostor: clearly, she is not following his reasoning. The impostor stands up abruptly and closes the journal he's been writing in. Gaspard opens his eyes a little.

IMPOSTOR

(to Madame Morel)

For as long as he is staying with us, you will not serve him any meals you've had to 'warm up a little.' Tomorrow you will receive detailed instructions about what kinds of meals you will be preparing for him. Over the next two weeks you will not cook the same meal more than once. You will not serve him any comfort food. And you will certainly not serve him wine made after 1860. Is that clear?

Madame Morel bows and hurries towards the kitchen. The impostor opens the journal and resumes writing.

INT. VILLA – KITCHEN - SAME

Madame Morel is preparing the fois gras. Ondine is helping her.

MADAME MOREL

Sooner or later he'll leave the house. Nobody's going to ask him if he prefers fois gras or duck confit. He'll have to eat bread and onion like the rest of us. He should get used to it now.

MONTAGE SEQUENCE: Madame Morel and Ondine prepare a series of elaborate, exquisite meals. The impostor sits next to Gaspard, explaining the nature of every dish and instructing Gaspard to eat it slowly so he can savour every bite. Madame Morel and Ondine wash piles of dirty plates and cutlery. Monsieur Morel arranges numerous bottles of champagne and wine on the kitchen counter.

IMPOSTOR (O.S.)

He must be exposed to nothing but the most exquisite food, the most beautiful colors, the most subtle aromas and flavours until he reaches a point where his mind begins to admit only highly-refined sensations and sensual torments...

EXT. THE TOWN OF FONTENAY - DAY

Gaspard's carriage stops in front of a building with the sign "TAILOR."

INT. TOWN - TAILOR'S STUDIO - SAME

The impostor, followed by Gaspard, walk around the room, examining different suits and shirts.

IMPOSTOR

Do you have a favourite color? Blue will suit you.

The impostor picks a blue velvet waistcoat, exactly like his own, and holds it in front of Gaspard. The impostor seems pleased with it.

IMPOSTOR

Now, shirts...

The TAILOR shows them some shirts. Gaspard wanders away. He walks around the store, looking at the fancy shirts, jackets, and gloves. He stops in front of a white shirt with long, wide sleeves and a tall collar. He touches the soft fabric.

IMPOSTOR (O.S)

Do you like it?

Gaspard continues to rub the fabric between his fingers.

IMPOSTOR
(to tailor)

We'll take it.

The tailor comes closer. He looks at Gaspard.

TAILOR

It will have to be corrected. The sleeves are too long.

INT. TAILOR'S - DAY

The tailor steps back from Gaspard. The corrections have been done. Gaspard now looks like his former self, an aristocrat. The impostor walks around Gaspard, inspecting every little wrinkle in the fabric. He looks at Gaspard as if he were a beautifully executed painting. He then selects a cravat and ties it around Gaspard's neck. Suddenly, the impostor shudders and his face turns pale. He staggers back.

TAILOR

Monsieur?

The impostor controls himself with an obvious effort.

IMPOSTOR

What do I owe you?

The two of them walk to the back of the room. Gaspard remains standing in front of the mirror, admiring himself. Reflected in the mirror, behind Gaspard, is the impostor paying the tailor for the purchase.

INT. VILLA – DINING ROOM – EVENING

Gaspard and the impostor finish eating dinner. Gaspard secretly observes the impostor: nothing in that man's gestures, actions, and mannerisms betrays that he is not a Duke. Gaspard plays with his empty crystal glass. He holds it up.

GASPARD

It must cost a fortune.

The impostor glances at the glass.

IMPOSTOR

It's beautiful, isn't it?

The impostor stands up from the table and takes his empty glass with him.

IMPOSTOR

I want to show you something. Bring your glass.

He leaves the room. Gaspard follows him but first he examines the silverware on the table, picks up a silver spoon encrusted with precious stones and puts it in his pocket.

INT. VILLA – STUDY - SAME

Monsieur Morel is perched on a stool rearranging the books on the shelves. The impostor shows Gaspard a strange-looking device sitting on top of the side table.

IMPOSTOR

It makes music for the palate. The taste of each liquor corresponds to the sound of an instrument. I call it a mouth organ.

The impostor starts mixing a drink. Gaspard observes him with suspicion.

GASPARD

(seemingly casual)

It must be wonderful to sit here on a gloomy winter evening, composing cavatinas and quadrilles.

The impostor's face twists in disgust.

IMPOSTOR

You mean those contemptible Italian cavatinas and quadrilles played by a full orchestra and sung by second-rate actors? No, no. The only music worth listening to is the monastic music of the Middle Ages. But you can't even hear it any more.

The impostor holds up two slender eprouvettes and carefully pours the contents of one into the other. Gaspard stares at the impostor's gold cufflinks.

IMPOSTOR (cont.)

Secular music is a promiscuous art. To enjoy it you have to mix with all those vulgar men that go to the Cirque d'Hiver. I made the mistake of going there once. All I could make out was a man who looked like a carpenter, beating the air like he was whisking mayonnaise and butchering pieces from Wagner, and all this to the immense delight of everyone present.

The impostor starts preparing the second drink.

GASPARD

Crème de menthe must be the clarinet and whiskey the trumpet.

The impostor shakes his head and smiles.

IMPOSTOR (cont.)

I see you don't drink. Crème de menthe is obviously the flute: both sugary and peppery, whiny and sweet. Dry curacao is the clarinet: tart and velvety. Whisky takes the roof off your mouth like the trombone. Raki and masticha ouzo are the cymbals and drums.

The impostor offers Gaspard one of the drinks. Gaspard drinks it bottoms up. The impostor tries to stop him but it's too late.

IMPOSTOR

No, you need to savour it!

He shows Gaspard how to do it.

GASPARD

This way you don't really feel it.

IMPOSTOR

On the contrary: only this way you really feel it.

The impostor points at the bookshelves.

IMPOSTOR

This is where I feel most at home. [to Morel] No, no, Verlaine and Mallarme go on the upper shelf. I told you not to shelve them too tightly. Balzac goes on the first shelf on the left.

Gaspard pulls out Balzac's *La Cousine Bette* from the shelf.

GASPARD

There is no one like Balzac.

The impostor waves his hand dismissively.

IMPOSTOR

Passion. Avarice. Ambition. Jealousy. Senile lust. Yes, he is the master when it comes to the healthy vices. But he has no conception of morbid depravity. If you want to feel the aberrations

and diseases of the mind, the hot fevers of lust, the decay of feeling, the resentment, the skilful self-deception—read Verlaine or Baudlaire.

The impostor pulls out a volume of Verlaine’s poetry and flips through it.

IMPOSTOR

Here is someone who captures the most highly-strung sensibilities, the caprices of the most morbid psychologies, in the most depraved style.

Morel steps off the stool and takes in all the shelves with a single glance. The impostor dismisses him and pulls out a little volume of Baudlaire’s poems. He gives it to Gaspard.

IMPOSTOR

Soft, isn’t it? On the inside it’s lined with genuine sow skin.

GASPARD

How much does it cost?

IMPOSTOR

I never bothered to ask. I have no intention of selling my books.

As the impostor talks about Verlaine and Baudlaire he grows exceedingly agitated. At first Gaspard listens to him but gradually he is distracted by the beautiful furniture in the room. He walks around the room, admiring, and touching, the plush sofa, the heavy oriental carpet, and the crystal chandeliers.

IMPOSTOR (cont.) (O.S.)

People are not ready for Baudlaire. They are still obsessed with the ‘French classics.’ It’s become a hobby: the ‘broad humour’ of Rabelais, the “enduring comedy” of Moliere, et cetera. That kind of clownish buffoonery belongs at the country fair. Diderot, Voltaire, Rousseau! Their inane moralising makes me sick! I need more ‘music’.

Gaspard walks over to the mouth organ and begins mixing a drink.

IMPOSTOR (O.S.)

You seem to be a natural already.

Gaspard doesn’t turn back. The impostor walks unsteadily toward the sofa and lies down, out of breath.

INT. VILLA – DRESSING ROOM - DAY

Gaspard and the impostor stand in front of shelves lined up with bottles of all sizes and shapes. The impostor picks up one bottle and brings it to his nose. He inhales deeply. Gaspard does the same but immediately starts coughing. The impostor selects a few vaporizers and sprays them into the room.

GASPARD

They all smell the same.

IMPOSTOR

Without prior instruction no one can distinguish a bouquet created by a real artist from a potpourri fabricated by some industrial manufacturer to be sold in grocery shops and cheap bazaars.

The impostor puts the bottle back on the shelf and picks up another one.

GASPARD

Do you use flowers from the garden?

The impostor laughs. Gaspard looks at him with resentment. The impostor doesn't notice.

IMPOSTOR

Perfumes are never produced from the flowers after which they are named. If you borrow only natural elements, you'll produce nothing but a bastard work lacking authenticity and style.

The impostor sprays other vaporizers in the room and invites Gaspard to smell the air.

IMPOSTOR

The essence obtained by the distillation of flowers offers only a distant and very imprecise analogy to the actual aroma of the living flower when it disperses its effusions in the open air. Jasmine is the only exception: there are no fakes, counterfeits or approximations. All other flowers can be imitated through a combination of alcohols and spirits.

GASPARD

You must waste a lot of time trying to determine the right combination.

The impostor uncorks several little bottles, pours the liquid in special measuring cups, and mixes them in precise proportions.

IMPOSTOR

To decipher the language of flowers, you must first master its grammar. (He holds a measuring cup under Gaspard's nose) Smell this.

GASPARD

What is it?

IMPOSTOR

The vintner can recognize a particular vineyard from the smell of a single drop of wine. It's sweet pea with a touch of jasmine.

Gaspard takes the cup from the impostor but suddenly drops it: it spills all over his hands and clothes.

IMPOSTOR

Word of advice: stay away from women. There is something about jasmine: they are wild about it.

INT. VILLA – KITCHEN - DAY

Ondine is doing the dishes. Gaspard walks past the kitchen. He comes back and stands by the door. Ondine does not notice him. Several unruly strands of her sleek dark hair have come loose under her bonnet. She is wearing a dress with deep décollette. Gaspard watches her, his face flushed with desire. At that moment the impostor appears from behind Ondine: he locks eyes with Gaspard.

INT. MADAME LAURE'S BROTHEL – EVENING

Madame Laure is reading a letter. The last sentence reads: "I hope to find your best girl at my door by the end of the week. Gaspard De Ronsard."

INT. VILLA – HALLWAY – EVENING

The door bell rings. Madame Morel opens the door. Blanche walks in. She is wearing a hat decorated with green feathers.

INT. VILLA – SITTING ROOM - EVENING

Gaspard sits at his desk, smoking. Blanche walks around the room, swaying her hips suggestively. Gaspard is preparing himself a drink.

BLANCHE

It must get pretty lonely around here.

IMPOSTOR

I've lived here long enough. (he nods at Gaspard) Monsieur Blanc is still trying to adjust.

Blanche glances at Gaspard. She finally understands.

BLANCHE

Perhaps I could be of help...

She turns toward Gaspard but the impostor motions to her to follow him outside.

INT. VILLA – STUDY - SAME

The door to the study is slightly ajar. Gaspard listens in on the conversation. The impostor unlocks one of the drawers, takes out a sheet of paper and hands it to Blanche.

IMPOSTOR

I've described in great detail what I want you to do.

BLANCHE

What's this?

IMPOSTOR

A script.

She looks at him, confused.

IMPOSTOR

You begin with some preliminaries, then the pace quickens until you hit a plateau, where you stay for a while, before you proceed to the next series of increasingly stimulating exchanges. They are all listed here, in the order in which they should happen.

BLANCHE

What if he wants something not on the list?

IMPOSTOR

You refuse and stick to the script. Is there a problem?

Blanche looks down at the sheet of paper, then back at him.

BLANCHE

I can't read.

INT. VILLA – SITTING ROOM - EVENING

Blanche appears at the door. Gaspard is sitting on the sofa. He looks up at her. She smiles and walks over to a large mirror on the opposite wall. She stands in front of the mirror, with her back toward Gaspard. In the mirror their eyes lock. Blanche takes off her large hat decorated with

green feathers. She places it on a chair nearby. She begins to undress. He reaches out to touch her but she points to her reflection in the mirror.

BLANCHE

Just watch.

Gaspard shifts his attention to her reflection in the mirror. He responds to her looks directed both at her own reflection and at his reflection. She turns around and starts walking very slowly toward him, swaying her hips and playing with her hair. Gaspard continues to look only at her reflection in the mirror. When she reaches the sofa, she lifts up her leg and puts it on the edge of the sofa. At that moment, Gaspard's gaze shifts from the mirror to the woman. He looks her straight in the eyes and places his hand on her thigh. She gives in.

His shirt gets caught in something: her turquoise earring. Gaspard takes it off and looks at it. He motions to take off the other one as well but notices that it's missing.

BLANCHE

I lost it.

She holds his face in his hands and looks at him carefully.

BLANCHE

You look familiar.

He ignores her and starts kissing her.

BLANCHE

I don't know...Must have been a long time ago...

GASPARD

I'd have remembered you.

She continues searching his face.

BLANCHE

Perhaps you were younger...

GASPARD

(annoyed)

You're mistaken.

BLANCHE

Do you know rue de Ronsard in Paris?

He pushes her away from him and walks over to the window, turning his back to her. Surprised by his reaction she walks over to him and caresses him.

BLANCHE

It must have been someone else.

He resists her embraces for a while but finally gives in.

INT. VILLA – STUDY HALLWAY - EVENING

Gaspard stands outside the half-open door, listening in.

IMPOSTOR (O.S.)

I specifically asked you to let him fantasize and not to let him touch you.

BLANCHE (O.S.)

Why?

IMPOSTOR (O.S.)

Any girl could have done what you just did. I thought you could give him something more. Apparently, I was mistaken.

BLANCHE (O.S.)

He reminds me of someone.

There is a pause. Gaspard peers through the door opening. Gaspard pays Blanche. She counts the money.

BLANCHE

I can come back...

IMPOSTOR

(aloof)

That won't be necessary.

Blanche leaves. Once she is outside, Gaspard emerges from behind the door. He watches her walk away.

INT. VILLA – IMPOSTOR'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A hand pushes open the door to the bedroom: Gaspard stands in the doorway, watching the impostor sleep. On a chair next to the bed lies the coat the impostor was wearing the day before:

an extravagant coat we remember Gaspard wearing when he lived in the villa by himself. Gaspard walks into the room and picks up the coat.

INT. VILLA - SITTING ROOM – SAME

Wearing what used to be his own coat Gaspard wanders around the room, touching various objects. He stops before the bookcase and pulls out different books at random. A notebook hidden behind the books falls on the floor: we recognize it as the same journal Gaspard found earlier when he broke into his own Paris apartment looking for money. He opens it to one of the last entries: “The girl is rather simple-looking. I told her she is to consult with me about the kinds of clothes she wears while performing her duties. This change in dress code did little to reign in his basest desires. It was then that I had the idea of bringing in Blanche to work on his erotic imagination without appealing directly to his base carnal desires. Alas, her egregious deviation from the script I provided her with...”

Gaspard flips back to the beginning of the journal: “The bet is on. The man was chosen randomly. He is the perfect embodiment of everything I find despicable and pathetic in men of his social class. He will go to any lengths—steal, even kill—to roll on that sofa again.” Gaspard reads the sentence again.

He walks over to the sofa and sits down. He opens the journal to another random page: “I am simply training a murderer...” He flips to another page: “What happens when a man finally realizes he is who he thinks he is pretending to be...” Gaspard stares at the words. He closes the journal and returns it to its place. Suddenly he catches his reflection in the mirror and quickly turns around as if the reflection was that of someone spying on him from behind.

INT. VILLA – GASPARD’S BEDROOM – SAME

Gaspard is sitting on his bed, completely still. He bends down and pulls a small suitcase from under the bed. We recognize it as the suitcase he had on him when he was released from the hospital. He turns it upside down. There is something shiny on top of one of the shirts. He picks it up slowly: an earring, exactly like the one Blanche was wearing. He stares at it incomprehensibly.

INT. MADAME LAUREL’S BROTHEL – PRIVATE ROOM - EVENING – FLASHBACK

Blanche is having sex with a young man. We don’t see the man’s face. Blanche rolls over to the edge of the bed. Something shiny falls on the floor: her earring. Only now we see the man: it’s Theo. His suit lies folded on a chair beside the bed. Pressing her body against his, Blanche closes her eyes and whispers in his ear.

BLANCHE

Theo...

INT. VILLA – GASPARD’S BEDROOM – PRESENT

Gaspard stares at the earring. He stands up and walks over to the mirror. He stands there for a long time, his head bent down. Finally, he slowly lifts up his head and looks at himself in the mirror: in the mirror he, and we, see Theo's reflection. Gaspard IS Theo.

INT. VILLA – IMPOSTOR'S BEDROOM - SAME

Theo stands still at the door, staring at the man sleeping in the bed, his back towards Theo. Theo's POV: The man rolls around on his other side, now facing Theo. The man in bed IS Gaspard. Theo clenches his jaw but his face remains expressionless. He turns around and walks down the hallway.

EXT. VILLA – GARDEN – DAY

Gaspard and Theo walk through the garden. Gaspard looks unnaturally pale. They stop beside a bush: here the ground is uneven. Theo stares at Gaspard. Gaspard notices.

GASPARD

You are looking at me as if you've never seen me before.

Theo shakes his head.

THEO

I was thinking about someone else. (pointing to the ground) What is it?

GASPARD

One of my experiments. I am afraid it ended in failure...

Gaspard sweeps the hair out of his face. His fingers are trembling. His lips are turning blue. Theo watches him closely.

THEO

Are you cold?

GASPARD

No. Are you cold?

THEO

Your fingers.

Gaspard looks down at his hands. He is surprised to see they are trembling. His fingernails are blue.

GASPARD

I don't feel anything.

Gaspard walks toward the house. Theo waits for him to disappear from view. He falls on his knees and starts digging. He gets to one end of the tortoise shell and tries to break off the tiny precious stones.

INT. VILLA – SITTING ROOM - DAY

Ondine is washing the windows. Her dress is buttoned all the way up to her chin.

THEO (O.S.)

Ondine.

Startled, Ondine turns around. She bows.

THEO

Sounds like the name of a perfume.

ONDINE

I wouldn't know, Monsieur.

THEO

You don't use perfume?

ONDINE
(blushing)

No, I never...

THEO

Come here. Don't be shy.

Ondine approaches him. Theo starts mixing a perfume.

THEO

Did you know that perfumes are never produced from the flowers after which they are named?

He enjoys the look of surprise and credulity on her face.

THEO

Yes, it's a common misconception. You see, the essence obtained by the distillation of flowers offers only a distant and very imprecise analogy to the actual aroma of the living flower when it disperses its effusions in the open air. All flowers can be faked through a combination of alcohols and spirits.

He picks up a little bottle and pours most of it in Ondine's hands. Then he rubs it into her arms and neck. Ondine sneezes.

THEO

To decipher the language of flowers, you must first master its grammar.

She looks up at him in awe.

INT. VILLA – DINING ROOM – EVENING

Gaspard and Theo are having dinner. Theo puts down his knife and fork. Ondine stands by the side of the table, waiting for orders.

THEO

The lamb is undercooked.

GASPARD

You've had the exact same dish, prepared in the exact same way, dozens of time, and now all of a sudden it's inedible?

THEO

It's not all of a sudden. I didn't want to say anything but I couldn't help noticing that the quality of the meals has significantly deteriorated in the last several weeks. The sauces are not as light as they used to be, the meat is often undercooked, the pudding is bland...Why are you smiling?

GASPARD

I thought it would take a lot longer for you to appreciate the subtleties of haute cuisine, given your previous diet. I suppose I should have known that once you got to that point it would take very little for anything to disappoint you. That reminds me: did you enjoy Blanche?

THEO

I'd have preferred to go to a brothel in Paris.

Gaspard laughs, a short, hysterical laugh that stops as abruptly as it started. He pushes aside his plate, still full, stands up and walks around the room. He appears restless and anxious. Theo observes him carefully.

GASPARD

Paris is dead. Brothels are disappearing. As soon as a brothel closes, a cheap cafe opens in its place. Now when a man feel his sap rising he can't bring himself to go in, consummate, pay and leave. He thinks that's bestial, like a dog mounting a bitch. It's all about vanity.

Gaspard circles around Ondine, looking her up and down as if he is trying to determine her price.

GASPARD (cont.)

But wooing a brasserie girl is completely different. Men can have arguments over a girl like that and the one she agrees to go out with can imagine he has won her from his rivals. The truth is these serving girls are as stupid, self-seeking, degraded and gluttonous as any girl you find in a brothel. They all drink without being thirsty, laugh without being amused, insult each other and pull each other's hair for no reason.

Ondine starts clearing the table. Theo looks at Gaspard and then at Ondine: his look is conspiratorial, as if he wants her to think the two of them know something Gaspard doesn't. Gaspard continues rambling.

GASPARD (cont.)

Men are such idiots! The money they spend on numerous drinks—which, of course, the landlady has priced in advance—the repeated delays designed to encourage more drinks and more tips. Apparently the sum total of human wisdom nowadays consists in dragging things out interminably, in saying 'no' before finally saying 'yes'. The truth is, very few men have discovered the secret.

THEO

The secret?

Gaspard slides his finger over the rim of his wine glass, producing a beautiful sound that echoes in the big dining room.

GASPARD

The most exquisite sensual pleasure, which is, of course, inevitably, a kind of sensual torment, does not come from the immediate gratification of natural carnal desires.

Exhausted, Gaspard falls back in his chair and closes his eyes. Ondine continues clearing the table.

THEO (whispering)

I apologize. I am afraid Monsieur is slightly intoxicated.

Embarrassed, Ondine looks away. Theo steps up closer to her.

THEO

Frankly, I never expected a man of his rank would be that vulgar.

He smiles at her. She blushes and turns around. When she can no longer see him, he freely examines the seductive curves of her body. Theo sits down. Gaspard opens his eyes: he tries to pour wine into Theo's glass but his hand is shaking. Determined, he tries to refill the glass but spills even more wine. Theo takes the glass from his hand: there is only a bit of wine in it. He motions to Ondine.

THEO

Take this to the kitchen and wash it. Then bring it back.

Gaspard observes him with curiosity. Ondine takes the glass and leaves.

GASPARD

You will never learn to tell one wine from another if you don't try your luck with the most complex aromas.

THEO

This is exactly what I intend to do.

Ondine comes back. Theo takes the clean, empty glass from her hands and raises it to his nose. Gaspard waves his hand.

GASPARD

The only smell left in there is the smell of soap.

Theo ignores him. He inhales once, then a second time.

THEO

Wild berry and vanilla oak aromas. Subdued earthly tones with soft ripe sweetness.

Theo passes the glass to Gaspard, who raises it to his nose. Theo watches him closely. Gaspard inhales once. He puts the glass on the table.

GASPARD

All I smell is jasmine. (to Ondine) Did you break one of the perfume bottles I left in the study?

Embarrassed, Ondine looks down.

THEO

It's not jasmine.

GASPARD

(annoyed)

I know what jasmine smells like.

Theo leaves the room. When he comes back, he is holding a broken perfume bottle, which he places in front of Gaspard. The label reads "Lilies." Gaspard opens the bottle and smells it. He regains his composure.

GASPARD

You are right. I was working with jasmine all day: now everything smells like it.

INT. VILLA – DINING ROOM - EVENING

Gaspard stares at the food, unable to bring himself to taste it. Theo lifts the fork to his mouth and slowly swallows a piece of pudding.

THEO

That new Indian spice complements the rosemary perfectly.

GASPARD

There is no Indian spice. I told Madame Morel not to put it in.

Gaspard cuts a tiny piece of pudding and puts it in his mouth. He chews automatically, like someone who eats because he has to, not because he enjoys it. Madame Morel comes in with another bottle of wine.

GASPARD

Madame Morel, you didn't use that Indian spice, did you?

Madame Morel's face turns red.

MADAME MOREL

Monsieur, I forgot! I put it in.

THEO

You are lucky the Duke can't tell the difference.

Madame Morel appears confused. Gaspard dismisses her with a wave of his hand.

GASPARD

That'll be all Madame Morel.

Madame Morel leaves. They eat in silence. Out of the corner of his eye, Theo sees Gaspard watching him.

INT. VILLA – DRESSING ROOM - SAME

Gaspard stands in front of the shelves lined up with bottles of all sizes and shapes. He picks up one bottle and brings it to his nose. He desperately inhales and exhales but he doesn't smell anything. Suddenly he becomes aware of Theo's presence: he is standing at the door, observing Gaspard. Gaspard pretends to be relaxed and casually signals him to come closer.

GASPARD

What do you think of this one?

Gaspard lets Theo smell his palm.

THEO

It's a bit too strong. The rose extract is too much. It should be three fifths, not three fourths.

Gaspard smells his palm.

GASPARD

That's what I thought too. Will you fix us some drinks?

Theo turns around.

GASPARD

I forgot to tell you. I have to go to Paris for a few days. Will you be fine here on your own?

Theo doesn't turn back.

THEO

I am sure I can find ways to amuse myself.

INT. VILLA – GASPARD'S BEDROOM - DAY

The door is slightly open. Theo stands in front of the mirror dressed in what we recognize as one of Gaspard's suits. He tries to take off his leather gloves but he can't. Frustrated, he rings the bell. Madame Morel appears at the door.

THEO

These gloves won't come off.

Madame Morel looks around the room: Gaspard's clothes are thrown around the room every each way.

THEO

I don't understand why they suddenly feel so tight.

MADAME MOREL

Are you sure they are your gloves, Monsieur?

The door bell rings. Theo slips past Madame Morel and runs down the stairs.

INT. VILLA – STAIRCASE - DAY

Standing at the door is a woman in her 60s. When she sees Theo, she lifts her hand to her mouth and her eyes become teary. She is MADAME RENAULT.

MADAME RENAULT

My dear Gaspard, is it really you?

Theo hesitates.

THEO

(smiling awkwardly)

This is embarrassing...

MADAME RENAULT

No need to be embarrassed. After all, you were only sixteen when I last saw you.

THEO

Of course, I remember now, Madame...

MADAME RENAULT

Renault.

The two of them walk into the sitting room.

INT. VILLA – SITTING ROOM - DAY

Madame Renault is sitting on the sofa. Madame Morel pours the tea. A phonograph on the table is playing Handel. Theo walks around the room cutting the air with his hands. He talks with an aloof, superfine air.

THEO

There's nothing better than listening to Handel on Sunday. I mean, how many times can you reread Balzac? All that robust artistry! Don't you find it insufferable?

MADAME RENAULT

(obsequiously)

Your mother always said you had the soul of an artist. Even as a child.

Theo looks out the window: a carriage pulls up in front of the villa. He frowns. Moments later the door opens and Gaspard walks into the room.

THEO

You didn't tell me you were coming back today.

GASPARD

Madame, what a pleasant surprise. I hope Monsieur Blanc was keeping you company.

Confused, Madame Renault looks at Theo, then back at Gaspard.

MADAME RENAULT

Gaspard and I were just reminiscing about the old times...

Gaspard looks at Theo. Theo ignores him.

MADAME RENAULT (cont.)

He used to be a very quiet boy. I saw him a few times when he was home from the seminary. He would always carry a book with him. Sometimes he would disappear for hours, day-dreaming.

Gaspard sits on the sofa and crosses his legs.

GASPARD (to Theo)

You never told me about your parents. What does your father do?

THEO

(awkward)

We've grown apart over the last several years.

MADAME RENAULT

I thought your father passed away years ago, soon after your mother.

Gaspard raises his hands and starts applauding. Madame Renault appears even more confused. Theo looks at Gaspard with resentment.

GASPARD

Madame Renault, my dear friend and I have gotten into the habit of playing a little game with our guests: he pretends to be me, which naturally forces me to pretend to be him. I've told him so many times we can't fool anyone, but he insists.

MADAME RENAULT

(to Theo)

You are not Gaspard?

GASPARD

(to Madame Renault)

I am pleased to introduce to you Monsieur Blanc.

Madame Renault stares at Theo.

MADAME RENAULT

You look exactly like your...his...mother.

INT. VILLA – BATHROOM – EVENING

Gaspard sits on the edge of the tub, wearing a bath robe. There is a knock on the door.

GASPARD

What took you so long?

Madame Morel opens the door. She is carrying a tray with a cocktail glass. When she sees Gaspard she gasps.

MADAME MOREL

Monsieur!

GASPARD

(annoyed)

What is it now?

Gaspard stands up and looks at himself in the mirror: his face is almost white, his lips and fingernails blue. His eyes are burning feverishly bright. Madame Morel touches the water in the bathtub.

MADAME MOREL

It's freezing!

Madame Morel touches his hand.

MADAME MOREL

Monsieur, you are cold as ice!

She rushes out of the bathroom. Gaspard touches different parts of his body: he presses, squeezes, and twists the skin but he feels nothing. He picks up a pair of scissors, extends his arm and tries to cut it above the elbow. Madame Morel returns. Shocked at the sight of the bloody scissors, she grabs them from his hands.

MADAME MOREL

Monsieur! What are you doing?!

Ondine appears in the doorway.

ONDINE

Monsieur Blanc is not feeling well. His stomach is upset. He says it's the parsley in the rabbit stew.

MADAME MOREL

(distracted)

He never complained before.

ONDINE

He wants to know if you got the parsley from the market as usual.

MADAME MOREL

(to Gaspard)

I didn't have time to go to the market. I got it from the garden. Who can tell the difference anyway? It's parsley! (to Ondine)
Bring me hot water! And blankets!

Madame Morel starts covering Gaspard with all the towels she can find in the bathroom.

EXT. THE WOODS OUTSIDE THE VILLA - EVENING

Theo walks unsteadily through the woods. He leans against a tree and vomits. He looks back at the villa discreetly: Gaspard stands behind one of the windows, watching him. Then he disappears behind the curtains.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE OUTSIDE THE VILLA – SUMMER- DAY

TITLE: SEVERAL MONTHS LATER

It's an especially hot day. A fiery dust rises from the charred roads. The grass has turned yellow.

INT. VILLA – DINING ROOM - DAY

Half-naked Gaspard stands in front of the window, breathing heavily. He closes the window and stumbles back to the table. He lies back exhausted in his chair, his arms falling inertly by his side. His shirt is sticking to his back. The sight of the meat on the table makes him sick. He walks over to a chest. Inside several different kinds of fur lie folded on top of each other.

INT. VILLA – GASPARD'S BEDROOM - DAY

Gaspard sits in a sleigh in the middle of the bedroom. He is wrapped up in furs pulled up to his chest. He is shivering and covered in sweat.

GASPARD

This wind is glacial! It's freezing here! Freezing!

He throws off the furs, grabs some ice cubes from the tray, lies on his bed, and stares at the ceiling. His bedroom door is slightly ajar. He does not see Theo and the three domestics watching him from the hallway.

MADAME MOREL

(whispering)

Dear God!

Theo looks over at her and smiles to himself.

INT. VILLA – GASPARD'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Theo opens the door. Gaspard is sleeping in the sleigh. He is covered with furs. Theo tip toes through the room, pressing a small bag to his chest. He opens the closet, takes something out the bag and hides it at the bottom of the closet.

INT. VILLA – SITTING ROOM - EVENING

The impostor stands by the window, smoking. Doctor Gautier rushes into the room.

DOCTOR GAUTIER

I came as soon as I could. Where is Monsieur De Ronsard?

THEO

That's exactly what I would like to discuss with you.

Gautier extends his hand.

GAUTIER

I don't think I have the pleasure. Doctor Gautier. And you are?

THEO

I want to show you something. Please follow me.

Puzzled, Gautier follows Theo out of the room.

INT. VILLA – GASPARD'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Theo opens the door and steps aside. Gautier steps forward. Gaspard is still sleeping in the sleigh, covered with furs. Stunned, Gautier stares at him.

GAUTIER

Is this some kind of joke?

THEO

Do you know him?

GAUTIER

What kind of a silly question is this? I've been his family doctor for years. Why is he covered with furs in this heat?!

Theo motions to Gautier to follow him downstairs.

INT. VILLA – SITTING ROOM - EVENING

Theo lights a cigarette and offers Gautier a drink. Still stunned by what he has just seen, Gautier accepts.

THEO

What would you say if I told you that the man you just saw is not who he claims to be?

GAUTIER

I would say you are out of your mind.

THEO

And how would you characterize the mental state of a man sleeping in a sleigh, wrapped up in furs, on a hot August evening?

GAUTIER

Monsieur De Ronsard has always led what some might consider an eccentric life but this in no way suggests that...

THEO

How long have you been his family doctor?

Gautier is surprised by the question.

GAUTIER

I don't know. A long time. His father, Duke de Ronsard...

THEO

He *told* you his father was Duke de Ronsard?

GAUTIER

I had heard the name of course. The Duke was a highly respected man in Paris.

THEO

But you never met his father. Just as you never met his son before he moved here.

Theo draws closer to Gautier and lowers his voice.

THEO

You cannot imagine the things this man has been involved in. Ask the domestics. They'll tell you about the time when he bought a live tortoise and encrusted its shell with precious stones. The poor creature died the next day. Or the time when he got into a big argument with a gardener, who was impudent enough to sell him artificial plants that looked natural when what he wanted were natural plants that looked artificial. A few days ago, when Morel told him the beams in the shed should be replaced before someone gets hurt, he laughed at him and told him he'd never take advice from someone who is "not even real." Clearly the man is deranged! He believes he is a Duke!

GAUTIER

That's enough, Monsieur. What gives you the authority to claim that a man I know, quite well, is an impostor?

THEO

There is only one condition under which I could claim, with absolute authority, that the man upstairs is an impostor.

Gautier stares at him. Gradually he realizes what Theo is suggesting.

GAUTIER

But this is absurd!

THEO

When my father, of whom you just said you've heard a lot, died, I moved to Paris. I had already developed a strong interest in the new sciences of mind, particularly with the work of a colleague of yours, Doctor Charcot. I wondered what would happen if a delusional man was allowed to live out for real, in the greatest possible detail, the specific delusion his brain had created.

Theo lights a cigarette and starts walking around the room. Gautier, sceptical at first, now listens to the story as though it's not just a story.

THEO (cont.)

Thanks to my father's connections I was able to secure an appropriate subject for my experiment, a criminal—he had committed several murders—who believed himself a Duke. His delusional belief system was quite elaborate. I arranged for him to be released from the asylum, where he was awaiting sentence for the murders. I brought him here. I wanted to see how long his delusional system would continue to function before it implodes. To raise the stakes even higher, I decided to take his place and pass myself off as him.

GAUTIER

Why should I believe you?

THEO

Because you are not sure that I *sound* more like a madman than the man in the upstairs *looks* like one.

GAUTIER

You ask me to believe you? You ask me to believe a man who voluntarily assumed the identity of a madman, supposedly to demonstrate that a delusion remains a delusion even if it is given the chance to become real? Monsieur, you spent a significant amount of time in the madhouse. Successfully feigning insanity under close medical supervision is no slight achievement. Who is to say that in all these years of feigned insanity nature didn't lend some assistance to art?

THEO

The man in the other room is a chameleon of the highest calibre. Inimitable at imitation! But if you insist on empirical proof, so be it.

Theo puts out his cigarette and motions to Gautier to follow him.

INT. GASPARD'S BEDROOM - EVENING

Theo and Gautier walk into the room. Gaspard is still sleeping. Theo opens the closet and points to something at the bottom. Gautier bends down and retrieves Blanc's black journal and the white robe with the initials "TB."

EXT. VILLA – ENTRANCE - EVENING

Gaspard, escorted by TWO DOCTORS in white coats, gets into the carriage. The carriage starts moving. Gaspard pulls the curtain aside and looks back at the villa as it recedes in the distance.

INT. CARRIAGE – FLASHBACK

Gaspard looks back at the Jesuit seminary as it recedes in the distance.

INT. CARRIAGE – SECOND FLASHBACK

Gaspard looks back at his family estate, Chateau de Lourps, as it recedes in the distance.

INT. VILLA – GASPARD’S BEDROOM - PRESENT

Theo stands by the window. He watches Gaspard’s carriage recede in the distance until the darkness engulfs it.

INT. ASSIZE COURT – DAY

The courtroom is empty, except for Theo, Gaspard, the judge, the prosecutor, the defence attorney, captain Boileau and the jury. The judge stares at Gaspard.

JUDGE

I believe we all know the defendant.

The prosecutor stands up.

PROSECUTOR

Your Honour, new facts have come to light. It is my intention to prove that the defendant is, in fact, guilty of all the crimes he confessed to, as well as to some others he has not yet confessed to. It appears now that during the earlier trials we have all been the unwitting victims of the defendant’s elaborate delusional system of belief, which has the curious power of devouring anything outside it—including the values we hold in the highest esteem, truth and justice—and making it function as part of the system. I call to the stand Doctor Girard.

Doctor Girard addresses the jury.

DOCTOR GIRARD

It is a scientific fact that there is a strong correlation between sensitivity to pain and insanity. The discriminative faculty of idiots is curiously low: they hardly distinguish between heat and cold, and their sense of pain is so obtuse that some of the more idiotic seem hardly to know what it is. In their dull lives, such pain as can be excited in them may literally be accepted with a welcome surprise. Please bear with me while I carry out a simple test.

Gaspard is escorted to the middle of the room. He doesn't resist. Girard places two containers filled with water on Gaspard's either side.

DOCTOR GIRARD

The water in the left container is boiling hot and that in the other is freezing cold.

Girard submerges Gaspard's hand in one of them. Gaspard does not react. Girard submerges his other hand in the other container. He then takes out a needle and pricks Gaspard's arm. Again, no reaction.

DOCTOR GIRARD

When the defendant was brought to the hospital, I noticed a large scar above his elbow. His servants recalled an incident when he accidentally burned himself. Apparently, liking the keenness of the new sensation, he took the next opportunity of repeating the experience but he overdid it. Monsieur De Ronsard (points to Theo) was able to recall multiple occasions when the defendant inflicted pain on himself in a vain attempt to restore his sensitivity and, by extension, his sanity.

The prosecutor signals to Gaspard to stand up and roll up his sleeves so everyone can see the scars.

DOCTOR GIRARD (cont.)

By contrast, Monsieur Gaspard De Ronsard (points to Theo) exhibits an exceptional sensitivity to very slight variations in taste, sound, light, as the domestics can testify. I shall refrain from conducting a parallel test for fear of subjecting the Duke to unnecessary pain.

INT. SALPÊTRIÈRE – PSYCHIATRIC WARD - DAY

Gaspard lies on the ground. Across from him another patient, GORIN, an old man, observes Gaspard with suspicion. He stands up and approaches Gaspard but then remembers something and covers his mouth with his hand. He sniffs his own clothes, raises his arms and smells his armpits, his face twisting in disgust.

GORIN

God, it's awful!

GASPARD

I don't smell anything.

GORIN

I know I smell like compost. My hair smells like rotten eggs.
Look, I am infested with insects!

Gorin shoves his greasy hair under Gaspard's nose. Gaspard turns away.

GASPARD

I don't see anything.

Gorin withdraws, scratching his head and looking at Gaspard suspiciously.

GASPARD

Except for the cockroaches.

Surprised to have his delusion confirmed, Gorin relaxes.

GORIN

It sure is nice to have company. The last time I had someone to talk to was over a year ago. He wasn't the talkative type. What the hell was his name...Blanc...Theo Blanc. A bookkeeper, I think. Kept telling everyone some 'phantom pursuer' was after him.

Gaspard slowly lifts up his head.

GASPARD

What was he in for?

GORIN

Stealing, murder, you name it. But those were not his only problems if you know what I mean.

Gorin points to his head.

GASPARD

What happened to him?

GORIN

Ran away. I heard he was passing himself off as insane—which, of course, he is—and getting paid for it. And you know what's funny? He accused everyone else of being an impostor but if there was one thing that kid was good at, it was being someone else. A real actor, that one!

GASPARD

Who was the phantom that was always after him?

GORIN

Who knows! He kept saying one day he was going to find him and take his revenge on him. The kid was clearly delusional. There never was such a man. He invented him. So what are you here for?

GASPARD

Murder.

GORIN

(grinning)

In that case, I'll have the pleasure of your company for a while.

INT. LA SALPÊTRIÈRE – PSYCHIATRIC WARD - DAY

Gaspard is looking at the patch of grey sky visible through the little window in the wall. DOCTOR BOUJOLAIS and Theo walk down the hallway. Theo is dressed very elegantly: he is wearing one of Gaspard's suits. They stop in front of Gaspard's cell. Gaspard looks up at Theo. Theo pretends not to recognize him.

THEO

What's wrong with this one?

BOUJOLAIS

We call it *le délire de négation*. It starts with sadness, depression, self-absorption, self-loathing, et cetera. In rare cases it can escalate to the ultimate negation.

THEO

The ultimate negation?

BOUJOLAIS

The patient denies his own existence.

Theo looks at Gaspard for a long time, studying him as if he were a curious specimen. He and Boujolais continue on their way.

After a while Doctor Boujolais comes back. He motions to Gaspard to come to the door and slips a sheet of paper and a little bottle through the door.

BOUJOLAIS

From the Duke's private cellar. He calls it "Funereal Quartet."

Gaspard opens the letter. It's a page torn off from Gaspard's own journal.

CLOSE ON: “By leading him here, in the middle of a luxury the existence of which he hadn’t even suspected and which will engrave itself indelibly on his memory, by offering him, every fortnight, such a prize as this, he’ll get accustomed to these pleasures that he cannot really afford to enjoy. He will go to any lengths to roll on that sofa again.”

EXT. PARIS CAFÉ – DAY – FLASHBACK

Theo Blanc, the bookkeeper, sits on a bench in front of an office building. The sign behind him reads “Laurent & Moreau.”

INT. VILLA– SITTING ROOM – WINTER – DAY – BACK TO THE PRESENT

Theo leafs through a little book: it’s filled with accounts of various monetary transactions, names and addresses of banks in Paris etc. He walks around the room and points at various objects. He is accompanied by Monsieur Morel.

THEO

Everything must go: the artificial flowers, all pelts and skins, these ridiculous armchairs and whatever this is...

MONSIEUR MOREL

It’s an old church book-stand, Monsieur.

THEO

Get rid of it.

MONSIEUR MOREL

What about the books?

THEO

Sell them.

Theo points to every painting on the wall: Jan Luyken’s *Religious Persecutions*, Gustave Moreau’s *Salome* and *The Apparition*, Bresdin’s *The Comedy of Death* and *The Good Samaritan*, Odilon Redon’s *Melancholy*, Goya’s *Proverbs*.

THEO

This one, this one, this one and that one. And this one. And that one. In fact, take them all down.

Morel takes down the paintings and props them against the wall. Theo looks at the marks left by the paintings on the walls.

THEO

(frowning)

We’ll have to repaint the room.

EXT. VILLA – DAY

The door opens and Monsieur Morel comes out. He is carrying something heavy. He throws it on the ground and rushes back inside. It's the tortoise shell. All the precious stones have been cut out, leaving gaping holes behind.

EXT. PARIS STREETS - EVENING

Wearing a bookkeeper's outfit, the same one he was wearing the first time he met Gaspard, Theo stands in the middle of the street. A newspaper boy carrying a bundle of posters is walking straight toward Theo, yelling at the top of his lungs.

BOY

You want to be in the movies? You want to be in the movies?

Theo starts walking toward the boy.

The End.