

Maigret et l'amour morbide

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When Maigret entered the cavernous central lobby of the main police station at 36, Quai des Orfèvres, he froze for an instant, enchanted: even this lobby -- most days the grayest, dingiest place on earth -- was beautifully touched with morning sun, at least in the form of luminous dust, which drifted like fiery snowflakes through the stale tomb-like air. The lobby was filled, as usual, with the soft sounds of bureaucratic labor: papers were shuffled, pink stubble was brushed from careful erasures, white balls of paper rebounded from steel trash cans with a quiet *thuk*. The sibilant voices of the clerks evaporated in the upper atmosphere, barely distinguishable from the sound of the mail and coffee carts whisked over tiled carpet in granite tones. The organization was at peace in its steady productivity.

Dead bodies were heaped on benches between the office doors, some handcuffed to steel rings installed for that purpose just under the seat. Others slumped backwards or leaned on their neighbors, their heads settled carelessly into their laps, open-mouthed, their bloodless faces touched with the insubstantial expressions brought on by dreams. As Maigret stepped toward the office of the Chief of Police, his mind sifting through the facts of the Quai de Valmy case, one of the bodies stood up from a bench and removed its hat in greeting. The gesture revealed a sallow face, limned in gold, with a tell-tale hollow at its center where the nose had been: a distinguished token of long decay. The head that bore that face was primly stitched to a bloodless neck, the suture just visible in a formal black line above the starched white collar.

Maigret called out with sudden familiarity: "Well Vicomte, what have you got to say for yourself?"

The man known to everyone as Vicomte smiled to hear his name spoken in these warm tones, exposing polished black teeth behind pale, watercolor lips. He was the last of the boulevard dandies, dressed with turn-of-the-century elegance in dark gray flannel and a sea-green waistcoat, a monocle strung with broad sable ribbon hanging down from his neck. It could well have been the monocle, which he almost never used, that earned him this sobriquet -- had the allusion not been fixed from the start by a group of detectives, who, spying him at the corner bar one night, invited him to sit down, one of them declaring, "We need a little more Vicomte in our Courvoisier!" For the past seventeen years he had covered the *Quai des Orfèvres* for a Paris newspaper, a press agency, and some twenty provincial dailies, but his relationship with Maigret extended well beyond that.

"So have they found the head yet?" he asked coquettishly, reaching out to touch the Chief Superintendent on the hip under his suit jacket.

"Not that I know of."

"I just spoke to Judel on the phone. He says no" -- the hand moving across the belt line discreetly, grasping the buckle, giving a gentle tug. Then, in a whisper, "If you hear anything, don't forget me."

"How could I ever forget you?" Maigret said huskily, and raised Vicomte's hand to his lips. The lips parted, taking the pale blue fingertips gently inside, where they encountered the hidden firmness of Maigret's teeth. The first joint of Vicomte's ring finger was missing, the digit ending in a gnarled wound that pulled sensuously at the other man's lower lip.

"I still have it, you know," whispered the Chief Superintendent, then opened his mouth further: something gleamed inside, nestled between the cool dry tongue and tobacco-stained molars. It was a small nub of gilded bone, about the size and shape of a human distal phalanx. At the sight of it, Vicomte pressed forward in earnest, as if hungry to complete himself, and they joined in a hard kiss, their tongues laid together like dying oysters, the little finger-bone bobbing from mouth to mouth like a misshapen pearl.

Maigret unfastened the other man's belt buckle and trousers with practiced skill, helping him down to an empty spot on the bench. He dropped forward to his knees, pressing his face into the front of Vicomte's tight boxers to take in the sweet, moldy scent of his crotch. Beside them a third man slept in a corner of the bench, his throat slashed, his face impassive, his handcuffs making cruel troughs in the flesh of his wrists. Vicomte lay back against the soft stranger as Maigret found the opening of his boxers, then raised his hips in a slow thrust as the cool dry mouth closed over the shaft of his cock. He reached back and scooped a mass of foetid blood from the open throat of the sleeping man, then offered it down to Maigret, who smeared it across his lips and tongue. Maigret strained forward again at Vicomte's crotch, taking more and more of the cool shaft into his throat: past the uvula, past the pharynx, through to the tracheal ring. There was no need to breathe. He paused a moment as the other man pushed into him, felt the hands arrive at the back of his head, nine fingers evenly placed, and the odd one -- felt the threads pull taut at the nape of the neck, where his own head had been reattached -- then gave himself over and forgot everything but the missing finger and this airless depth, the fullness blocking his airway, the mouth of his trachea stretched to the limit by Vicomte. He raised himself then -- pressing back against the hands, their resistance like still water -- and dragged his teeth firmly along the shaft until he reached the top, worked his tongue over the salty head, then plunged forward again, straining, blocking, stretching, full. His eyes rolled back in ecstasy, trembling white orbs traced with delicate veins of thickened blood. The hands pressed more insistently, holding him down, and he let go for good this time. His nose bled. Everything

went black. Vicomte was thrusting now with a violent urgency, delight breaking over his face as stars of burning dust fell overhead thru the dismal air, and Maigret's throat exploded with tepid cum, mixed with the cold blood from his own nose and that of the third dead man. The world swam up in a purple mass. Maigret rose to his knees, and the ceiling flashed by in a dizzy movement before he righted himself. Vicomte lay back against the throat-cut prisoner, who was crumpled against the bench like a laundry sack, still asleep.