

Weidmann appeared before you in a five o'clock edition, his head swathed in white bands, a nun and yet a wounded pilot fallen into the rye one September day like the day when the world came to know the name of Our Lady of the Flowers. His handsome face, multiplied by the presses, swept down upon Paris and all of France, to the depths of the most out-of-the-way villages, in castles and cabins, revealing to the mirthless bourgeois that their daily lives are grazed by enchanting murderers, cunningly elevated to their sleep, which they will cross by some back stairway that has abetted them by not creaking. Beneath his picture burst the dawn of his crimes: murder one, murder two, murder three, up to six, bespeaking his secret glory and preparing his future glory.

A little earlier, the Negro Angel Sun had killed his mistress.

A little later, the soldier Maurice Pilorge killed his lover, Escudero, to rob him of something under a thousand francs, then, for his twentieth birthday, they cut off his head while, you will recall, he thumbed his nose at the enraged executioner.

Finally, a young ensign, still a child, committed treason for treason's sake: he was shot. And it is in honour of their crimes that I am writing my book.

I learned only in bits and pieces of that wonderful blossoming of dark and lovely flowers: one was revealed to me by a scrap of newspaper; another was casually alluded to by my lawyer; another was mentioned, almost sung, by the prisoners - their song became fantastic and funereal (a *De Profundis*), as much so as the plaints which they sing in the evening, as the voice which crosses the cells and reaches me blurred, hopeless, inflected. At the end of the phrases it breaks, and that break makes it so sweet that it seems borne by the music of angels, which horrifies me, for angels fill me with horror, being, I imagine, neither mind nor matter, white, filmy, and frightening, like the transluscent bodies of ghosts.

These murderers, now dead, have nevertheless reached me, and whenever one of these luminaries of affliction falls into my cell, my heart beats fast, my heart beats a loud tattoo, if the tattoo is the

drum-call announcing the capitulation of a city. And there follows a fervor comparable to that which wrung me and left me for some minutes grotesquely contorted, when I heard the German plane passing over the prison and the burst of the bomb which it dropped nearby. In the twinkling of an eye, I saw a lone child, borne by his iron bird, laughingly, strewing death. For him alone were unleashed the sirens, the bells, the hundred-and-one cannon shots reserved for the Dauphin, the cries of hatred and fear. All the cells were atremble, shivering, made with terror; the prisoners pounded the doors, rolled on the floor, shrieked, screamed blasphemies, and prayed to God. I saw, as I say, or thought I saw, an eighteen-year-old child in the plane, and from the depths of my 426 I smiled at him lovingly.

I do not know whether it is their faces, the real ones, which spatter the wall of my cell with a sparkling mud, but it cannot be by chance that I cut those handsome, vacant-eyed heads out of the magazines. I say vacant, for all the eyes are clear and must be sky-blue, like the razor's edge to which clings a star of transparent light, blue and vacant like the windows of buildings under construction, through which you can see the sky from the windows of the opposite wall. Like those barracks which in the morning are open to all the winds, which you think are empty and pure when they are swarming with dangerous males, sprawled promiscuously on their beds. I say empty, but if they close their eyes, they become more disturbing to me than are huge prisons to the nubile maiden who passes by the high barred windows, prisons behind which sleeps, dreams, swears, and spits a race of murderers, which makes of each cell the hissing nest of a tangle of snakes, but also a kind of confessional with a curtain of dusty serge. These eyes, seemingly without mystery, are like certain closed cities - Lyons, Zurich - and they hypnotize me as much as do empty theatres, deserted prisons, machinery at rest, deserts, for deserts are closed and do not communicate with the infinite. Men with such faces terrify me, whenever I have to cross their paths warily, but what a dazzling surprise when, in their landscape, at the turning of a deserted lane, I approach, my heart racing wildly, and discover nothing, nothing but looming emptiness, sensitive and proud like a tall foxglove!

I do not know, as I have said, whether the heads there are really those of my guillotined friends, but I have recognized by certain signs that they - those on the wall - are thoroughly supple, like the lashes of whips, and rigid as glass knives, precocious as child pundits and

fresh as forget-me-nots, bodies chosen because they are possessed by terrible souls.

The newspapers are tattered by the time they reach my cell, and the finest pages have been looted of their finest flowers, those pimps, like gardens in May. The big, inflexible, strict pimps, their members in full bloom - I no longer know whether they are lilies or whether lilies and members are not totally they, so much so that in the evening, on my knees, in thought, I encircle their legs with my arms - all that rigidity floors me and makes me confuse them, and the memory which I gladly give as food for my nights is of yours, which, as I caressed it, remained inert, stretched out; only your rod, unsheathed and brandished, went through my mouth with the suddenly cruel sharpness of a steeple puncturing a cloud of ink, a hatpin a breast. You did not move, you were not asleep, you were not dreaming, you were in flight, motionless and pale, frozen, straight, stretched out stiff on the flat bed, like a coffin on the sea, and I know that we were chaste, while I, all attention, felt you flow into me, warm and white, in continuous little jerks. Perhaps you were playing at coming. At the climax, you were lit up with a quiet ecstasy, which enveloped your blessed body in a supernatural nimbus, like a cloak that you pierced with your head and feet.

Still, I managed to get about twenty photographs, and with bits of chewed bread I pasted them on the back of the cardboard sheet of regulations that hangs on the wall. Some are pinned up with bits of brass wire which the foreman brings me and on which I have to string coloured glass beads.

Using the same beads with which the prisoners next door make funeral wreaths, I have made star-shaped frames for the most purely criminal. In the evening, as you open your window to the street, I turn the back of the regulations sheet toward me. Smiles and sneers, alike inexorable, enter me by all the holes I offer, their vigour penetrates me and erects me. I live among these pits. They watch over my little routines, which, along with them, are all the family I have and my only friends.

Perhaps some lad who did nothing to deserve prison - a champion, an athlete - slipped in among the twenty by mistake. But if I have nailed him to my wall, it was because, as I see it, he had the sacred sign of the monster at the corner of his mouth or the angle of the eyelids. The flaw on the face or in the set gesture indicates to me that they may very possibly love me, for they love me only if they are

monsters - and it may therefore be said that it is this stray himself who has chosen to be here. To provide them with a court and retinue, I have culled here and there, from the illustrated covers of a few adventure novels, a young Mexican half-breed, a gaucho, a Caucasian horseman, and, from the pages of these novels that are passed from hand to hand when we take our walk, clumsy drawings: profiles of pimps and apaches with a smoking butt, or the outline of a tough with a hard-on.

At night I love them, and my love endows them with life. During the day I go about my petty concerns. I am the housekeeper, watchful lest a bread crumb or a speck of ash fall on the floor. But at night! Fear of the guard who may suddenly flick on the light and stick his head through the grating compels me to take sordid precautions lest the rustling of the sheets draw attention to my pleasure; but though my gesture may be less noble, by becoming secret it heightens my pleasure. I dawdle. Beneath the sheet, my right hand stops to caress the absent face, and then the whole body, of the outlaw I have chosen for that evening's delight. The left hand closes, then arranges its fingers in the form of a hollow organ which tries to resist, then offers itself, opens up, and a vigorous body, a wardrobe, emerges from the wall, advances, and falls upon me. Crushes me against my straw mattress, which has already been stained by more than a hundred prisoners, while I think of the happiness into which I sink at a time when God and His angels exist.

No one can tell whether I shall get out of here, or, if I do, when it will be.

So, with the help of my unknown lovers, I am going to write a story. My heroes are they, pasted on the wall, they and I who am here, locked up. As you read on, the characters, and Divine too, and Culafroy, will fall from the wall onto my page like dead leaves, to fertilize my tale. As for their death, need I tell you about it? For all of them it will be the death of him who, when he learned of his from the jury, merely mumbled in a Rhenish accent: 'I'm already beyond that' (Weidmann).

This story may not always seem artificial, and in spite of me you may recognize in it the call of the blood: the reason is that within my night I shall have happened to strike my forehead at some door, freeing an anguished memory that had been haunting me since the world began. Forgive me for it. This book aims to be only a small fragment of my inner life.

Sometimes the cat-footed guard tosses me a hello through the grate. He talks to me and, without meaning to, tells me a good deal about my forger neighbours, about arsonists, counterfeiters, murderers, swaggering adolescents who roll on the floor screaming: 'Mama, help!' He slams the grate shut and delivers me to a tête-à-tête with all those fine gentlemen whom he has just let slip in and who twist and squirm in the warmth of the sheets and the drowsiness of the morning to seek the end of the thread which will unravel the motives, the system of complicity, a whole fierce and subtle mechanism which, among other neat tricks, changed a few pink girls into white corpses. I want to mingle them too, with their heads and legs, among my friends on the wall, and to compose with them this children's tale. And to refashion in my own way, and for the enchantment of my cell (I mean that thanks to her my cell will be enchanted), the story of Divine, whom I knew only slightly, the story of Our Lady of the Flowers, and, never fear, my own story.

Description of Our Lady of the Flowers: height, 5 ft 7 ins, weight, 156 lbs, oval face, blond hair, blue eyes, matt complexion, perfect teeth, straight nose.

Divine died yesterday in a pool of her vomited blood which was so red that, as she expired, she had the supreme illusion that this blood was the visible equivalent of that black hole which a gutted violin, seen in a judge's office in the midst of a hodge-podge of pieces of evidence, revealed with dramatic insistence, as does a Jesus the gilded chancre where gleams His flaming Sacred Heart. So much for the divine aspect of her death. The other aspect, ours, because of those streams of blood that had been shed on her nightshirt and sheets (for the sun, poignant on the bloody sheets, had set, not nastily, in her bed), makes her death tantamount to a murder.

Divine died holy and murdered - by consumption.

It is January, and in the prison too, where this morning, during the walk, slyly, among prisoners, we wished each other a happy New Year, as humbly as servants must do among themselves in the pantry. The chief guard gave us each a little half-ounce packet of coarse salt as a New Year's gift. Three hours after noon. It has been raining behind the bars since yesterday, and it's windy. I let myself drift, as to the depth of an ocean, to the depths of a dismal neighbourhood of hard and opaque but rather light houses, to the inner gaze of memory, for the matter of memory is porous. The garret in which Divine lived for

such a long time is at the top of one of these houses. Its large window propels the eyes (and delights them) toward the little Montmartre Cemetery. The stairway leading up to it plays an important role today. It is the antechamber, sinuous as the hallways of the Pyramids, of Divine's temporary tomb. This cavernous hypogeum looms up, pure as the bare marble arm in the darkness which is devouring the queen to whom it belongs. Coming from the street, the stairway mounts to death. It ushers one to the final resting place. It smells of decaying flowers and already of the odour of candles and incense. It rises into the shadow. From floor to floor it dwindles and darkens until, at the top, it is no more than an illusion blending with the azure. This is Divine's landing. While in the street, beneath the black haloes of the tiny flat umbrellas which they are holding in one hand like bouquets, Mimosa I, Mimosa II, Mimosa the half-IV, First Communion, Angela, Milord, Castagnette, Régine - in short, a host, a still long litany of creatures who are glittering names - are waiting, and in the other hand are carrying, like umbrellas, little bouquets of violets which make one of them lose herself, for example, in a reverie from which she will emerge bewildered and quite dumbfounded with nobility, for she (let us say First Communion) remembers the article, thrilling as a song from the other world, from our world too, in which an evening paper, thereby embalmed, stated:

'The black velvet rug of the Hotel Crillon, where lay the silver and ebony coffin containing the embalmed body of the Princess of Monaco, was strewn with Parma violets.'

First Communion was chilly. She thrust her chin forward as great ladies do. Then she drew it in and wrapped herself in the folds of a story (born of her desires and taking into account, so as to magnify them, all the mishaps of her drab existence) in which she was dead and a princess.

The rain favoured her flight.

Girl-queens were carrying wreaths of glass beads, the very kind I make in my cell, to which they bring the odour of wet moss and the memory of the trail of slime left on the white stones of my village cemetery by snails and slugs.

And all of them, the girl-queens and boy-queens, the aunties, fags, and nellies of whom I am speaking, are assembled at the foot of the stairway. The girl-queens are huddled together, chattering and chirping around the boy-queens, who are straight, motionless, and vertiginous, as motionless and silent as branches. All are dressed in

black: trousers, jacket, and overcoat, but their faces, young or old, smooth or crinkly, are divided into quarters of colour like a coat of arms. It is raining. With the patter of the rain is mingled:

'Poor Divine!'

'Would you believe it, my dear! But at her age it was fatal.'

'It was falling apart. She was losing her bottom.'

'Hasn't Darling come?'

'Hi there!'

'Dig *her!*'

Divine, who disliked anyone's walking over her head, lived on the top floor of a middle-class apartment house in a sober neighbourhood. It was at the foot of this house that the crowd belonging to this backstage conversation shuffled about.

Any minute now the hearse, drawn perhaps by a black horse, will come to take away Divine's remains and carry them to the church, then here, close by, to the little Montmartre Cemetery, which the procession will enter by the Avenue Rachel.

The Eternal passed by in the form of a pimp. The prattle ceased. Bareheaded and very elegant, simple and smiling, simple and supple, Darling Daintyfoot arrived. There was in his supple bearing the weighty magnificence of the barbarian who tramples choice furs beneath his muddy boots. The torso on his hips was a king on a throne. Merely to have mentioned him is enough for my left hand in my torn pocket to . . . And the memory of Darling will not leave me until I have completed my gesture. One day the door of my cell opened and framed him. I thought I saw him, in the twinkling of an eye, as solemn as a walking corpse, set in the thickness - which you can only imagine - of the prison walls. He appeared standing before me with the same graciousness that might have been his lying naked in a field of pinks. I was his at once, as if (who said that?) he had discharged through my mouth straight to my heart. Entering me until there was no room left for myself, so that now I am one with gangsters, burglars, and pimps, and the police arrest me by mistake. For three months he regaled himself with my body, beating me for all he was worth. I dragged at his feet, more trampled on than a dust mop. Ever since he has gone off free to his robberies, I keep remembering his gestures, so vivid they revealed him cut out of a faceted crystal, gestures so vivid that you suspected they were all involuntary, for it seems utterly impossible that they were born of ponderous reflection and decision. Of the tangible him there remains, sad to say, only the plaster cast that Divine herself

made of his cock which was gigantic when erect. The most impressive thing about it is the vigour, hence the beauty, of that part which goes from the anus to the tip of the penis.

I shall say that he had lace fingers, that, each time he awoke, his outstretched arms, open to receive the World, made him look like the Christ Child in his manger - with the heel of one foot on the instep of the other - that his eager face offered itself, as it bent backward facing heaven, that, when standing, he would tend to make the basket movement we see Nijinsky making in the old photos where he is dressed in shredded roses. His wrist, fluid as a violinist's, hangs down, graceful and loose-jointed. And at times, in broad daylight, he strangles himself with his lithe arm, the arm of a tragedienne.

This is almost an exact portrait of Darling, for - we shall see him again - he had a talent for the gesture that thrills me, and, if I think about him, I can't stop praising him until my hand is smeared with my liberated pleasure.

A Greek, he entered the house of death walking on air. A Greek, that is, a crook as well. As he passed - the motion was revealed by an imperceptible movement of the torso - within themselves, secretly, Milord, the Mimosas, Castagnette, in short, all the queens, imparted a tendril-like movement to their bodies and fancied they were enlacing this handsome man, were twining about him. Indifferent and bright as a slaughterhouse knife, he passed by, cleaving them all into two slices which came noiselessly together again, though emitting a slight scent of hopelessness which no one divulged. Darling went up the stairs two at a time, an ample and forthright ascension, which may lead, after the roof, on steps of blue air, up to heaven. In the garret, less mysterious since death had converted it into a vault (it was losing its equivocal meaning, was again assuming, in all its purity, that air of incoherent gratuity that these funereal and mysterious objects, these mortuary objects lent it: white gloves, a lampion, an artilleryman's jacket, in short, an inventory that we shall list later on), the only one to sigh in her mourning veils was Divine's mother, Ernestine. She is old. But now at last the wonderful, long-awaited opportunity does not escape her. Divine's death enables her to free herself, by an external despair, by a visible mourning consisting of tears, flowers and crape, from the hundred great roles which possessed her. The opportunity slipped between her fingers at the time of an illness which I shall tell about, when Divine the Gaytime Girl was still just a village youngster named Louis Culafroy. From his

sick bed, he looked at the room where an angel (once again this word disturbs me, attracts me, and sickens me. If they have wings, do they have teeth? Do they fly with such heavy wings, feathered wings, 'those mysterious wings'? And scented with that wonder: their angels' name which they change if they fall?), an angel, a soldier dressed in light blue, and a Negro (for will my books ever be anything but a pretext for showing a soldier dressed in sky blue, and a brotherly Negro and angel playing dice or knuckle bones in a dark or light prison?) were engaged in a confabulation from which he himself was excluded. The angel, the Negro, and the soldier kept assuming the faces of various schoolmates and peasants, but never that of Alberto the snake fisher. He was the one Culafroy was waiting for in his desert, to calm his torrid thirst with that mouth of starry flesh. To console himself, he tried, despite his age, to conceive a kind of happiness in which nothing would be winsome, a pure, deserted, desolate field, a field of azure or sand, a dumb, dry, magnetic field, where nothing sweet, no colour or sound, would remain. Quite some time before, the appearance on the village road of a bride wearing a black dress, though wrapped in a veil of white tulle, lovely and sparkling, like a young shepherd beneath the hoar frost, like a powdered blond miller, or like Our Lady of the Flowers whom he will meet later on and whom I saw with my own eyes here in my cell one morning, near the latrines - his sleepy face pink and bristly beneath the soapsuds, which blurred his vision - revealed to Culafroy that poetry is something other than a melody of curves on sweetness, for the tulle snapped apart into abrupt, clear, rigorous, icy facets. It was a warning.

He was waiting for Alberto, who did not come. Yet all the peasant boys and girls who came in had something of the snake fisher about them. They were like his harbingers, his ambassadors, his precursors, bearing some of his gifts before him, preparing his coming by smoothing the way for him. They shouted hallelujah. One had his walk, another his gestures, or the colour of his trousers, or his corduroy, or Alberto's voice; and Culafroy, like someone waiting, never doubted that all these scattered elements would eventually fuse and enable a reconstructed Alberto to make the solemn, appointed, and surprising entrance into his room that a dead and alive Darling Daintyfoot made into my cell.

When the village abbé, hearing the news, said to Ernestine: 'Madame, it's a blessing to die young,' she replied: 'Yes, your Lordship,' and made a curtsy.

The priest looked at her.

She was smiling in the shiny floor at her antipodal reflection which made her the Queen of Spades, the ill-omened widow.

'Don't shrug your shoulders, my friend, I'm not crazy.'

And she wasn't crazy.

'Lou Culafroy is going to die shortly. I feel it. He's going to die, I can tell.'

'He's going to die, I can tell,' was the expression torn alive - and helping her to fly - from a book, and bleeding, like a wing from a sparrow (or from an angel, if it can bleed crimson), and murmured with horror by the heroine of that cheap novel printed in tiny type in newsprint - which, so they say, is as spongy as the consciences of those nasty gentlemen who debauch children.

'So, I'm dancing the dirge.'

He therefore had to die. And in order for the pathos of the act to be more virulent, she herself would have to be the cause of his death. Here, to be sure, morality is not involved, nor the fear of prison, or of hell. With remarkable precision, the whole mechanism of the drama presented itself to Ernestine's mind, and thereby to mine. She would simulate a suicide. 'I'll say he killed himself,' Ernestine's logic, which is a stage logic, has no relationship with what is called verisimilitude, verisimilitude being the disavowal of unavowable reasons. Let us not be surprised, we shall be all the more astonished.

The presence of a huge army revolver at the back of a drawer was enough to dictate her attitude. This is not the first time that things have been the instigators of an act and must alone bear the fearful, though light, responsibility for a crime. This revolver became - or so it seemed - the indispensable accessory of her gesture. It was a continuation of her heroine's outstretched arm, in fact it haunted her, since there's no denying it, with a brutality that burned her cheeks, just as the girls of the village were haunted by the brutal swelling of Alberto's thick hands in his pockets. But - just as I myself would be willing to kill only a lithe adolescent in order to bring forth a corpse from his death, though a corpse still warm and a shade sweet to hug, so Ernestine agreed to kill only on condition that she avoid the horror that the here below would not fail to inspire in her (convulsions, squirting blood and brain, reproaches in the child's dismayed eyes), and the horror of an angelic beyond, or perhaps to make the moment more stately - she put on her jewels. So in the past I would inject my cocaine with a cut-glass syringe shaped like the stopper of a decanter

and put a huge diamond on my index finger. She was not aware that by going about it in this way she was aggravating her gesture, changing it into an exceptional gesture, the singularity of which threatened to upset everything. Which is what happened. With a kind of smooth sliding, the room descended till it blended with a luxurious apartment, adorned with gold, the walls hung with garnet-red velvet, the furniture heavy but toned down with red faille curtains; here and there were large bevelled mirrors, adorned with candelabra and their crystal pendants. From the ceiling - an important detail - hung a huge chandelier. The floor was covered with thick blue and violet carpets.

One evening, during her honeymoon in Paris, Ernestine had glimpsed from the street, through the curtains, one of those elegant, well-heated apartments, and as she walked demurely with her arm in her husband's - demurely still - she longed to die there of love (phenobarbital and flowers) for a Teutonic knight. Then, as she had already died four or five times, the apartment had remained available for a drama more serious than her own death.

I'm complicating things, getting involved, and you're talking of childishness. It is childishness. All prisoners are children, and only children are underhanded, wily, open, and confused. 'What would top it all,' thought Ernestine, 'would be for him to die in a fashionable city, in Cannes or Venice, so that I could make pilgrimages to it.'

To stop at a Ritz, bathed by the Adriatic, wife or mistress of a Doge; then, her arms full of flowers, to climb a path to the cemetery, to sit down on a simple flagstone, a white, slightly curved stone, and, all curled up in fragrant grief, to brood!

Without bringing her back to reality, for she never left reality, the arrangement of the setting obliged her to shake off the dream. She went to get the revolver, which had long since been loaded by a most considerate Providence, and when she held it in her hand, weighty as a phallus in action, she realized she was big with murder, pregnant with a corpse.

You, you have no idea of the superhuman or extra-lucid state of mind of the blind murderer who holds the knife, the gun, or the phial, or who has already released the movement that propels to the precipice.

Ernestine's gesture might have been performed quickly, but, like Culafroy in fact, she is serving a text she knows nothing about, a text I am composing whose *dénouement* will occur when the time is ripe.

Ernestine is perfectly aware of how ridiculously literary her act is, but that she has to submit to cheap literature makes her even more touching in her own eyes and ours. In drama, as in all of life, she escapes vainglorious beauty.

Every premeditated murder is always governed by a preparatory ceremonial and is always followed by a propitiatory ceremonial. The meaning of both eludes the murderer's mind. Everything is in order. Ernestine has just time to appear before a Star Chamber. She fired. The bullet shattered the glass of a frame containing an honorary diploma of her late husband. The noise was frightful. Drugged by sleeping pills, the child heard nothing. Nor did Ernestine. She had fired in the apartment with the garnet-red velvet, and the bullet, shattering the bevelled mirrors, the pendants, the crystals, the stucco, the stars, tearing the hangings - in short, destroying the structure which collapsed - brought down not sparkling powder and blood, but the crystal of the chandelier and the pendants, a grey ash on the head of Ernestine, who swooned.

She came back to her senses amidst the debris of her drama. Her hands, freed from the revolver, which disappeared beneath the bed like an axe at the bottom of a pond, like a prowler into a wall, her hands, lighter than her thoughts, fluttered about her. Since then, she has been waiting.

That was how Darling saw her, intoxicated with the tragic. He was intimidated by her, for she was beautiful and seemed mad, but especially because she was beautiful. Did he, who himself was handsome, have to fear her? I'm sorry to say I know too little (nothing) about the secret relations between people who are handsome and know it, and nothing about the seemingly friendly but perhaps hostile contacts between handsome boys. If they smile at each other over a trifle, is there, unknown to them, some tenderness in their smile, and do they feel its influence in some obscure way? Darling made a clumsy sign of the cross over the coffin. His constraint gave the impression that he was deep in thought; and his constraint was all his grace.

Death had laced its mark, which weighs like a lead seal at the bottom of a parchment, on the curtains, the walls, the rugs. Particularly on the curtains. They are sensitive. They sense death and echo it like dogs. They bark at death through the folds that open, dark as the mouth and eyes of the masks of Sophocles, or which bulge like the eyelids of Christian ascetics. The blinds were drawn and the candles lighted. Darling, no longer recognizing the attic where he

had lived with Divine, behaved like a young man on a visit.

His emotion beside the coffin? None. He no longer remembered Divine.

The undertaker's assistants arrived almost immediately and saved him from further embarrassment.

In the rain, this black cortege, bespangled with multicoloured faces and blended with the scent of flowers and rouge, followed the hearse. The flat round umbrellas, undulating above the ambulating procession, held it suspended between heaven and earth. The passersby did not even see it, for it was so light that it was already floating ten yards from the ground; only the maids and butlers might have noticed it, but at ten o'clock the former were bringing the morning chocolate to their mistresses and the latter were opening the door to early visitors. Besides, the cortege was almost invisible because of its speed. The hearse had wings on its axle. The abbé emerged first into the rain singing the *dies irae*. He tucked up his cassock and cope, as he had been taught to do at the seminary when the weather was bad. His gesture, though automatic, released within him, with a placenta of nobility, a series of sad and secret creatures. With one of the flaps of the black velvet cope, the velvet from which are made Fantômas' masks and those of the Doges' wives, he tried to slip away, but it was the ground that gave way under him, and we shall see the trap into which he fell. Just in time, he prevented the cloth from hiding the lower part of his face. Bear in mind that the abbé was young. You could tell that under his funereal vestments he had the lithe body of a passionate athlete. Which means, in short, that he was in travesty. In the church - the whole funeral service having been merely the 'do this in memory of me' - approaching the altar on tiptoe, in silence, he had picked the lock of the tabernacle, parted the veil like someone who at midnight parts the double curtains of an alcove, held his breath, seized the ciborium with the caution of an ungloved burglar, and finally, having broken it, swallowed a questionable host.

From the church to the cemetery, the road was long and the text of the breviary too familiar. Only the dirge and the black, silver-embroidered cope exuded charms. The abbé plodded through the mud as he would have done in the heart of the woods. 'Of what woods?' he asked himself. In a foreign country, a forest of Bohemia. Or rather of Hungary. In choosing this country, he was no doubt guided by the precious suspicion that Hungarians are the only Asiatics in Europe. Huns. The Hunis. Attila burning the grass, and his

soldiers warming between their brutal and colossal thighs (like those, and perhaps even larger than those, of Alberto, Darling, and Gorgui) and their horses' flanks the raw meat that they will eat. It is autumn. It is raining in the Hungarian forest.

Every branch that he has to push aside wets the priest's forehead. The only sound is the patter of the drops on the wet leaves. Since it is evening, the woods become more and more alarming. The priest draws the grey coat more tightly about his splendid loins, the great cape, like his cope of today, which envelops him over there.

In the forest is a sawmill; two young men work it and hunt. They are unknown in the region. They have (the abbé knows this as one knows things in dreams without having learned them) been around the world. And so here the abbé was chanting the dirge as he would have sung it there when he met one of the strangers, the younger, who had the face of the butcher of my village. He was on his way back from hunting. In the corner of his mouth, an unlit butt. The word 'butt' and the taste of the sucked tobacco made the abbé's spine stiffen and draw back with three short jerks, the vibrations of which reverberated through all his muscles and on to infinity, which shuddered and ejaculated a seed of constellations.

The woodcutter's lips came down on the abbé's mouth, where, with a thrust of the tongue more imperious than a royal order, they drove in the butt. The priest was knocked down, bitten, and he expired with love on the soggy moss. After having almost disrobed him, the stranger caressed him, gratefully, almost fondly, thought the abbé. With a heave, he shouldered his game bag, which was weighted down with a wildcat, picked up his gun, and went off whistling a raffish tune.

The abbé was winding his way among mausoleums; the queens were stumbling over the stones, getting their feet wet in the grass, and among the graves were being angelicized. The choir boy, a puny lad with ringworm, who hadn't the slightest suspicion of the adventure the abbé had just had, asked him whether he might keep his skullcap on. The abbé said yes. As he walked, his leg made the movement peculiar to dancers (with one hand in their pocket) as they finish a tango. He bent forward on his leg, which was slightly advanced on the tip of the toe; he slapped his knee against the cloth of the cassock, which flapped back and forth like the bell-bottomed trousers of a swaying sailor or gaucho. Then he began a psalm.

When the procession arrived at the hole which had already been

dug, perhaps by the gravedigger Divine used to see from her window, they lowered the coffin in which Divine lay wrapped in a white lace sheet. The abbé blessed the grave and handed his sprinkler to Darling, who blushed to feel it so heavy (for he had to some degree returned, after and beyond Divine, to his race, which was akin to that of young gypsies, who are willing to jerk you off, but only with their feet), then to the queens, who turned the whole area into a squealing of pretty cries and high giggles. Divine departed as she would have desired, in a mixture of fantasy and sordidness.

*Divine is dead, is dead and buried . . .
 . . . is dead and buried.*

Since Divine is dead, the poet may sing her, may tell her legend, the Saga, the annals of Divine. The Divine Saga should be danced, mimed, with subtle directions. Since it is impossible to make a ballet of it, I am forced to use words that are weighed down with precise ideas, but I shall try to lighten them with expressions that are trivial, empty, hollow and invisible.

What is involved for me who is making up this story? In reviewing my life, in tracing its course, I fill my cell with the pleasure of being what for want of a trifle I failed to be, recapturing, so that I may hurl myself into them as into dark pits, those moments when I strayed through the trap-ridden compartments of a subterranean sky. Slowly displacing volumes of fetid air, cutting threads from which hang bouquets of feelings, seeing the gypsy for whom I am looking emerge perhaps from some starry river, wet, with mossy hair, playing the fiddle, diabolically whisked away by the scarlet velvet portiere of a cabaret.

I shall speak to you about Divine, mixing masculine and feminine as my mood dictates, and if, in the course of the tale, I shall have to refer to a woman, I shall manage, I shall find an expedient, a good device, to avoid any confusion.

Divine appeared in Paris to lead her public life about twenty years before her death. She was then thin and vivacious and will remain so until the end of her life, though growing angular. At about two A.M. she entered Graff's Café in Montmartre. The customers were a muddy, still shapeless clay. Divine was limpid water. In the big café with the closed windows and the curtains drawn on their hollow rods,