

the lace, the lace, the ocean of lace, the universe of lace. From the far end of the world, a boxer's fist sent me tumbling into a tiny sewer.' Just then, the angelus tolled. Now she is asleep in the lace, and their married bodies are afloat.

Here I am this morning, after a long night of caressing my beloved couple, torn from my sleep by the noise of the bolt being drawn by the guard who comes to collect the garbage. I get up and stagger to the latrine, still entangled in my strange dream, in which I succeeded in *getting my victim to pardon me*. Thus, I was plunged to the mouth in horror. The horror entered me. I chewed it. I was full of it. My young victim was sitting near me, and his bare leg, instead of crossing his right, went through the thigh. He said nothing, but I knew without the slightest doubt what he was thinking: 'I've told the judge everything, you're pardoned. Besides, it's me sitting on the bench. You can confess. And you don't have to worry. You're pardoned.' Then, with the immediacy of dreams, he was a little corpse no bigger than a figurine in an Epiphany pie, than a pulled tooth, lying in a glass of champagne in the middle of a Greek landscape with truncated ringed columns, around which long white tapeworms were twisting and streaming like coils, all this in a light seen only in dreams. I no longer quite remember my attitude, but I do know that I believed what he told me. Upon waking, I still had the feeling of baptism. But there is no question of resuming contact with the precise and tangible world of the cell. I lie down again until it's time for bread. The atmosphere of the night, the smell rising from the blocked latrines, overflowing with shit and yellow water, stir childhood memories which rise up like a black soil mined by moles. One leads to another and makes it surge up; a whole life which I thought subterranean and forever buried rises to the surface, to the air, to the sad sun, which give it a smell of decay, in which I delight. The reminiscence that really tugs at my heart is that of the toilet of the slate house. It was my refuge. Life, which I saw far off and blurred through its darkness and smell - an odour that filled me with compassion, in which the scent of the elders and the loamy earth was dominant, for the outhouse was at the far end of the garden, near the hedge - life, as it reached me, was singularly sweet, caressing, light, or rather lightened, delivered from heaviness. I am speaking of the life which was things outside the toilet, whatever in the world was not in my little retreat with its worm-eaten boards. It seemed to me as if it

were somewhat in the manner of floating, painted dreams, whereas I in my hole, like a larva, went on with a restful nocturnal existence, and at times I had the feeling I was sinking slowly, as into sleep or a lake or a maternal breast or even a state of incest, to the spiritual centre of the earth. My periods of happiness were never luminously happy, my peace never what men of letters and theologians call a 'celestial peace'. That's as it should be, for I would be horrified if I were pointed at by God, singled out by Him; I know very well that if I were sick, and were cured by a miracle, I would not survive it. Miracles are unclean; the peace I used to seek in the outhouse, the one I am going to seek in the memory of it, is a reassuring and soothing peace.

At times it would rain. I would hear the patter of the drops on the zinc roofing. Then my sad well-being, my morose delectation, would be aggravated by a further sorrow. I would open the door a crack, and the sight of the wet garden and the pelted vegetables would grieve me. I would remain for hours squatting in my cell, roosting on my wooden seat, my body and soul prey to the odour and darkness; I would feel mysteriously moved, because it was there that the most secret part of human beings came to reveal itself, as in a confessional. Empty confessionals had the same sweetness for me. Back issues of fashion magazines lay about there, illustrated with engravings in which the women of 1910 always had a muff, a parasol, and a dress with a bustle.

It took me a long time to learn to exploit the spell of these nether powers, who drew me to them by the feet, who flapped their black wings about me, fluttering them like the eyelashes of a vamp, and dug their branchlike fingers into my eyes.

Someone has flushed the toilet in the next cell. Since our two latrines are adjoining, the water stirs in mine, and a whiff of odour heightens my intoxication. My stiff penis is caught in my underpants; it is freed by the touch of my hand, strikes against the sheet, and forms a little mound. Darling! Divine! And I am alone here.

It is Darling whom I cherish most, for you realize that, in the final analysis, it is my own destiny, be it true or false, that I am draping (at times a rag, at times a court robe) on Divine's shoulders.

Slowly but surely I want to strip her of every vestige of happiness so as to make a saint of her. The fire that is searing her has already burned away heavy bonds; new ones are shackling her: Love. A morality is being born, which is certainly not the usual morality (it is

consonant with Divine), though it is a morality all the same, with its Good and Evil. Divine is not beyond good and evil, there where the saint must live. And I, more gentle than a wicked angel, lead her by the hand.

Here are some 'Divinariana' gathered expressly for you. Since I wish to show the reader a few candid shots of her, it is up to him to provide the sense of duration, of passing time, and to assume that during this first chapter she will be between twenty and thirty years of age.

DIVINARIANA

Divine to Darling: 'You're my Maddening Baby!'

- Divine is humble. She is aware of luxury only through a certain mystery which it secretes and which she fears. Luxury hotels, like the dens of witches, hold in thrall aggressive charms which a gesture of ours can free from marble, carpets, velvet, ebony, and crystal. As soon as she accumulated a little money, thanks to an Argentine, Divine trained herself in luxury. She bought leather and steel luggage saturated with musk. Seven or eight times a day, she would take the train, enter the Pullman car, have her bags stacked in the baggage racks, settle down on the cushions until it was time for the train to leave, and, a few seconds before the whistle blew, would call two or three porters, have her things removed, take a cab and have herself driven to a fine hotel, where she would remain long enough to install herself discreetly and luxuriously. She played this game of being a star for a whole week, and now she knows how to walk on carpets and talk to flunkeys, who are luxury furnishings. She has domesticated the charms and brought luxury down to earth. The sober contours and scrolls of Louis XV furniture and frames and woodwork sustain her life - which seems to unroll more nobly, a double stairway - in an infinitely elegant air. But it is particularly where her hired car passes a wrought-iron gate or makes a delicious swerve that she is an Infanta.

- Death is no trivial matter. Divine already fears being caught short for the solemnity. She wants to die with dignity. Just as that air-force lieutenant went into combat in his dress uniform so that, if the death

that flies overtook him in the plane, it would find and transfix him as an officer and not a mechanic, so Divine always carries in her pocket her oily grey diploma for advanced study.

- He's as dumb as a button, as a button on . . . (Mimosa is about to say: your boot).

Divine, blandly: on your fly.

- She always had with her, up her sleeve, a small fan made of muslin and pale ivory. Whenever she said something that disconcerted her, she would pull the fan from her sleeve with the speed of a magician, unfurl it, and suddenly one would see the fluttering wing in which the lower part of her face was hidden. Divine's fan will beat lightly about her face all her life. She inaugurated it in a poultry shop on the Rue Lepic. Divine had gone down with a sister to buy a chicken. They were in the shop when the butcher's son entered. She looked at him and clucked, called the sister and, putting her index finger into the rump of the trussed chicken that lay on the stall, she cried out: 'Oh, look! Beauty of Beauties!' and her fan quickly fluttered to her blushing cheeks. She looked again with moist eyes at the butcher's son.

- On the boulevard, policemen have stopped Divine, who is tipsy. She is singing the *Veni Creator* in a shrill voice. In all the passersby are born little married couples veiled in white tulle who kneel on tapestried prayer stools; each of the two policemen remembers the time he was best man at a cousin's wedding. In spite of this, they take Divine to the station. Along the way she rubs against them, and they each get a hard-on, squeeze her more tightly, and stumble on purpose in order to tangle their thighs with hers. Their huge cocks are alive and rap sharply or push with desperate, sobbing thrusts against the door of their blue woollen pants. They bid them open, like the clergy at the closed church door on Palm Sunday. The little queens, both young and old, scattered along the boulevard, who see Divine going off, borne away to the music of the grave nuptial hymn, the *Veni Creator*, cry out:

'They're going to put her in irons!'

'Like a sailor!'

'Like a convict!'

'Like a woman in childbirth!'

The solid citizens going by form a crowd and see nothing, know nothing. They are scarcely, imperceptibly, dislodged from their calm state of confidence by the trivial event: Divine being led away by the arm, and her sisters bewailing her.

Having been released, the next evening she is again at her post on the boulevard. Her blue eyelid is swollen:

'My God, Beauties, I almost passed out. The policemen held me up. They were all standing around me fanning me with their checked handkerchiefs. They were the Holy Women wiping my face. My Divine Face. "Snap out of it, Divine! Snap out of it," they shouted, "snap out of it, snap out of it!" They were singing to me.

'They took me to a dark cell. Someone (Oh! that SOMEONE who must have drawn them! I shall seek him throughout the fine print on the heavy pages of adventure novels which throng with miraculously handsome and raffish page boys. I untie and unlace the doublet and hip boots of one of them, who follows Black-Stripe John; I leave him, a cruel knife in one hand and his stiff prick clutched in the other, standing with his face to the white wall, and here he is, a young, fiercely virgin convict. He puts his cheek to the wall. With a kiss, he licks the vertical surface, and the greedy plaster sucks in his saliva. Then a shower of kisses. All his movements outline an invisible horseman who embraces him and whom the inhuman wall confines. At length, bored to tears, overtaxed with love, the page draws . . .) had drawn dear ladies, a whirligig of ah! yes yes, my Beauties, dream and play the Boozer so you can fly there - I refuse to tell you what - but they were winged and puffy and big, sober as cherubs, splendid cocks, made of barley sugar. Ladies, around some of them that were more upright and solid than the others, were twined clematis and convolvulus and nasturtium, and winding little pimps too. Oh! those columns! The cell was flying at top speed! It drove me simply mad, mad, mad!'

The sweet prison cells! After the foul monstrousness of my arrest, of my various arrests, each of which is always the first, which appeared to me in all its irremediable aspects in an inner vision of blazing and fatal speed and brilliance the moment my hands were imprisoned in the steel handcuffs, gleaming as a jewel or a theorem, the prison cell, which now I love as one loves a vice, consoles me, by its being, for my own being.

The odour of prison is an odour of urine, formaldehyde, and paint. I

benediction of the Redeemer. Forty days later, on a spring evening, the machine was set up in the prison yard. At dawn, it was ready to cut. Our Lady of the Flowers had his head cut off by a real knife. And nothing happened. What would be the point? There is no need for the veil of the temple to be ripped from top to bottom because a god gives up the ghost. All that this can prove is the bad quality of the cloth and its deterioration. Though it behooves me to be indifferent, still I would not mind if an irreverent scapegrace kicked through it and ran off shouting, 'A miracle!' It's flashy and would make a very good framework for the Legend.

I have reread the earlier chapters. They are now closed, rigorously, and I note that I have given no smile to Culafroy, Divine, Ernestine, or the others. The sight of a little boy in the visitor's room makes me aware of this and makes me think of my childhood, of the ribbons on my mother's white petticoats. In each child I see - but I see so few - I try to find the child I was, to love him for what I was. But when I saw the minors during the medical examination, I looked at those two little mugs, and I left feeling deeply moved, for that was not what I had been like, too white a child, like an underbaked loaf of bread; it is for the men they will be that I love them. When they passed before me, rolling their hips and with their shoulders erect, I already saw at their shoulder blades the hump of the muscles covering the roots of their wings.

All the same, I would like to think that I was like that one. I saw myself again in his face, especially in his forehead and eyes, and I was about to recognize myself completely when, bang, he smiled. It was no longer I, for in my childhood I could no more laugh, or even smile, than in any other period of my life. When the child laughed, I crumbled, so to speak, before my very eyes.

Like all children, adolescents, or mature men, I smiled readily, I even laughed heartily, but as my life rounded out a cycle, I dramatized it. Eliminating the elements of mischievousness, levity, and prankishness, I have retained only those which are properly tragic: Fear, Despair, unhappy Love . . . and I free myself from them only by declaiming those poems which are as convulsed as the faces of sybils. They leave my soul clarified. But if the child in whom I think I see myself laughs or smiles, he breaks up the drama which has been constructed and which is my past life when I think back to it; he

destroys it, falsifies it, at least because he manifests an attitude which the character could not have had; he tears to bits the memory of a harmonious (though painful) life, forces me to see myself becoming another, and on the first drama grafts a second.

DIVINARIANA (*conclusion*)

So here are the last Divinariana. I'm in a hurry to get rid of Divine. I toss off helter skelter, at random, the following notes, in which you, by unscrambling them, will try to find the essential form of the Saint.

Divine, in thought, pushes mimicry to the point of assuming the exact posture that Darling's had assumed in that very spot. Thus, her head is in place of Darling's head, her mouth in place of his mouth, her member in place of his, etc., then she repeats, as exactly as possible - hesitantly, for it must be done with studied refinement (refinement alone, by its difficulty, makes one aware of the game) - the gestures that were Darling's gestures. She occupies, successively, all the space he occupied. She follows him, fills continually all that contained him.

Divine:

'My life? I'm desolate, I'm a Valley of Desolation.'

And it is a valley similar - with pines black beneath the storm - to the landscapes I have discovered during my imaginary adventures beneath the brown, lice-infested blankets of prisons everywhere and which I called Valley of Desolation, of Consolation, Vale of Angels. She (Divine) did not act, perhaps, in accordance with Christ. She was reproached for this. But she: 'Does Lifar dance home from the Opera?'

Her detachment from the world is such that she says: 'What does it matter to me what X - thinks of the Divine I was? What do I care about the memory he has of me? I am another. Each time I will be another.' Thus, she fought against vanity. Thus, she was always ready for some new infamy, without feeling the fear of opprobrium.

She cut off her lashes so as to be even more repulsive. Thinking she is thus burning her boats.

She lost her mannerisms. She managed to attract attention by dint of discretion. Freezing her face. Formerly, when insulted, she could

ck 9
memory of having spoken familiarly with the Holy Virgin.'

At times a regiment goes into the desert and - for the purposes of tactics - a small column of men detaches itself and goes off in a different direction. The fragment may advance thus for some time, quite near the regiment, for an hour or more. The men of the two sections could speak together, see one another, and they do not speak together, they do not see one another: no sooner did the detachment take a step in the new direction than it felt a personality being born to it. It knew that it was alone and that its actions were its action.

Divine has repeated a hundred times that little gesture for detaching herself from the world. But, however far she may depart from it, the world calls her back.

She has spent her life hurling herself from the top of a rock. Now that she no longer has a body (or she has so little left, a little that is whitish, pale, bony, and at the same time very flabby), she slips off to heaven.

Divine, of herself:

'Madame née Secret.'

The saintliness of Divine.

Unlike most saints, Divine had knowledge of it. There is nothing surprising in this, since saintliness was her vision of God and, higher still, her union with Him. This union did not occur without difficulty (pain) on both sides. On Divine's side, the difficulty was due to her having to give up a stable, familiar, and comfortable situation for too wondrous a glory. To retain her position, she did what she thought fitting: she made gestures. Her whole body was then seized with a frenzy to remain behind. She made some gestures of frightful despair, other gestures of hesitation, of timid attempts to find the right way, to cling to earth and not rise to heaven. This last sentence seems to imply that Divine made an ascension. That is not so. Rising to heaven here means: without moving, to leave Divine for the Divinity. The miracle, occurring in privacy, would have been ferocious in its horror. She had to stand her ground, whatever the cost. Had to hold her own against God, Who was summoning her in silence. Had to keep from answering. But had to attempt the gestures that will keep her on earth, that would replant her firmly in matter. In space, she kept devising new and barbaric forms for herself, for she sensed intuitively that immobility makes it too easy for God to get you in a good wrestling hold and carry you off. So she danced. While walking. Everywhere. Her body was

always manifesting itself. Manifesting a thousand bodies. Nobody was aware of what was going on and of Divine's tragic moments as she struggled against God. She assumed poses as astounding as those of certain Japanese acrobats. You might have taken her for some mad tragic actress who, unable to re-enter her own personality, keeps trying, trying . . . Finally, one day, when she wasn't expecting it, as she lay still in bed, God took her and made her a saint. Let us mention, however, a characteristic event. She wanted to kill herself. To kill herself. To kill my kindness. The following brilliant idea therefore occurred to her, and she carried it out: her balcony, which was on the ninth floor of an apartment house, looked down on a paved court. The iron railing was latticed, but across it stretched a wire netting. One of her neighbours had a two-year-old baby girl to whom Divine used to give candy and who occasionally came to visit her. The child would run to the balcony and look at the street through the netting. One day, Divine made up her mind: she detached the netting and left it leaning against the railing. When the little girl came to see her, she locked her in and ran downstairs. When she got to the yard, she waited for the child to go and play on the balcony and lean against the railing. The weight of her body made her fall into the void. From below, Divine watched. None of the child's pirouettes was lost on her. She was superhuman, to the point of - without tears or cries or shudders - gathering with her gloved fingers what remained of the child. She was given three months of preventive custody for involuntary manslaughter, but her goodness was dead. For: 'What good would it do me to be a thousand times good now? How could this inexpiable crime ever be redeemed? So, let us be bad.'

Indifferent, so it seemed, to the rest of the world, Divine was dying.

For a long time, Ernestine did not know what had become of her son, whom she had lost sight of when he ran away a second time. When she finally did hear from him, he was a soldier. She received a somewhat sheepish letter asking her for a little money. But she did not see her son, who had become Divine, until quite some time later, in Paris, where she had gone for an operation, as do all women from the provinces. Divine was then living in rather grand style. Ernestine, who knew nothing about her vice, guessed it almost instantly and thought to herself, 'Lou's got an El Dorado between his buttocks.' She made no comment to him. It hardly affected her opinion of herself to know that she had brought forth a monstrous creature, neither male nor female, scion or scioness of the Picquignys,

ambiguous issue of a great family, of which the siren Melusina was mother. Mother and son were as remote as if they had been at a distance, looking into emptiness: a grazing of insensitive skins. Ernestine never said to herself, 'He is flesh of my flesh.' Divine never said to herself, 'All the same, she's the one who spawned me.' But Divine was, for her mother, a pretext for theatrical gestures, as we showed at the beginning. Divine, out of hatred of that bitch of a Mimosa, who detested her mother, pretended to herself to love and respect her own. This respect pleased Darling, who, like a good pimp, like a real bad boy, had, deep down in his heart, as they say, 'a little spot of purity dedicated to an old mama' whom he did not know. He obeyed the earthly injunctions that govern pimps. He loved his mother, just as he was a patriot and a Catholic. Ernestine came to see Divine die. She brought some sweets, but, by signs that country women recognize - signs that tell more surely than crape - she had known that Divine was leaving.

'He's going away,' she said to herself.

The priest - the same one we saw officiating so oddly - brought the Holy Sacrament. A candle was burning on the little tea table, near a black crucifix and a bowl of holy water in which a dry, dusty little branch of box holly was soaking.

Usually, Ernestine accepted in religion only what was most *purely* marvellous in it (not the mystery that is added to the mystery and conceals it); the marvellous that she found in it was as sound as sterling. Judge from the following: knowing that lightning has a fancy for entering by the chimney and leaving by the window, she, from her armchair, would watch herself go through the window-panes, retaining - including her bust, neck, legs, and skirts - the stiffness, the coagulation of a starched cloth, and falling on the lawn or rising to the sky with her heels together, as if she were a statue. Thus, she would fall downward or upward, the way we see saints and angels flying in old paintings, the way Jesus goes straight to heaven, without being carried by clouds.

That was her religion. As at other times, the days of big flush and gush, days of mystic debauch, she would say to herself: 'Suppose I played at believing in God?' She would do it until she trembled.

At the hour of Divine's death, she played so well at believing in God that she couldn't help having a bit of a transport.

She saw God gulping down an egg. 'To see' is here a casual way of speaking. Regarding revelation, there is not much I can say, for all I

know of it is what was granted me to know, thanks to God, in a Yugoslav prison. I had been taken from town to town, depending on where the police van stopped. I would stay a day or two, sometimes longer, in each of the town prisons. Finally, I arrived and was locked up in a rather large room with about twenty other prisoners. Three gypsies had organized a school for pickpockets there. It worked as follows: while one of the prisoners lay sleeping on his bunk, each of us, in turn, had to remove from his pockets - and put back without waking him - the objects that were already there. It was delicate work, for we often had to tickle the sleeper in a certain way so that he would turn in his sleep and free the pocket on which he was lying with the full weight of his thighs.

When it was my turn to operate, the head gypsy called me and ordered me to go to work. Beneath the cloth of the jacket, I felt my heart beating, and I fainted. I was carried to my bunk and was left there until I came to. I still have a very exact memory of the arrangement of the theatre. The cell was a kind of passageway that left just enough room for the sloping wooden bunks that lined the walls. At one of the ends, opposite the door, was a slightly arched skylight which was fortified with bars. The yellow light that filtered in from a sky invisible to us was falling obliquely, exactly the way it is shown in prints and novels.

When I regained consciousness, I was in the corner near the window. I squatted, the way Berbers and little children do, with my feet wrapped in a blanket. In the other corner, standing in a bunch, were the other men.

They looked at me and burst out laughing. As I did not know their language, one of them pointed at me and made the following gesture: he scratched his hair and, as if he had pulled out a louse, made a show of eating it, with the mimetic gestures characteristic of monkeys.

I do not remember whether I had lice. In any case, I have never devoured any. My head was covered with dandruff that formed a crust which I would scrape off with my nail and then knock from my nail with my teeth, and which I sometimes swallowed.

It was at that moment that I understood the room. I realized - for a fraction of a second - its essence. It remained a room, though a prison of the world. I was, through my monstrous horror, exiled to the confines of the obscene (which is the off-scene of the world), facing the graceful pupils of the school of light-fingered theft. I saw clearly ('see', as in the case of Ernestine) what that room and those men

were, what role they were *playing*: it was a major role in the march of the world. This role was the origin of the world and at the origin of the world. It seemed to me suddenly, thanks to a kind of extraordinary lucidity, that I understood the system. The world dwindled, and its mystery too, as soon as I was cut off from it. It was a truly supernatural moment, similar, in respect to this detachment from the human, to the one I experienced when Chief Warrant Officer Cesari, at the Cherche-Midi Prison, had to write a report on my sexual practices. He said to me, 'That word' (he didn't dare utter the word 'homosexual'), 'is it written as two words?' And he pointed to it on the sheet with his forefinger extended . . . but not touching the word.

I was ravished.

Like me, Ernestine was ravished by God's Angels, who are details, meetings, coincidences of the following order: the toe step or perhaps the meeting place of the thighs of the ballerina which the smile of a beloved soldier makes blossom in the hollow of my chest. She held the world between her fingers for a moment and looked at it with the severity of a schoolmistress.

During the preparation for the last sacrament, Divine emerged from her coma. On seeing the taper, beacon of her own end, she quailed. She realized that death had always been present in life, though its symbolic face had been hidden by a kind of moustache which adjusted its ghastly reality to current taste - that Frankish moustache which, once soldierly, now falling from the scissors, made it look as sheepish as a castrato, for its face at once grew gentle and delicate, pale, with a tiny chin and rounded forehead, like the face of a female saint on Romanesque stained glass or a Byzantine empress, a face we are accustomed to seeing capped with a veiled hennin. Death was so close that it could touch Divine, could tap at her with its lean forefinger, as at a door. She clenched her rigid fingers, tugged at the sheets, which also stiffened, froze.

'But,' she said to the priest, 'I'm not dead yet. I've heard the angels farting on the ceiling.'

'... dead yet,' she repeated to herself, and in voluptuously swinging, nauseating and, in effect, paradisial clouds, Divine again sees the dead woman - and the death of the dead woman - old Adeline of the village, who used to tell him - and Solange - stories about Negroes.

When the old woman (his cousin) died, he was unable to weep, and

in order, nevertheless, to make people think that he was deeply grieved, it occurred to him to moisten his dry eyes with saliva. A ball of smoke is rolling in the heart of Divine's belly. Then she feels herself being invaded, as if by seasickness, by the soul of old Adeline, whose high-heeled button shoes Ernestine made her wear to school after the old lady's death.

On the night of the wake, moved by curiosity, Culafroy got up. As he started to tiptoe out of his room, there surged forth from every corner a throng of souls which formed a barrier that he had to cross. He entered into their midst, strong in his hieratic delegation, frightened, thrilled, more dead than alive. The souls, the shades, formed an immense, a numerous cortege, rose up from the beginnings of the world; generations of shades trailed behind him to the deathbed. It was fear. He was walking barefoot, as unsolemnly as possible.

He was advancing as a thief in the night is supposed to advance, perhaps as many a night he had stolen to the closet to steal sugared almonds, almonds that had been given to Ernestine at some baptism or wedding and which he munched with respect, not as a trivial tidbit, but as a sacred food, a symbol of purity, regarding them in the same way he did white wax orange blossoms that lay under a glass globe: a musty smell of incense, a vision of white veils. And that air: the *Veni Creator*.

'What if the woman keeping vigil is at her post? What will she say?' But she was in the kitchen, drinking coffee.

The room was empty. Emptied. Death creates a vacuum otherwise and better than does an air pump. The bed sheets outlined the face in relief, like clay that has barely been touched by the sculptor.

With outstretched hand and rigid arm, Culafroy lifts the sheets. The corpse was still there. He drew near so as to be less frightened. He dared touch the face and even kiss the eyelids, which were as round and icy as agate marbles. The body seemed fecundated by reality. It was uttering the truth.

At that moment, the child was invaded, as it were, by a disorderly troop of memories of readings and stories he had heard: for example, that the room of Bernadette Soubiroux, at the hour of her death, was full of the scent of invisible violets. He therefore instinctively sniffed, but did not recognize the odour that is said to be the odour of sanctity. God was forgetting His servant. And a good thing too. In the first place, you shouldn't waste the scent of flowers on the bed of a dead

old maid; and furthermore, you should fear to sow panic in the souls of children.

But that moment seems to have been the starting point of the thread that was to lead Culafroy-Divine, in accordance with a superlatively devised fatality, to death. The tentative groping had begun long before. The preliminary investigation, which had been carried on at first in the wonderment arising at the first replies, dated from remote, misty, opaque ages, when he belonged to the people of the gods, exactly like the primitives, who have not yet been unswaddled of their urine-scented wrappings and who possess the dignity - which they share with children and certain animals - the gravity, and the nobility that are rightly called ancient. Now - and increasingly so, until the attainment of the exactly poetic vision of the world - knowledge having been acquired, the swaddling clothes were thrust aside. As each questioning, each sounding, rendered a more and more hollow sound, it indicated death, which is the only reality that satisfies us wholly.

Gone was the joyous rebound upon contact with objects. At each touch, his blindly scrutinizing little finger plunged into emptiness. Doors turned by themselves and revealed nothing. He kissed the old lady on the eyes, and the snakelike iciness froze him. He was about to reel, perhaps fall, when the Memory came to his rescue: the memory of Alberto's corduroy pants. As a man who, through some unexpected privilege, has caught a glimpse of the very heart of the mysteries, quickly looks away so as to regain his footing on earth, so the terror-stricken Culafroy flung himself, burying his head, into the warm, enveloping memory of Alberto's trousers, where he thought to find, to his relief, comforting broods of titmice.

Then, borne by Alberto, who had come down from heaven, he went back to his room and to bed, where he wept. But - and don't let this surprise you - he wept at being unable to weep.

Here is how our Great Divine died.

Having looked for her little gold watch, she found it between her thighs and, with her fist closed over it, handed it to Ernestine, who was sitting at her bedside. Their two hands met in the form of a shell with the watch in the middle. A vast physical peace relaxed Divine. Filth, an almost liquid shit, spread out beneath her like a warm little lake, into which she gently, very gently - as the vessel of a hopeless emperor sinks, still warm, into the waters of Lake Nemi - was engulfed, and with this relief she heaved another sigh, which rose to

her mouth with blood, then another sigh, the last.

Thus did she pass away, one might also say drowned.

Ernestine was waiting. Suddenly, by some miracle, she realized that the throbbing of their joined hands was the ticking of the watch.

Because she lived among omens and signs, she was not superstitious. She therefore laid out the corpse all by herself and dressed Divine in a very modest blue cheviot suit of English cut.

So here she is dead. The Quite-Dead. Her body is caught in the sheets. It is, from head to foot, forever a ship in the breaking-up of ice-floes, motionless and rigid, drifting toward infinity: you, Jean, dear heart, motionless and rigid, as I have already said, drifting on my bed to a happy Eternity.

And with Divine dead, what is left for me to do? To say?

This evening, the poplars, of which I see only the tops, are being cruelly dashed together by an angry wind. My cell, lulled by that kindly death, is so sweet today!

What if I were free tomorrow?

(Tomorrow is the day of the hearing.)

Free, in other words, exiled among the living. I have made myself a soul to fit my dwelling. My cell is so sweet. Free: to drink wine, to smoke, to see ordinary people. And tomorrow, what will the jury be like? I have anticipated the stiffest possible sentence it can inflict. I have prepared myself for it with great care, for I have chosen my horoscope (according to what I can read of it from past events) as a figure of fatality. Now that I can obey it, my grief is less great. It is annihilated in the face of the irremediable. It is my hopelessness, and what will be, will be. I have given up my desires. I too am 'already far beyond that' (Weidmann). Let me therefore live between these walls for a man's lifetime. Who will be judged tomorrow? Some stranger bearing a name that was once my name. I can continue to die, until my death, amidst all these widowers. Lamp, washbasin, regulations, broom. And the straw mattress, my spouse.

I do not feel like going to sleep. Tomorrow's hearing is a solemnity that requires a vigil. It is this evening that I should like to weep - as one who stays behind - for my farewells. But my lucidity is like a nakedness. The wind outside is getting wilder and wilder and is being joined by the rain. The elements are thus a prelude to tomorrow's ceremonies. Today is the 12th, isn't it? What shall I decide? Warnings are said to come from God. They don't interest me. I already feel that I no longer belong to the prison. Broken is the exhausting fraternity

that bound me to the men of the tomb. Perhaps I shall live . . .

At times I am shaken with a burst of brutal and unaccountable laughter. It resounds within me like a joyous cry in the fog, which it seems to be trying to dissipate, but it leaves no trace other than a wistful longing for sun and gaiety.

What if I am condemned? I shall don homespun again, and this rust-coloured garment will immediately entail the monastic gesture: hiding my hands in my sleeves; and the equivalent attitude of mind will follow: I shall feel myself becoming humble and glorious; then, snug under my blankets - it is in *Don Juan* that the characters come back to life on the stage and kiss each other - I shall, for the enchantment of my cell, refashion lovely new lives for Darling, Divine, Our Lady and Gabriel.

I have read moving letters, full of wonderful touches, of despair, of hopes, of songs; and others more severe. I am choosing from among them one which will be the letter Darling wrote to Divine from prison:

'Dearest,

I'm writing a few lines to give you the news, which isn't good. I've been arrested for stealing. So try to get a lawyer to handle my case. Arrange to pay him. And also arrange to send me a money order, because you know how lousy things are here. Also try to get permission to come and see me and bring me some linens. Put in the blue and white silk pyjamas. And some undershirts. Dearest, I'm awfully sorry about what's happened to me. Let's face it, I'm plain unlucky. So I'm counting on you to help me out. I only wish I could have you in my arms so I could hold you and squeeze you tight. Remember the things we used to do together. Try to recognize the dotted lines. And kiss it. A thousand big kisses, sweetheart, from

Your Darling.'

The dotted line that Darling refers to is the outline of his prick. I once saw a pimp who had a hard-on while writing to his girl place his heavy cock on the paper and trace its contours. I would like that line to portray Darling.

Fresnes Prison, 1942