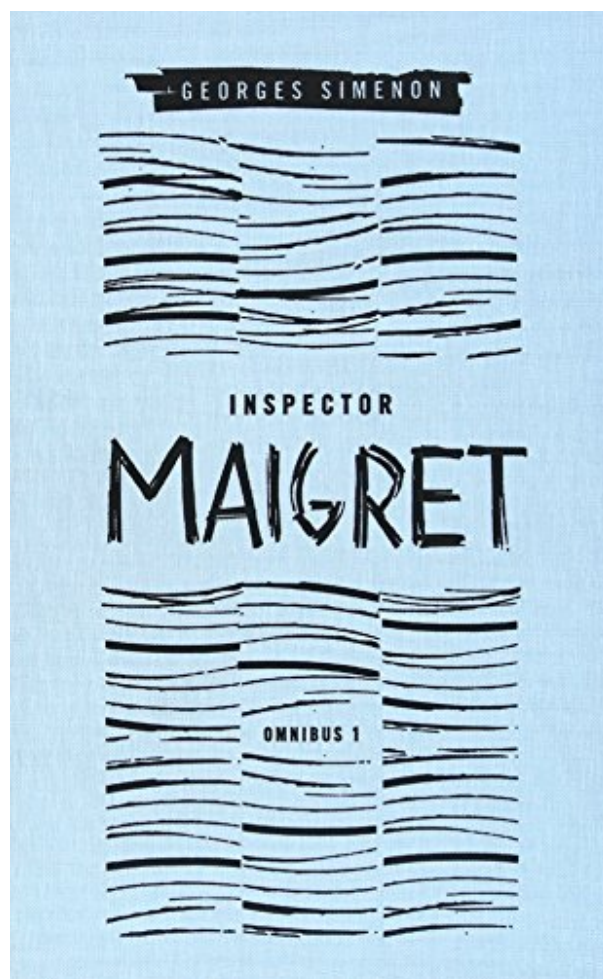
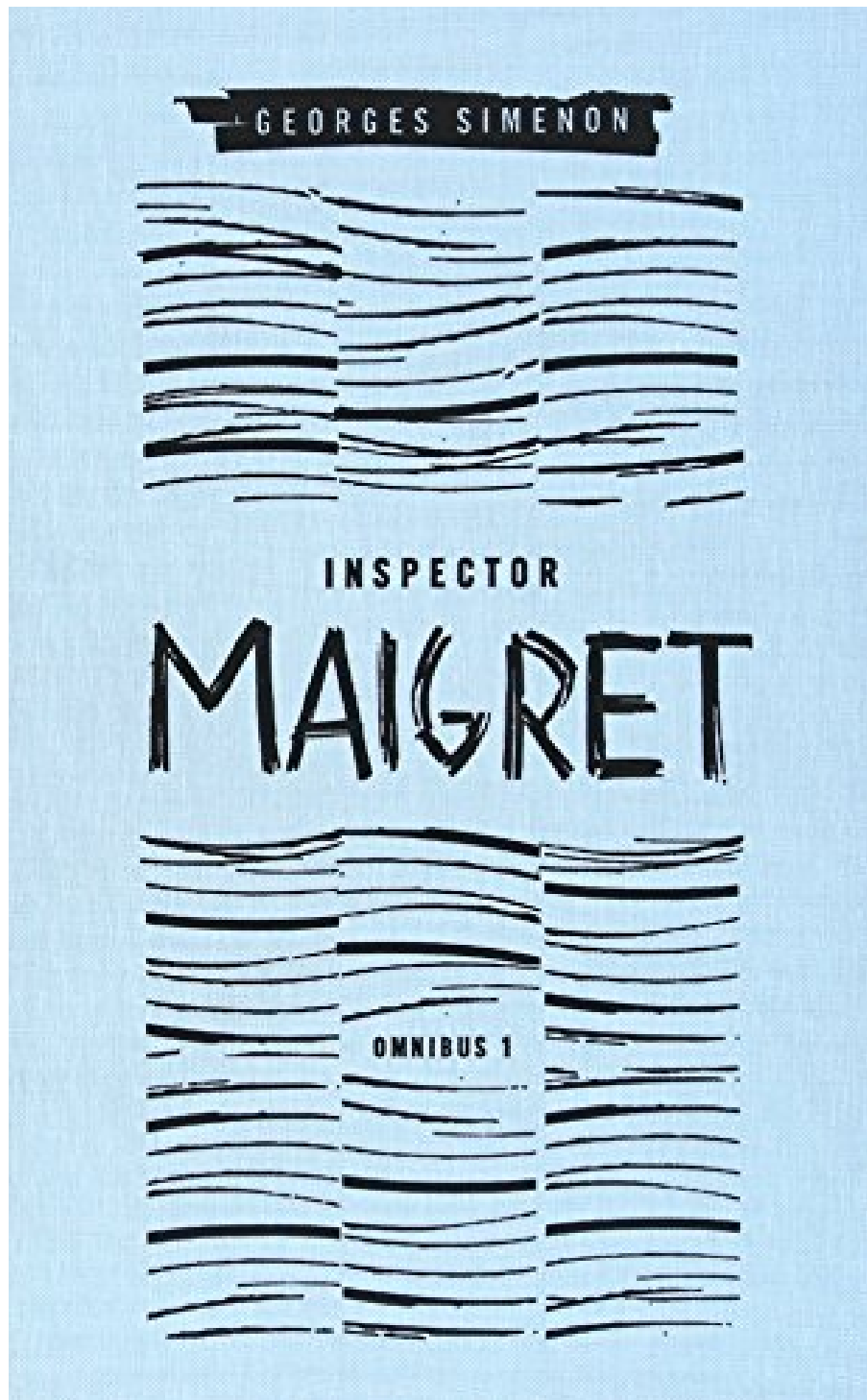


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**Inspector Maigret Omnibus: Volume 1: Pietr The Latvian; The Hanged Man Of Saint-Pholien; The Carter Of 'La Providence'; The Grand Banks Caf.** In undergoing this life, lots of people constantly aim to do as well as get the very best. New understanding, experience, lesson, and also every little thing that can improve the life will be done. Nonetheless, many individuals sometimes really feel confused to obtain those things. Feeling the restricted of encounter and sources to be better is one of the lacks to have. Nevertheless, there is a quite straightforward point that can be done. This is exactly what your teacher constantly manoeuvres you to do this one. Yeah, reading is the solution. Reading a publication as this Inspector Maigret Omnibus: Volume 1: Pietr The Latvian; The Hanged Man Of Saint-Pholien; The Carter Of 'La Providence'; The Grand Banks Caf as well as other references can enhance your life quality. Exactly how can it be?

## **Review**

'One of the greatest writers of the twentieth century...Simenon was unequalled at making us look inside, though the ability was masked by his brilliance at absorbing us obsessively in his stories.' — The Guardian

'I love reading Simenon. He makes me think of Chekhov.' — William Faulkner

'The greatest of all, the most genuine novelist we have had in literature' — André Gide

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'Superb... The most addictive of writers... A unique teller of tales' — The Observer

'Compelling, remorseless, brilliant.' — John Gray

'A truly wonderful writer... marvellously readable - lucid, simple, absolutely in tune with the world he creates' — Muriel Spark

'A novelist who entered his fictional world as if he were a part of it' — Peter Ackroyd

'Extraordinary masterpieces of the twentieth century' — John Banville

## **About the Author**

GEORGES SIMENON (1903–1989) was born in Liège, Belgium. Best known in the English-speaking world as the author of the Inspector Maigret books, his prolific output of more than four hundred novels and short stories have made him a household name in continental Europe.

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Georges Simenon

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INSPECTOR MAIGRET  
OMNIBUS 1

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Title Page

Copyright

About the Author

Pietr the Latvian

1. Apparent age 32, height 169 ...
  2. Mixing with Millionaires
  3. The Strand of Hair
  4. The Seeteufel's First Mate
  5. The Russian Drunkard
  6. Au Roi de Sicile
  7. The Third Interval
  8. Maigret Gets Serious
  9. The Hit-man
  10. The Return of Oswald Oppenheim
  11. Arrivals and Departures
  12. A Woman With a Gun
  13. The Two Pietrs
  14. The Ugala Club
  15. Two Telegrams
  16. On the Rocks
  17. And a Bottle of Rum
  18. Hans at Home
  19. The Injured Man
- The Hanged Man of Saint-Pholien

1. The Crime of Inspector Maigret
2. Monsieur Van Damme
3. The Herbalist's Shop in Rue Picpus
4. The Unexpected Visitor
5. Breakdown at Luzancy
6. The Hanged Men
7. The Three Men
8. Little Klein
9. The Companions of the Apocalypse
10. Christmas Eve in Rue du Pot-au-Noir

#### 11. The Candle End

#### The Carter of La Providence

1. Lock 14
2. The Passengers on Board the Southern Cross
3. Mary Lampson's Necklace
4. The Lover
5. The YCF Badge
6. The American Sailor's Cap
7. The Bent Pedal

8. Ward 10
9. The Doctor

#### 10. The Two Husbands

#### 11. Right of Way

#### The Grand Banks Café

1. The Glass Eater
2. The Tan-Coloured Shoes
3. The Headless Photograph

4. The Mark of Rage
5. Adèle and Friend
6. The Three Innocents
7. Like a Family
8. The Drunken Sailor
9. Two Men on Deck
10. What Happened on the Third Day
11. The Océan Sails

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Georges Simenon was born on 12 February 1903 in Liège, Belgium, and died in 1989 in Lausanne, Switzerland, where he had lived for the latter part of his life. Between 1931 and 1972 he published seventy-five novels and twenty-eight short stories featuring Inspector Maigret.

Simenon always resisted identifying himself with his famous literary character, but acknowledged that they shared an important characteristic:

My motto, to the extent that I have one, has been noted often enough, and I've always conformed to it. It's the one I've given to old Maigret, who resembles me in certain points ... 'understand and judge not'.

Penguin is publishing the entire series of Maigret novels.

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Georges Simenon

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## PIETR THE LATVIAN

Translated by David Bellos

1. Apparent age 32, height 169 ...

ICPC to PJ Paris Xvzust Krakowvimontra m ghks triv psot uv Pietr-le-Letton Bremen vs tyz btolem.

Detective Chief Inspector Maigret of the Flying Squad raised his eyes. It seemed to him that the cast-iron stove in the middle of his office with its chimney tube rising to the ceiling wasn't roaring properly. He pushed the telegram away, rose ponderously to his feet, adjusted the flue and thrust three shovels of coal into the firebox.

Then he stood with his back to the stove, filled his pipe and adjusted his stud collar, which was irritating his neck even though it wasn't set very high.

He glanced at his watch. Four p.m. His jacket was hanging on a hook on the back of the door.

Slowly he returned to his desk, mouthing a translation as he went:

International Criminal Police Commission to Police Judiciaire in Paris: Krakow police report sighting Pietr the Latvian en route to Bremen.

The International Criminal Police Commission, or ICPC, is based in Vienna. Broadly speaking, it oversees the struggle against organized crime in Europe, with a particular responsibility for liaison between the various national police forces on the Continent.

Maigret pulled up another telegram that was similarly written in IPC, the secret international police code used for communication between all the world's police forces. He translated at sight:

Polizei-Präsidium Bremen to PJ Paris: Pietr the Latvian reported en route Amsterdam and Brussels.

Another telegram from the Nederlandsche Centrale in Zake Internationale Misdadigers, the Dutch police HQ, reported:

At 11 a.m. Pietr the Latvian boarded Étoile du Nord, compartment G. 263, car 5, destination Paris.

The final message in IPC had been sent from Brussels and said:

Confirm Pietr the Latvian on board Étoile du Nord via Brussels 2 a.m. in compartment reported by Amsterdam.

Behind Maigret's desk there was a huge map pinned to the wall. The inspector was a broad and heavy man. He stood staring at the map with his hands in his pockets and his pipe sticking out the side of his mouth.

His eyes travelled from the dot representing Krakow to the other dot showing the port of Bremen and from there to Amsterdam and Paris.

He checked the time once again. Four-twenty. The Étoile du Nord should now be hurtling along at sixty miles an hour between Saint-Quentin and Compiègne.

It wouldn't stop at the border. It wouldn't be slowing down.

In car 5, compartment G. 263, Pietr the Latvian was presumably spending his time reading or looking at the scenery.

Maigret went over to a door that opened onto a closet, washed his hands in an enamel basin, ran a comb through thick dark-brown hair flecked with only a few silver strands around the temple, and did his best to straighten out his tie – he'd never learned how to do a proper knot.

It was November and it was getting dark. Through the window he could see a branch of the Seine, Place

Saint-Michel, and a floating wash-house, all in a blue shroud speckled by gas lamps lighting up one after the other.

He opened a drawer and glanced at a dispatch from the International Identification Bureau in Copenhagen.

Paris PJ Pietr-le-Letton 32 16901512 0224 0255 02732 03116 03233 03243 03325 03415 03522 04115 04144 0414705221 ...

This time he made an effort to speak the translation aloud and even went over it several times, like a schoolchild reciting a lesson:

Description Pietr the Latvian: apparent age 32 years, height 169 cm, sinus top straight line, bottom flat, extension large max, special feature septum not visible, ear unmarked rim, lobe large, max cross and dimension small max, protuberant antitragus, vex edge lower fold, edge shape straight line edge feature separate lines, orthognathous upper, long face, biconcave, eyebrows thin fair light, lower lip jutting max thick lower droop, light.

This 'word-picture' of Pietr was as clear as a photograph to Inspector Maigret. The principal features were the first to emerge: the man was short, slim, young and fair-haired, with sparse blonde eyebrows, greenish eyes and a long neck.

Maigret now also knew the shape of his ear in the minutest detail. This would enable him to make a positive identification in a milling crowd even if the suspect was in disguise.

He took his jacket off the hook and slipped his arms into it, then put on a heavy black overcoat and a bowler hat.

One last glance at the stove, which seemed on the verge of exploding.

At the end of the corridor, on the stair landing that was used as a waiting room, he reminded Jean:

'You won't forget to keep my stove going, will you?'

The wind swirling up the stairs took him by surprise, and he had to shelter from the draught in a corner to get his pipe to light.

Wind and rain blew in squalls over the platforms of Gare du Nord despite the monumental glass canopy overhead. Several panes had blown out and lay in shards on the railway tracks. The lighting wasn't working properly. People huddled up inside their clothes.

Outside one of the ticket windows an alarming travel notice had been posted:

Channel forecast: gale-force winds.

One woman, whose son was to catch the Folkestone boat train, looked upset; her eyes were red. She kept on telling the boy what he should do, right up to the last minute. In his embarrassment he had no choice but to promise not to go out on deck.

Maigret stood near platform 11 where people were awaiting the arrival of the Étoile du Nord. All the leading hotels, as well as Thomas Cook, had their agents standing by.

He stood still. Other people were agitated. A young woman clad in mink yet wearing only sheer silk stockings walked up and down, stamping her heels.

He just stood there: a hulk of a man, with shoulders so broad as to cast a wide shadow. When people bumped into him he stayed as firm as a brick wall.

The yellow speck of the train's headlamp appeared in the distance. Then came the usual hubbub, with porters shouting and passengers tramping and jostling their way towards the station exit.

A couple of hundred passengers paraded past Maigret before he picked out in the crowd a short man wearing a broad-checked green travelling cape of a distinctly Nordic cut and colour.

The man wasn't in a hurry. He had three porters behind him. Bowing and scraping, an agent from one of the grand hotels on the Champs-Élysées cleared the way in front of him.

Apparent age 32, height 169 ... sinus top ...

Maigret kept calm. He looked hard at the man's ear. That was all he needed.

The man in green passed close by. One of his porters bumped Maigret with one of the suitcases.

At exactly the same moment a railway employee began to run, shouting out something to his colleague standing at the station end of the platform, next to the barrier.

The chain was drawn closed. Protests erupted.

The man in the travelling cape was already out of the station.

Maigret puffed away at his pipe in quick short bursts. He went up to the official who had closed the barrier.

'Police! What's happened?'

'A crime ... They've just found ...'

'Carriage 5? ...'

'I think so ...'

The station went about its regular business; only platform 11 looked abnormal. There were fifty passengers still waiting to get out, but their path was blocked. They were getting excited.

'Let them go ...' Maigret said.

'But ...'

'Let them go ...'

He watched the last cluster move away. The station loudspeaker announced the departure of a local train. Somebody was running somewhere. Beside one of the carriages of the Étoile du Nord there was a small group waiting for something. Three of them, in railway company livery.

The stationmaster got to them first. Hewas a large man and had a worried look on his face. Then a hospital stretcher waswheeled through the main hall, past clumps of people who looked at it uneasily,especially those about to depart.

Maigret walked up the side of the trainwith his usual heavy tread, smoking as he went. Carriage 1, carriage2 ... He came to carriage 5.

That's where the group wasstanding at the door. The stretcher came to a halt. The stationmaster tried tolisten to the three men, who were all speaking at the same time.

'Police! Where is he?'

Maigret's presence providedobvious relief. He propelled his placid mass towards the centre of the franticgroup. The other men instantly became his satellites.

'In the toilet ...'

Maigret hauled himself up onto the trainand saw that the toilet door on his rightwas open. On the floor, in a heap, was a body, bent double in a strangely contortedposture.

The conductor was giving orders from theplatform.

'Shunt the carriage to theyard ... Hang on! ... Track 62 ... Let the railway policeknow ...'

At first he could only see the back ofthe man's neck. But when he tipped his cap off its oblique angle, he could seethe man's left ear. Maigret mumbled to himself: lobe large, max cross anddimension small max, protuberant antitragus ...

There were a few drops of blood on thelinoleum. Maigret looked around. The railway staff were standing on the platform oron the running board. The stationmaster was still talking.

So Maigret clenched his pipe between histeeth even harder and turned the man's head over.

If he hadn't seen the traveller inthe green cloak leave the station, if he hadn't seen him taken to a car by aninterpreter from the Majestic, he could have had doubts.

It was the same physiognomy. The samefair toothbrush moustache under a sharply defined nose. The same sparse blondeyebrows. The same grey-green eyes.

In other words: Pietr the Latvian!

Maigret could hardly turn around in thetiny washroom, where the tap was still running and a jet of steam was seeping fromsome poorly sealed joint.

He was standing right next to thecorpse. He pulled the man's upper body upright and saw on his chest, on hisjacket and shirt, the burn-marks made by gunshot from point-blank range.

It was a big blackish stain tinged withthe dark red of coagulating blood.

One detail struck the inspector. He happened to notice oneof the man's feet. It was twisted on its side, as was the whole body, whichmust have been squashed into a corner so as to allow the door to close.

The shoe was black and happened to be of a very cheap and common kind. Apparently it had been re-soled. The heel was worn on one side, and a coin-shaped gap had opened up in the middle of the sole.

The local chief of the railway police had now reached the carriage and was calling up from the platform. He was a self-confident man wearing a uniform with epaulettes.

‘So what is it, then? Murder? Suicide? Don’t touch anything until the law gets here, OK? Be careful! I’m the one who’s in charge. OK?’

Maigret had a tough time disentangling his own feet from the dead man’s legs to extricate himself from the toilet. With swift, professional movements he patted the man’s pockets. Clean as a whistle. Nothing in them at all.

He got out of the carriage, his pipe had gone out, his hat was askew and he had a bloodstain on his cuff.

‘Well, if it isn’t Maigret! ... What do you make of it, then?’

‘Not much. Go have a look yourself ...’

‘It’s suicide, right?’

‘If you say so ... Did you call the prosecutor’s office?’

‘As soon as I heard ...’

The loudspeaker crackled with some message or other. A few people had noticed there was something unusual going on and stood in the distance, watching the empty train and the group of people standing next to the running board of carriage 5.

Maigret strode off without saying a word. He left the station and hailed a cab.

‘Hôtel Majestic! ...’

The storm had got even worse. Gusts swept down the streets and made pedestrians totter about like drunks. A roof tile smashed onto the pavement. Buses, and more buses.

The Champs-Élysées was almost entirely deserted. Drops of rain had begun to fall. The porter at the Majestic dashed out to the taxi with a huge red umbrella.

‘Police! ... Has someone from the Étoile du Nord just checked in?’

That prompted the porter to fold his umbrella.

‘Yes, sir, that true.’

‘Green cape ... Fair moustache ...’

‘That right. Sir, good reception.’

People were scrambling to shelter from the rain. Maigret got inside the hotel just in time to avoid drops as big as walnuts and cold as ice.

Despite this, the receptionists and interpreters behind the polished wood counter were as elegant and efficient

asever.

‘Police ... A guest in a green cape ... Small fair moustache—’

‘Room 17, sir. His bags are on their way up right now ...’

## 2. Mixing with Millionaires

Inevitably Maigret was a hostile presence in the Majestic. He constituted a kind of foreign body that the hotel’s atmosphere could not assimilate.

Not that he looked like a cartoon policeman. He didn’t have a moustache and he didn’t wear heavy boots. His clothes were well cut and made of fairly light worsted. He shaved every day and looked after his hands.

But his frame was proletarian. He was a big, bony man. Iron muscles shaped his jacket sleeves and quickly wore through new trousers.

He had a way of imposing himself just by standing there. His assertive presence had often irked many of his own colleagues.

It was something more than self-confidence but less than pride. He would turn up and stand like a rock with his feet wide apart. On that rock all would shatter, whether Maigret moved forward or stayed exactly where he was.

His pipe was nailed to his jawbone. He wasn’t going to remove it just because he was in the lobby of the Majestic.

Could it be that Maigret simply preferred to be common and self-assertive?

You just couldn’t miss the man wearing a big black velvet-collared overcoat in that brightly lit lobby, where excitable society ladies scattered trails of perfume, tinkling laughter and loud whispers amidst the unctuous compliments of impeccable flunkies.

He paid no attention. He wasn’t part of the flow. He was impervious to the sound of jazz floating up from the dance-floor in the basement.

The inspector started to go up one of the stairs. A liftboy called out and asked if he wanted to take the lift, but Maigret didn’t even turn round.

At the first landing someone asked him:

‘Are you looking for ...?’

It was as if the sound wave hadn’t reached him. He glanced at the corridors with their red carpets stretching out so far that they almost made you sick. He went on up.

On the second floor he read the numbers on the bronze plaques. The door of no. 17 was open. Valets with striped waistcoats were bringing in the luggage.

The traveller had taken off his cloak and looked very slender and elegant in his pinstripe suit. He was smoking a papirosa and giving instructions at the same time.

No. 17 wasn't a room, but a wholesuite: lounge, study, bedroom and bathroom. The doors opened onto two intersecting corridors, and at the corner, like a bench placed by a crossroads, there was a huge, curved sofa.

That's where Maigret sat himself down, right opposite the open door. He stretched out his legs and unbuttoned his overcoat.

Pietr saw him and, showing neither surprise nor disquiet, he carried on giving instructions. When the valets had finished placing his trunks and cases on stands, he came to the door, held it open for an instant to inspect the detective, then closed it himself.

Maigret sat there for as long as it took to smoke three pipes, and to dismiss two room-service waiters and one chambermaid who came up to inquire what he was waiting for.

On the stroke of eight Pietr the Latvian came out of his room, looking even slimmer and smarter than before, in a classically tailored dinner jacket that must have come from Savile Row.

He was hatless. His short, ash-blond hair was already thinning. His hairline was set far back and his forehead notably high; you could glimpse a streak of pink scalp along the parting.

He had long, pale hands. On the fourth finger of his left hand he wore a chunky platinum signet ring set with a yellow diamond.

He was smoking again – another papirosa. He walked right up to Maigret, stopped for a moment, looked at him as if he felt like saying something, then walked on towards the lift as if lost in thought.

Ten minutes later he took his seat in the dining room at the table of Mr and Mrs Mortimer-Levingston. The latter was the centre of attention: she had pearls worth a cool million on her neck.

The previous day her husband had come to the rescue of one of France's biggest automobile manufacturers, with the result that he was now its majority shareholder.

The three of them were chatting merrily. Pietr talked a lot, but discreetly, with his head leaning forwards. He was completely at ease, natural and casual, despite being able to see the detective's dark outline through the glazed partition.

Inspector Maigret asked reception to show him the guest list. He wasn't surprised to see that Pietr had signed in under the name of Oswald Oppenheim, ship-owner, from Bremen.

It was a foregone conclusion that he had a genuine passport and full identity papers in that name, just as he no doubt did in several others.

It was equally obvious that he'd met the Mortimer-Levingstons previously, whether in Berlin, Warsaw, London or New York.

Was the sole purpose of his presence in Paris to rendezvous with them and to get away with another one of the colossal scams that were his trademark?

Maigret had the Latvian's filecard in his jacket pocket. It said:

Extremely clever and dangerous. Nationality uncertain, from Baltic area. Reckoned to be either Latvian or Estonian. Fluent in Russian, French, English and German. High level of education. Thought to be capo of



major international ring mainly involved in fraud. The ring has been spotted successively in Paris, Amsterdam (Van Heuvel case), Berne (United Shipowners affair), Warsaw (Lipmann case) and in various other European cities where identification of its methods and procedures was less clear.

Pietr the Latvian's associates seem to be mainly British and American. One who has been seen most often with him and who was identified when he presented a forged cheque for cash at the Federal Bank in Berne was killed during arrest. His alias was Major Howard of the American Legion, but it has been established that he was actually a former New York bootlegger known in the USA as Fat Fred.

Pietr the Latvian has been arrested twice. First, in Wiesbaden, for swindling a Munich trader out of half a million marks; second, in Madrid, for a similar offence involving a leading figure at the Spanish royal court.

On both occasions he used the same ploy. He met his victims and presumably told them that the stolen sums were safely hidden and that having him arrested would not reveal where they were. Both times the complaint was withdrawn, and the plaintiffs were probably paid off.

Since then he has never been caught red-handed.

He is probably in cahoots with the Maronetti gang (counterfeit money and forged documents) and the Cologne gang (the 'wall-busters').

There was another rumour doing the rounds of European police departments: Pietr, as the ring-leader and money-launderer of one or more gangs, was said to be sitting on several million that had been split up under different names in different banks and even invested in legitimate industries.

The man smiled subtly at the story Mrs Mortimer-Levingston was telling, while with his ivory hand he plucked luscious grapes from the bunch on his plate.

'Excuse me, sir. Could I please have a word with you?'

Maigret was speaking to Mortimer-Levingston in the lobby of the Majestic after Pietr and Mortimer's wife had both gone back up to their rooms.

Mortimer didn't have the athletic look of a Yank. He was more of the Mediterranean type.

He was tall and thin. His very small head was topped with black hair parted down the middle.

He looked permanently tired. His eyelids were weary and blue. In any case he led an exhausting life, somehow managing to turn up in Deauville, Miami, Venice, Paris, Cannes and Berlin before getting back to his yacht and then dashing off to do a deal in some European capital or to referee a major boxing match in New York or California.

He looked Maigret up and down in lordly fashion.

'And you are ...?'

'Detective Chief Inspector Maigret of the Flying Squad ...'

Mortimer barely frowned and stood there leaning forwards as if he had decided to grant just one second of his time.

‘Are you aware you have just dined with Pietr the Latvian?’

‘Is that all you have to say?’

Maigret didn’t budge an inch. It was pretty much what he’d expected.

He put his pipe back in his mouth –he’d allowed himself to remove it in order to speak to the millionaire – and muttered:

‘That’s all.’

He looked pleased with himself. Levingston moved off icily and got into the lift.

It was just after 9.30. The symphony orchestra that had been playing during dinner yielded the stage to a jazz band. People were coming in from outside.

Maigret hadn’t eaten. He was standing calmly and patiently in the middle of the lobby. The manager repeatedly gave him worried and disapproving looks from a distance. Even the lowliest members of staff scowled as they passed by, when they didn’t manage to jostle him.

The Majestic could not stomach him. Maigret persisted in being a big black unmoving stain amidst the gilding, the chandeliers, the comings and goings of silk evening gowns, fur coats and perfumed, sparkling silhouettes.

Mrs Levingston was the first to come back down in the lift. She had changed, and now wore a lamé cape lined with ermine that left her shoulders bare.

She seemed astonished not to find anyone waiting for her and began to walk up and down, drumming the floor with her gold-lacquered high heels.

She suddenly stopped at the polished wooden counter where the receptionists and interpreters stood and said a few words. One of the staff pushed a red button and picked up a handset.

He looked surprised and called a bellboy, who rushed to the lift.

Mrs Mortimer-Levingston was visibly anxious. Through the glass door you could see the sleek shape of an American-made limousine standing at the kerb.

The bellboy reappeared, spoke to the member of staff, who in his turn said something to Mrs Mortimer. She protested. She must have been saying:

‘But that’s impossible!’

Maigret then went up the staircase, stopped outside suite 17, knocked on the door. As he’d expected after the circus he’d just watched, there was no answer.

He opened the door and found the lounge deserted. Pietr’s dinner jacket was lying casually on the bed in the bedroom. One trunk was open. A pair of patent-leather shoes had been left at opposite ends of the carpet.

The manager came in and grunted:

‘You’re already here, are you?’

‘So? ... Vanished, has he? Levingston as well! Is that right?’

‘Now there’s no need to go overboard. Neither of them is in his room, but we’ll probably find them somewhere else in the hotel.’

‘How many exits are there?’

‘Three. The main entrance on the Champs-Élysées ... Then there’s the entrance in the covered mall, and the service entrance on Rue de Ponthieu ...’

‘Is there a security guard? Call him ...’

The telephone worked. The manager was in a temper. He took it out on an operator who couldn’t understand him. He kept his gaze fixed on Maigret, and it was not kind.

‘What does all this mean?’ he asked as he waited for the guard to come up from the glass-walled box where he was on duty beside the service entrance.

‘Nothing, or almost, as you said ...’

‘I hope there’s not been a ... a ...’

The word crime, dreaded like the plague by hoteliers the world over from the humblest lodging-house landlord to the manager of a luxury resort, just would not pass his lips.

‘We’ll find out.’

Mrs Mortimer-Levingston appeared.

‘Well? ...’ she inquired.

The manager bowed and muttered something. A figure appeared at the far end of the corridor – an old man with a straggly beard and ill-cut clothes at odds with the luxurious appearance of the hotel. He was obviously meant to stay in the back, otherwise he too would have been given a fine uniform and been sent to the barber every day.

‘Did you see anyone go out?’

‘When?’

‘In the last few minutes ...’

‘A guy from the kitchen, I think ... I wasn’t paying attention ... A guy with a cap ...’

‘Was he short? Fair?’ Maigret interrupted.

‘Yes ... I think so ... I wasn’t watching ... He was quick ...’

‘Nobody else?’

‘I dunno ... I went round the corner to buy the paper ...’

Mrs Mortimer-Levingston began to lose her temper.

‘Well now! Is that how you conduct a manhunt?’ she said to Maigret. ‘I’ve just been told you’re a policeman ... My husband might have been killed ... What are you waiting for?’

The look that then fell upon her was Maigret through and through! Completely calm! Completely unruffled! It was as if he’d just noticed the buzzing of a bee. As if what he had before him was something quite ordinary.

She was not accustomed to being looked at in that way. She bit her lip, blushed crimson beneath her make-up and stamped her heel with impatience.

He was still staring at her.

Because he was pushing her to the limit, or perhaps because she didn’t know what else to do, Mrs Mortimer-Levingston threw a fit.

### 3. The Strand of Hair

It was nearly midnight when Maigret got back to his office on Quai des Orfèvres. The storm was at its peak. The trees on the riverbank were rattling back and forth and the wash-house barge was tossing about in the waves.

The building was almost empty. At least Jean was still at his post in the lobby at the entrance to a corridor of empty offices.

Voices could be heard coming from the duty room. Then, further down, there was light streaking out from beneath a door – a detective or an inspector working on some case. One of the official cars in the courtyard below was running its engine.

‘Is Torrence back?’ Maigret asked.

‘He’s just come in.’

‘My stove?’

‘It was so hot in your office I had to open the window. There was condensation running down your wall!’

‘Get me some beers and sandwiches. None of that soft white bread, mind you.’

He pushed a door and called out:

‘Torrence!’

Detective Torrence followed his chief to his office. Before he’d left Gare du Nord Maigret had called Torrence on the telephone and told him to keep going on the case on his own.

Inspector Maigret was forty-five and his junior was barely thirty years old. Even so, there was something solid and bulky about Torrence that made him an almost full-scale model of his boss.

They’d conducted many cases together without ever saying an unnecessary word.

Maigret took off his overcoat and his jacket and loosened his tie. He stood for a while with his back to the stove to let the heat seep in. Then he asked:

‘So?’

‘The Prosecution Service had an emergency meeting. Forensics took photographs but couldn’t find any fingerprints – except the dead man’s, of course. They don’t match any we have on record.’

‘If I remember correctly, don’t they have a file on our friend from the Baltic?’

‘Just the “word-picture”. No fingerprints, no anthropometric data.’

‘So we can’t be sure that the dead man is someone other than Piotr.’

‘But there’s no guarantee that it is him, either!’

Maigret had taken out his pipe and a pouch that had only a sprinkling of brown dust left in it. Mechanically Torrence handed him an opened packet of shag.

There was a pause. Tobacco crackled in Maigret’s pipe. Then came a sound of footsteps and tinkling glassware on the other side of the door, which Torrence opened.

The waiter from Brasserie Dauphine brought in six glasses of beer and four thick-stuffed sandwiches on a tray, which he laid on the table.

‘Are you sure that’ll be enough?’ he asked, seeing that Maigret had company.

‘That’s fine.’

Maigret started drinking and munching without putting his pipe out, though he did push a glass over to his assistant’s side of the desk.

‘Well?’

‘I questioned all the staff who were on the train. There’s definite proof that someone was on board without a ticket. Could be the victim, could be the culprit! We’re assuming he got on at Brussels, on the track side. It’s easier to hide in a Pullman car than in any other because each carriage has a lot of luggage space. Piotr had tea in the restaurant car between Brussels and the French border and spent his time flicking through a pile of French and English newspapers, including the financial dailies. He went to the toilet between Maubeuge and Saint-Quentin. The head waiter remembers that because as he went past him Piotr said, “Take a whisky to my seat”.’

‘And he went back to his seat later on?’

‘Fifteen minutes later, he was back at his regular place with a whisky in front of him. But the head waiter didn’t see Piotr again, since he didn’t go back by way of the restaurant car.’

‘Did anybody try to use the toilet after him?’

‘Sure! A lady traveller tried to get in, but the lock was jammed. It wasn’t until the train got to Paris that a staff member managed to force it open. The mechanism had been clogged with iron filings.’

‘Up to that point, had anybody set eyes on the second Piotr?’

‘Absolutely not. He would have been very noticeable. He was wearing shoddy clothes and would have stood

out a million a de luxe express.'

'What about the bullet?'

'Shot at point-blank range. Automatic revolver, 6 mm. The shot caused such burning of the skin that according to the doctor the victim would have died from the heat shock alone.'

'Any sign of a struggle?'

'None at all. The pockets were empty.'

'I know that ...'

'Sorry! However, I did find this in a small button-down pocket on the inside of his waistcoat.'

Torrence then extracted from his wallet a folded piece of transparent paper inside which you could see a strand of brown hair.

'Hand it over ...'

Maigret hadn't stopped eating and drinking all the while.

'A woman's hair? Or a child's?'

'Forensics says it's a woman's hair. I left him a few strands that he's promised to examine closely.'

'And the autopsy?'

'All done by 10 a.m. Probable age: thirty-two. Height 1 m 68 cm. No hereditary abnormalities. One of his kidneys was in poor shape, which could mean he was a boozer. Stomach contained tea and other digested matter that couldn't be identified straight away. They'll work on the analysis tomorrow. Now the examination is over the body is being kept on ice at the morgue.'

Maigret wiped his mouth, stationed himself in his favourite position in front of the stove and held out his hand, which Torrence mechanically supplied with a packet of tobacco.

'For my part,' Maigret said eventually, 'I saw Pietr, or whoever has taken over his role, check in at Hôtel Majestic and have dinner with the Mortimer-Levingstons, which seems to have been arranged in advance.'

'The millionaires?'

'Yes, that's right. After the meal, Pietr went back to his suite. I warned the American. Mortimer then went to his room. They were obviously planning to go out as a threesome, since Mrs Mortimer came down straight after, in full evening gear. Ten minutes later, both men had vanished. Our Latvian had switched his evening wear for less swanky clothes. He'd put on a cap, and the guard just assumed he was a kitchen worker. But Levingston left as he was, in formal attire.'

Torrence said nothing. In the long pause that ensued, you could hear the fire roaring in the stove and the window panes rattling in the storm.

Torrence finally broke the silence.

‘Luggage?’ he asked.

‘Done. Nothing there! Just clothes and underwear ... The usual accoutrements of a first-class traveller. Not a scrap of paper. The Mortimer woman is certain that her husband has been murdered.’

Somewhere a bell rang. Maigret opened the drawer in his desk where that afternoon he’d put all the telegrams about Pietr the Latvian.

Then he looked at the map. He drew a line with his finger from Krakow to Bremen, then to Amsterdam, Brussels and Paris.

Somewhere near Saint-Quentin, a brief halt: a man died.

In Paris, the line came to a full stop. Two men vanish from the middle of the Champs-Élysées.

All that’s left are suitcases in a suite and Mrs Mortimer-Levingston, whose mind is as empty as Pietr’s travelling chest.

The gurgle from Maigret’s pipe was getting so annoying that the inspector took a swatch of chicken feathers from another drawer, cleaned the shaft, then opened the stove door and flung the soiled feathers in the fire.

Four of the beer glasses were empty but for sticky froth marks on the rim. Somebody came out of one of the offices on the corridor, locked his door and went away.

‘Who’s a lucky man!’ Torrence observed. ‘That’s Lucas. Tonight he got a tip-off from some moneyed brat and arrested a pair of drug dealers.’

Maigret was poking the fire, and when he stood up his face was crimson. In routine fashion he picked up the translucent paper, extracted the strand of hair and turned it over in the light. Then he went back to the map and studied the invisible track of Pietr’s journey. It made a sweeping arc of almost 180 degrees.

If he had started out from Krakow, then why had he gone all the way north to Bremen before swerving back down to Paris?

He was still holding the slip of paper. He muttered:

‘There must have been a picture inside this once.’

In fact, the tissue was a glassine envelope, a slipcover of the kind photographers use to protect customers’ orders. But it was an obsolete size known as ‘album format’ that could only now be found in provincial backwaters. The photo that this cover must have protected would have been about half the size of a standard postcard, printed on off-white glacé paper on cardboard backing.

‘Is anyone still there at the lab?’ Maigret suddenly asked.

‘I guess so. They must still be processing the photos of the Étoile du Nord affair.’

There was only one full glass left on the table. Maigret gulped it down and put on his jacket.

‘You’ll come along? ... Those kinds of portrait photos usually have the name and address of the photographer printed or embossed on them ...’

Torrence got the point. They set off through a labyrinth of passageways and stairs up into the attic floors of the Law Courts and finally found the forensics lab.

An expert took the slipcover, ran it through his fingers, almost sniffed at it. Then he sat at an arc lamp and wheeled over a carriage-mounted multiplying glass.

The principle is straightforward: blank paper that has been in protracted contact with another sheet that has been printed or written on eventually acquires an imprint of the letters on that other sheet. The imprint cannot be seen by the naked eye, but photography can reveal it.

The fact that there was a stove in the lab meant that Maigret was destined to end up there. He stood watch for the best part of an hour, smoking pipe after pipe, while Torrence trailed the photographer as he came and went.

At long last the darkroom door opened. A voice cried out:

‘We’ve got it!’

‘Yes?’

‘The photo credit is: Léon Moutet, Art Photography, Quai des Belges, Fécamp.’

Only a real expert could decipher the plate. Torrence, for instance, could only see a blur.

‘Do you want to see the post-mortem photos?’ the expert asked cheerfully. ‘They’re first-rate! But it was a tight fit inside that railway toilet! Would you believe it, we had to hang the camera from the ceiling ...’

‘Have you got an outside line?’ Maigret asked, gesturing towards the phone.

‘Yes ... the switchboard shuts down at nine, so before she goes off the operator connects me to the outside.’

Maigret called the Majestic and spoke to one of the desk interpreters.

‘Has Mr Mortimer-Levingston come back in?’

‘I’ll find out for you, sir. To whom do I have the honour of ...’

‘Police!’

‘No, sir, he’s not back.’

‘What about Mr Oswald Oppenheim?’

‘Not back either, sir.’

‘What is Mrs Mortimer up to?’

A pause.

‘I asked you what Mrs Mortimer is doing.’

‘She is ... I think she is in the bar ...’



‘Do you mean she’s drunk?’

‘She has had a few cocktails, sir. She said she would not go up to her suite until her husband comes back ... Do you ...?’

‘What’s that?’

‘Hello? ... This is the manager speaking,’ another voice broke in. ‘Any progress? Do you think this will get into the papers? ...’

Cruelly, Maigret hung up. To please the photographer he took a look at the first proof photos laid out in the drying trays, still gleaming wet. While doing that he was talking to Torrence.

‘You’re going to settle in at the Majestic, old pal. The main thing is to take no notice whatsoever of the manager.’

‘What about you, patron?’

‘I’m going back to the office. There’s a train to Fécamp at 5.30, It’s not worth going home and waking up Mme Maigret. Hang on ... The Dauphine should still be open. On your way, order me up a beer ...’

‘Just one ...?’ Torrence inquired, with a deadpan expression on his face.

‘As you like, old pal! The waiter’s smart enough to know it means three or four. Have him throw in a few sandwiches as well.’

They traipsed down an unending spiral staircase in single file.

The black-gowned photographer was left on his own to admire the prints he’d just made. He still had to number them.

The two detectives parted company in the freezing courtyard.

‘If you leave the Majestic for any reason, make sure one of our men holds the fort,’ Maigret instructed. ‘I’ll telephone the front desk if I need to get in touch ...’

He went back to his office and stoked the fire so vigorously he could have snapped the grate.

#### 4. The Seeteufel’s First Mate

The station at La Bréauté, on the mainline to Le Havre, where Maigret had to change trains at 7.30 a.m., gave him a foretaste of Fécamp.

The ill-lit station buffet had grimy walls and a counter offering only a few mouldy pieces of cake alongside a miserable fruit stack made of three bananas and five oranges.

The foul weather had even more impact there than in Paris. Rain was coming down in buckets. Crossing from one track to the other meant wading through knee-deep mud.

The branch-line train was a rickety affair made up of carriages on their way to scrap. In the pale half-light of dawn you could hardly make out the fuzzy shapes of farmhouses through the pelting rain.

Fécamp! The air was laden with the smell of herring and cod. Mountains of casks. Ships' masts peering over the locomotive. Somewhere a siren blared.

'Quai des Belges?'

Straight ahead. All he had to do was walk through slimy puddles gleaming with fish scales and rotting innards.

The photographer was also a shopkeeper and a newspaper vendor. He stocked oilskins, sailcloth pea-jackets and hempen rope alongside New Year's greeting cards.

A weakling with very pale skin: as soon as he heard the word 'police' he called his wife to the rescue.

'Can you tell me what photo was in this slipcover?'

It dragged on. Maigret had to squeeze words out of him one by one and do his thinking for him.

In the first place, the technician hadn't used that format for eight years, ever since he'd acquired new equipment to do postcard-sized portraits.

Who might have had his or her photograph taken eight or more years ago? Monsieur Moutet took a whole fifteen minutes to remember that he'd got an album with archive copies of all the portraits done in his establishment.

His wife went to get it. Sailors came and went. Kids came in to buy a penny's worth of sweets. Outside, ships' tackle scraped on the dock. You could hear the waves shifting shingle along the breakwater.

Maigret thumbed through the archive album, then specified what he was looking for:

'A young woman with extremely fine brown hair ...'

That did it.

'Mademoiselle Swaan!' the photographer exclaimed. He turned up the snapshot straight away. It was the only time he'd had a decent subject to photograph.

She was a pretty woman. She looked twenty. The photo fitted the slipcover exactly.

'Who is she?'

'She's still living in Fécamp. But now she's got a cliff-top villa five minutes from the Casino ...'

'Is she married?'

'She wasn't then. She was the cashier at the Railway Hotel.'

'Opposite the station, I suppose?'

'Yes, you must have seen it on your way here. She was an orphan from some small place around here ... Les Loges ... Do you know where I mean? ... Anyway, that's how she got to meet a traveller staying at the hotel ... They got married ... At the moment she's living in the villa with her two children and a maid ...'

‘Mr Swaan doesn’t live in Fécamp?’

There was a pause. The photographer and his wife exchanged glances. The woman answered:

‘Since you’re from the police, I suppose we’d better tell you everything. Anyway you’d find it all out in the end, but ... They’re only rumours, but ... Mr Swaan almost never stays in Fécamp. When he does come he stops for a few days at the most ... Sometimes it’s just a flying visit ... He first came not long after the war ... The Grand Banks were being reorganized, after five years’ interruption. He wanted to look into it properly, so he said, and to make investments in businesses that were being started up again. He claimed to be Norwegian ... His first name is Olaf ... The herring fishermen who sometimes go as far as Norway say there are plenty of people over there who have that name ... Nonetheless, people said he was really a German spy. That’s why, when he got married, his wife was kept at arm’s length. Then we discovered he really was a sailor and was first mate on a German merchantman, and that was why he didn’t show up very often ... Eventually people stopped bothering about him, but we’re still wary ...’

‘You said they had children?’

‘Two ... A little girl of three and a baby a few months old ...’

Maigret took the photograph out of the album and got directions to the villa. It was a bit too early to turn up. He waited in a harbour café for two hours, listening to fishermen talking about the herring catch, which was at its height. Five trawlers were tied up at the quay. Fish was being unloaded by the barrelful. Despite the wind and rain, the air stank.

To get to the villa he walked along the deserted breakwater and around the shuttered Casino still plastered with last summer’s posters. At last he got to a steep climb that began at the foot of the cliff. As he plodded up he got occasional glimpses of iron railings in front of villas. The one he was looking for turned out to be a comfortable-looking red-brick structure, neither large nor small. He guessed that the garden with its white-gravel paths was well tended in season. The windows must have had a good view into the far distance.

Maigret rang the bell. A great Dane came to sniff at him through the railings, and its lack of bark made it seem all the more ferocious. At the second ring, a maid appeared. First she took the dog back to his kennel, and then asked:

‘What is it about?’

She spoke with the local accent.

‘I would like to see Mr Swaan, please.’

She seemed hesitant.

‘I don’t know if sir is in ... I’ll go and ask.’

She hadn’t opened the gate. Rain was still pouring down, and Maigret was soaked through. He watched the maid go up the steps and vanish inside the house. Then a curtain shifted at a window. A few moments later the maid reappeared.

‘Sir will not be back for several weeks. He is in Bremen ...’

‘In that case I would like to have a word with Madame Swaan ...’

The maid hesitated again, but ended up opening the gate.

‘Madame isn’t dressed. You will have to wait ...’

The dripping detective was shown into a neat lounge with white curtains and a waxed floor. The furniture was brand new, but just the same as you would find in any lower-middle-class home. They were good-quality pieces, in a style that would have been called modern around 1900.

Light oak. Flowers in an ‘artistic’ stone vase in the middle of the table. Crochet-work place-mats. On the other hand, there was a magnificent sculpted silver samovar on a side-table. It must have been worth more than the rest of the room’s contents put together.

Maigret heard noises coming from the first floor. A baby could be heard crying through one of the ground-floor walls; someone else was mumbling something in a soft and even voice, as if to comfort it. At last, the sound of slippered feet gliding along the corridor. The door opened. Maigret found himself facing a young woman who had dressed in a hurry so as to meet him.

She was of medium height, more plump than slim, with a pretty and serious face that betrayed a pang of anxiety. She smiled nonetheless and said:

‘Why didn’t you take a seat?’

Rivulets of rainwater flowed from Maigret’s overcoat, trousers and shoes into little puddles on the polished floor. In that state he could not have sat down on the light-green velvet of the armchairs in the lounge.

‘Madame Swaan, I presume? ...’

‘Yes, monsieur ...’

She looked at him quizzically.

‘I’m sorry to disturb you like this ... It’s just a formality ... I’m with the Immigration Service ... We’re conducting a survey ...’

She said nothing. She didn’t seem any more or less anxious than before.

‘I understand Mr Swaan is a Swede. Is that correct?’

‘Oh no, he’s Norwegian ... But for the French I guess it’s something ... To begin with, I myself ...’

‘He is a ship’s officer?’

‘He’s first mate on the Seeteufel, out of Bremen ...’

‘As I thought ... So he is in the employ of a German company?’

She blushed.

‘The ship-owner is German, yes ... At least, on paper ...’

‘Meaning? ...’

'I don't think I need to keep it from you ... You must be aware that the merchant fleet has been in crisis since the war ... Even here you can find ocean-going captains who've been unable to find commissions and who have to take positions as first or even second mates ... Others have joined the Newfoundland or the North Sea fishing fleets.'

She spoke quite fast, but in a gentle and even tone.

'My husband didn't want to take on a commission in the Pacific, where there's more work, because he wouldn't have been able to come back to Europe more than once every two years ... Shortly after we got married, some Americans bought the Seeteufel in the name of a German shipping firm ... Olaf first came to Fécamp looking specifically for more schooners to buy ... Now you must see ... The aim was to run booze to the USA ... Substantial firms were set up with American money ... They have offices in France, Holland, or Germany ... The truth is that my husband works for one of these companies. The Seeteufel sails what's called Rum Alley. It doesn't really have anything to do with Germany.'

'Is he at sea at the moment?' Maigret asked, keeping his eyes on that pretty face, which struck him as an honest and even at times a touching one.

'I don't think so. You must realize that the sailings aren't as regular as those of a liner. But I always try to keep abreast of the Seeteufel's position. At the moment he ought to be in Bremen, or very nearly there.'

'Have you ever been to Norway?'

'Never! I've actually never left Normandy, so to speak. Just a couple of times, for short stays in Paris.'

'With your husband?'

'Yes ... On our honeymoon, as well.'

'He's got fair hair, hasn't he?'

'Yes ... Why do you ask?'

'And a thin, close-cropped blond moustache?'

'Yes ... I can show you a picture of him if you like.'

She opened a door and went out. Maigret could hear her moving about in the bedroom next door.

She was out for longer than made sense, and the noises of doors opening and closing and of comings and goings around the house were just as illogical.

At last she came back, looking somewhat perplexed and apologetic.

'Please excuse me ...' she said. 'I can't manage to put my hand on that photo ... A house with children is always upside down ...'

'One more question ... To how many people did you give a copy of this photograph of yourself?'

Maigret showed her the archive print he'd been given by the photographer. Madame Swaan went bright red and stuttered:

'I don't understand ...'

'Your husband presumably has one?'

'Yes ... We were engaged when ...'

'Does any other man have a print?'

She was on the verge of tears. The quiver of her lips gave away her distress.

'No, nobody.'

'Thank you, madame. That will be all.'

As he was leaving a little girl slipped into the hallway. Maigret had no need to memorize her features. She was the spitting image of Pietr the Latvian!

'Olga! ...' her mother scolded, as she hustled her back through a half-open door.

Maigret was back outside in the rain and the wind.

'Goodbye, madame ...'

He caught a final glimpse of her through the closing door. He was aware that he had left her at a loss, after bursting in on her in the warmth of her own home. He picked up a trace in her eyes of something uncertain but undoubtedly akin to anxiety as she shut her front door.

## 5. The Russian Drunkard

You don't boast about these kinds of things, they would raise a laugh if they were mentioned out loud, but all the same, they call for a kind of heroism.

Maigret hadn't slept. From 5.30 to 8 a.m. he'd been shaken about in draughty railway carriages. Ever since he'd changed trains at La Bréauté he'd been soaked through. Now his shoes squelched out dirty water at every step and his bowler was a shapeless mess. His overcoat and trousers were sopping wet.

The wind was slapping him with more rain. The alleyway was deserted. It was no more than a steep path between garden walls. The middle of it had turned into a raging torrent.

He stood still for quite a while. Even his pipe had got wet in his pocket. There was no way of hiding near the villa. All he could do was stick as close as possible to a wall and wait.

Anyone coming by would catch sight of him and look round. He might have to stay there for hours on end. There was no definite proof that there was a man in the house. And even if he were there, why should he come out?

Grumpy as he was, Maigret filled his wet pipe with tobacco all the same, and wedged himself as best he could into a cranny in the wall ...

This was no place for a detective chief inspector of the Police Judiciaire. At most it was a job for a new recruit. Between the age of twenty-two and thirty he'd stood this sort of watch a hundred times over.

He had a terrible time getting a match to light. The emery board on the side of the box was coming off in strips. If one of the sticks hadn't finally ignited, maybe even Maigret would have given up and gone home.

He couldn't see anything from where he was standing except a low wall and the green-painted railing of the villa. He had brambles at his ankles and a draught all down his neck.

Fécamp was laid out beneath him, but he could not see the town. He could only hear the roar of the sea and now and again a siren or the sound of a car.

After half an hour on watch he saw a woman with a shopping basket, who looked like a cook, making her way up the steep slope. She only saw Maigret when she passed close by him. His huge, unmoving shape standing next to the wall in a wind-swept alley so scared her that she started to run.

Perhaps she worked for one of the villas at the top of the rise? A few minutes later a man appeared at the bend and stared at Maigret from afar. Then a woman joined him, and both went back inside.

It was a ridiculous situation. The inspector knew there wasn't one chance in ten that his surveillance would be of any use.

Yet he stuck it out – just because of a vague feeling that didn't even deserve to be called an intuition. In fact it was a pet theory of his that he'd never worked out in full and remained vague in his mind, but which he dubbed for his own use the theory of the crack in the wall.

Inside every wrong-doer and crook there lives a human being. In addition, of course, there is an opponent in a game, and it's the player that the police are inclined to see. As a rule, that's what they go after.

Some crime or offence is committed. The match starts on the basis of more or less objective facts. It's a problem with one or more unknowns that a rational mind tries to solve.

Maigret worked like any other policeman. Like everyone else, he used the amazing tools that men like Bertillon, Reiss and Locard have given the police – anthropometry, the principle of the trace, and so forth – and that have turned detection into forensic science. But what he sought, what he waited and watched out for, was the crack in the wall. In other words, the instant when the human being comes out from behind the opponent.

At the Majestic he'd seen the player. But here, he had a premonition of something else. The tidy, quiet villa wasn't one of the props that Pietr used to play his hand. Especially the wife and the children he'd seen and heard: they belonged to a different physical and moral order.

That's why he was waiting, albeit in a foul mood, for he was too fond of his big cast-iron stove and his office with glasses of frothy beer on the table not to be miserable in such awful weather.

He'd started his watch a little after 10.30. At half past noon he heard footsteps scrunching the gravel and swift, practised movements opening the gate, which brought a figure to within three metres of the inspector. The lie of the land made it impossible for Maigret to retreat. So he stood his ground unwaveringly, or, to be more precise, inertly, standing on two legs that could be seen in the round through the sopping wet trousers that clung to them.

The man leaving the villa was wearing a poor-quality belted trenchcoat, with its worn-out collar upturned. He was also wearing a grey cap. The get-up made him look very young. He went down the hill with his hands in his pockets, all hunched up and shivering because of the contrast in temperature.

He was obliged to pass within a metre of the Detective Chief Inspector. He chose that moment to slow down, take a packet of cigarettes out of his pocket and light up. It was as if he'd positively tried to get his face into the light so as to allow the detective to study it in detail!

Maigret let him go on a few paces, then set off on his tail, with a frown on his face. His pipe had gone out. His whole being exuded a sense of displeasure as well as an ardent desire to understand.

The man in the trenchcoat looked like the Latvian and yet did not resemble him! Same height: about 1 m 68 cm. At a pinch he could be the same age, though in the outfit he was wearing he looked closer to twenty-six than thirty-two. There was nothing to determine that this man was not the original of the 'word-picture' that Maigret knew by heart and also had on a piece of paper in his pocket.

And yet ... it was not the same man! For one thing, his eyes had a vaguer, more sentimental expression. They were a lighter shade of grey, as if the rain had scrubbed them. Nor did he have a blond toothbrush moustache. But that wasn't the only thing that made him different.

Maigret was struck by other details. His outfit was nothing like that of an officer of the merchant fleet. It didn't even fit the villa, given the comfortable middle-class style of living that it implied.

His shoes were worn and the heels had been redone. Because of the mud, the man hitched up his trouser legs, showing faded grey cotton socks that had been clumsily darned.

There were lots of stains on the trenchcoat. Overall, the man fitted a type that Maigret knew well: the migrant low-lifer, predominantly of Eastern European origin, who slept in squalid lodging houses and sometimes in railway stations. A type not often seen outside Paris, but accustomed to travelling in third-class carriages when not riding the footboards or hopping freight trains.

He got proof of his insight a few minutes later. Fécamp doesn't have any genuine low dives, but behind the harbour there are two or three squalid bars favoured by dockhands and seamen. Ten metres before these places there's a regular café kept clean and bright. The man in the trenchcoat walked right past it and straight into the least prepossessing of the bars, where he put his elbow on the counter in a way that Maigret saw right through.

It was the straightforwardly vulgar body-language of a guttersnipe. Even if he'd tried, Maigret couldn't have imitated it. The inspector followed the man into the bar. He'd ordered an absinthe substitute and was just standing there, wordless, with a blank stare on his face. He didn't register Maigret's presence, though the inspector was now right next to him.

Through a gap in the man's jacket Maigret could see that his linen was dirty. That's not something that can be simulated, either! His shirt and collar – now not much more than a ribbon – had been worn for days, maybe for weeks on end. They'd been slept in – God knows where! They'd been sweated in and rained on.

The man's suit was not unstylish, but it bore the same signs and told the same miserable story of a vagrant life.

'Same again!'

The glass was empty, and the barman refilled it, serving Maigret a measure of spirits at the same time.

'So you're back in these parts again? ...'

The man didn't answer. He downed his drink in one gulp and gestured for a refill straight away.



‘Anything to eat? ... I’ve got some pickled herring ...’

Maigret had sidled up to a small stove, and stood in front of it to warm his back, now as shiny as an umbrella.

‘Come to think of it ... I had a man in here last week from your part of the world ... Russian he was, from Archangelsk ... Sailing a Swedish three-master that had to put in to port because of the bad weather ... Hardly had time to drink his fill, I can tell you! ... Had a devil of a job on his hands ... Torn sails, snapped yards, you name it ...’

The man, now on his fourth imitation absinthe, was drinking steadily. The barman filled his glass every time it was empty, glancing at Maigret with a conniving wink.

‘As for Captain Swaan, I ain’t seen him since you was here last.’

Maigret shuddered. The man in the trenchcoat who’d now downed his fifth neat ersatz absinthe staggered towards the stove, bumped into the detective and held out his hands towards the warmth.

‘I’ll have a herring, all the same ...’ he said.

He had a quite strong accent – a Russian accent, as far as the detective could judge.

There they were, next to each other, shoulder to shoulder, so to speak. The man wiped his face with his hand several times, and his eyes grew ever more murky.

‘Where’s my glass? ...’ he inquired testily.

It had to be put in his hand. As he drank he stared at Maigret and pouted with disgust.

There was no mistaking that expression! As if to assert his opinion all the more clearly, he threw his glass to the ground, leaned on the back of a chair and muttered something in a foreign tongue.

The barman, somewhat concerned, found away of getting close to Maigret and whispering quietly in a way that was nonetheless audible to the Russian:

‘Don’t take any notice of him. He’s always like that ...’

The man gave a drunkard’s strangled laugh. He slumped into the chair, put his head in both his hands and stayed like that until a plate of herring was pushed over the table between his elbows. The barman shook his shoulder.

‘Eat up! ... It’ll do you good ...’

The man laughed again. It was more like a bitter cough. He turned round so he could see Maigret and stare at him aggressively, then he pushed the plate of herring off the table.

‘More drink! ...’

The barman raised his arms and grunted as if it was an excuse:

‘Russians, I ask you!’

Then he put his finger to his head and turned it, as if he was tightening a loose screw.

Maigret had pushed his bowler to the back of his head. His clothes were steaming, giving off a grey haze. He was only up to his second glass of spirits.

'I'll have some herring!' he said.

He was still eating it with a slice of bread when the Russian got up on unsteady legs, looked around as if he didn't know what to do and grinned for the third time when he set eyes on Maigret.

Then he slumped down at the bar, took a glass from the shelf and a bottle from the enamel sink where it was being kept cool in water. He helped himself without watching how much he was taking and smacked his tongue as he drank.

Eventually he took a 100 franc note out of his pocket.

'Is that enough, you swine?' he asked the waiter.

He threw the banknote up in the air. The barman had to fish it out of the sink.

The Russian struggled with the door handle, which wouldn't open. There was almost a fight because the barman tried to help his customer, who kept elbowing him away.

At long last the trench coat faded away into the mist and rain along the harbour-side, going towards the station.

'That's an odd'un,' the barman sighed, intending to be heard by Maigret, who was paying his bill.

'Is he often in?'

'Now and again ... Once he spent the whole night here, on the bench where you're sitting ... He's a real Russian! ... Some Russian sailors who were here in Fécamp at the same time as he was told me so ... Apparently he's quite educated ... Did you look at his hands? ...'

'Don't you think he's got the same looks as Captain Swaan? ...'

'Oh! So you know him ... Well, of course he does! But not so much as you'd mistake one for the other ... All the same ... For ages I thought it was his brother.'

The beige silhouette vanished round a corner. Maigret started to walk faster. He caught up with the Russian just as he was going into the third-class waiting room at the station. The man slumped onto a bench and once again put his head in his hands.

# **INSPECTOR MAIGRET OMNIBUS: VOLUME 1: PIETR THE LATVIAN; THE HANGED MAN OF SAINT-PHOLIEN; THE CARTER OF 'LA PROVIDENCE'; THE GRAND BANKS CAF PDF**

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The first annual omnibus edition in the new Penguin Inspector Maigret series, comprising four titles from the series so far: Pietr the Latvian, The Hanged Man of Saint-Pholien, The Carter of La Providence and The Grand Banks Cafe. Additional material includes the original French first edition covers, art directed by Georges Simenon himself.

Penguin is publishing the entire series of Maigret novels.

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'A supreme writer . . . unforgettable vividness.' - The Independent

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- Inspector Maigret Omnibus Volume 1 Pietr the Latvian The Hanged Man of Saint Pholien The Carter of La Providence The Grand Banks Cafe

## **Review**

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'A novelist who entered his fictional world as if he were a part of it' — Peter Ackroyd

'Extraordinary masterpieces of the twentieth century' — John Banville

#### About the Author

GEORGES SIMENON (1903–1989) was born in Liège, Belgium. Best known in the English-speaking world as the author of the Inspector Maigret books, his prolific output of more than four hundred novels and short stories have made him a household name in continental Europe.

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Georges Simenon

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INSPECTOR MAIGRET  
OMNIBUS 1

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Title Page

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About the Author

Pietr the Latvian

1. Apparent age 32, height 169 ...
2. Mixing with Millionaires
3. The Strand of Hair
4. The Seeteufel's First Mate
5. The Russian Drunkard
6. Au Roi de Sicile
7. The Third Interval
8. Maigret Gets Serious
9. The Hit-man
10. The Return of Oswald Oppenheim
11. Arrivals and Departures

12. A Woman With a Gun

13. The Two Pietrs

14. The Ugala Club

15. Two Telegrams

16. On the Rocks

17. And a Bottle of Rum

18. Hans at Home

19. The Injured Man

The Hanged Man of Saint-Pholien

1. The Crime of Inspector Maigret

2. Monsieur Van Damme

3. The Herbalist's Shop in Rue Picpus

4. The Unexpected Visitor

5. Breakdown at Luzancy

6. The Hanged Men

7. The Three Men

8. Little Klein

9. The Companions of the Apocalypse

10. Christmas Eve in Rue du Pot-au-Noir

11. The Candle End

The Carter of La Providence

1. Lock 14

2. The Passengers on Board the Southern Cross

3. Mary Lampson's Necklace

4. The Lover

5. The YCF Badge

6. The American Sailor's Cap

7. The Bent Pedal

8. Ward 10

9. The Doctor

10. The Two Husbands

11. Right of Way

The Grand Banks Café

1. The Glass Eater

2. The Tan-Coloured Shoes

3. The Headless Photograph

4. The Mark of Rage

5. Adèle and Friend

6. The Three Innocents

7. Like a Family

8. The Drunken Sailor

9. Two Men on Deck

10. What Happened on the Third Day

11. The Océan Sails

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Georges Simenon was born on 12 February 1903 in Liège, Belgium, and died in 1989 in Lausanne, Switzerland, where he had lived for the latter part of his life. Between 1931 and 1972 he published seventy-five novels and twenty-eight short stories featuring Inspector Maigret.

Simenon always resisted identifying himself with his famous literary character, but acknowledged that they shared an important characteristic:

My motto, to the extent that I have one, has been noted often enough, and I've always conformed to it. It's the one I've given to old Maigret, who resembles me in certain points ... 'understand and judge not'.

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Georges Simenon

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## PIETR THE LATVIAN

Translated by David Bellos

1. Apparent age 32, height 169 ...

ICPC to PJ Paris Xvzust Krakowvimontra m ghks triv psot uv Pietr-le-Letton Bremen vs tyz btolem.

Detective Chief Inspector Maigret of the Flying Squad raised his eyes. It seemed to him that the cast-iron stove in the middle of his office with its chimney tube rising to the ceiling wasn't roaring properly. He pushed the telegram away, rose ponderously to his feet, adjusted the flue and thrust three shovels of coal into the firebox.

Then he stood with his back to the stove, filled his pipe and adjusted his stud collar, which was irritating his neck even though it wasn't set very high.

He glanced at his watch. Four p.m. His jacket was hanging on a hook on the back of the door.

Slowly he returned to his desk, mouthing a translation as he went:

International Criminal Police Commission to Police Judiciaire in Paris: Krakow police report sighting Pietr the Latvian en route to Bremen.

The International Criminal Police Commission, or ICPC, is based in Vienna. Broadly speaking, it oversees the struggle against organized crime in Europe, with a particular responsibility for liaison between the various national police forces on the Continent.

Maigret pulled up another telegram that was similarly written in IPC, the secret international police code used for communication between all the world's police forces. He translated at sight:

Polizei-Präsidium Bremen to PJ Paris: Pietr the Latvian reported en route Amsterdam and Brussels.

Another telegram from the Nederlandsche Centrale in Zake Internationale Misdadigers, the Dutch police HQ, reported:

At 11 a.m. Pietr the Latvian boarded Étoile du Nord, compartment G. 263, car 5, destination Paris.

The final message in IPC had been sent from Brussels and said:

Confirm Pietr the Latvian on board Étoile du Nord via Brussels 2 a.m. in compartment reported by Amsterdam.

Behind Maigret's desk there was a huge map pinned to the wall. The inspector was a broad and heavy man.

He stood staring at the map with his hands in his pockets and his pipe sticking out the side of his mouth.

His eyes travelled from the dot representing Krakow to the other dot showing the port of Bremen and from there to Amsterdam and Paris.

He checked the time once again. Four-twenty. The Étoile du Nord should now be hurtling along at sixty miles an hour between Saint-Quentin and Compiègne.

It wouldn't stop at the border. It wouldn't be slowing down.

In car 5, compartment G. 263, Pietr the Latvian was presumably spending his time reading or looking at the scenery.

Maigret went over to a door that opened onto a closet, washed his hands in an enamel basin, ran a comb through thick dark-brown hair flecked with only a few silver strands around the temple, and did his best to straighten out his tie – he'd never learned how to do a proper knot.

It was November and it was getting dark. Through the window he could see a branch of the Seine, Place Saint-Michel, and a floating wash-house, all in a blue shroud speckled by gas lamps lighting up one after the other.

He opened a drawer and glanced at a dispatch from the International Identification Bureau in Copenhagen.

Paris PJ Pietr-le-Letton 32 16901512 0224 0255 02732 03116 03233 03243 03325 03415 03522 04115 04144 0414705221 ...

This time he made an effort to speak the translation aloud and even went over it several times, like a schoolchild reciting a lesson:

Description Pietr the Latvian: apparent age 32 years, height 169 cm, sinus top straight line, bottom flat, extension large max, special feature septum not visible, ear unmarked rim, lobe large, max cross and dimension small max, protuberant antitragus, vex edge lower fold, edge shape straight line edge feature separate lines, orthognathous upper, long face, biconcave, eyebrows thin fair light, lower lip jutting max thick lower droop, light.

This 'word-picture' of Pietr was as clear as a photograph to Inspector Maigret. The principal features were the first to emerge: the man was short, slim, young and fair-haired, with sparse blonde eyebrows, greenish eyes and a long neck.

Maigret now also knew the shape of his ear in the minutest detail. This would enable him to make a positive identification in a milling crowd even if the suspect was in disguise.

He took his jacket off the hook and slipped his arms into it, then put on a heavy black overcoat and a bowler hat.

One last glance at the stove, which seemed on the verge of exploding.

At the end of the corridor, on the stair landing that was used as a waiting room, he reminded Jean:

‘You won’t forget to keep my stove going, will you?’

The wind swirling up the stairs took him by surprise, and he had to shelter from the draught in a corner to get his pipe to light.

Wind and rain blew in squalls over the platforms of Gare du Nord despite the monumental glass canopy overhead. Several panes had blown out and lay in shards on the railway tracks. The lighting wasn’t working properly. People huddled up inside their clothes.

Outside one of the ticket windows an alarming travel notice had been posted:

Channel forecast: gale-force winds.

One woman, whose son was to catch the Folkestone boat train, looked upset; her eyes were red. She kept on telling the boy what he should do, right up to the last minute. In his embarrassment he had no choice but to promise not to go out on deck.

Maigret stood near platform 11 where people were awaiting the arrival of the Étoile du Nord. All the leading hotels, as well as Thomas Cook, had their agents standing by.

He stood still. Other people were agitated. A young woman clad in mink yet wearing only sheer silk stockings walked up and down, stamping her heels.

He just stood there: a hulk of a man, with shoulders so broad as to cast a wide shadow. When people bumped into him he stayed as firm as a brick wall.

The yellow speck of the train’s headlamp appeared in the distance. Then came the usual hubbub, with porters shouting and passengers tramping and jostling their way towards the station exit.

A couple of hundred passengers paraded past Maigret before he picked out in the crowd a short man wearing a broad-checked green travelling cape of a distinctly Nordic cut and colour.

The man wasn’t in a hurry. He had three porters behind him. Bowing and scraping, an agent from one of the grand hotels on the Champs-Élysées cleared the way in front of him.

Apparent age 32, height 169 ... sinus top ...

Maigret kept calm. He looked hard at the man’s ear. That was all he needed.

The man in green passed close by. One of his porters bumped Maigret with one of the suitcases.

At exactly the same moment a railway employee began to run, shouting out something to his colleague standing at the station end of the platform, next to the barrier.

The chain was drawn closed. Protests erupted.

The man in the travelling cape was already out of the station.

Maigret puffed away at his pipe in quick short bursts. He went up to the official who had closed the barrier.

‘Police! What’s happened?’

'A crime ... They've just found ...'

'Carriage 5? ...'

'I think so ...'

The station went about its regular business; only platform 11 looked abnormal. There were fifty passengers still waiting to get out, but their path was blocked. They were getting excited.

'Let them go ...' Maigret said.

'But ...'

'Let them go ...'

He watched the last cluster move away. The station loudspeaker announced the departure of a local train. Somebody was running somewhere. Beside one of the carriages of the Étoile du Nord there was a small group waiting for something. Three of them, in railway company livery.

The stationmaster got to them first. He was a large man and had a worried look on his face. Then a hospital stretcher was wheeled through the main hall, past clumps of people who looked at it uneasily, especially those about to depart.

Maigret walked up the side of the train with his usual heavy tread, smoking as he went. Carriage 1, carriage 2 ... He came to carriage 5.

That's where the group was standing at the door. The stretcher came to a halt. The stationmaster tried to listen to the three men, who were all speaking at the same time.

'Police! Where is he?'

Maigret's presence provided obvious relief. He propelled his placid mass towards the centre of the frantic group. The other men instantly became his satellites.

'In the toilet ...'

Maigret hauled himself up onto the train and saw that the toilet door on his right was open. On the floor, in a heap, was a body, bent double in a strangely contorted posture.

The conductor was giving orders from the platform.

'Shunt the carriage to the yard ... Hang on! ... Track 62 ... Let the railway police know ...'

At first he could only see the back of the man's neck. But when he tipped his cap off its oblique angle, he could see the man's left ear. Maigret mumbled to himself: lobe large, max cross and dimension small max, protuberant antitragus ...

There were a few drops of blood on the linoleum. Maigret looked around. The railway staff were standing on the platform or on the running board. The stationmaster was still talking.

So Maigret clenched his pipe between his teeth even harder and turned the man's head over.

If he hadn't seen the traveller in the green cloak leave the station, if he hadn't seen him taken to a car by an interpreter from the Majestic, he could have had doubts.

It was the same physiognomy. The same fair toothbrush moustache under a sharply defined nose. The same sparse blonde eyebrows. The same grey-green eyes.

In other words: Pietr the Latvian!

Maigret could hardly turn around in the tiny washroom, where the tap was still running and a jet of steam was seeping from some poorly sealed joint.

He was standing right next to the corpse. He pulled the man's upper body upright and saw on his chest, on his jacket and shirt, the burn-marks made by gunshot from point-blank range.

It was a big blackish stain tinged with the dark red of coagulating blood.

One detail struck the inspector. He happened to notice one of the man's feet. It was twisted on its side, as was the whole body, which must have been squashed into a corner so as to allow the door to close.

The shoe was black and happened to be of a very cheap and common kind. Apparently it had been re-soled. The heel was worn on one side, and a coin-shaped gap had opened up in the middle of the sole.

The local chief of the railway police had now reached the carriage and was calling up from the platform. He was a self-confident man wearing a uniform with epaulettes.

'So what is it, then? Murder? Suicide? Don't touch anything until the law gets here, OK? Be careful! I'm the one who's in charge. OK?'

Maigret had a tough time disentangling his own feet from the dead man's legs to extricate himself from the toilet. With swift, professional movements he patted the man's pockets. Clean as a whistle. Nothing in them at all.

He got out of the carriage, his pipe had gone out, his hat was askew and he had a bloodstain on his cuff.

'Well, if it isn't Maigret! ... What do you make of it, then?'

'Not much. Go have a look yourself ...'

'It's suicide, right?'

'If you say so ... Did you call the prosecutor's office?'

'As soon as I heard ...'

The loudspeaker crackled with some message or other. A few people had noticed there was something unusual going on and stood in the distance, watching the empty train and the group of people standing next to the running board of carriage 5.

Maigret strode off without saying a word. He left the station and hailed a cab.

'Hôtel Majestic! ...'

The storm had got even worse. Gusts swept down the streets and made pedestrians totter about like drunks. A roof tile smashed onto the pavement. Buses, and more buses.

The Champs-Élysées was almost entirely deserted. Drops of rain had begun to fall. The porter at the Majestic dashed out to the taxi with a huge red umbrella.

‘Police! ... Has someone from the Étoile du Nord just checked in?’

That prompted the porter to fold his umbrella.

‘Yes, sir, that true.’

‘Green cape ... Fair moustache ...’

‘That right. Sir, good reception.’

People were scrambling to shelter from the rain. Maigret got inside the hotel just in time to avoid drops as big as walnuts and cold as ice.

Despite this, the receptionists and interpreters behind the polished wood counter were as elegant and efficient as ever.

‘Police ... A guest in a green cape ... Small fair moustache—’

‘Room 17, sir. His bags are on their way up right now ...’

## 2. Mixing with Millionaires

Inevitably Maigret was a hostile presence in the Majestic. He constituted a kind of foreign body that the hotel’s atmosphere could not assimilate.

Not that he looked like a cartoon policeman. He didn’t have a moustache and he didn’t wear heavy boots. His clothes were well cut and made of fairly light worsted. He shaved every day and looked after his hands.

But his frame was proletarian. He was a big, bony man. Iron muscles shaped his jacket sleeves and quickly wore through new trousers.

He had a way of imposing himself just by standing there. His assertive presence had often irked many of his own colleagues.

It was something more than self-confidence but less than pride. He would turn up and stand like a rock with his feet wide apart. On that rock all would shatter, whether Maigret moved forward or stayed exactly where he was.

His pipe was nailed to his jawbone. He wasn’t going to remove it just because he was in the lobby of the Majestic.

Could it be that Maigret simply preferred to be common and self-assertive?

You just couldn’t miss the man wearing a big black velvet-collared overcoat in that brightly lit lobby, where excitable society ladies scattered trails of perfume, tinkling laughter and loud whispers amidst the unctuous compliments of impeccable flunkies.

He paid no attention. He wasn't part of the flow. He was impervious to the sound of jazz floating up from the dance-floor in the basement.

The inspector started to go up one of the stairs. A liftboy called out and asked if he wanted to take the lift, but Maigret didn't even turn round.

At the first landing someone asked him:

'Are you looking for ...?'

It was as if the sound waves hadn't reached him. He glanced at the corridors with their red carpets stretching out so far that they almost made you sick. He went on up.

On the second floor he read the numbers on the bronze plaques. The door of no. 17 was open. Valets with striped waistcoats were bringing in the luggage.

The traveller had taken off his cloak and looked very slender and elegant in his pinstripe suit. He was smoking a papirosa and giving instructions at the same time.

No. 17 wasn't a room, but a whole suite: lounge, study, bedroom and bathroom. The doors opened onto two intersecting corridors, and at the corner, like a bench placed by a crossroads, there was a huge, curved sofa.

That's where Maigret sat himself down, right opposite the open door. He stretched out his legs and unbuttoned his overcoat.

Pietr saw him and, showing neither surprise nor disquiet, he carried on giving instructions. When the valets had finished placing his trunks and cases on stands, he came to the door, held it open for an instant to inspect the detective, then closed it himself.

Maigret sat there for as long as it took to smoke three pipes, and to dismiss two room-service waiters and one chambermaid who came up to inquire what he was waiting for.

On the stroke of eight Pietr the Latvian came out of his room, looking even slimmer and smarter than before, in a classically tailored dinner jacket that must have come from Savile Row.

He was hatless. His short, ash-blond hair was already thinning. His hairline was set far back and his forehead notespecially high; you could glimpse a streak of pink scalp along the parting.

He had long, pale hands. On the fourth finger of his left hand he wore a chunky platinum signet ring set with a yellow diamond.

He was smoking again – another papirosa. He walked right up to Maigret, stopped for a moment, looked at him as if he felt like saying something, then walked on towards the lift as if lost in thought.

Ten minutes later he took his seat in the dining room at the table of Mr and Mrs Mortimer-Levingston. The latter was the centre of attention: she had pearls worth a cool million on her neck.

The previous day her husband had come to the rescue of one of France's biggest automobile manufacturers, with the result that he was now its majority shareholder.

The three of them were chatting merrily. Pietr talked a lot, but discreetly, with his head leaning forwards. He was completely at ease, natural and casual, despite being able to see the detective's dark outline through the



glazed partition.

Inspector Maigret asked reception to show him the guest list. He wasn't surprised to see that Pietr had signed in under the name of Oswald Oppenheim, ship-owner, from Bremen.

It was a foregone conclusion that he had a genuine passport and full identity papers in that name, just as he no doubt did in several others.

It was equally obvious that he'd met the Mortimer-Levingstons previously, whether in Berlin, Warsaw, London or New York.

Was the sole purpose of his presence in Paris to rendezvous with them and to get away with another one of the colossal scams that were his trademark?

Maigret had the Latvian's filecard in his jacket pocket. It said:

Extremely clever and dangerous. Nationality uncertain, from Baltic area. Reckoned to be either Latvian or Estonian. Fluent in Russian, French, English and German. High level of education. Thought to be capo of major international ring mainly involved in fraud. The ring has been spotted successively in Paris, Amsterdam (Van Heuvel case), Berne (United Shipowners affair), Warsaw (Lipmann case) and in various other European cities where identification of its methods and procedures was less clear.

Pietr the Latvian's associates seem to be mainly British and American. One who has been seen most often with him and who was identified when he presented a forged cheque for cash at the Federal Bank in Berne was killed during arrest. His alias was Major Howard of the American Legion, but it has been established that he was actually a former New York bootlegger known in the USA as Fat Fred.

Pietr the Latvian has been arrested twice. First, in Wiesbaden, for swindling a Munich trader out of half a million marks; second, in Madrid, for a similar offence involving a leading figure at the Spanish royal court.

On both occasions he used the same ploy. He met his victims and presumably told them that the stolen sums were safely hidden and that having him arrested would not reveal where they were. Both times the complaint was withdrawn, and the plaintiffs were probably paid off.

Since then has never been caught red-handed.

Is probably in cahoots with the Maronetti gang (counterfeit money and forged documents) and the Cologne gang (the 'wall-busters').

There was another rumour doing the rounds of European police departments: Pietr, as the ring-leader and money-launderer of one or more gangs, was said to be sitting on several million that had been split up under different names in different banks and even invested in legitimate industries.

The man smiled subtly at the story Mrs Mortimer-Levingston was telling, while with his ivory hand he plucked luscious grapes from the bunch on his plate.

'Excuse me, sir. Could I please have a word with you?'

Maigret was speaking to Mortimer-Levingston in the lobby of the Majestic after Pietr and Mortimer's wife had both gone back up to their rooms.

Mortimer didn't have the athletic look of a Yank. He was more of the Mediterranean type.

He was tall and thin. His very small head was topped with black hair parted down the middle.

He looked permanently tired. His eyelids were weary and blue. In any case he led an exhausting life, somehow managing to turn up in Deauville, Miami, Venice, Paris, Cannes and Berlin before getting back to his yacht and then dashing off to do a deal in some European capital or to referee a major boxing match in New York or California.

He looked Maigret up and down in lordly fashion.

'And you are ...?'

'Detective Chief Inspector Maigret of the Flying Squad ...'

Mortimer barely frowned and stood there leaning forwards as if he had decided to grant just one second of his time.

'Are you aware you have just dined with Pietr the Latvian?'

'Is that all you have to say?'

Maigret didn't budge an inch. It was pretty much what he'd expected.

He put his pipe back in his mouth – he'd allowed himself to remove it in order to speak to the millionaire – and muttered:

'That's all.'

He looked pleased with himself. Levingston moved off icily and got into the lift.

It was just after 9.30. The symphony orchestra that had been playing during dinner yielded the stage to a jazz band. People were coming in from outside.

Maigret hadn't eaten. He was standing calmly and patiently in the middle of the lobby. The manager repeatedly gave him worried and disapproving looks from a distance. Even the lowliest members of staff scowled as they passed by, when they didn't manage to jostle him.

The Majestic could not stomach him. Maigret persisted in being a big black unmoving stain amidst the gilding, the chandeliers, the comings and goings of silk evening gowns, fur coats and perfumed, sparkling silhouettes.

Mrs Levingston was the first to come back down in the lift. She had changed, and now wore a lamé cape lined with ermine that left her shoulders bare.

She seemed astonished not to find anyone waiting for her and began to walk up and down, drumming the floor with her gold-lacquered high heels.

She suddenly stopped at the polished wooden counter where the receptionists and interpreters stood and said a few words. One of the staff pushed a red button and picked up a handset.

He looked surprised and called a bellboy, who rushed to the lift.

Mrs Mortimer-Levingston was visibly anxious. Through the glass door you could see the sleek shape of an American-made limousine standing at the kerb.

The bellboy reappeared, spoke to the member of staff, who in his turn said something to Mrs Mortimer. She protested. She must have been saying:

‘But that’s impossible!’

Maigret then went up the staircase, stopped outside suite 17, knocked on the door. As he’d expected after the circus he’d just watched, there was no answer.

He opened the door and found the lounge deserted. Pietr’s dinner jacket was lying casually on the bed in the bedroom. One trunk was open. A pair of patent-leather shoes had been left at opposite ends of the carpet.

The manager came in and grunted:

‘You’re already here, are you?’

‘So? ... Vanished, has he? Levingston as well! Is that right?’

‘Now there’s no need to go overboard. Neither of them is in his room, but we’ll probably find them somewhere else in the hotel.’

‘How many exits are there?’

‘Three. The main entrance on the Champs-Élysées ... Then there’s the entrance in the covered mall, and the service entrance on Rue de Ponthieu ...’

‘Is there a security guard? Call him ...’

The telephone worked. The manager was in a temper. He took it out on an operator who couldn’t understand him. He kept his gaze fixed on Maigret, and it was not kind.

‘What does all this mean?’ he asked as he waited for the guard to come up from the glass-walled box where he was on duty beside the service entrance.

‘Nothing, or almost, as you said ...’

‘I hope there’s not been a ... a ...’

The word crime, dreaded like the plague by hoteliers the world over from the humblest lodging-house landlord to the manager of a luxury resort, just would not pass his lips.

‘We’ll find out.’

Mrs Mortimer-Levingston appeared.

‘Well? ...’ she inquired.

The manager bowed and muttered something. A figure appeared at the far end of the corridor – an old man with a straggly beard and ill-cut clothes at odds with the luxurious appearance of the hotel. He was obviously meant to stay in the back, otherwise he too would have been given a fine uniform and been sent to the barber

every day.

‘Did you see anyone go out?’

‘When?’

‘In the last few minutes ...’

‘A guy from the kitchen, I think ... I wasn’t paying attention ... A guy with a cap ...’

‘Was he short? Fair?’ Maigret interrupted.

‘Yes ... I think so ... I wasn’t watching ... He was quick ...’

‘Nobody else?’

‘I dunno ... I went round the corner to buy the paper ...’

Mrs Mortimer-Levingston began to lose her temper.

‘Well now! Is that how you conduct a manhunt?’ she said to Maigret. ‘I’ve just been told you’re a policeman ... My husband might have been killed ... What are you waiting for?’

The look that then fell upon her was Maigret through and through! Completely calm! Completely unruffled! It was as if he’d just noticed the buzzing of a bee. As if what he had before him was something quite ordinary.

She was not accustomed to being looked at in that way. She bit her lip, blushed crimson beneath her make-up and stamped her heel with impatience.

He was still staring at her.

Because he was pushing her to the limit, or perhaps because she didn’t know what else to do, Mrs Mortimer-Levingston threw a fit.

### 3. The Strand of Hair

It was nearly midnight when Maigret got back to his office on Quai des Orfèvres. The storm was at its peak. The trees on the riverbank were rattling back and forth and the wash-house barge was tossing about in the waves.

The building was almost empty. At least Jean was still at his post in the lobby at the entrance to a corridor of empty offices.

Voices could be heard coming from the duty room. Then, further down, there was light streaking out from beneath a door – a detective or an inspector working on some case. One of the official cars in the courtyard below was running its engine.

‘Is Torrence back?’ Maigret asked.

‘He’s just come in.’

‘My stove?’

‘It was so hot in your office I had to open the window. There was condensation running down your wall!’

‘Get me some beers and sandwiches. None of that soft white bread, mind you.’

He pushed a door and called out:

‘Torrence!’

Detective Torrence followed his chief to his office. Before he’d left Gare du Nord Maigret had called Torrence on the telephone and told him to keep going on the case on his own.

Inspector Maigret was forty-five and his junior was barely thirty years old. Even so, there was something solid and bulky about Torrence that made him an almost full-scale model of his boss.

They’d conducted many cases together without ever saying an unnecessary word.

Maigret took off his overcoat and his jacket and loosened his tie. He stood for a while with his back to the stove to let the heat seep in. Then he asked:

‘So?’

‘The Prosecution Service had an emergency meeting. Forensics took photographs but couldn’t find any fingerprints – except the dead man’s, of course. They don’t match any we have on record.’

‘If I remember correctly, don’t they have a file on our friend from the Baltic?’

‘Just the “word-picture”. No fingerprints, no anthropometric data.’

‘So we can’t be sure that the dead man is someone other than Pietr.’

‘But there’s no guarantee that it is him, either!’

Maigret had taken out his pipe and a pouch that had only a sprinkling of brown dust left in it. Mechanically Torrence handed him an opened packet of shag.

There was a pause. Tobacco crackled in Maigret’s pipe. Then came a sound of footsteps and tinkling glassware on the other side of the door, which Torrence opened.

The waiter from Brasserie Dauphine brought in six glasses of beer and four thick-stuffed sandwiches on a tray, which he laid on the table.

‘Are you sure that’ll be enough?’ he asked, seeing that Maigret had company.

‘That’s fine.’

Maigret started drinking and munching without putting his pipe out, though he did push a glass over to his assistant’s side of the desk.

‘Well?’

‘I questioned all the staff who were on the train. There’s definite proof that someone was on board without a ticket. Could be the victim, could be the culprit! We’re assuming he got on at Brussels, on the track side. It’s easier to hide in a Pullman car than in any other because each carriage has a lot of luggage space. Pietr had

tea in the restaurant car between Brussels and the French border and spent his time flicking through a pile of French and English newspapers, including the financial dailies. He went to the toilet between Maubeuge and Saint-Quentin. The head waiter remembers that because as he went past him Pietr said, "Take a whisky to my seat".'

'And he went back to his seat later on?'

'Fifteen minutes later, he was back at his regular place with a whisky in front of him. But the head waiter didn't see Pietr again, since he didn't go back by way of the restaurant car.'

'Did anybody try to use the toilet after him?'

'Sure! A lady traveller tried to get in, but the lock was jammed. It wasn't until the train got to Paris that a staff member managed to force it open. The mechanism had been clogged with iron filings.'

'Up to that point, had anybody set eyes on the second Pietr?'

'Absolutely not. He would have been very noticeable. He was wearing shoddy clothes and would have stood out a mile on a de luxe express.'

'What about the bullet?'

'Shot at point-blank range. Automatic revolver, 6 mm. The shot caused such burning of the skin that according to the doctor the victim would have died from the heat shock alone.'

'Any sign of a struggle?'

'None at all. The pockets were empty.'

'I know that ...'

'Sorry! However, I did find this in a small button-down pocket on the inside of his waistcoat.'

Torrence then extracted from his wallet a folded piece of transparent paper inside which you could see a strand of brown hair.

'Hand it over ...'

Maigret hadn't stopped eating and drinking all the while.

'A woman's hair? Or a child's?'

'Forensics says it's a woman's hair. I left him a few strands that he's promised to examine closely.'

'And the autopsy?'

'All done by 10 a.m. Probable age: thirty-two. Height 1 m 68 cm. No hereditary abnormalities. One of his kidneys was in poor shape, which could mean he was a boozier. Stomach contained tea and other digested matter that couldn't be identified straight away. They'll work on the analysis tomorrow. Now the examination is over the body is being kept on ice at the morgue.'

Maigret wiped his mouth, stationed himself in his favourite position in front of the stove and held out his

hand, which Torrence mechanically supplied with a packet of tobacco.

‘For my part,’ Maigret said eventually, ‘I saw Pietr, or whoever has taken over his role, check in at Hôtel Majestic and have dinner with the Mortimer-Levingstons, which seems to have been arranged in advance.’

‘The millionaires?’

‘Yes, that’s right. After the meal, Pietr went back to his suite. I warned the American. Mortimer then went to his room. They were obviously planning to go out as a threesome, since Mrs Mortimer came down straight after, in full evening gear. Ten minutes later, both men had vanished. Our Latvian had switched his evening wear for less swanky clothes. He’d put on a cap, and the guard just assumed he was a kitchen worker. But Levingston left as he was, in formal attire.’

Torrence said nothing. In the long pause that ensued, you could hear the fire roaring in the stove and the window panes rattling in the storm.

Torrence finally broke the silence.

‘Luggage?’ he asked.

‘Done. Nothing there! Just clothes and underwear ... The usual accoutrements of a first-class traveller. Not a scrap of paper. The Mortimer woman is certain that her husband has been murdered.’

Somewhere a bell rang. Maigret opened the drawer in his desk where that afternoon he’d put all the telegrams about Pietr the Latvian.

Then he looked at the map. He drew a line with his finger from Krakow to Bremen, then to Amsterdam, Brussels and Paris.

Somewhere near Saint-Quentin, a brief halt: a man died.

In Paris, the line came to a full stop. Two men vanish from the middle of the Champs-Élysées.

All that’s left are suitcases in a suite and Mrs Mortimer-Levingston, whose mind is as empty as Pietr’s travelling chest.

The gurgle from Maigret’s pipe was getting so annoying that the inspector took a swatch of chicken feathers from another drawer, cleaned the shaft, then opened the stove door and flung the soiled feathers in the fire.

Four of the beer glasses were empty but for sticky froth marks on the rim. Somebody came out of one of the offices on the corridor, locked his door and went away.

‘Who’s a lucky man!’ Torrence observed. ‘That’s Lucas. Tonight he got a tip-off from some moneyed brat and arrested a pair of drug dealers.’

Maigret was poking the fire, and when he stood up his face was crimson. In routine fashion he picked up the translucent paper, extracted the strand of hair and turned it over in the light. Then he went back to the map and studied the invisible track of Pietr’s journey. It made a sweeping arc of almost 180 degrees.

If he had started out from Krakow, then why had he gone all the way north to Bremen before swerving back down to Paris?

He was still holding the slip of paper. He muttered:

‘There must have been a picture inside this once.’

In fact, the tissue was a glassine envelope, a slipcover of the kind photographers use to protect customers’ orders. But it was an obsolete size known as ‘album format’ that could only now be found in provincial backwaters. The photo that this cover must have protected would have been about half the size of a standard postcard, printed on off-white glacé paper on cardboard backing.

‘Is anyone still there at the lab?’ Maigret suddenly asked.

‘I guess so. They must still be processing the photos of the Étoile du Nord affair.’

There was only one full glass left on the table. Maigret gulped it down and put on his jacket.

‘You’ll come along? ... Those kinds of portrait photos usually have the name and address of the photographer printed or embossed on them ...’

Torrence got the point. They set off through a labyrinth of passageways and stairs up into the attic floors of the Law Courts and finally found the forensics lab.

An expert took the slipcover, ran it through his fingers, almost sniffed at it. Then he sat at an arc lamp and wheeled over a carriage-mounted multiplying glass.

The principle is straightforward: blank paper that has been in protracted contact with another sheet that has been printed or written on eventually acquires an imprint of the letters on that other sheet. The imprint cannot be seen by the naked eye, but photography can reveal it.

The fact that there was a stove in the lab meant that Maigret was destined to end up there. He stood watch for the best part of an hour, smoking pipe after pipe, while Torrence trailed the photographer as he came and went.

At long last the darkroom door opened. A voice cried out:

‘We’ve got it!’

‘Yes?’

‘The photo credit is: Léon Moutet, Art Photography, Quai des Belges, Fécamp.’

Only a real expert could decipher the plate. Torrence, for instance, could only see a blur.

‘Do you want to see the post-mortem photos?’ the expert asked cheerfully. ‘They’re first-rate! But it was a tight fit inside that railway toilet! Would you believe it, we had to hang the camera from the ceiling ...’

‘Have you got an outside line?’ Maigret asked, gesturing towards the phone.

‘Yes ... the switchboard shuts down at nine, so before she goes off the operator connects me to the outside.’

Maigret called the Majestic and spoke to one of the desk interpreters.

‘Has Mr Mortimer-Levingston come back in?’



'I'll find out for you, sir. To whom do I have the honour of ...'

'Police!'

'No, sir, he's not back.'

'What about Mr Oswald Oppenheim?'

'Not back either, sir.'

'What is Mrs Mortimer up to?'

A pause.

'I asked you what Mrs Mortimer is doing.'

'She is ... I think she is in the bar ...'

'Do you mean she's drunk?'

'She has had a few cocktails, sir. She said she would not go up to her suite until her husband comes back ... Do you ...?'

'What's that?'

'Hello? ... This is the manager speaking,' another voice broke in. 'Any progress? Do you think this will get into the papers? ...'

Cruelly, Maigret hung up. To please the photographer he took a look at the first proof photos laid out in the drying trays, still gleaming wet. While doing that he was talking to Torrence.

'You're going to settle in at the Majestic, old pal. The main thing is to take no notice whatsoever of the manager.'

'What about you, patron?'

'I'm going back to the office. There's a train to Fécamp at 5.30. It's not worth going home and waking up Mme Maigret. Hang on ... The Dauphine should still be open. On your way, order me up a beer ...'

'Just one ...?' Torrence inquired, with a deadpan expression on his face.

'As you like, old pal! The waiter's smart enough to know it means three or four. Have him throw in a few sandwiches as well.'

They traipsed down an unending spiral staircase in single file.

The black-gowned photographer was left on his own to admire the prints he'd just made. He still had to number them.

The two detectives parted company in the freezing courtyard.

'If you leave the Majestic for any reason, make sure one of our men holds the fort,' Maigret instructed. 'I'll telephone the front desk if I need to get in touch ...'

He went back to his office and stoked the fire so vigorously he could have snapped the grate.

#### 4. The Seeteufel's First Mate

The station at La Bréauté, on the mainline to Le Havre, where Maigret had to change trains at 7.30 a.m., gave him a foretaste of Fécamp.

The ill-lit station buffet had grimy walls and a counter offering only a few mouldy pieces of cake alongside a miserable fruit stack made of three bananas and five oranges.

The foul weather had even more impact here than in Paris. Rain was coming down in buckets. Crossing from one track to the other meant wading through knee-deep mud.

The branch-line train was a rickety affair made up of carriages on their way to scrap. In the pale half-light of dawn you could hardly make out the fuzzy shapes of farmhouses through the pelting rain.

Fécamp! The air was laden with the smell of herring and cod. Mountains of casks. Ships' masts peering over the locomotive. Somewhere a siren blared.

'Quai des Belges?'

Straight ahead. All he had to do was walk through slimy puddles gleaming with fish scales and rotting innards.

The photographer was also a shopkeeper and a newspaper vendor. He stocked oilskins, sailcloth pea-jackets and hempen rope alongside New Year's greeting cards.

A weakling with very pale skin: as soon as he heard the word 'police' he called his wife to the rescue.

'Can you tell me what photo was in this slipcover?'

It dragged on. Maigret had to squeeze words out of him one by one and do his thinking for him.

In the first place, the technician hadn't used that format for eight years, ever since he'd acquired new equipment to do postcard-sized portraits.

Who might have had his or her photograph taken eight or more years ago? Monsieur Moutet took a whole fifteen minutes to remember that he'd got an album with archive copies of all the portraits done in his establishment.

His wife went to get it. Sailors came and went. Kids came in to buy a penny's worth of sweets. Outside, ships' tackle scraped on the dock. You could hear the waves shifting shingle along the breakwater.

Maigret thumbed through the archive album, then specified what he was looking for:

'A young woman with extremely fine brown hair ...'

That did it.

'Mademoiselle Swaan!' the photographer exclaimed. He turned up the snapshot straight away. It was the only time he'd had a decent subject to photograph.

She was a pretty woman. She looked twenty. The photo fitted the slipcover exactly.

‘Who is she?’

‘She’s still living in Fécamp. But now she’s got a clifftop villa five minutes from the Casino ...’

‘Is she married?’

‘She wasn’t then. She was the cashier at the Railway Hotel.’

‘Opposite the station, I suppose?’

‘Yes, you must have seen it on your way here. She was an orphan from some small place around here ... Les Loges ... Do you know where I mean? ... Anyway, that’s how she got to meet a traveller staying at the hotel ... They got married ... At the moment she’s living in the villa with her two children and a maid ...’

‘Mr Swaan doesn’t live in Fécamp?’

There was a pause. The photographer and his wife exchanged glances. The woman answered:

‘Since you’re from the police, I suppose we’d better tell you everything. Anyway you’d find it all out in the end, but ... They’re only rumours, but ... Mr Swaan almost never stays in Fécamp. When he does come he stops for a few days at the most ... Sometimes it’s just a flying visit ... He first came not long after the war ... The Grand Banks were being reorganized, after five years’ interruption. He wanted to look into it properly, so he said, and to make investments in businesses that were being started up again. He claimed to be Norwegian ... His first name is Olaf ... The herring fishermen who sometimes go as far as Norway say there are plenty of people over there who have that name ... Nonetheless, people said he was really a German spy. That’s why, when he got married, his wife was kept at arm’s length. Then we discovered he really was a sailor and was first mate on a German merchantman, and that was why he didn’t show up very often ... Eventually people stopped bothering about him, but we’re still wary ...’

‘You said they had children?’

‘Two ... A little girl of three and a baby a few months old ...’

Maigret took the photograph out of the album and got directions to the villa. It was a bit too early to turn up. He waited in a harbour café for two hours, listening to fishermen talking about the herring catch, which was at its height. Five trawlers were tied up at the quay. Fish was being unloaded by the barrelful. Despite the wind and rain, the air stank.

To get to the villa he walked along the deserted breakwater and around the shuttered Casino still plastered with last summer’s posters. At last he got to a steep climb that began at the foot of the cliff. As he plodded up he got occasional glimpses of iron railings in front of villas. The one he was looking for turned out to be a comfortable-looking red-brick structure, neither large nor small. He guessed that the garden with its white-gravel paths was well tended in season. The windows must have had a good view into the far distance.

Maigret rang the bell. A great Dane came to sniff at him through the railings, and its lack of bark made it seem all the more ferocious. At the second ring, a maid appeared. First she took the dog back to his kennel, and then asked:

‘What is it about?’

She spoke with the local accent.

‘I would like to see Mr Swaan, please.’

She seemed hesitant.

‘I don’t know if sir is in ... I’ll go and ask.’

She hadn’t opened the gate. Rain was still pouring down, and Maigret was soaked through. He watched the maid go up the steps and vanish inside the house. Then a curtain shifted at a window. A few moments later the maid reappeared.

‘Sir will not be back for several weeks. He is in Bremen ...’

‘In that case I would like to have a word with Madame Swaan ...’

The maid hesitated again, but ended up opening the gate.

‘Madame isn’t dressed. You will have to wait ...’

The dripping detective was shown into a neat lounge with white curtains and a waxed floor. The furniture was brand new, but just the same as you would find in any lower-middle-class home. They were good-quality pieces, in a style that would have been called modern around 1900.

Light oak. Flowers in an ‘artistic’ stone vase in the middle of the table. Crochet-work place-mats. On the other hand, there was a magnificent sculpted silver samovar on a side-table. It must have been worth more than the rest of the room’s contents put together.

Maigret heard noises coming from the first floor. A baby could be heard crying through one of the ground-floor walls; someone else was mumbling something in a soft and even voice, as if to comfort it. At last, the sound of slippered feet gliding along the corridor. The door opened. Maigret found himself facing a young woman who had dressed in a hurry so as to meet him.

She was of medium height, more plump than slim, with a pretty and serious face that betrayed a pang of anxiety. She smiled nonetheless and said:

‘Why didn’t you take a seat?’

Rivulets of rainwater flowed from Maigret’s overcoat, trousers and shoes into little puddles on the polished floor. In that state he could not have sat down on the light-green velvet of the armchairs in the lounge.

‘Madame Swaan, I presume? ...’

‘Yes, monsieur ...’

She looked at him quizzically.

‘I’m sorry to disturb you like this ... It’s just a formality ... I’m with the Immigration Service ... We’re conducting a survey ...’

She said nothing. She didn’t seem any more or less anxious than before.

'I understand Mr Swaan is a Swede. Is that correct?'

'Oh no, he's Norwegian ... But for the French I guess it's the something ... To begin with, I myself ...'

'He is a ship's officer?'

'He's first mate on the Seeteufel, out of Bremen ...'

'As I thought ... So he is in the employ of a German company?'

She blushed.

'The ship-owner is German, yes ... At least, on paper ...'

'Meaning? ...'

'I don't think I need to keep it from you ... You must be aware that the merchant fleet has been in crisis since the war ... Even here you can find ocean-going captains who've been unable to find commissions and who have to take positions as first or even second mates ... Others have joined the Newfoundland or the North Sea fishing fleets.'

She spoke quite fast, but in a gentle and even tone.

'My husband didn't want to take on a commission in the Pacific, where there's more work, because he wouldn't have been able to come back to Europe more than once every two years ... Shortly after we got married, some Americans bought the Seeteufel in the name of a German shipping firm ... Olaf first came to Fécamp looking specifically for more schooners to buy ... Now you must see ... The aim was to run booze to the USA ... Substantial firms were set up with American money ... They have offices in France, Holland, or Germany ... The truth is that my husband works for one of these companies. The Seeteufel sails what's called Rum Alley. It doesn't really have anything to do with Germany.'

'Is he at sea at the moment?' Maigret asked, keeping his eyes on that pretty face, which struck him as an honest and even at times a touching one.

'I don't think so. You must realize that the sailings aren't as regular as those of a liner. But I always try to keep abreast of the Seeteufel's position. At the moment he ought to be in Bremen, or very nearly there.'

'Have you ever been to Norway?'

'Never! I've actually never left Normandy, so to speak. Just a couple of times, for short stays in Paris.'

'With your husband?'

'Yes ... On our honeymoon, as well.'

'He's got fair hair, hasn't he?'

'Yes ... Why do you ask?'

'And a thin, close-cropped blond moustache?'

'Yes ... I can show you a picture of him if you like.'

She opened a door and went out. Maigret could hear her moving about in the bedroom next door.

She was out for longer than made sense, and the noises of doors opening and closing and of comings and goings around the house were just as illogical.

At last she came back, looking somewhat perplexed and apologetic.

'Please excuse me ...' she said. 'I can't manage to put my hand on that photo ... A house with children is always upside down ...'

'One more question ... To how many people did you give a copy of this photograph of yourself?'

Maigret showed her the archive print he'd been given by the photographer. Madame Swaan went bright red and stuttered:

'I don't understand ...'

'Your husband presumably has one?'

'Yes ... We were engaged when ...'

'Does any other man have a print?'

She was on the verge of tears. The quiver of her lips gave away her distress.

'No, nobody.'

'Thank you, madame. That will be all.'

As he was leaving a little girl slipped into the hallway. Maigret had no need to memorize her features. She was the spitting image of Pietr the Latvian!

'Olga! ...' her mother scolded, as she hustled her back through a half-open door.

Maigret was back outside in the rain and the wind.

'Goodbye, madame ...'

He caught a final glimpse of her through the closing door. He was aware that he had left her at a loss, after bursting in on her in the warmth of her own home. He picked up a trace in her eyes of something uncertain but undoubtedly akin to anxiety as she shut her front door.

## 5. The Russian Drunkard

You don't boast about these kinds of things, they would raise a laugh if they were mentioned out loud, but all the same, they call for a kind of heroism.

Maigret hadn't slept. From 5.30 to 8 a.m. he'd been shaken about in draughty railway carriages. Ever since he'd changed trains at La Bréauté he'd been soaked through. Now his shoes squelched out dirty water at every step and his bowler was a shapeless mess. His overcoat and trousers were sopping wet.

The wind was slapping him with more rain. The alleyway was deserted. It was no more than a steep path between garden walls. The middle of it had turned into a raging torrent.

He stood still for quite a while. Even his pipe had got wet in his pocket. There was no way of hiding near the villa. All he could do was stick as close as possible to a wall and wait.

Anyone coming by would catch sight of him and look round. He might have to stay there for hours on end. There was no definite proof that there was a man in the house. And even if he were there, why should he come out?

Grumpy as he was, Maigret filled his wet pipe with tobacco all the same, and wedged himself as best he could into a cranny in the wall ...

This was no place for a detective chief inspector of the Police Judiciaire. At most it was a job for a new recruit. Between the age of twenty-two and thirty he'd stood this sort of watch a hundred times over.

He had a terrible time getting a match to light. The emery board on the side of the box was coming off in strips. If one of the sticks hadn't finally ignited, maybe even Maigret would have given up and gone home.

He couldn't see anything from where he was standing except a low wall and the green-painted railing of the villa. He had brambles at his ankles and a draught all down his neck.

Fécamp was laid out beneath him, but he could not see the town. He could only hear the roar of the sea and now and again a siren or the sound of a car.

After half an hour on watch he saw a woman with a shopping basket, who looked like a cook, making her way up the steep slope. She only saw Maigret when she passed close by him. His huge, unmoving shape standing next to the wall in a wind-swept alley so scared her that she started to run.

Perhaps she worked for one of the villas at the top of the rise? A few minutes later a man appeared at the bend and stared at Maigret from afar. Then a woman joined him, and both went back inside.

It was a ridiculous situation. The inspector knew there wasn't one chance in ten that his surveillance would be of any use.

Yet he stuck it out – just because of a vague feeling that didn't even deserve to be called an intuition. In fact it was a pet theory of his that he'd never worked out in full and remained vague in his mind, but which he dubbed for his own use the theory of the crack in the wall.

Inside every wrong-doer and crook there lives a human being. In addition, of course, there is an opponent in a game, and it's the player that the police are inclined to see. As a rule, that's what they go after.

Some crime or offence is committed. The match starts on the basis of more or less objective facts. It's a problem with one or more unknowns that a rational mind tries to solve.

Maigret worked like any other policeman. Like everyone else, he used the amazing tools that men like Bertillon, Reiss and Locard have given the police – anthropometry, the principle of the trace, and so forth – and that have turned detection into forensic science. But what he sought, what he waited and watched out for, was the crack in the wall. In other words, the instant when the human being comes out from behind the opponent.

At the Majestic he'd seen the player. But here, he had a premonition of something else. The tidy, quiet villa wasn't one of the props that Pietr used to play his hand. Especially the wife and the children he'd seen and heard: they belonged to a different physical and moral order.

That's why he was waiting, albeit in a foul mood, for he was too fond of his big cast-iron stove and his office with glasses of frothy beer on the table not to be miserable in such awful weather.

He'd started his watch a little after 10.30. At half past noon he heard footsteps scrunching the gravel and swift, practised movements opening the gate, which brought a figure to within three metres of the inspector. The lie of the land made it impossible for Maigret to retreat. So he stood his ground unwaveringly, or, to be more precise, inertly, standing on two legs that could be seen in the round through the sopping wet trousers that clung to them.

The man leaving the villa was wearing a poor-quality belted trenchcoat, with its worn-out collar upturned. He was also wearing a grey cap. The get-up made him look very young. He went down the hill with his hands in his pockets, all hunched up and shivering because of the contrast in temperature.

He was obliged to pass within a metre of the Detective Chief Inspector. He chose that moment to slow down, take a packet of cigarettes out of his pocket and light up. It was as if he'd positively tried to get his face into the light so as to allow the detective to study it in detail!

Maigret let him go on a few paces, then set off on his tail, with a frown on his face. His pipe had gone out. His whole being exuded a sense of displeasure as well as an ardent desire to understand.

The man in the trenchcoat looked like the Latvian and yet did not resemble him! Same height: about 1 m 68 cm. At a pinch he could be the same age, though in the outfit he was wearing he looked closer to twenty-six than thirty-two. There was nothing to determine that this man was not the original of the 'word-picture' that Maigret knew by heart and also had on a piece of paper in his pocket.

And yet ... it was not the same man! For one thing, his eyes had a vaguer, more sentimental expression. They were a lighter shade of grey, as if the rain had scrubbed them. Nor did he have a blond toothbrush moustache. But that wasn't the only thing that made him different.

Maigret was struck by other details. His outfit was nothing like that of an officer of the merchant fleet. It didn't even fit the villa, given the comfortable middle-class style of living that it implied.

His shoes were worn and the heels had been redone. Because of the mud, the man hitched up his trouser legs, showing faded grey cotton socks that had been clumsily darned.

There were lots of stains on the trenchcoat. Overall, the man fitted a type that Maigret knew well: the migrant low-lifer, predominantly of Eastern European origin, who slept in squalid lodging houses and sometimes in railway stations. A type not often seen outside Paris, but accustomed to travelling in third-class carriages when not riding the footboards or hopping freight trains.

He got proof of his insight a few minutes later. Fécamp doesn't have any genuine low dives, but behind the harbour there are two or three squalid bars favoured by dockhands and seamen. Ten metres before these places there's a regular café kept clean and bright. The man in the trenchcoat walked right past it and straight into the least prepossessing of the bars, where he put his elbow on the counter in a way that Maigret saw right through.

It was the straightforwardly vulgar body-language of a guttersnipe. Even if he'd tried, Maigret couldn't have imitated it. The inspector followed the man into the bar. He'd ordered an absinthe substitute and was just standing there, wordless, with a blank stare on his face. He didn't register Maigret's presence, though the inspector was now right next to him.



Through a gap in the man's jacket Maigret could see that his linen was dirty. That's not something that can be simulated, either! His shirt and collar – now not much more than a ribbon – had been worn for days, maybe for weeks on end. They'd been slept in – God knows where! They'd been sweated in and rained on.

The man's suit was not unstylish, but it bore the same signs and told the same miserable story of a vagrant life.

'Same again!'

The glass was empty, and the barman refilled it, serving Maigret a measure of spirits at the same time.

'So you're back in these parts again? ...'

The man didn't answer. He downed his drink in one gulp and gestured for a refill straight away.

'Anything to eat? ... I've got some pickled herring ...'

Maigret had sidled up to a small stove, and stood in front of it to warm his back, now as shiny as an umbrella.

'Come to think of it ... I had a man in here last week from your part of the world ... Russian he was, from Archangelsk ... Sailing a Swedish three-master that had to put in to port because of the bad weather ... Hardly had time to drink his fill, I can tell you! ... Had a devil of a job on his hands ... Torn sails, snapped yards, you name it ...'

The man, now on his fourth imitation absinthe, was drinking steadily. The barman filled his glass every time it was empty, glancing at Maigret with a conniving wink.

'As for Captain Swaan, I ain't seen him since you was here last.'

Maigret shuddered. The man in the trenchcoat who'd now downed his fifth neat ersatz absinthe staggered towards the stove, bumped into the detective and held out his hands towards the warmth.

'I'll have a herring, all the same ...' he said.

He had a quite strong accent – a Russian accent, as far as the detective could judge.

There they were, next to each other, shoulder to shoulder, so to speak. The man wiped his face with his hand several times, and his eyes grew ever more murky.

'Where's my glass? ...' he inquired testily.

It had to be put in his hand. As he drank he stared at Maigret and pouted with disgust.

There was no mistaking that expression! As if to assert his opinion all the more clearly, he threw his glass to the ground, leaned on the back of a chair and muttered something in a foreign tongue.

The barman, somewhat concerned, found away of getting close to Maigret and whispering quietly in a way that was nonetheless audible to the Russian:

'Don't take any notice of him. He's always like that ...'

The man gave a drunkard's strangled laugh. He slumped into the chair, put his head in both his hands

and stayed like that until a plate of herring was pushed over the table between his elbows. The barman shook his shoulder.

‘Eat up! ... It’ll do you good ...’

The man laughed again. It was more like a bitter cough. He turned round so he could see Maigret and stare at him aggressively, then he pushed the plate of herring off the table.

‘More drink! ...’

The barman raised his arms and grunted as if it was an excuse:

‘Russians, I ask you!’

Then he put his finger to his head and turned it, as if he was tightening a loose screw.

Maigret had pushed his bowler to the back of his head. His clothes were steaming, giving off a grey haze. He was only up to his second glass of spirits.

‘I’ll have some herring!’ he said.

He was still eating it with a slice of bread when the Russian got up on unsteady legs, looked around as if he didn’t know what to do and grinned for the third time when he set eyes on Maigret.

Then he slumped down at the bar, took a glass from the shelf and a bottle from the enamel sink where it was being kept cool in water. He helped himself without watching how much he was taking and smacked his tongue as he drank.

Eventually he took a 100 franc note out of his pocket.

‘Is that enough, you swine?’ he asked the waiter.

He threw the banknote up in the air. The barman had to fish it out of the sink.

The Russian struggled with the door handle, which wouldn’t open. There was almost a fight because the barman tried to help his customer, who kept elbowing him away.

At long last the trenchcoat faded away into the mist and rain along the harbour-side, going towards the station.

‘That’s an odd’un,’ the barman sighed, intending to be heard by Maigret, who was paying his bill.

‘Is he often in?’

‘Now and again ... Once he spent the whole night here, on the bench where you’re sitting ... He’s a real Russian! ... Some Russian sailors who were here in Fécamp at the same time as he was told me so ... Apparently he’s quite educated ... Did you look at his hands? ...’

‘Don’t you think he’s got the same looks as Captain Swaan? ...’

‘Oh! So you know him ... Well, of course he does! But not so much as you’d mistake one for the other ... All the same ... For ages I thought it was his brother.’

The beige silhouette vanished round a corner. Maigret started to walk faster. He caught up with the Russian just as he was going into the third-class waiting room at the station. The man slumped onto a bench and once again put his head in his hands.

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## **About the Author**

GEORGES SIMENON (1903–1989) was born in Liège, Belgium. Best known in the English-speaking world as the author of the Inspector Maigret books, his prolific output of more than four hundred novels and short stories have made him a household name in continental Europe.

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Georges Simenon

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INSPECTOR MAIGRET  
OMNIBUS 1

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Title Page

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About the Author

Pietr the Latvian

1. Apparent age 32, height 169 ...
2. Mixing with Millionaires
3. The Strand of Hair
4. The Seeteufel's First Mate
5. The Russian Drunkard
6. Au Roi de Sicile
7. The Third Interval
8. Maigret Gets Serious
9. The Hit-man
10. The Return of Oswald Oppenheim
11. Arrivals and Departures
12. A Woman With a Gun
13. The Two Pietrs
14. The Ugala Club
15. Two Telegrams
16. On the Rocks
17. And a Bottle of Rum
18. Hans at Home
19. The Injured Man

The Hanged Man of Saint-Pholien

1. The Crime of Inspector Maigret
2. Monsieur Van Damme
3. The Herbalist's Shop in Rue Picpus

4. The Unexpected Visitor
5. Breakdown at Luzancy
6. The Hanged Men
7. The Three Men
8. Little Klein
9. The Companions of the Apocalypse
10. Christmas Eve in Rue du Pot-au-Noir
11. The Candle End

The Carter of La Providence

1. Lock 14
2. The Passengers on Board the Southern Cross
3. Mary Lampson's Necklace
4. The Lover
5. The YCF Badge
6. The American Sailor's Cap
7. The Bent Pedal
8. Ward 10
9. The Doctor
10. The Two Husbands
11. Right of Way

The Grand Banks Café

1. The Glass Eater
2. The Tan-Coloured Shoes
3. The Headless Photograph
4. The Mark of Rage
5. Adèle and Friend
6. The Three Innocents

7. Like a Family
8. The Drunken Sailor
9. Two Men on Deck
10. What Happened on the Third Day
11. The Océan Sails

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Georges Simenon was born on 12 February 1903 in Liège, Belgium, and died in 1989 in Lausanne, Switzerland, where he had lived for the latter part of his life. Between 1931 and 1972 he published seventy-five novels and twenty-eight short stories featuring Inspector Maigret.

Simenon always resisted identifying himself with his famous literary character, but acknowledged that they shared an important characteristic:

My motto, to the extent that I have one, has been noted often enough, and I've always conformed to it. It's the one I've given to old Maigret, who resembles me in certain points ... 'understand and judge not'.

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Georges Simenon

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## PIETR THE LATVIAN

Translated by David Bellos

1. Apparent age 32, height 169 ...

ICPC to PJ Paris Xyzust Krakow vimontra m ghks triv psot uv Pietr-le-Letton Bremen vs tyz btolem.

Detective Chief Inspector Maigret of the Flying Squad raised his eyes. It seemed to him that the cast-iron stove in the middle of his office with its chimney tube rising to the ceiling wasn't roaring properly. He pushed the telegram away, rose ponderously to his feet, adjusted the flue and thrust three shovels of coal into the firebox.

Then he stood with his back to the stove, filled his pipe and adjusted his stud collar, which was irritating his neck even though it wasn't set very high.

He glanced at his watch. Four p.m. His jacket was hanging on a hook on the back of the door.

Slowly he returned to his desk, mouthing a translation as he went:

International Criminal Police Commission to Police Judiciaire in Paris: Krakow police report sighting

Pietr the Latvian en route to Bremen.

The International Criminal Police Commission, or ICPC, is based in Vienna. Broadly speaking, it oversees the struggle against organized crime in Europe, with a particular responsibility for liaison between the various national police forces on the Continent.

Maigret pulled up another telegram that was similarly written in IPC, the secret international police code used for communication between all the world's police forces. He translated at sight:

Polizei-Präsidium Bremen to PJ Paris: Pietr the Latvian reported en route Amsterdam and Brussels.

Another telegram from the Nederlandsche Centrale in Zake Internationale Misdadigers, the Dutch police HQ, reported:

At 11 a.m. Pietr the Latvian boarded Étoile du Nord, compartment G. 263, car 5, destination Paris.

The final message in IPC had been sent from Brussels and said:

Confirm Pietr the Latvian on board Étoile du Nord via Brussels 2 a.m. in compartment reported by Amsterdam.

Behind Maigret's desk there was a huge map pinned to the wall. The inspector was a broad and heavy man. He stood staring at the map with his hands in his pockets and his pipe sticking out the side of his mouth.

His eyes travelled from the dot representing Krakow to the other dot showing the port of Bremen and from there to Amsterdam and Paris.

He checked the time once again. Four-twenty. The Étoile du Nord should now be hurtling along at sixty miles an hour between Saint-Quentin and Compiègne.

It wouldn't stop at the border. It wouldn't be slowing down.

In car 5, compartment G. 263, Pietr the Latvian was presumably spending his time reading or looking at the scenery.

Maigret went over to a door that opened onto a closet, washed his hands in an enamel basin, ran a comb through thick dark-brown hair flecked with only a few silver strands around the temple, and did his best to straighten out his tie – he'd never learned how to do a proper knot.

It was November and it was getting dark. Through the window he could see a branch of the Seine, Place Saint-Michel, and a floating wash-house, all in a blue shroud speckled by gas lamps lighting up one after the other.

He opened a drawer and glanced at a dispatch from the International Identification Bureau in Copenhagen.

Paris PJ Pietr-le-Letton 32 16901512 0224 0255 02732 03116 03233 03243 03325 03415 03522 04115 04144 0414705221 ...

This time he made an effort to speak the translation aloud and even went over it several times, like a schoolchild reciting a lesson:

Description Pietr the Latvian: apparent age 32 years, height 169 cm, sinus top straight line, bottom flat, extension large max, special feature septum not visible, ear unmarked rim, lobe large, max cross and dimension small max, protuberant antitragus, vex edge lower fold, edge shape straight line edge feature separate lines, orthognathous upper, long face, biconcave, eyebrows thin fair light, lower lip jutting max thick lower droop, light.

This 'word-picture' of Pietr was as clear as a photograph to Inspector Maigret. The principal features were the first to emerge: the man was short, slim, young and fair-haired, with sparse blonde eyebrows, greenish eyes and a long neck.

Maigret now also knew the shape of his ear in the minutest detail. This would enable him to make a positive identification in a milling crowd even if the suspect was in disguise.

He took his jacket off the hook and slipped his arms into it, then put on a heavy black overcoat and a bowler hat.

One last glance at the stove, which seemed on the verge of exploding.

At the end of the corridor, on the stair landing that was used as a waiting room, he reminded Jean:

'You won't forget to keep my stove going, will you?'

The wind swirling up the stairs took him by surprise, and he had to shelter from the draught in a corner to get his pipe to light.

Wind and rain blew in squalls over the platforms of Gare du Nord despite the monumental glass canopy overhead. Several panes had blown out and lay in shards on the railway tracks. The lighting wasn't working properly. People huddled up inside their clothes.

Outside one of the ticket windows an alarming travel notice had been posted:

Channel forecast: gale-force winds.

One woman, whose son was to catch the Folkestone boat train, looked upset; her eyes were red. She kept on telling the boy what he should do, right up to the last minute. In his embarrassment he had no choice but to promise not to go out on deck.

Maigret stood near platform 11 where people were awaiting the arrival of the Étoile du Nord. All the leading hotels, as well as Thomas Cook, had their agents standing by.

He stood still. Other people were agitated. A young woman clad in mink yet wearing only sheer silk stockings

walked up and down, stamping her heels.

He just stood there: a hulk of a man, with shoulders so broad as to cast a wide shadow. When people bumped into him he stayed as firm as a brick wall.

The yellow speck of the train's headlamp appeared in the distance. Then came the usual hubbub, with porters shouting and passengers tramping and jostling their way towards the station exit.

A couple of hundred passengers paraded past Maigret before he picked out in the crowd a short man wearing a broad-checked green travelling cape of a distinctly Nordic cut and colour.

The man wasn't in a hurry. He had three porters behind him. Bowing and scraping, an agent from one of the grand hotels on the Champs-Élysées cleared the way in front of him.

Apparent age 32, height 169 ... sinus top ...

Maigret kept calm. He looked hard at the man's ear. That was all he needed.

The man in green passed close by. One of his porters bumped Maigret with one of the suitcases.

At exactly the same moment a railway employee began to run, shouting out something to his colleague standing at the station end of the platform, next to the barrier.

The chain was drawn closed. Protest erupted.

The man in the travelling cape was already out of the station.

Maigret puffed away at his pipe in quick short bursts. He went up to the official who had closed the barrier.

'Police! What's happened?'

'A crime ... They've just found ...'

'Carriage 5? ...'

'I think so ...'

The station went about its regular business; only platform 11 looked abnormal. There were fifty passengers still waiting to get out, but their path was blocked. They were getting excited.

'Let them go ...' Maigret said.

'But ...'

'Let them go ...'

He watched the last cluster move away. The station loudspeaker announced the departure of a local train. Somebody was running somewhere. Beside one of the carriages of the Étoile du Nord there was a small group waiting for something. Three of them, in railway company livery.

The stationmaster got to them first. He was a large man and had a worried look on his face. Then a hospital stretcher was wheeled through the main hall, past clumps of people who looked at it uneasily, especially those about to depart.

Maigret walked up the side of the train with his usual heavy tread, smoking as he went. Carriage 1, carriage 2 ... He came to carriage 5.

That's where the group was standing at the door. The stretcher came to a halt. The stationmaster tried to listen to the three men, who were all speaking at the same time.

'Police! Where is he?'

Maigret's presence provided obvious relief. He propelled his placid mass towards the centre of the frantic group. The other men instantly became his satellites.

'In the toilet ...'

Maigret hauled himself up onto the train and saw that the toilet door on his right was open. On the floor, in a heap, was a body, bent double in a strangely contorted posture.

The conductor was giving orders from the platform.

'Shunt the carriage to the yard ... Hang on! ... Track 62 ... Let the railway police know ...'

At first he could only see the back of the man's neck. But when he tipped his cap off its oblique angle, he could see the man's left ear. Maigret mumbled to himself: lobe large, max cross and dimension small max, protuberant antitragus ...

There were a few drops of blood on the linoleum. Maigret looked around. The railway staff were standing on the platform or on the running board. The stationmaster was still talking.

So Maigret clenched his pipe between his teeth even harder and turned the man's head over.

If he hadn't seen the traveller in the green cloak leave the station, if he hadn't seen him taken to a car by an interpreter from the Majestic, he could have had doubts.

It was the same physiognomy. The same fair toothbrush moustache under a sharply defined nose. The same sparse blonde eyebrows. The same grey-green eyes.

In other words: Pietr the Latvian!

Maigret could hardly turn around in the tiny washroom, where the tap was still running and a jet of steam was seeping from some poorly sealed joint.

He was standing right next to the corpse. He pulled the man's upper body upright and saw on his chest, on his jacket and shirt, the burn-marks made by gunshot from point-blank range.

It was a big blackish stain tinged with the dark red of coagulating blood.

One detail struck the inspector. He happened to notice one of the man's feet. It was twisted on its side, as was the whole body, which must have been squashed into a corner so as to allow the door to close.

The shoe was black and happened to be of a very cheap and common kind. Apparently it had been re-soled. The heel was worn on one side, and a coin-shaped gap had opened up in the middle of the sole.

The local chief of the railway police had now reached the carriage and was calling up from the platform. He

was a self-confident man wearing a uniform with epaulettes.

‘So what is it, then? Murder? Suicide? Don’t touch anything until the law gets here, OK? Be careful! I’m the one who’s in charge. OK?’

Maigret had a tough time disentangling his own feet from the dead man’s legs to extricate himself from the toilet. With swift, professional movements he patted the man’s pockets. Clean as a whistle. Nothing in them at all.

He got out of the carriage, his pipe had gone out, his hat was askew and he had a bloodstain on his cuff.

‘Well, if it isn’t Maigret! ... What do you make of it, then?’

‘Not much. Go have a look yourself ...’

‘It’s suicide, right?’

‘If you say so ... Did you call the prosecutor’s office?’

‘As soon as I heard ...’

The loudspeaker crackled with some message or other. A few people had noticed there was something unusual going on and stood in the distance, watching the empty train and the group of people standing next to the running board of carriage 5.

Maigret strode off without saying a word. He left the station and hailed a cab.

‘Hôtel Majestic! ...’

The storm had got even worse. Gusts swept down the streets and made pedestrians totter about like drunks. A roof tile smashed onto the pavement. Buses, and more buses.

The Champs-Élysées was almost entirely deserted. Drops of rain had begun to fall. The porter at the Majestic dashed out to the taxi with a huge red umbrella.

‘Police! ... Has someone from the Étoile du Nord just checked in?’

That prompted the porter to fold his umbrella.

‘Yes, sir, that true.’

‘Green cape ... Fair moustache ...’

‘That right. Sir, good reception.’

People were scrambling to shelter from the rain. Maigret got inside the hotel just in time to avoid drops as big as walnuts and cold as ice.

Despite this, the receptionists and interpreters behind the polished wood counter were as elegant and efficient as ever.

‘Police ... A guest in a green cape ... Small fair moustache—’

‘Room 17, sir. His bags are on their way up right now ...’

## 2. Mixing with Millionaires

Inevitably Maigret was a hostile presence in the Majestic. He constituted a kind of foreign body that the hotel’s atmosphere could not assimilate.

Not that he looked like a cartoon policeman. He didn’t have a moustache and he didn’t wear heavy boots. His clothes were well cut and made of fairly light worsted. He shaved every day and looked after his hands.

But his frame was proletarian. He was a big, bony man. Iron muscles shaped his jacket sleeves and quickly wore through new trousers.

He had a way of imposing himself just by standing there. His assertive presence had often irked many of his own colleagues.

It was something more than self-confidence but less than pride. He would turn up and stand like a rock with his feet wide apart. On that rock all would shatter, whether Maigret moved forward or stayed exactly where he was.

His pipe was nailed to his jawbone. He wasn’t going to remove it just because he was in the lobby of the Majestic.

Could it be that Maigret simply preferred to be common and self-assertive?

You just couldn’t miss the man wearing a big black velvet-collared overcoat in that brightly lit lobby, where excitable society ladies scattered trails of perfume, tinkling laughter and loud whispers amidst the unctuous compliments of impeccable flunkys.

He paid no attention. He wasn’t part of the flow. He was impervious to the sound of jazz floating up from the dance-floor in the basement.

The inspector started to go up one of the stairs. A liftboy called out and asked if he wanted to take the lift, but Maigret didn’t even turn round.

At the first landing someone asked him:

‘Are you looking for ...?’

It was as if the sound waves hadn’t reached him. He glanced at the corridors with their red carpets stretching out so far that they almost made you sick. He went on up.

On the second floor he read the numbers on the bronze plaques. The door of no. 17 was open. Valets with striped waistcoats were bringing in the luggage.

The traveller had taken off his cloak and looked very slender and elegant in his pinstripe suit. He was smoking a pipe and giving instructions at the same time.

No. 17 wasn’t a room, but a whole suite: lounge, study, bedroom and bathroom. The doors opened onto two intersecting corridors, and at the corner, like a bench placed by a crossroads, there was a huge, curved sofa.

That’s where Maigret sat himself down, right opposite the open door. He stretched out his legs and

unbuttoned his overcoat.

Pietr saw him and, showing neither surprise nor disquiet, he carried on giving instructions. When the valets had finished placing his trunks and cases on stands, he came to the door, held it open for an instant to inspect the detective, then closed it himself.

Maigret sat there for as long as it took to smoke three pipes, and to dismiss two room-service waiters and one chambermaid who came up to inquire what he was waiting for.

On the stroke of eight Pietr the Latvian came out of his room, looking even slimmer and smarter than before, in a classically tailored dinner jacket that must have come from Savile Row.

He was hatless. His short, ash-blond hair was already thinning. His hairline was set far back and his forehead notably high; you could glimpse a streak of pink scalp along the parting.

He had long, pale hands. On the fourth finger of his left hand he wore a chunky platinum signet ring set with a yellow diamond.

He was smoking again – another papirosa. He walked right up to Maigret, stopped for a moment, looked at him as if he felt like saying something, then walked on towards the lift as if lost in thought.

Ten minutes later he took his seat in the dining room at the table of Mr and Mrs Mortimer-Levingston. The latter was the centre of attention: she had pearls worth a cool million on her neck.

The previous day her husband had come to the rescue of one of France's biggest automobile manufacturers, with the result that he was now its majority shareholder.

The three of them were chatting merrily. Pietr talked a lot, but discreetly, with his head leaning forwards. He was completely at ease, natural and casual, despite being able to see the detective's dark outline through the glazed partition.

Inspector Maigret asked reception to show him the guest list. He wasn't surprised to see that Pietr had signed in under the name of Oswald Oppenheim, ship-owner, from Bremen.

It was a foregone conclusion that he had a genuine passport and full identity papers in that name, just as he no doubt did in several others.

It was equally obvious that he'd met the Mortimer-Levingstons previously, whether in Berlin, Warsaw, London or New York.

Was the sole purpose of his presence in Paris to rendezvous with them and to get away with another one of the colossal scams that were his trademark?

Maigret had the Latvian's filecard in his jacket pocket. It said:

Extremely clever and dangerous. Nationality uncertain, from Baltic area. Reckoned to be either Latvian or Estonian. Fluent in Russian, French, English and German. High level of education. Thought to be capo of major international ring mainly involved in fraud. The ring has been spotted successively in Paris, Amsterdam (Van Heuvel case), Berne (United Shipowners affair), Warsaw (Lipmann case) and in various other European cities where identification of its methods and procedures was less clear.



Pietr the Latvian's associates seem to be mainly British and American. One who has been seen most often with him and who was identified when he presented a forged cheque for cash at the Federal Bank in Berne was killed during arrest. His alias was Major Howard of the American Legion, but it has been established that he was actually a former New York bootlegger known in the USA as Fat Fred.

Pietr the Latvian has been arrested twice. First, in Wiesbaden, for swindling a Munich trader out of half a million marks; second, in Madrid, for a similar offence involving a leading figure at the Spanish royal court.

On both occasions he used the same ploy. He met his victims and presumably told them that the stolen sums were safely hidden and that having him arrested would not reveal where they were. Both times the complaint was withdrawn, and the plaintiffs were probably paid off.

Since then he has never been caught red-handed.

He is probably in cahoots with the Maronetti gang (counterfeit money and forged documents) and the Cologne gang (the 'wall-busters').

There was another rumour doing the rounds of European police departments: Pietr, as the ring-leader and money-launderer of one or more gangs, was said to be sitting on several million that had been split up under different names in different banks and even invested in legitimate industries.

The man smiled subtly at the story Mrs Mortimer-Levingston was telling, while with his ivory hand he plucked luscious grapes from the bunch on his plate.

'Excuse me, sir. Could I please have a word with you?'

Maigret was speaking to Mortimer-Levingston in the lobby of the Majestic after Pietr and Mortimer's wife had both gone back up to their rooms.

Mortimer didn't have the athletic look of a Yank. He was more of the Mediterranean type.

He was tall and thin. His very small head was topped with black hair parted down the middle.

He looked permanently tired. His eyelids were weary and blue. In any case he led an exhausting life, somehow managing to turn up in Deauville, Miami, Venice, Paris, Cannes and Berlin before getting back to his yacht and then dashing off to do a deal in some European capital or to referee a major boxing match in New York or California.

He looked Maigret up and down in lordly fashion.

'And you are ...?'

'Detective Chief Inspector Maigret of the Flying Squad ...'

Mortimer barely frowned and stood there leaning forwards as if he had decided to grant just one second of his time.

'Are you aware you have just dined with Pietr the Latvian?'

'Is that all you have to say?'

Maigret didn't budge an inch. It was pretty much what he'd expected.

He put his pipe back in his mouth –he'd allowed himself to remove it in order to speak to the millionaire – and muttered:

'That's all.'

He looked pleased with himself. Levingston moved off icily and got into the lift.

It was just after 9.30. The symphony orchestra that had been playing during dinner yielded the stage to a jazz band. People were coming in from outside.

Maigret hadn't eaten. He was standing calmly and patiently in the middle of the lobby. The manager repeatedly gave him worried and disapproving looks from a distance. Even the lowliest members of staff scowled as they passed by, when they didn't manage to jostle him.

The Majestic could not stomach him. Maigret persisted in being a big black unmoving stain amidst the gilding, the chandeliers, the comings and goings of silk evening gowns, fur coats and perfumed, sparkling silhouettes.

Mrs Levingston was the first to come back down in the lift. She had changed, and now wore a lamé cape lined with ermine that left her shoulders bare.

She seemed astonished not to find anyone waiting for her and began to walk up and down, drumming the floor with her gold-lacquered high heels.

She suddenly stopped at the polished wooden counter where the receptionists and interpreters stood and said a few words. One of the staff pushed a red button and picked up a handset.

He looked surprised and called a bellboy, who rushed to the lift.

Mrs Mortimer-Levingston was visibly anxious. Through the glass door you could see the sleek shape of an American-made limousine standing at the kerb.

The bellboy reappeared, spoke to the member of staff, who in his turn said something to Mrs Mortimer. She protested. She must have been saying:

'But that's impossible!'

Maigret then went up the staircase, stopped outside suite 17, knocked on the door. As he'd expected after the circus he'd just watched, there was no answer.

He opened the door and found the lounge deserted. Pietr's dinner jacket was lying casually on the bed in the bedroom. One trunk was open. A pair of patent-leather shoes had been left at opposite ends of the carpet.

The manager came in and grunted:

'You're already here, are you?'

'So? ... Vanished, has he? Levingston as well! Is that right?'

'Now there's no need to go overboard. Neither of them is in his room, but we'll probably find

themsomewhere else in the hotel.'

'How many exits are there?'

'Three. The main entrance on theChamps-Élysées ... Then there's the entrance in the covered mall, andthe service entrance on Rue de Ponthieu ...'

'Is there a security guard? Callhim ...'

The telephone worked. The manager was ina temper. He took it out on an operator who couldn't understand him. He kepthis gaze fixed on Maigret, and it was not kind.

'What does all this mean?'he asked as he waited for the guard to come up from the glass-walled box where hewas on duty beside the service entrance.

'Nothing, or almost, as yousaid ...'

'I hope there's not beena ... a ...'

The word crime, dreaded likethe plague by hoteliers the world over from the humblest lodging-house landlord tothe manager of a luxury resort, just would not pass his lips.

'We'll find out.'

Mrs Mortimer-Levingston appeared.

'Well? ...' sheinquired.

The manager bowed and mutteredsomething. A figure appeared at the far end of the corridor – an old man with astraggly beard and ill-cut clothes at odds with the luxurious appearance of thehotel. He was obviously meant to stay in the back, otherwise he too would have beengiven a fine uniform and been sent to the barber every day.

'Did you see anyone goout?'

'When?'

'In the last fewminutes ...'

'A guy from the kitchen, Ithink ... I wasn't paying attention ... A guy with acap ...'

'Was he short? Fair?'Maigret interrupted.

'Yes ... I think so ... Iwasn't watching ... He was quick ...'

'Nobody else?'

'I dunno ... I went roundthe corner to buy the paper ...'

Mrs Mortimer-Levingston began to loseher temper.

'Well now! Is that how you conducta manhunt?' she said to Maigret. 'I've just been told you'rea policeman ... My husband might have been killed ... What are youwaiting for?'

The look that then fell upon her was Maigret through and through! Completely calm! Completely unruffled! It was as if he'd just noticed the buzzing of a bee. As if what he had before him was something quite ordinary.

She was not accustomed to being looked at in that way. She bit her lip, blushed crimson beneath her make-up and stamped her heel with impatience.

He was still staring at her.

Because he was pushing her to the limit, or perhaps because she didn't know what else to do, Mrs Mortimer-Levingston threw a fit.

### 3. The Strand of Hair

It was nearly midnight when Maigret got back to his office on Quai des Orfèvres. The storm was at its peak. The trees on the riverbank were rattling back and forth and the wash-house barge was tossing about in the waves.

The building was almost empty. At least Jean was still at his post in the lobby at the entrance to a corridor of empty offices.

Voices could be heard coming from the duty room. Then, further down, there was light streaking out from beneath a door – a detective or an inspector working on some case. One of the official cars in the courtyard below was running its engine.

'Is Torrence back?' Maigret asked.

'He's just come in.'

'My stove?'

'It was so hot in your office I had to open the window. There was condensation running down your wall!'

'Get me some beers and sandwiches. None of that soft white bread, mind you.'

He pushed a door and called out:

'Torrence!'

Detective Torrence followed his chief to his office. Before he'd left Gare du Nord Maigret had called Torrence on the telephone and told him to keep going on the case on his own.

Inspector Maigret was forty-five and his junior was barely thirty years old. Even so, there was something solid and bulky about Torrence that made him an almost full-scale model of his boss.

They'd conducted many cases together without ever saying an unnecessary word.

Maigret took off his overcoat and his jacket and loosened his tie. He stood for a while with his back to the stove to let the heat seep in. Then he asked:

'So?'

'The Prosecution Service had an emergency meeting. Forensics took photographs but couldn't find

any fingerprints – except the dead man's, of course. They don't match any we have on record.'

'If I remember correctly, don't they have a file on our friend from the Baltic?'

'Just the "word-picture". No fingerprints, no anthropometric data.'

'So we can't be sure that the dead man is someone other than Pietr.'

'But there's no guarantee that it is him, either!'

Maigret had taken out his pipe and a pouch that had only a sprinkling of brown dust left in it. Mechanically Torrence handed him an opened packet of shag.

There was a pause. Tobacco crackled in Maigret's pipe. Then came a sound of footsteps and tinkling glassware on the other side of the door, which Torrence opened.

The waiter from Brasserie Dauphine brought in six glasses of beer and four thick-stuffed sandwiches on a tray, which he laid on the table.

'Are you sure that'll be enough?' he asked, seeing that Maigret had company.

'That's fine.'

Maigret started drinking and munching without putting his pipe out, though he did push a glass over to his assistant's side of the desk.

'Well?'

'I questioned all the staff who were on the train. There's definite proof that someone was on board without a ticket. Could be the victim, could be the culprit! We're assuming he got on at Brussels, on the track side. It's easier to hide in a Pullman car than in any other because each carriage has a lot of luggage space. Pietr had tea in the restaurant car between Brussels and the French border and spent his time flicking through a pile of French and English newspapers, including the financial dailies. He went to the toilet between Maubeuge and Saint-Quentin. The head waiter remembers that because as he went past him Pietr said, "Take a whisky to my seat".'

'And he went back to his seat later on?'

'Fifteen minutes later, he was back at his regular place with a whisky in front of him. But the head waiter didn't see Pietr again, since he didn't go back by way of the restaurant car.'

'Did anybody try to use the toilet after him?'

'Sure! A lady traveller tried to get in, but the lock was jammed. It wasn't until the train got to Paris that a staff member managed to force it open. The mechanism had been clogged with iron filings.'

'Up to that point, had anybody set eyes on the second Pietr?'

'Absolutely not. He would have been very noticeable. He was wearing shoddy clothes and would have stood out a mile on a de luxe express.'

'What about the bullet?'

‘Shot at point-blank range. Automatic revolver, 6 mm. The shot caused such burning of the skin that according to the doctor the victim would have died from the heat shock alone.’

‘Any sign of a struggle?’

‘None at all. The pockets were empty.’

‘I know that ...’

‘Sorry! However, I did find this in a small button-down pocket on the inside of his waistcoat.’

Torrence then extracted from his wallet a folded piece of transparent paper inside which you could see a strand of brown hair.

‘Hand it over ...’

Maigret hadn’t stopped eating and drinking all the while.

‘A woman’s hair? Or a child’s?’

‘Forensics says it’s a woman’s hair. I left him a few strands that he’s promised to examine closely.’

‘And the autopsy?’

‘All done by 10 a.m. Probable age: thirty-two. Height 1 m 68 cm. No hereditary abnormalities. One of his kidneys was in poor shape, which could mean he was a boozer. Stomach contained tea and other digested matter that couldn’t be identified straight away. They’ll work on the analysis tomorrow. Now the examination is over the body is being kept on ice at the morgue.’

Maigret wiped his mouth, stationed himself in his favourite position in front of the stove and held out his hand, which Torrence mechanically supplied with a packet of tobacco.

‘For my part,’ Maigret said eventually, ‘I saw Pietr, or whoever has taken over his role, check in at Hôtel Majestic and have dinner with the Mortimer-Levingstons, which seems to have been arranged in advance.’

‘The millionaires?’

‘Yes, that’s right. After the meal, Pietr went back to his suite. I warned the American. Mortimer then went to his room. They were obviously planning to go out as a threesome, since Mrs Mortimer came down straight after, in full evening gear. Ten minutes later, both men had vanished. Our Latvian had switched his evening wear for less swanky clothes. He’d put on a cap, and the guard just assumed he was a kitchen worker. But Levingston left as he was, in formal attire.’

Torrence said nothing. In the long pause that ensued, you could hear the fire roaring in the stove and the window panes rattling in the storm.

Torrence finally broke the silence.

‘Luggage?’ he asked.

‘Done. Nothing there! Just clothes and underwear ... The usual accoutrements of a first-class traveller. Not a scrap of paper. The Mortimer woman is certain that her husband has been murdered.’

Somewhere a bell rang. Maigret opened the drawer in his desk where that afternoon he'd put all the telegrams about Pietr the Latvian.

Then he looked at the map. He drew a line with his finger from Krakow to Bremen, then to Amsterdam, Brussels and Paris.

Somewhere near Saint-Quentin, a brief halt: a man died.

In Paris, the line came to a full stop. Two men vanish from the middle of the Champs-Élysées.

All that's left are suitcases in a suite and Mrs Mortimer-Levingston, whose mind is as empty as Pietr's travelling chest.

The gurgle from Maigret's pipe was getting so annoying that the inspector took a swatch of chicken feathers from another drawer, cleaned the shaft, then opened the stove door and flung the soiled feathers in the fire.

Four of the beer glasses were empty but for sticky froth marks on the rim. Somebody came out of one of the offices on the corridor, locked his door and went away.

'Who's a lucky man!' Torrence observed. 'That's Lucas. Tonight he got a tip-off from some moneyed brat and arrested a pair of drug dealers.'

Maigret was poking the fire, and when he stood up his face was crimson. In routine fashion he picked up the translucent paper, extracted the strand of hair and turned it over in the light. Then he went back to the map and studied the invisible track of Pietr's journey. It made a sweeping arc of almost 180 degrees.

If he had started out from Krakow, then why had he gone all the way north to Bremen before swerving back down to Paris?

He was still holding the slip of paper. He muttered:

'There must have been a picture inside this once.'

In fact, the tissue was a glassine envelope, a slipcover of the kind photographers use to protect customers' orders. But it was an obsolete size known as 'album format' that could only now be found in provincial backwaters. The photo that this cover must have protected would have been about half the size of a standard postcard, printed on off-white glacé paper on cardboard backing.

'Is anyone still there at the lab?' Maigret suddenly asked.

'I guess so. They must still be processing the photos of the Étoile du Nord affair.'

There was only one full glass left on the table. Maigret gulped it down and put on his jacket.

'You'll come along? ... Those kinds of portrait photos usually have the name and address of the photographer printed or embossed on them ...'

Torrence got the point. They set off through a labyrinth of passageways and stairs up into the attic floors of the Law Courts and finally found the forensics lab.

An expert took the slipcover, ran it through his fingers, almost sniffed at it. Then he sat at an arc lamp and wheeled over a carriage-mounted multiplying glass.

The principle is straightforward: blank paper that has been in protracted contact with another sheet that has been printed or written on eventually acquires an imprint of the letters on that other sheet. The imprint cannot be seen by the naked eye, but photography can reveal it.

The fact that there was a stove in the lab meant that Maigret was destined to end up there. He stood watch for the best part of an hour, smoking pipe after pipe, while Torrence trailed the photographer as he came and went.

At long last the darkroom door opened. A voice cried out:

‘We’ve got it!’

‘Yes?’

‘The photo credit is: Léon Moutet, Art Photography, Quai des Belges, Fécamp.’

Only a real expert could decipher the plate. Torrence, for instance, could only see a blur.

‘Do you want to see the post-mortem photos?’ the expert asked cheerfully. ‘They’re first-rate! But it was a tight fit inside that railway toilet! Would you believe it, we had to hang the camera from the ceiling ...’

‘Have you got an outside line?’ Maigret asked, gesturing towards the phone.

‘Yes ... the switchboard shuts down at nine, so before she goes off the operator connects me to the outside.’

Maigret called the Majestic and spoke to one of the desk interpreters.

‘Has Mr Mortimer-Levingston come back in?’

‘I’ll find out for you, sir. To whom do I have the honour of ...’

‘Police!’

‘No, sir, he’s not back.’

‘What about Mr Oswald Oppenheim?’

‘Not back either, sir.’

‘What is Mrs Mortimer up to?’

A pause.

‘I asked you what Mrs Mortimer is doing.’

‘She is ... I think she is in the bar ...’

‘Do you mean she’s drunk?’

‘She has had a few cocktails, sir. She said she would not go up to her suite until her husband comes back ... Do you ...?’

‘What’s that?’



‘Hello? ... This is the manager speaking,’ another voice broke in. ‘Any progress? Do you think this will get into the papers? ...’

Cruelly, Maigret hung up. To please the photographer he took a look at the first proof photos laid out in the drying trays, still gleaming wet. While doing that he was talking to Torrence.

‘You’re going to settle in at the Majestic, old pal. The main thing is to take no notice whatsoever of the manager.’

‘What about you, patron?’

‘I’m going back to the office. There’s a train to Fécamp at 5.30, It’s not worth going home and waking up Mme Maigret. Hang on ... The Dauphine should still be open. On your way, order me up a beer ...’

‘Just one ...?’ Torrence inquired, with a deadpan expression on his face.

‘As you like, old pal! The waiter’s smart enough to know it means three or four. Have him throw in a few sandwiches as well.’

They traipsed down an unending spiral staircase in single file.

The black-gowned photographer was left on his own to admire the prints he’d just made. He still had to number them.

The two detectives parted company in the freezing courtyard.

‘If you leave the Majestic for any reason, make sure one of our men holds the fort,’ Maigret instructed. ‘I’ll telephone the front desk if I need to get in touch ...’

He went back to his office and stoked the fire so vigorously he could have snapped the grate.

#### 4. The Seeteufel’s First Mate

The station at La Bréauté, on the mainline to Le Havre, where Maigret had to change trains at 7.30 a.m., gave him a foretaste of Fécamp.

The ill-lit station buffet had grimy walls and a counter offering only a few mouldy pieces of cake alongside a miserable fruit stack made of three bananas and five oranges.

The foul weather had even more impact there than in Paris. Rain was coming down in buckets. Crossing from one track to the other meant wading through knee-deep mud.

The branch-line train was a rickety affair made up of carriages on their way to scrap. In the pale half-light of dawn you could hardly make out the fuzzy shapes of farmhouses through the pelting rain.

Fécamp! The air was laden with the smell of herring and cod. Mountains of casks. Ships’ masts peering over the locomotive. Somewhere a siren blared.

‘Quai des Belges?’

Straight ahead. All he had to do was walk through slimy puddles gleaming with fish scales and rotting innards.

The photographer was also a shopkeeper and a newspaper vendor. He stocked oilskins, sailcloth pea-jackets and hempen rope alongside New Year's greeting cards.

A weakling with very pale skin: as soon as he heard the word 'police' he called his wife to the rescue.

'Can you tell me what photo was in this slipcover?'

It dragged on. Maigret had to squeeze words out of him one by one and do his thinking for him.

In the first place, the technician hadn't used that format for eight years, ever since he'd acquired new equipment to do postcard-sized portraits.

Who might have had his or her photograph taken eight or more years ago? Monsieur Moutet took a whole fifteen minutes to remember that he'd got an album with archive copies of all the portraits done in his establishment.

His wife went to get it. Sailors came and went. Kids came in to buy a penny's worth of sweets. Outside, ships' tackle scraped on the dock. You could hear the waves shifting shingle along the breakwater.

Maigret thumbed through the archive album, then specified what he was looking for:

'A young woman with extremely fine brown hair ...'

That did it.

'Mademoiselle Swaan!' the photographer exclaimed. He turned up the snapshot straight away. It was the only time he'd had a decent subject to photograph.

She was a pretty woman. She looked twenty. The photo fitted the slipcover exactly.

'Who is she?'

'She's still living in Fécamp. But now she's got a cliff-top villa five minutes from the Casino ...'

'Is she married?'

'She wasn't then. She was the cashier at the Railway Hotel.'

'Opposite the station, I suppose?'

'Yes, you must have seen it on your way here. She was an orphan from some small place around here ... Les Loges ... Do you know where I mean? ... Anyway, that's how she got to meet a traveller staying at the hotel ... They got married ... At the moment she's living in the villa with her two children and a maid ...'

'Mr Swaan doesn't live in Fécamp?'

There was a pause. The photographer and his wife exchanged glances. The woman answered:

'Since you're from the police, I suppose we'd better tell you everything. Anyway you'd find it all out in the end, but ... They're only rumours, but ... Mr Swaan almost never stays in Fécamp. When he does come he stops for a few days at the most ... Sometimes it's just a flying visit ... He first came not long after the

war ... The Grand Banks were being reorganized, after five years' interruption. He wanted to look into it properly, so he said, and to make investments in businesses that were being started up again. He claimed to be Norwegian ... His first name is Olaf ... The herring fishermen who sometimes go as far as Norway say there are plenty of people over there who have that name ... Nonetheless, people said he was really a German spy. That's why, when he got married, his wife was kept at arm's length. Then we discovered he really was a sailor and was first mate on a German merchantman, and that was why he didn't show up very often ... Eventually people stopped bothering about him, but we're still wary ...'

'You said they had children?'

'Two ... A little girl of three and a baby a few months old ...'

Maigret took the photograph out of the album and got directions to the villa. It was a bit too early to turn up. He waited in a harbour café for two hours, listening to fishermen talking about the herring catch, which was at its height. Five trawlers were tied up at the quay. Fish was being unloaded by the barrelful. Despite the wind and rain, the air stank.

To get to the villa he walked along the deserted breakwater and around the shuttered Casino still plastered with last summer's posters. At last he got to a steep climb that began at the foot of the cliff. As he plodded up he got occasional glimpses of iron railings in front of villas. The one he was looking for turned out to be a comfortable-looking red-brick structure, neither large nor small. He guessed that the garden with its white-gravel paths was well tended in season. The windows must have had a good view into the far distance.

Maigret rang the bell. A great Dane came to sniff at him through the railings, and its lack of bark made it seem all the more ferocious. At the second ring, a maid appeared. First she took the dog back to his kennel, and then asked:

'What is it about?'

She spoke with the local accent.

'I would like to see Mr Swaan, please.'

She seemed hesitant.

'I don't know if sir is in ... I'll go and ask.'

She hadn't opened the gate. Rain was still pouring down, and Maigret was soaked through. He watched the maid go up the steps and vanish inside the house. Then a curtain shifted at a window. A few moments later the maid reappeared.

'Sir will not be back for several weeks. He is in Bremen ...'

'In that case I would like to have a word with Madame Swaan ...'

The maid hesitated again, but ended up opening the gate.

'Madame isn't dressed. You will have to wait ...'

The dripping detective was shown into a neat lounge with white curtains and a waxed floor. The furniture was brand new, but just the same as you would find in any lower-middle-class home. They were good-quality pieces, in a style that would have been called modern around 1900.

Light oak. Flowers in an 'artistic' stone vase in the middle of the table. Crochet-workplace-mats. On the other hand, there was a magnificent sculpted silver samovar on a side-table. It must have been worth more than the rest of the room's contents put together.

Maigret heard noises coming from the first floor. A baby could be heard crying through one of the ground-floor walls; someone else was mumbling something in a soft and even voice, as if to comfort it. At last, the sound of slippers gliding along the corridor. The door opened. Maigret found himself facing a young woman who had dressed in a hurry so as to meet him.

She was of medium height, more plump than slim, with a pretty and serious face that betrayed a pang of anxiety. She smiled nonetheless and said:

'Why didn't you take a seat?'

Rivulets of rainwater flowed from Maigret's overcoat, trousers and shoes into little puddles on the polished floor. In that state he could not have sat down on the light-green velvet of the armchairs in the lounge.

'Madame Swaan, I presume? ...'

'Yes, monsieur ...'

She looked at him quizzically.

'I'm sorry to disturb you like this ... It's just a formality ... I'm with the Immigration Service ... We're conducting a survey ...'

She said nothing. She didn't seem any more or less anxious than before.

'I understand Mr Swaan is a Swede. Is that correct?'

'Oh no, he's Norwegian ... But for the French I guess it's something ... To begin with, I myself ...'

'He is a ship's officer?'

'He's first mate on the Seeteufel, out of Bremen ...'

'As I thought ... So he is in the employ of a German company?'

She blushed.

'The ship-owner is German, yes ... At least, on paper ...'

'Meaning? ...'

'I don't think I need to keep it from you ... You must be aware that the merchant fleet has been in crisis since the war ... Even here you can find ocean-going captains who've been unable to find commissions and who have to take positions as first or even second mates ... Others have joined the Newfoundland or the North Sea fishing fleets.'

She spoke quite fast, but in a gentle and even tone.

'My husband didn't want to take on a commission in the Pacific, where there's more work, because he wouldn't have been able to come back to Europe more than once every two years ... Shortly after we got married, some Americans bought the Seeteufel in the name of a German shipping firm ... Olaf first came to Fécamp looking specifically for more schooners to buy ... Now you must see ... The aim was to run booze to the USA ... Substantial firms were set up with American money ... They have offices in France, Holland, or Germany ... The truth is that my husband works for one of these companies. The Seeteufel sails what's called Rum Alley. It doesn't really have anything to do with Germany.'

'Is he at sea at the moment?' Maigret asked, keeping his eyes on that pretty face, which struck him as an honest and even at times a touching one.

'I don't think so. You must realize that the sailings aren't as regular as those of a liner. But I always try to keep abreast of the Seeteufel's position. At the moment he ought to be in Bremen, or very nearly there.'

'Have you ever been to Norway?'

'Never! I've actually never left Normandy, so to speak. Just a couple of times, for short stays in Paris.'

'With your husband?'

'Yes ... On our honeymoon, as well.'

'He's got fair hair, hasn't he?'

'Yes ... Why do you ask?'

'And a thin, close-cropped blond moustache?'

'Yes ... I can show you a picture of him if you like.'

She opened a door and went out. Maigret could hear her moving about in the bedroom next door.

She was out for longer than made sense, and the noises of doors opening and closing and of comings and goings around the house were just as illogical.

At last she came back, looking somewhat perplexed and apologetic.

'Please excuse me ...' she said. 'I can't manage to put my hand on that photo ... A house with children is always upside down ...'

'One more question ... To how many people did you give a copy of this photograph of yourself?'

Maigret showed her the archive print he'd been given by the photographer. Madame Swaan went bright red and stuttered:

'I don't understand ...'

'Your husband presumably has one?'

'Yes ... We were engaged when ...'

'Does any other man have a print?'

She was on the verge of tears. The quiver of her lips gave away her distress.

‘No, nobody.’

‘Thank you, madame. That will be all.’

As he was leaving a little girl slipped into the hallway. Maigret had no need to memorize her features. She was the spitting image of Pietr the Latvian!

‘Olga! ...’ her mother scolded, as she hustled her back through a half-open door.

Maigret was back outside in the rain and the wind.

‘Goodbye, madame ...’

He caught a final glimpse of her through the closing door. He was aware that he had left her at a loss, after bursting in on her in the warmth of her own home. He picked up a trace in her eyes of something uncertain but undoubtedly akin to anxiety as she shut her front door.

## 5. The Russian Drunkard

You don’t boast about these kinds of things, they would raise a laugh if they were mentioned out loud, but all the same, they call for a kind of heroism.

Maigret hadn’t slept. From 5.30 to 8 a.m. he’d been shaken about in draughty railway carriages. Ever since he’d changed trains at La Bréauté he’d been soaked through. Now his shoes squelched out dirty water at every step and his bowler was a shapeless mess. His overcoat and trousers were sopping wet.

The wind was slapping him with more rain. The alleyway was deserted. It was no more than a steep path between garden walls. The middle of it had turned into a raging torrent.

He stood still for quite a while. Even his pipe had got wet in his pocket. There was no way of hiding near the villa. All he could do was stick as close as possible to a wall and wait.

Anyone coming by would catch sight of him and look round. He might have to stay there for hours on end. There was no definite proof that there was a man in the house. And even if he were there, why should he come out?

Grumpy as he was, Maigret filled his wet pipe with tobacco all the same, and wedged himself as best he could into a cranny in the wall ...

This was no place for a detective chief inspector of the Police Judiciaire. At most it was a job for a new recruit. Between the age of twenty-two and thirty he’d stood this sort of watch a hundred times over.

He had a terrible time getting a match to light. The emery board on the side of the box was coming off in strips. If one of the sticks hadn’t finally ignited, maybe even Maigret would have given up and gone home.

He couldn’t see anything from where he was standing except a low wall and the green-painted railing of the villa. He had brambles at his ankles and a draught all down his neck.

Fécamp was laid out beneath him, but he could not see the town. He could only hear the roar of the sea and now and again a siren or the sound of a car.

After half an hour on watch he saw a woman with a shopping basket, who looked like a cook, making her way up the steep slope. She only saw Maigret when she passed close by him. His huge, unmoving shape standing next to the wall in a wind-swept alley so scared her that she started to run.

Perhaps she worked for one of the villas at the top of the rise? A few minutes later a man appeared at the bend and stared at Maigret from afar. Then a woman joined him, and both went back inside.

It was a ridiculous situation. The inspector knew there wasn't one chance in ten that his surveillance would be of any use.

Yet he stuck it out – just because of a vague feeling that didn't even deserve to be called an intuition. In fact it was a pet theory of his that he'd never worked out in full and remained vague in his mind, but which he dubbed for his own use the theory of the crack in the wall.

Inside every wrong-doer and crook there lives a human being. In addition, of course, there is an opponent in a game, and it's the player that the police are inclined to see. As a rule, that's what they go after.

Some crime or offence is committed. The match starts on the basis of more or less objective facts. It's a problem with one or more unknowns that a rational mind tries to solve.

Maigret worked like any other policeman. Like everyone else, he used the amazing tools that men like Bertillon, Reiss and Locard have given the police – anthropometry, the principle of the trace, and so forth – and that have turned detection into forensic science. But what he sought, what he waited and watched out for, was the crack in the wall. In other words, the instant when the human being comes out from behind the opponent.

At the Majestic he'd seen the player. But here, he had a premonition of something else. The tidy, quiet villa wasn't one of the props that Pietr used to play his hand. Especially the wife and the children he'd seen and heard: they belonged to a different physical and moral order.

That's why he was waiting, albeit in a foul mood, for he was too fond of his big cast-iron stove and his office with glasses of frothy beer on the table not to be miserable in such awful weather.

He'd started his watch a little after 10.30. At half past noon he heard footsteps scrunching the gravel and swift, practised movements opening the gate, which brought a figure to within three metres of the inspector. The lie of the land made it impossible for Maigret to retreat. So he stood his ground unwaveringly, or, to be more precise, inertly, standing on two legs that could be seen in the round through the sopping wet trousers that clung to them.

The man leaving the villa was wearing a poor-quality belted trenchcoat, with its worn-out collar upturned. He was also wearing a grey cap. The get-up made him look very young. He went down the hill with his hands in his pockets, all hunched up and shivering because of the contrast in temperature.

He was obliged to pass within a metre of the Detective Chief Inspector. He chose that moment to slow down, take a packet of cigarettes out of his pocket and light up. It was as if he'd positively tried to get his face into the light so as to allow the detective to study it in detail!

Maigret let him go on a few paces, then set off on his tail, with a frown on his face. His pipe had gone out. His whole being exuded a sense of displeasure as well as an ardent desire to understand.

The man in the trenchcoat looked like the Latvian and yet did not resemble him! Same height: about 1 m

68cm. At a pinch he could be the same age, though in the outfit he was wearing he looked closer to twenty-six than thirty-two. There was nothing to determine that this man was not the original of the 'word-picture' that Maigret knew by heart and also had on a piece of paper in his pocket.

And yet ... it was not the same man! For one thing, his eyes had a vaguer, more sentimental expression. They were a lighter shade of grey, as if the rain had scrubbed them. Nor did he have a blond toothbrush moustache. But that wasn't the only thing that made him different.

Maigret was struck by other details. His outfit was nothing like that of an officer of the merchant fleet. It didn't even fit the villa, given the comfortable middle-class style of living that it implied.

His shoes were worn and the heels had been redone. Because of the mud, the man hitched up his trouser legs, showing faded grey cotton socks that had been clumsily darned.

There were lots of stains on the trenchcoat. Overall, the man fitted a type that Maigret knew well: the migrant low-lifer, predominantly of Eastern European origin, who slept in squalid lodginghouses and sometimes in railway stations. A type not often seen outside Paris, but accustomed to travelling in third-class carriages when not riding the footboards or hopping freight trains.

He got proof of his insight a few minutes later. Fécamp doesn't have any genuine low dives, but behind the harbour there are two or three squalid bars favoured by dockhands and seamen. Ten metres before these places there's a regular café kept clean and bright. The man in the trenchcoat walked right past it and straight into the least prepossessing of the bars, where he put his elbow on the counter in a way that Maigret saw right through.

It was the straightforwardly vulgar body-language of a guttersnipe. Even if he'd tried, Maigret couldn't have imitated it. The inspector followed the man into the bar. He'd ordered an absinthe substitute and was just standing there, wordless, with a blank stare on his face. He didn't register Maigret's presence, though the inspector was now right next to him.

Through a gap in the man's jacket Maigret could see that his linen was dirty. That's not something that can be simulated, either! His shirt and collar – now not much more than a ribbon – had been worn for days, maybe for weeks on end. They'd been slept in – God knows where! They'd been sweated in and rained on.

The man's suit was not unstylish, but it bore the same signs and told the same miserable story of a vagrant life.

'Same again!'

The glass was empty, and the barman refilled it, serving Maigret a measure of spirits at the same time.

'So you're back in these parts again? ...'

The man didn't answer. He downed his drink in one gulp and gestured for a refill straight away.

'Anything to eat? ... I've got some pickled herring ...'

Maigret had sidled up to a small stove, and stood in front of it to warm his back, now as shiny as an umbrella.

'Come to think of it ... I had a man in here last week from your part of the world ... Russian he was, from Archangelsk ... Sailing a Swedish three-master that had to put in to port because of the bad weather ... Hardly had time to drink his fill, I can tell you! ... Had a devil of a job on his hands ... Torn



sails, snapped yards, you name it ...'

The man, now on his fourth imitation absinthe, was drinking steadily. The barman filled his glass every time it was empty, glancing at Maigret with a conniving wink.

'As for Captain Swaan, I ain't seen him since you was here last.'

Maigret shuddered. The man in the trenchcoat who'd now downed his fifth neat ersatz absinthe staggered towards the stove, bumped into the detective and held out his hands towards the warmth.

'I'll have a herring, all the same ...' he said.

He had a quite strong accent – a Russian accent, as far as the detective could judge.

There they were, next to each other, shoulder to shoulder, so to speak. The man wiped his face with his hand several times, and his eyes grew ever more murky.

'Where's my glass? ...' he inquired testily.

It had to be put in his hand. As he drank he stared at Maigret and pouted with disgust.

There was no mistaking that expression! As if to assert his opinion all the more clearly, he threw his glass to the ground, leaned on the back of a chair and muttered something in a foreign tongue.

The barman, somewhat concerned, found away of getting close to Maigret and whispering quietly in a way that was nonetheless audible to the Russian:

'Don't take any notice of him. He's always like that ...'

The man gave a drunkard's strangled laugh. He slumped into the chair, put his head in both his hands and stayed like that until a plate of herring was pushed over the table between his elbows. The barman shook his shoulder.

'Eat up! ... It'll do you good ...'

The man laughed again. It was more like a bitter cough. He turned round so he could see Maigret and stare at him aggressively, then he pushed the plate of herring off the table.

'More drink! ...'

The barman raised his arms and grunted as if it was an excuse:

'Russians, I ask you!'

Then he put his finger to his head and turned it, as if he was tightening a loose screw.

Maigret had pushed his bowler to the back of his head. His clothes were steaming, giving off a grey haze. He was only up to his second glass of spirits.

'I'll have some herring!' he said.

He was still eating it with a slice of bread when the Russian got up on unsteady legs, looked around as if he didn't know what to do and grinned for the third time when he set eyes on Maigret.

Then he slumped down at the bar, took a glass from the shelf and a bottle from the enamel sink where it was being kept cool in water. He helped himself without watching how much he was taking and smacked his tongue as he drank.

Eventually he took a 100 franc note out of his pocket.

'Is that enough, you swine?' he asked the waiter.

He threw the banknote up in the air. The barman had to fish it out of the sink.

The Russian struggled with the door handle, which wouldn't open. There was almost a fight because the barman tried to help his customer, who kept elbowing him away.

At long last the trench coat faded away into the mist and rain along the harbour-side, going towards the station.

'That's an odd'un,' the barman sighed, intending to be heard by Maigret, who was paying his bill.

'Is he often in?'

'Now and again ... Once he spent the whole night here, on the bench where you're sitting ... He's a real Russian! ... Some Russian sailors who were here in Fécamp at the same time as he was told me so ... Apparently he's quite educated ... Did you look at his hands? ...'

'Don't you think he's got the same looks as Captain Swaan? ...'

'Oh! So you know him ... Well, of course he does! But not so much as you'd mistake one for the other ... All the same ... For ages I thought it was his brother.'

The beige silhouette vanished round a corner. Maigret started to walk faster. He caught up with the Russian just as he was going into the third-class waiting room at the station. The man slumped onto a bench and once again put his head in his hands.

**Inspector Maigret Omnibus: Volume 1: Pietr The Latvian; The Hanged Man Of Saint-Pholien; The Carter Of 'La Providence'; The Grand Banks Caf.** In undergoing this life, lots of people constantly aim to do as well as get the very best. New understanding, experience, lesson, and also every little thing that can improve the life will be done. Nonetheless, many individuals sometimes really feel confused to obtain those things. Feeling the restricted of encounter and sources to be better is one of the lacks to have. Nevertheless, there is a quite straightforward point that can be done. This is exactly what your teacher constantly manoeuvres you to do this one. Yeah, reading is the solution. Reading a publication as this Inspector Maigret Omnibus: Volume 1: Pietr The Latvian; The Hanged Man Of Saint-Pholien; The Carter Of 'La Providence'; The Grand Banks Caf as well as other references can enhance your life quality. Exactly how can it be?