

WHEN I WAS A PHOTOGRAPHER

NADAR

BALZAC AND THE DAGUERRETYPE

When the word spread that two inventors had just succeeded to fix on silver plates every image presented in front of them, there was a universal stupefaction that we would be unable to imagine, accustomed as we have been for many years now to photography and made so indifferent to it by its vulgarization.

There were some who stubbornly refused to believe that it was possible. A usual phenomenon, since by nature we are hostile to everything that disconcerts our received ideas and disturbs our habits. Suspicion, hateful irony, the “eagerness to kill,” as our friend Sand used to say, arise immediately. Didn’t it happen only yesterday, the furious protest of that member of the Institute invited to the first demonstration of the phonograph? With what indignation did the distinguished “professor” refuse to waste one more second with this “ventriloquist hoax,” and with what a scene did he storm out, swearing that the impertinent charlatan would have to deal with him...

—How! Gustave Doré—a clear and free mind like no other—said to me one day while in a bad mood, “How is it possible that you don’t understand the enjoyment one has in discovering the chink in the armor of a masterpiece?”

The unknown strikes us with a vertigo and would shock us like insolence, as the “Sublime always gives us the effect of a riot.”¹

The appearance of the Daguerreotype—which more legitimately should be called the Niepce type—therefore could not fail to provoke considerable emotion. Exploding unexpectedly, totally unexpectedly, surpassing all possible expectations, diverting everything that we thought we knew and even what could be hypothesized, the new discovery presented itself assuredly, as it remains, the most extraordinary in the constellation of inventions that already have made our still unfinished century the greatest of the scientific centuries—in the absence of other virtues.

Such is in fact the glorious haste that the proliferation of germinating ideas seems to render incubation superfluous: the hypothesis comes out of the human brain in full armor, fully formed, and the first induction immediately becomes the constituted work. The idea runs to the fact. Scarcely has steam reduced distance, than electricity abolishes it. While Bourseul²—a Frenchman, a lowly employee of the Post Office—first foresaw the telephone and while the poet Charles Cros³ dreamt of the phonograph, Lissajoux, with his sound waves, makes us *see* the sound that Ader transmits beyond our range, and that Edison recorded for us for all time; Pasteur, simply by examining more closely the helminths intuited by Raspail, imposes a new diagnostic that throws away our old codex; —Charcot opens the mysterious door of the hyper-physical world, suspected by Mesmer, and all our secular ideas of criminality collapse; —Marey, who just stole from the bird the secret of aeronautics [l’aéronautique rationnelle par les graves], reveals to man in the

immensities of the ether the new domain that will be his from tomorrow on, —and, a simple fact of pure physiology, anesthesia elevates itself, with an almost divine aspiration, to the mercy that lifts from humanity physical pain, which is from now on abolished... —And it is this, indeed, all this, that the good Mr. Brunetière calls: “the failure of Science”...

Here we are well beyond the remarkable accomplishments of Fourcroy, at that supreme hour when the genius of a nation in danger *would order discoveries*, beyond even those of Laplace, Montgolfier, Lavoisier, Chappe, Conte, and of all the others, so well beyond that, in the face of this set of events, of nearly simultaneous explosions of Science in our nineteenth century, its symbolism also must be transformed: “the Hercules of antiquity was a man with the full force of his age, with powerful and large muscles; the modern Hercules is a child leaning on a lever.”⁴

But all these new wonders, do they not have to be effaced in front of the most astonishing and disturbing one of all, that one which finally seems to give man the power to create, he, too, in his turn, by materializing the impalpable specter that vanishes as soon as it is perceived without leaving a shadow on the crystal of the mirror, or a ripple in the water in a basin? Was it not possible for man then to believe that he actually was creating since he seized, apprehended, fixed the intangible, preserving the fleeting vision, the flash, engraved by him today in the hardest of bronze?

In short, Niepce and his fine accomplice were wise to have waited to be born. The Church always has shown itself to be more than cold toward innovators—when it was not rather warm toward them—, and the discovery of 1842 seemed mostly suspect.⁵ This mystery smelled devilishly like a spell and reeked of heresy: the celestial rotisserie had been heated up for less.

Nothing was lacking for the affair to be disquieting: hydroscopy, bewitchment, evocations, apparitions. Night—dear to all thaumaturges—reigned alone in the somber recesses of the darkroom, the preferred place by all indication of the Prince of Darkness. Scarcely anything was needed to make philters from our filters.

It is not surprising, then, if, at first, even admiration seemed uncertain; it remained unsettled, as if bewildered. Time was needed for the Universal Animal to make up his mind and approach the Monster.

In front of the Daguerreotype, things went “from the lowliest to the highest,” as the popular saying goes, and the ignorant and the illiterate were not the only ones to have this defiant, almost superstitious, hesitation. More than one of the most beautiful minds suffered the contagion of this first recoil.⁶

To mention only one from among the very highest, Balzac felt uneasy before the new prodigy: he could not defend himself against a vague apprehension about the Daguerreian operation.

He had found his own explanation, for whatever it was worth then, returning somehow to fantastic hypotheses à la Cardan. I think I remember well having seen his particular theory stated by him in detail in a corner somewhere in the immensity of his work. I do not have the time to research it, but my recollection is very clear and precise because of the prolix account that he gave me in one of our meetings and which he repeated to me another time, since he seemed to be obsessed with the idea, in the little

violet apartment that he occupied at the corner of rue Richelieu and the boulevard: this building, famous as a gambling house during the Restoration, was still called at that time the Hotel Frascati.

Therefore, according to Balzac, every body in nature is composed of a series of specters, in infinitely superimposed layers, foliated into infinitesimal pellicules, in all directions in which the optic perceives this body.

Since man is unable to create—that is, to constitute from an apparition, from the impalpable, a solid thing, or to make a *thing* out of *nothing*—every Daguerreian operation would catch, detach, and retain, by applying onto itself one of the layers of the photographed body.

It follows that for that body, and with every repeated operation, there was an evident loss of one of its specters, which is to say, of a portion of its constitutive essence.

Was there an absolute, definitive loss, or would this partial loss repair itself consecutively in the mystery of a more or less instantaneous rebirth of the spectral material? I suppose that Balzac, once he began, was not the kind of man to stop along such a good path, and that he would walk until the end of his hypothesis. But this second point was never brought up between us.

This terror of Balzac before the Daguerreotype, was it sincere or simulated? If it was sincere, Balzac had only to gain from his loss, since his abdominal abundances, and others, permitted him to squander his “specters” without counting. In any case, it did not prevent him from posing at least once for that unique Daguerreotype that I owned after Gavarni and Silvy, and that is now in the possession of Mr. Spoelberg de Lovenjoul.

To claim that it was simulated would be delicate, without forgetting, however, that the desire to shock had been for a long time the most fashionable sin of our elite minds. These originals, so real, of such genuine frankness, seem to enjoy so thoroughly the pleasure of presenting themselves paradoxically in front of us that we had to invent a name for this disease of the brain, “*the pose*,” the pose that the hunched, consumptive Romantics, with a fatal air, have transmitted perfectly in the same way, first under the naïve and brutal allure of the naturalist realists, then up to the present rigidity, the concrete and thrice-locked posture of our current decadents, idiographic and self-centered—on point more annoying themselves than all the others together, eternal token of the imperishability of Cathos and Madelon.⁷

Be that as it may, Balzac did not have to go far to find two disciples for his new parish. Among his closest friends, Gozlan, in his prudence, immediately got out of the way; but good old Gautier and the no less excellent Gerard de Nerval immediately followed suit to the “specters.” Any thesis beyond verisimilitudes could only agree with the impeccable “Theo,” the precious and charming poet, rocking in the vagueness of his oriental somnolence: the image of man already is, moreover, prohibited in the countries of the rising sun.—As for the sweet Gerard, forever mounted on the Chimera, he already was predisposed: For the initiate of Isis, intimate friend of the Queen of Sheba, “Faultless” as he was known to be, Gautier never was one to pass up a dubious proposition. Did that writer of elegant and polished verse, floating in an opiate world of Oriental fantasies, forget that the very image of man is forbidden in the lands of the rising sun? As for gentle Gerard, shy and sweet-tempered, always galloping off across some

fantastic landscape, he was spoken for well in advance. To an initiate of Isis, an intimate friend of the Queen of Sheba and of the Duchesse de Longueville, every dream would arrive in the form of a friend...—but talking about specters, both the one and the other, and without any qualms, were among the very first to pass before our lens.

I could not say for how long this cabalist trio resisted the entirely scientific explanation of the Daguerreian mystery, which soon passed to the domain of the banal. It can be assumed that our Sanhedrin had the same end as anything else and that, after a very lively first agitation, we very quickly finished up not speaking about it. As they had come, the “Specters” had to leave.

Never again did it come up in any other meeting or visit of the two friends to my studio.

GAZEBON AVENGED

Dear Sir,

M. Mauclerc, a theater artist, in transit in our city, has shown to me and the patrons of my establishment, a daguerreotyped (sic) portrait of himself taken, he said, by you in Paris, while he was in Eaux-Bonnes (by means of the electric process).

Many people who ignore the progress of electricity have refused to lend credence to M. Mauclerc's claims, which I myself did not doubt for a moment, since I have been somewhat occupied with the daguerreotype for a time.

I therefore am begging you, sir, to make my portrait using the same process and to send it to me as quickly as possible.

Since I receive everyday the best Society, and even a large number of Englishmen, especially in the wintertime, I urge you to take the greatest possible care with this commission, which will no doubt be to your benefit, since many people have the intention of writing to you in order to have their portrait done.

I would like it in color and, if possible, taken while I am seated at one of the tables in my grand billiard room.

I have the honor of saluting you.

GAZEBON,
*Proprietor of the Cafe du
Grand-Theatre,
Grande-Place.*

Pau, 27 August 1856.

On the back and body of the letter, as was the practice before the use of envelopes, with the stamps of Pau and Paris, plus the canceled Imperial seal, was the following postal address:

*Monsieur NADAR,
Daguerreotype artist,
Rue Saint-Lazare, 113
Paris.*

I had read and reread this curious letter—which I reproduce here word for word, with its spelling and punctuation—admiring equally the gullibility of Gazebon and the knavery of perfidious Mauclerc.

Having “*been somewhat occupied with the daguerreotype for a time*” had left me thinking...

And, in a vague memory that slowly was becoming precise, I managed to find again these two names of the naive café proprietor from Pau and of the mischievous comedian.

Some two years before I had received from the same Gazebon, under the instigation and auspices of the very same Mauclerc—already then “*in transit in our city*”—a first “sensational-sounding” epistle.

It concerned an atrocious clock in gilded copper, a masterpiece of Restoration bad taste, entitled *Malek Adel on His Charger*. This ubiquitous Malek Adel,—one could see him everywhere—had been reduced to seeing himself being refused asylum by even the last secondhand dealers.

This Mauclerc “*in transit, etc.,*” nosing about the café, and coming across this last souvenir of the books of Mrs. Cottin, the insidious Mauclerc exclaimed, swearing to the innocent Gazebon, that he had there in his possession a treasure of the first order in upscale curiosities, cited by all the connoisseurs, and of which the one and only other example was in my hands. —In such a way, he had thus easily incited his chosen victim to write to me and to come to an understanding with me—in order to keep the prices high.

I had abstained from responding and, since this first effort by Mauclerc had no effect, at least as far as I was concerned, he charged again, pushing his Gazebon on me a second time.

So much for Gazebon, who “receives everyday the best Society, and even a large number of Englishmen”;—But why me, why this obstinacy, this obsession to choose me specifically and to pursue me as their chosen vessel, to impose on me the complicity of such misdeeds? Mauclerc, “*theater artist, in transit in our city,*” what do you want from me?

Without allowing myself to be touched by his so marked preference for my collaboration, a preference that I want to believe is flattering on the part of this Mauclerc, I didn’t find myself in the mood even this second time to give him an answer.

I left Mauclerc to turn all alone to witness his scheme explode, and the heroic Gazebon to await his portrait “taken in color and, *if possible,* while I am seated at one of the tables in my grand billiard room”—in plural.

But this letter begged to be kept as a specimen, and, as a collector pins a rare butterfly, I gave him a place in a special box.

It is not unpleasant and even justified, in the last days of a long and rather full career, to have received and to reread letters like this one.

Except that, who would have told me that fifteen or twenty years later the good old Gazebon would have found his avenger and that...

But let's not get ahead of ourselves.

*

Can you imagine anything more satisfying than those moments of rest before the evening meal, after a long day's work? Driven from bed before dawn by the preoccupations of work, the man hasn't stopped acting and thinking. He has given everything he can, without counting, struggling against a fatigue that becomes more and more oppressive:

I will fall tonight like a slaughtered ox,

and it is only at sundown, when the time of liberation rings, the time for everyone to stop, that, the main door of the house finally closed, he gives himself grace, granting a truce, until tomorrow, to his over-exhausted members and brain. It is this sweet hour par excellence, when, rewarded for his work—our great human advantage—by his work itself,—and rendered to himself at last, he stretches himself with delight in the chair of his choice, recapitulating the fruit of his day's labor...

Yes, but, even though our main door is closed, the back door always remains half-open, and if our good luck is to be perfect today, he will come to us for some good, intimate, comforting banter, where detestable discussion would never be permitted to interfere, he, one of those whom we love more than anybody else and who loves us,—one of those whom our thought always follows, since their thought is always with us: perfect agreements, cemented communions until beyond the last hour by long years of affection and esteem...

Exactly that afternoon, one of the most beloved and best fell upon me, the highest soul with the most alert and clearest spirit, one of the most brilliant foils cited in Parisian conversation, my excellent Hérald de Pages—and what a nice and intimate chat we were having, leaving fatigue and all the rest far behind!— until a visitor is announced to us.

—I'm not here! Leave me in peace!

—But this one already has come three times without finding you, and he just told us that, if you could not receive him now, he would come back; he absolutely needs to talk to you.

—Who is he?

—I don't know: a very young man who looks like a worker, bareheaded and with a white shirt.

—Let him come up, the good Hérald breaks in, who already has sensed (I know him!) something interesting...

—All right!!!...Let him come up.

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The young man appears wearing a white shirt and bareheaded.

He begins by apologizing for being in work clothes: having been occupied all day, he had not been able, under the fear of no longer being able to find me, for fear of missing me, to return to the home of his mother, with whom he lived on the heights of Clignancourt, to change.

He was about twenty years old, at most, a direct and clear look, his bearing reserved, modest yet self-assured. He spoke with remarkable ease, and had none of the drawn-out accent of the Parisian working class. [bas-fonds] Altogether a very pleasant young man: a typical example of the good French worker: intelligent, quick, resourceful.

After his apologies and thanks, he explained that, despite his absolute need to see me, he perhaps still would have hesitated to bother me if there were not already some familiar territory between us: his mother, whose name he says and repeats to me, had been in my mother's service in Lyon and had kept the best memories of her; in addition, he himself had worked for almost two years for Leopold Leclanché, the son of an old friend of mine, the translator of Cellini's *Mémoires*.

—...the one, sir, you had nicknamed *Farouchot*—he was laughing heartily as he was telling us the story!—“and whom we had the misfortune of losing before his son: a great loss this one, too, sir, for me and for everyone, since Mr. Leopold still had many inventions in front of him, perhaps even more precious than his electric battery, and he was kind enough to show an interest in me, a great interest. I have lost a lot with his death.

—You are an electrician then?

—Yes, sir. I've always liked my trade, and anything related to it: physics, chemistry, calculus. I attend community courses [aux cours des mairies] every evening or I read books and special reviews: this is my great, my only pleasure. I know nothing or almost nothing, but I keep up with what others know. I also like going to all the shops where I can learn something: that is why, after having worked for eighteen months at the Maison Breguet, I left: there is only manufacturing there, and it is the laboratory that attracts me [but I am drawn to the laboratory]. I was employed at Mr. Trouve's, in the rue de Valois, while he was working on his dual-motored electric velocipede. I worked—I wanted to know it all, see it all—at Mr. Froment's on his clocks, at Mr. Marcel Deprez's on generators and on energy transmission—a great thing of which we have not yet heard the last word, sir!—then with Mr. Ader⁸ on his telephone...

—Ah! You know Mr. Ader, too?

—Oh! Yes, sir; a very fine gentleman, who knows a lot and who will have a lot to tell us some day! And despite this, modest, too modest!

—Indeed.

—You know him, too?...Isn't it true, sir, that I'm not mistaken? Finally, I was even lucky enough to be accepted by Mr. Caselli to help with his research on autographic telegraphy. It is there especially...

—But just how old are you?

—Well, sir, I'm almost twenty.

—You do not even look that old. But, let's see: you are an electrician, you are studious, certainly intelligent, you know my friends “Farouchot” and Ader; you've been around: fine! But it is surely not only this that you have come to tell me.

Here, a moment of silence. The young man is hesitant, timid, embarrassed.. Finally, after a visible effort:

—Mr. Nadar, I won't permit myself to tell you for which reasons it is to you that I have come, why it is to you, to you alone, that I had to come, and why I would have come again if I had not been able to reach you: I find nothing worse than flattery and I would not want to appear a flatterer to you...

I must have frowned at that point, and he must have noticed:

—First and foremost, sir, I beg you not to take me for an arrogant person, which I have no reason to be; but what I have come to reveal to you is so...extraordinary, so beyond, even for you, what is recognized as accepted, classified, catalogued, that I first must make an appeal to you: to kindly agree not to judge me at my first word as crazy or impudent, to listen to me, to hear me without crying out...

—Go ahead!

—And I also must ask you, gentlemen, not to do me the honor of taking me for an inventor. I am only a young man, very ignorant, and it is not at all a discovery that I claim to bring to you. It is only a simple find, a chance, a coincidence in the laboratory [un recontre de laboratoire]. Moreover, you would be surprised at the simplicity, at the banality of the thing: I am speaking of my find in itself, from a scientific point of view, not in regard to its consequences. I was led there naturally by the latest published experiments on photophony. I said to myself: if the results obtained by Mr. Graham Bell and Mr. Summer Tainter have established that all bodies can emit *sound* under the action of *light*, why would we refuse to accept from light itself what light can offer us?

—And?...

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Here, another silence: then, with resolution, looking at me even more directly:

—Sir, would you admit, only for a moment, as a hypothesis, that, if, by some impossibility (but it is not for me to remind you, especially you, that, pure mathematics aside, the great Arago would not accept the word "impossibility"), if, then, a model, any subject whatsoever, were in this room where we find ourselves right now, for example, and on the other side, your camera man with his lens were in his studio, either on this floor, or on any other floor above or below us, that is, absolutely separated, isolated from this model of which he is unaware, which he cannot see, which he has not even seen—and which he has no need to see—would you admit that, if a photograph could be taken here, in front of you, under these strict conditions of segregation, the operation thus executed over such a short distance would have some chance of being reproduced over greater distances?...

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De Pages jumped up as if the young electrician had touched him with his live wire...

As for me, a little stunned, as you can imagine, I was examining my interlocutor: his clear gaze, that of a good young man, remained directly fixed on mine.

—And so, sir, I have come to you to ask you a favor—a favor that is nothing for you, and everything for me: to only and simply be kind enough to allow me to have a photograph taken in your studio, in front of you, by one of your technicians—under the

indicated conditions of isolation or conditions that you will indicate yourself, of any model you wish to choose, a photograph, no more than one photograph, which will suffice to demonstrate whether what I suggest is possible or not. Obviously, I myself have neither the equipment nor the photographic materials, and, in any case, this side of things is not my interest.

—This is all I had to ask you, sir, and you see that the inconvenience that I have come to solicit from you is not very great. As for my part in this, it will not inconvenience you much more: I do not take up much space and I will not be in your way with the eleven hundred grams that my little Griscom motor on my knees weighs—and which is all I need.

—And I will be very grateful to you, since it will be a great honor to me to have been heard in a house like yours. I'm not talking about the results from the point of view of financial profits, which touch me less than the rest. With my eyes closed, I here put myself in your hands—which I know.

I hadn't even flinched.

My friend De Pages, excited, was seeking my eye as eagerly as I was avoiding his, making numerous signals to me that I didn't wish to see. Too clearly, he thought I was cold. Unable to hold himself any longer, he intervened:

—So, you say that, across all distances and out of sight, you hope to take photographs?

—I do not hope to take them, sir; I take them. But I wouldn't know how to say it again to you and you will see it anyway: I'm not an inventor, I haven't invented anything; I have only encountered. I can take only a small credit there, if it all: that of removing the obstacles. Do you remember, Mr. Nadar, what you wrote about the first cogwheel of Stephenson's locomotive: "The first obstacle in most of the new manifestations of the human spirit is that we proceed almost constantly from the complex to the simple"?

—And he cites his classics!...de Pages tells me laughing.

—I've simplified, that's all. Only...only, gentlemen, I owe you a confession...My duty is to tell you...

—?...

—...to warn you that I already have attempted a first experiment, an experiment that, after your kind reception today, I must regret, since it was public. I should even have the newspaper that reviewed it on me...

He put his hand into his pocket, then, with a growing agitation, he searched successively his other pockets:

—O! My God! I must have left it in the workshop!!!...

Then, all happy:

—No! Here it is!...

He unfolded and handed the page to me—some *Courrier* or other or an *Echo de la Banlieue*. At the head of the "News Items" column we read, de Pages, fixed, his shoulder against mine:

"One of the most curious experiments took place yesterday, Sunday, at two o'clock in the afternoon, in the town hall of Montmartre. A very young man, almost a child, Mr. M..., had obtained from the office of the Mayor the necessary authorization

for his first public experiments of electrical photography across all distances, that is, with the model beyond the practitioner's the field of vision. The inventor had asserted that, from Montmartre, he would take photographs of Deuil, near Montmorency.

His Honor the Mayor of Montmartre, and several Council members were present at the experiment, as well as some residents of Deuil, who were to indicate the points to be reproduced.

Several photographs were obtained one after the other, produced immediately on demand, and everyone recognized the sites reproduced. Houses, trees, people were standing out with perfect clarity.

People warmly congratulated the young inventor, who was trying to escape the great enthusiasm of the crowd with a modesty that increased even more the public interest in this truly remarkable discovery, the consequences of which already appear to be incalculable."

We reread again this extraordinary account...

We were dumbfounded, and we would been that with less.

In fact, the very day before, we were coming out of the "Exposition of Electricity," fully dazzled, even blinded by its miracles, troubled by this mysterious power we now have domesticated and which rushes to our call even before our call—even better, summoning itself for our slightest needs or whims, always there, invisible and present, like some diabolical servant...

We had just seen it, the one we cannot see, accomplish all duties, perform all offices, realize all the desires of our imagination, as soon as they are formulated or only conceived, waiting, subdued and ready, for our commands to come. This agent, both omnipotent and impeccable, this servant unrivaled in all its liveries and all its names: telegraph, polyscope, phonophone, phonograph, phonautograph, telelogue, telephone, topophone, spectrophone, microphone, sphygmograph, pyrophone, etc., etc., we have seen it lifting and transporting our burdens for us, propelling our ships, our carriages, carrying our voice from region to region and keeping, *ne varietur*, the sound up to its least perceptible modulations, writing, drawing far beyond the reach of our hand, at all distances, chiseling, sandblasting, gilding, silver-plating—feeling our pulse and setting our clock, calling the firemen before we even see the fire and the diggers before the rising of the water level, fighting in our place either by keeping watch like a sentinel, or by regulating the speed of our missiles or by blowing up the enemy's forts, indicating to the surgeon the bullet lodged in our body, stopping dead in their tracks our launched horses or our locomotives, and also arresting the thieves, plowing our soil, winnowing our wheat, improving and aging our wine, and shooting game for us, monitoring our cashiers while guarding our cashboxes, and preventing even our good representatives from cheating when they vote until we obtain the blessed machine which at last will manufacture representatives who will not defraud us in anything; a first-class worker, in all arts and professions, and a Jack-of-All-Trades, one at a time or all at once, if you wish, market-porter, postman, lamp-man, engraver, farmer, physician, artillery-man, bookkeeper, archivist, carpenter, substitute soldier, tenor and police officer...

In fact, why not photographer, this universal Maître Jacques, and even long-distance photographer?

And good old Hérald, born to be credulous always, with all his spirit so fine, so sharp (like our good Latour-Saint-Ybars, gone before us...), Hérald was reproaching me, he was returning my silent resistance with his gaze illuminated before all the infinite prospects of his new path which was opening before us...

Eh! Yes, of course, I gave in, I would have given in ten times already if...—if I had not been imperatively arrested by a singular hallucination...

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As in phantasmagorical phenomena and with the obsession that attends certain cases of double vision, it seemed to me that the features of my noble Hérald and the honest face of the young worker were merging, blending into a kind of Mephistophelean mask from which appeared a disquieting figure that I had never seen before but that I recognized immediately: Mauclerc, deceitful Mauclerc, “in transit in our city,” mockingly handing me his electric image, from the country of Henry IV...

And I seemed, myself, to be Gazebon, yes, Gazebon himself, Gazebon “the Gullible”... and I would see myself in my Cafe du Grand-Théâtre in Pau, awaiting, from Nadar in Paris, my portrait “by the electric process” and, in the meantime, to kill time, serving a beer to “the best Society, even to Englishmen, seated, if possible, in my billiard room.”

And “taken in color”!...

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And while the good young man was waiting silently for an answer, his eyes always fixed on mine, fiery de Pages continued to sparkle...

—Well, Nadar, you say nothing?

—What do you want me to say?

—But what do you have to lose? And why do you care about one more or one less photograph? In the end, what is he asking from you?

Here, the young man, with a resigned sadness in his half-smile, said:

—Oh! No, it's not that! I understand very well what stops Mr. Nadar... Yet, when he will have seen, seen with his own eyes, that this phantom is nothing, less than nothing...

—Suppose that I do not stop: How will you arrange your conducting wires here?

—You will recoil even more this time, sir. And, yet, I cannot, in conscience, tell you what is not so... Sir, I have no need of wires.

—What do you mean!!!

—No, sir, I'm not an original, for it's not since yesterday but since 1838, I think, that Steinheil already had replaced his wire with the ground itself as a conductor, and Bourbouze had observed tellurian currents with a galvanometer. But, in any case, the way had long been indicated by the first experiments of the Royal Society of London, when Watson, Cavendish, and a third whose name escapes me (ah! Martin Folkes!) used the Thames as a conductor, not along its current, but across it, and when they even

increased the path by adding to the width of the river a stretch of land: an experiment that was repeated later with voltaic current. But isn't air itself recognized today as a conductor? Why then would we doubt today what has been known since 1747, for more than a century, and why would we be so hostile to ourselves so as to resist using this knowledge? Finally, the photo-phone, this mirror that vibrates across all distances under the action of the word, this miracle, wasn't it obtained without a wire? It is true that the selenium which produced it for us has been waiting since 1817, when Berzelius discovered it, for us to want to take the trouble to accept it. But it's always as you have said: "the human spirit proceeds from the complex to the simple..." Since the wires were useless to me, sir, I dispensed with wires.

From dumbfounded, I went to being absolutely stunned...

But the match had been won, and our young man already had felt it, since in order to be absolutely sure that he had won the city by planting his flag, he added, more familiarly and with the smile of a good boy:

—And now will you permit me, Mr. Nadar, to express my surprise at having encountered such resistance in a man known for so many diverse initiatives, in a man who—the first!—thirty years before anyone else dreamt of it, predicted, explained, and even baptized the *Phonograph*? For it was indeed in 1856, in an article in the *Musée français-anglais*, that you...

—Ok, ok...Enough!!

—...you who took the first underground photograph by artificial lights and also the first photograph from the basket of an aerostat; you who in 1863 gave a good kick to the chimera of balloons pretending to be dirigible and you who proclaimed since then the exclusive principle, accepted by everyone today, of heavier-than-air machines for aerial navigation...you who...

—Have mercy!!...Come whenever you like.

—Ah! Thank you, sir!!!

—And when will you come? De Pages asks, having reached a boiling point.

—Sir, if it's not inconvenient, I will come on the sixteenth of this month, at the time that Mr. Nadar would like to designate.

But Hérald:

—The sixteenth!...but today is only the fourth!!! Why lose these twelve days? Why not earlier?...tomorrow? even today?

—I am sorry, sir; I cannot before the sixteenth.

—Why?

But the young man already is moving toward the door, bowing to take his leave. De Pages grabs him by the sleeve of his shirt.

—But why such a delay?

—Excuse me, sir, if I cannot give you an answer: I have personal reasons, of no interest whatsoever. I'll come the sixteenth.

—But what possible reasons could you have to delay by twelve days a demonstration of such great importance to you?

—I can only repeat to you, sir: it is a personal matter and there is no need for anyone to intervene.

But de Pages is not one to be beaten and will not let go. He pushes, he presses with such vigor that the young man, crushed beyond his last defenses, begins to give in...De Pages inflames his arguments with persuasion:

—Come on, from you to us, really between us, what's the obstacle?...

—My God, sir, you insist so much that it would be bad form of me to refuse further such benevolence. Since you wish to know, I will tell you that it's only the fourth and I must wait until the fifteenth to be paid at the workshop...

—...For?...

—...For one or two small purchases of products needed for my experiment: last Sunday at Montmartre, I used up the last of my very few supplies. It is an insignificant cost, barely forty francs: but you understand—I'm sure you understand—that I feel very strongly about providing them myself...

“Here we are!” I thought.

It is I, this time, who searches for de Pages' gaze...But nothing escapes the one who watches: the young worker turns again toward Hérald and, choking, with a tear trembling at the corner of his eyelashes:

—There!!!...You see, sir!...I was sure! Mr. Nadar thinks ill of me!...Yet he himself is my witness that did not want to say anything about what concerned me alone; but you insisted so much that I gave in and now I am taken for a schemer, a miserable beggar...

It's necessary to calm him, to console him, to reassure him...I help Hérald in this and finally the young man leaves with his two louis, but how much we had to beg him!...

He will return tomorrow morning, at ten o'clock, *exactly* at ten o'clock.

There he went.

*

As I'm saying nothing:

—Well???...Hérald asks me.

—So much for your two louis!...

—What? Do you believe that this was nothing but a game, that this boy is a liar, that he will not come back tomorrow?

—...and it isn't very expensive after all! Notice to what degree our young artist was correct in his entire presentation: his entrance, modest, reserved, his attire standard: all this perfect; the use of sentimental opening lines, the evocation of the two old mothers (which never fails: see Dennery! See Coppée!...), the ingratiating exordium drawn from the character of the orator; the voluble list of facts and dates, difficult to verify on the spot, swirling to dazzle us like the balls of a juggler, the compliments, a bit exaggerated, but this always happens: and in order to achieve this perfect whole, think of all the preparations, of all the training! And he's still so young! Believe me, there is there in him a future minister for our horsetrading, and even conservative, Republic.

—But the names of friends he mentioned?

—Random information, obtained very easily from the first person who happens to be next to me for ten minutes or from anyone who knows me.

—And the newspaper article?

—How is it, my dear Hérald, that it is you, who has known so much about newspapers, you, who were the real, the initial founder of the *Petit Journal*, with its four million readers today, it is you who is taken in by a news item slipped into one of the two first and last issues of some short-lived tabloid by the complacency, or—who knows?—the complicity of a journalist comrade? You believe in newspapers, you who have made several of them! Despite your intelligence, you have remained a trusting man!...But no, all this means nothing or very little, and what we should admire, first of all, is much less the intelligence spent on all this pseudo-scientific knowledge than the way he used it, so skillfully laying it out and manipulating it on the carpet of lying! We encounter here a first-rate performer and I am very happy to have made the acquaintance of this strong man. He will go far!...Yes—and I am difficult!—this is a good job, since you’ve seen me consent to let myself be bitten. Here, then, is Gazebon avenged! On me! And by me!

Are you happy, Mauclerc! You and your hideous smile...

—But, my friend, how do you account for so many preparations, for all this effort, to achieve what? the puny result of two illicit louis?

—Excuse me, excuse me! You’re right here about that number two. We were worth more than that and he could have taken us for at least five: which is proof that even the best horse stumbles. But can you imagine that it was for me, for me alone, for this one and only representation, that he set up this theatrical performance that must have required the work of so many studies and rehearsals! That could hardly be compensated. No: what this pleasant boy has served us here, he will deliver, depending on the location, to all the photographers of the world, in Paris, in the suburbs, in provinces, abroad, seasoning the sauce of his entrée and of his sweet-talk according to the situation, the taste, and the stomach of each, since there will not be anyone too humble for him to cook for. And since none of the chosen, none of the privileged ones whom he favors, one after the other, with this very special honor of his confidence and with the unexpected promise of limitless benefits to be shared, since no one will dare to announce to his neighbor that he has been tricked, each one keeping the secret of his complicity, the mine is inexhaustible: now that is really what practical people call “a racket.” And at the same time, it has all the philosophy of adventure.

After a silence:

—The question remains, de Pages said again. To sum up, you who so complacently (which I find reprehensible) let the favorite saying of our very charming but detestable friend G...”Everything is possible, even God!” be repeated in front of you, you refuse absolutely to ever admit the possibility of photographing a model beyond our view?

—I would find it as rash to deny the possibility as to affirm it. I remain floating, exactly like my old friend Babinet, escaping the dispute that Biot was pushing on him. The atheist denied this God, of which you have just spoken, with such a furibund insistence that Babinet, in order to conclude, said: “Then you are absolutely certain that God does not exist? Well, my friend, you are even *more superstitious* than me. I really know nothing at all about it.” And my opinion being only of a very relative worth here, I will conclude by holding onto, in full innocence, this other saying of the same Biot, so profound, so essential, the eternal word:

“There is nothing easier than what was done yesterday; nothing more difficult than what will be done tomorrow.”

P.S. When we wrote these words, we scarcely imagined that the technical question indicated so imaginatively here would soon be taken up in actual fact by our eminent correspondent and friend Doctor Ed. Liesegang, of Vienna.

See, regarding this subject, the very interesting article translated in the *British Journal of Photography*, which finally discredits Mauclerc to the greatest glory of Gazebon, who is hereby rehabilitated...Hang yourself, Nadar!

P.P.S. ...And from this very morning, with the successful wireless telegraphy of Marconi, what can we not dream of?...

Marseilles, June 1899.

THE BLIND PRINCESS

—Has Mrs. Ratazzi arrived? I asked glancing over the list of appointments for the day.

—No, sir.

—I see there: the Princess of Solms?

—Yes, sir, but this is not Mrs. Ratazzi: this is the Princess of Solms, the sister of the King of Hanover. Her son and daughter came themselves to make the appointment: their mother is blind. The two young people are charming; they were sorry not to find you. They said that their family knows you and that they themselves almost came to know you in the past, too.

In the past, indeed...

In these personal recollections, it would be impossible to exclude the detestable “me.” It would even be uncomfortable to reduce it.

Still, I begin by asking to be excused for having to take the long road and to recall an old history ignored by the present generation and which, moreover, since 1863, has had enough time to be forgotten by everyone, despite the sensation it created then.

*

In my first ascents in quest of aerostatic photography—so difficult then and so easy now, since the path has been cleared, that everyone can play as they wish—I, like

everyone in the air and even on earth, did not fail to give myself over to the eternal human dream: aerial navigation.

Several abrupt descents during which, by a little fresh wind, my wicker basket crashed into trees and walls, very quickly gave me something to think about.

“If I can’t simply stop my balloon under this insignificant breeze, where the smallest speed tangles my anchors, tears my cables, and drags me through everything, my claim to direct it against the currents therefore would be more than impertinent.”

From this so simple first observation, a whole logical chain of other observations, no less decisive, had determined my conclusion:

“The aerostat (and this name that it received at its baptism seemed to define its unique destiny), the aerostat could never be a ship. Born a buoy, it will die a buoy. To control balloons is a chimera.”

*

On the other hand, nevertheless, I was thinking that man has the right to fly in the air at his will, since animals fly there.

I came to think then that birds and flying insects direct themselves in the air only under the fundamental, absolute condition that they are precisely unlike balloons: in fact, they do not rise, like the balloon, because of a simple difference in specific gravity and, contrary to the balloon, where air presses on the balloon, they press on the air. Without which they would not fly.

Those excellent professors, from the moment I paid attention to them, quickly taught me that flight, strictly speaking, aerial self-propulsion, can only be dynamic, mechanical, in agreement with other components, static, etc.

Finally clearing away the false starts on which, despite the lamentable and ridiculous series of endless discoveries,⁹ man repeatedly returned to the sublime but misleading discovery of Montgolfier; it was necessary, therefore, as homeopathy had done vis-à-vis allopathic theories, to reverse the proposition in order to extract the problem and finally to pose it in its true, absolute, exclusive terms:

TO BE DENSER—HEAVIER THAN AIR—IN ORDER TO COMMAND THE AIR—that is to say, as everywhere and in all things: —*To be the strongest in order not to be beaten.*

*

It was something; it was nothing.

Nothing but a formula: who would develop it?

Certainly not I, who has none of the virtues of the engineer, who has never been able to digest logarithms, by nature resistant to expressions like $A + B$, and who always has been reproached above all for barely knowing how to count.

But who will explain the great unknown to us, which one of us will set in motion this colossal revolution that will overturn from top to bottom (think about that for a

moment) all the conditions of our present existence, and before which all the discoveries of which humanity is so proud will be erased?

On the other hand, wouldn't this superhuman glory be too heavy for one person alone?

In front of such a complex thesis, in which all our knowledge participates, wouldn't it be necessary to call upon all researchers, all believers?

So, with a dear friend, whom I have since lost, the Excellent La Landelle, and Ponton d'Amecourt, struck by an analogous madness (*sapientem stultitiam*), I founded a *Society for the Encouragement of Aerial Navigation by Exclusively HEAVIER-THAN-AIR Machines*—and with the same stroke, no longer counting, I created our specialized journal *The Aeronaut*.

They came from everywhere, inventors, mechanics, algebraists, physicists, chemists, and others—from the Corps of Engineers and of the Navy, from the Department of Mining, from the prestigious, specialized Grande Écoles, etc. We were almost immediately six hundred, and each Friday evening these faithful souls gathered to discuss and present theories and plans.

But there again, to discuss was not enough: experiments were needed, experiments *ad infinitum*, in this science of synthesis, which had to be created from scratch. Money was needed, a lot of money.

Where to find it?...

I had never had any other fortune than my work, and from the government then, I didn't want to accept absolutely anything, despite a good will that I should acknowledge today, a good will remarkably insistent in front of my recoil.

In summary, I found myself along encouraging my Society for Encouragement. It was not enough.

*

I then had the idea of asking for the treasure that we needed, precisely at that aerostation that I wanted to exclude: I constructed at great expense an aerostat of previously unheard of dimensions, containing 6,000 cubic meters of gas, and able to lift, in addition to the weight of its enormous materials, up to forty-five artillery soldiers (which it actually did) on the platform of its two-story wicker basket.

The ascents of this monstrous balloon throughout the entire universe were to fill the coffers of our Association, and each capital, each great city, would pay its part of the ransom of the future of aerial navigation.

And in fact, Paris first twice, then Brussels, Lyon, Amsterdam, gathered in great numbers around the enclosure of the *Géant*.

I had not been mistaken, then, except on the essential point where Florian's monkey deviates¹⁰; I had forgotten to light my lantern, that is to say, I had not known how to organize my controls, where hundreds of thousands of francs poured in only to disappear...

And all my great effort resulted in nothing, except a grim struggle of ten years, of anxieties and efforts to honorably pay everything—which finally was done!

But this is of interest only to me.

*

It must seem that I am distancing myself more and more from the Princess of Hanover at the very moment when I am rushing toward her under full sail.

But what can I do in the face of so many memories, especially when I find myself standing again before the GREAT CAUSE—where it is impossible for me to stop!...

*

The second time we went up in the *Géant*, then, we left the Champ de Mars at seven o'clock in the evening, and we dropped out of the sky, through a bad maneuver of our crew members, at eight o'clock the next morning in Hanover, where we were dragged for seven leagues in the space of 30 minutes—nearly the normal speed of express trains.

Imagine that you thus cover seven leagues in half an hour, in tow behind the express train, in a basket at the end of a cord—and you can see what a dance this was...

Nevertheless, there were no casualties: one person had a broken arm, I fractured a leg and had a few sprains—and the very dear companion who had too bravely wanted—in the words of the civil code—“to follow her husband everywhere,” was cruelly bruised. The other passengers got away with contusions or insignificant injuries.

We were taken in rather great pain to the city of Hanover which was not too far and we were installed a little too sumptuously on the first floor of the Grand-Hotel, reserved for our little group—by the order of the King.¹¹

I wouldn't know how to describe the concern and kindness that flowed both from the Palace and the French Embassy. Flowers and fruits were, day and night, sent to my poor wounded wife by the Queen—whom I was to encounter in Paris several years later, bathed in tears, mad from all her grief, by the deathbed of her husband, both of them reduced by their Prussian brother to live in a furnished room on the Rue de Presbourg.

Twice a day, without fail, an aide-de-camp of the King came to inquire after us.

This aide-de-camp was a real giant, whose build appeared even more formidable under his white uniform.

I had the time, during the hours that he spent at my bedside, to observe that this magnificent carcass of war harbored a remarkably fine intelligence, developed by the most complete scientific education. Needless to say that the manifest evidence of our “HEAVIER-THAN-AIR” had quickly gained there another adept for our Society of Encouragement.

That officer was the Count of Wedel.

I hadn't seen him since Hanover.

But one day, looking through the newspapers, I came across his name in the international news section.

I read with regret that Count Wedel had just left the personal service of the King, and even the region of Hanover, immediately after a very unfortunate duel; he had shot a Duke—whose name was lost for me in the *burg*, *stein*, or *berg* endings, typical of the old German families...

*

But finally, after all this past, we here have arrived in the present:

The Princess of Solms has just been announced. Enter her daughter and her son who guide and support her, her eyes closed, smiling with anticipation, she proceeds with that sliding and prudent step particular to the blind.

This absent look is the same as that on the face of the King, her brother, struck by a similar blindness, without my ever being able to know if this duality was congenital. But the King, himself, would not admit it, and everyone remembers the innocent deception of the large binoculars that he pretended to use frequently at the Opera.

Like his sister and as if in perfect identification with her, the King also had his guardian angel, Princess Frédérique, his daughter, who never left his side, until death: accomplished perfections, these two Antigones, and, the one like the other, obstinately refusing marriage for the pious, jealous egoism of filial devotion...

The blind Princess had been seated: the operations of the laboratory got under way.

From one pose to the other, I would sit between the two young people, who immediately had won me over with their familiar and cordial ease, both even more pleasant than when they were announced to me. Their look did not leave their mother, whom they seemed to protect...

They recalled to me all the details of their memories, of our stay in Hanover: their endless visits to the basket and the aerostat, shattered into pieces, their curiosity about all the incidents of our catastrophe, their playing harmoniously with my son, a child, then, younger than them, whom we immediately had brought from Paris upon the news of the accident and whom the Queen sent for from the Palace every morning. They did not stop asking me questions, inquiring about what I had been able to attempt since then, about what I was planning to do.

And as I was answering their questions, in this fragmented conversation, interrupted by the necessities of my work, on my side I would ask them for information on certain points that had remained inexplicable to me in bed during my convalescence. From the back of the studio, and well separated from us, the mother would take some part in the conversation in the intervals between poses.

One last time, returning to sit with them, just as they were about to leave:

—And by the way, would you be kind enough to give me news of a very charming man of whom I have kept the best memory, and of whom I haven't heard since his terrible duel: the Count Wedel?...

*

Lightning striking all three of us on the spot could not have produced such a commotion.

The two young people, as if charged by an electric current, had leaped up, both of them stretching out toward a single point: their mother—white like a sheet, holding her

breath... —while the hand of the young girl toward my mouth in order to close it, and while the young man—rapidly, stridently, as if suffocating—had whispered:

—Silence!!!...I remained mute, without understanding anything...

But already the two young people were turning back toward one another, looking at each other directly in the eye—and what deep thoughts in the soul of that look!—all agitated, even undone, but with an immense sigh of relief...

Their mother had heard nothing, and was still smiling...

And then, against my ear—very softly, all too softly—the young man whispers to me:

—The man whom the Count of Wedel killed two years ago was our older brother.

We have been able to hide this catastrophe from our mother, thanks to her blindness. But with the coincidence of the Count's disappearance, we always have feared, we still fear always, the possibility of some encounter...

Until now, for our mother, our brother has been, for two years, on a grand tour, around the world.

Every two weeks, we read his letters to mother, always eagerly awaited: the letters that *HE* addresses to her—and which we write, my sister and I...

She thus awaits his return, counting the days...

One word more—and *you could have taken her from us...*

*

Derisory fragility of our human destinies: all these pious and long ruses disposed, combined, attended by the most tender love, all these holy subterfuges, all this breathless fervor, could have been thwarted, subtly and tragically annihilated in a second—all this sweet hope tenderly taken in by the mother, all this calming consolation from the others, all this falls down, collapsing suddenly in order to be irremediably swallowed up in the most terrifying of despairs, the one that cannot be consoled, in front of which we are speechless...—because of a single word spoken by accident, during a fortuitous visit to a photographer's studio, in a foreign country...

I still choke up, every time I remember it.

HOMICIDAL PHOTOGRAPHY

A small pharmacist's shop, in the rich quarter of Madeleine, improvised at an acute angle as a result of the failure of the architect's or the *pseudo*-architect's bevel joint, and much more cramped than one generally would choose for this business.¹²

From the very first glance, the store is scantily, insufficiently stocked. "Supplies" are not renewed there: one feels that they have forgotten the way by having lost the faith. The "specialty" is born too intelligent, having been taken advantage of once, to let itself be taken advantage of again.¹³ The little that has survived in the display cases is

discolored, faded, anemic, so spaced apart that it seems to be cold. The clientele, almost stillborn, is diminishing. Not even a cat, as we say: barely, here and there, a lowly maid comes, having disembarked just the day before and who, not yet au courant about the neighborhood, in her innocence, has put her hand on the latch of the door of unhappiness. The misery! Nevertheless, this discouraged hole is well-kept; what little is found there is strictly in place and as ordered as possible, having had, alas! time to be dusted twice.

At the counter, a woman. What is it that they come to do, these women, at the counters of pharmacists? Could you please get out of here? This is not your place!...The woman young, not ugly but not exactly pretty, what connoisseurs call "interesting": brown, pale, looking thin, the orbit bitumen-like, before her age weary of everything and nothing, exhaling from head to toe the implacable, immortal, and mortal boredom.

Desperately, like yesterday, like tomorrow, she leans over yesterday's hollow serial novels, similar to the novel from the day before yesterday, the same as the novel after tomorrow. It is there that, every day, from night to morning, lacking other food, she grazes. And her life passes like this, oriented around this emptiness...Two children, two little girls, who came without wasting a second, have changed nothing of this, being taken care of directly by a nurse.

And the pharmacist? The pharmacist is not there. The pharmacist is never there. The pharmacist is at the races, of which a tolerant government has accorded us this daily benefit—or, if he is not there, he is riding one of these carriages with postilions and five horses on which figures, naively greedy or sinister, are stacked up, young and old pigeons promoted hawks—or rather the pharmacist is with the bailiff to ask for "time"—or yet at the brasserie, the hangout of the shady wholeseller...

*

Of this shop where nothing is sold and where there is nothing to sell, of this counter that does not have money either to receive or to give, of this pharmacist bookmaker and of this lamentably idle woman who could sit somewhere else to read these bad novels—the explanation?

It is simple.

The man and woman come to us like so many others from any other province: these, from the heart of the Aveyron. The man, the son of peasants, has struggled to finish his studies at the seminary. The ambitious love of the mother and father had suffered, sought, invented heroic privations, to push breathlessly, to push further, to push again the son who is their pride and from whom they await their glory: he will be a doctor! As for the younger boy, this second one could not have been anything more than a good artisan. This one, in reality still more obtuse and whom an extensive study cannot even help to refine, they have made him a plumber—in the zinc and with "coverage"—and this is enough, since the first born, as they say, has taken everything for himself.

But our glorious one did not succeed in his final exams; rejected on his third attempt, he was obliged to withdraw. He will not add to the suspect group of adventurous doctors without patients and without money, gathering in the seediest places—we have seen many of them!—doctors who advertise on the fourth page and on municipal buildings, practitioners of all trades, including political horsetrading, or, like the young

Lebiez, cutting old women into small pieces. Our man fell back on the pharmacy and he has been received justly; a little more and it would have exceeded the height of his genius.

For two years, then, he was "the apprentice," moving from one office to another, at first in Rodez, then elsewhere in the province. But Rodez is not Paris, the Paris of dreams, and "being the apprentice" or "cramming for exams" does not achieve anything. It is necessary to be established, licensed, to buy or to create a business. With what? Ambition eats scruples, always and especially for the lower classes. The only known method in this case is to take over any dowry whatsoever that allows one to move to subsequent actions, to seize the dowry first, no matter where or how, in the same way in which a little fear and a good run is enough for the little thief to grab any cap in the window of a hatter.

Our penniless oaf could not count on his good looks to seduce the Cydalises who have an inheritance. The narrow and dark mind, the mediocre soul can be read on that low forehead where the thick mop of hair falls almost onto the bushy eyebrows: the forehead of an acephalous, at best a mandrill, furnishing just enough room for a meager idea at the time. The twisted little eyes, almost bloody, flee under the bushes, and with a bestial profile, the passionate analogy reveals at once the melancholy taciturnity of the badger. In addition, this gracious man remains obstinately mute, always. Eh! What could he tell us?

How, in what encounter, by what fortuitous coincidences, has this unattractive and voiceless animal found beside him, under his hand and having just the day before come out of the convent, the young girl with the money that he needed? By what combinations of his parents, by what strategy of looks and schemes, by what spells, did the band manage to capture the bag, as modest as it was, and this girl so prepared in advance to accept any of the life about which she knew nothing, not having the shadow of her desire, attraction, or repulsion—submissive, inert, like wax to be molded? And she is a "lady," so differently refined than us, peasants; this can be seen at first glance, even though she barely says a word or nothing, not daring to.

It is true that there is a flaw (the skeleton in the closet...), and the secret is public knowledge, like all the family secrets in the province: —the older sister who had died *mad*...

But it does not befit us to be difficult.

*

So the marriage took place between this silent passivity and this concentrated deviousness. The young couple immediately departs for Paris, taking the younger brother with them, inseparable from his elder brother whose superiority fascinates him ecstatically: the zinc-worker will find "day jobs" there, exactly as elsewhere. They leave behind the bloodless, aged parents, continuing to tighten their belt.

And in Paris the battle is immediately engaged.

Not the battle, the rout. Paris does not even have to bite to incapacitate such innocents: these species are volatilized upon entering its ambient atmosphere, for them irrespirable.

A few months were enough to punish the temerity. The tiny dowry was spent entirely on the planning and initial stocking of the shop, smothered before being opened by the crushing competition of its neighbors. The good landlord who had, from the first day, eyed a second leaseholder for this still new establishment, which cost him nothing, spurs his bailiff to give the final blow. The entrepreneurs are not completely paid, but they can go bankrupt; this does not concern him. In truth, it would not be worth it for these honest landlords to make the law themselves if it did not place them above such miserable details.

The pharmacist has been thrown off the horse at the first clash. Bewildered by the speed of the collapse, he loosened its grip and sought resources elsewhere, sniffing left and right, like all the famished, primarily to fill his empty stomach. Desperate in front of the possible, he runs after the impossible in the fields of the Chimera. He has come to intensify, with his sterile unit, the aleatory and illicit world that, as the impudent have dared to say, “improves the equestrian race in France,” begging for a small escutcheon with the bet as his carrot.

*

An incident in this monotony.

In seedy cafes and dens in backrooms where this unhealthy race finds itself, our pharmacist, wandering, met another poor devil, perhaps even more miserable than him, a young student pharmacist looking for work, lodging, a bit of bread, in search of anything. Then, something unexpected, what seemed to be three times closed forever in the Aveyronese was opened by itself: a soft, warm pity suddenly melted this frozen soul, softened this stone. This man who never had an outpouring vis-à-vis his own parents, who remains obscure, impenetrable even to his young wife, opened the door of his heart to this stranger, offering to share his distress with him—we will do what we can!—confiding his disappointments, anxieties, hopes, confessing everything to him, believing him and in him, loving him, making him his guest: *GUEST!* A word so great that it is enough for him alone to embrace at the same time him who receives and him who gives...

Then this dead shop seemed to live for an instant: we saw again this little door at the back knocked on, behind the counter, on which is written a little ambitiously: LABORATORY—a mostly intermittent and even deserted laboratory, despite the formal injunction of the law—, the law to which we are here as elsewhere disposed to give reverence. Well, for what it gives us in return!

But this was for the newcomer only a temporary solution: a time to touch the earth to regain his footing and to go even further, higher. Where the north wind blows, the indifferent nomad does not stay put any more than the rat remains in the sinking ship.

The test, moreover, becoming harder by the hour, comes to its end. The final blows are precipitated by an acceleration of speed as in every instance in which bodies fall. The battle of stamped papers is in its last cartridges. More than one night later, it

was getting late when the zinc worker brings from the suburb his “day’s wages” to keep the pot boiling.

This is the psychological moment when our Aveyronese trio will remain fixed on itself.

Indeed, the bird of passage, the young clerk, has just left—quietly, naturally, almost without saying goodbye or giving a warning—leaving behind him an even more lonely solitude, an even more abandoned abandonment...

*

In sum, so far nothing more banal than this failure of an insipid epic of little people. It is the eternal, universal story, vulgar ad nauseam, of the daily battle of all these subjacent multitudes that struggle as they flow toward the final hole in the ground, similarly habituated in their conformities. Nothing of significance in the action, or barely worth noticing in the actors.

Nevertheless, in the everydayness of this minor household, we suddenly will see these predisposed destinies reveal themselves in the world in a burst of thunder, then develop and realize themselves, terror-stricken, in the fateful monumentality and progression (unfolding) of a Shakespearean drama...

A spark is enough to burn the forest.

Here, it took only a last fragment of an old ticket torn to pieces—forgotten by the broom in a dark corner for weeks and picked up by the most fortuitous effect of the maliciousness of things—to reveal everything and to make it explode.

You remember the other wreck taken in: the assistant pharmacist of whom we hardly had time to catch a glimpse? Oh well, as fast as his ill-fated passage through this house was, the betrayal that entered with him had the time to open the door to adultery.

In fact, between, on the one hand, the husband always-absent and, on the other, the wife always desperately idle at home, the third term of the proposition could not but intervene. He did not fail here at all: at the right moment, by one of those games familiar to every stage, the coefficient, the second found himself playing the primary role...

Destroyed by the irrefutable revelation, the unfortunate woman confesses everything. She has betrayed everything, everything—even this meager cashbox which she was in charge of protecting and whose nearly empty contents she was stealing for this fugitive. He went away, the ignoble one, only when there was nothing left—nothing!...

*

In these adventures, there is only one rule of law. It is the bridge of the asses.

The husband makes his preliminary investigation, takes his time to examine, to weigh what would be best for him to do with the two lives he from now on finds himself having at his disposal: *jus utendi et abutendi*.¹⁴ Will he kill the wife or the lover, or the lover and the wife? This, this concerns him alone: it is at his discretion. He is asked

only, and in order to remain until the end within the bounds of propriety—*omne punctum!*¹⁵— to present himself, his deed done, before the judge:

—Your Honor, what would you have done in my place?

Whereupon there would be no need at all for deliberation: and hands up, the jury will proclaim the acquittal unanimously—without ever, not even once, even one of these brave men of the jury having thought, for one second, to ask the murderer this simple, essential question:

—You, Avenger, you who kill adulterers, weren't you ever an adulterer yourself, and indeed the first?..."

But, for the moment, it is not a question of such delicacies.

*

I omit the rage, the grinding of teeth, the bites, the tortures in this disaster forever without bottom or limits: it is necessary to run to revenge!

Nothing else exists anymore, not even the collapse in the future.

One question only: the traitor in the house, the thief of honor and of everything, will there ever be enough blood to quench such thirsts?

The wretch is there, nearby. With the money of some other woman—from where else would he have taken it?—he came to settle, himself, too, in a shop close by which seems to threaten to prosper; indefatigable hunter, like Nimrod in front of the Eternal, already the infamous one goes around all the matrimonial agencies in order to track down another woman to whom he can sell himself.

Darker than ever, the husband is possessed by a fixed idea; even though he dries up, even though he consumes himself in research, he does not yet know how to find, he will never know how to find, what can extinguish his hatred, this hatred that immediately elevates and reveals him, enlarges him—a negative, a nothing until then—in the eyes of his alarmed wife. All right, finally! Suddenly, here is the man, here is the valiant, terrible one—the one who commands and who is obeyed: the one who will kill—the Male!...

In regard to the accomplice, he has made a silent truce: he will decide later!

Presently, he does not want anything between him and his single-minded thought...

She, before him, is crushed, annihilated, ready to obey him in everything, to help the punishment of the other, the perjurer, the double perjurer...

The eyes in the eyes of his older sibling, the brother waits for only one sign—his arm raised to strike...

*

Let us not forget, in order to understand well and to understand everything, that this avenging trio, from a reality more dramatic in its perfect agreement than that of *Don Juan*, comes directly from the sinister zone whose provinces are tinted totally black on

the criminalist maps and on those of public instruction. It is the country where people kill the little old man by dragging him under the nasal sound of the organ, the land of the widow Bancal and of Bastide-le-Gigantesque, where the rocks endlessly return the echo of “the lament of ‘Fualdès.’” In this region inherently, naively scelerate, the sun, which intoxicates like a strong wine, releases vapors that smell of blood. The viper’s bite is more deadly there; the plants with exasperated colors, wolfsbanes or foxgloves, exude more acrid, more subtle poisons. The rattle of the cicada becomes obstinate in order to cover the step of the murderer, and, from the Pyrenees to the Abruzzi, the knife naturally seems to push the fingers, as to extend and perfect the hand that kills...

In a good judicial system, where everything counts, this in its turn will not be forgotten.

*

Finally, everything is laid out, prepared, ready. This man who, the day before, did not know how to find enough to pay for a piece of bread or a stamp, immediately has found everything he needs to rent an isolated house near Paris, in Croissy, at the edge of the bridge, and also how to defray all travel costs and other expenses, in such a way that the irrevocable execution could not be stopped for a second or hindered by some miserable question of detail.

Under his dictation, it is the woman—the woman herself—who will write to set up a last appointment with the felon lover... Stupefied, stupid like the instrument under the orders of the husband, which suddenly has become formidable in front of the crime to be accomplished, and, without even thinking to remember that she also has to avenge her lost life, the shame and remorse of her double betrayal betrayed in turn, she obeys, and, even beyond the horrible, she will obey: as if predestined by the ancient fatality, it is she—the sister of the other sister, do not forget! The sister of the mad one—it is she who will lead there, right under the knife, the man she has loved...

But, that evening, she will wait for him at the Gare Saint-Lazare in vain—and it also is in vain that the two others will wait for him there, in the isolated house at the end of the bridge... He did not come: everything has to begin again.

Let’s begin! This time he will come: a letter was used as the bait: “...An unexpected, amazing godsend has fallen, about which there is no time to explain to him, it is written. But, at least for now, there are a thousand francs for him, waiting for him...”

This time he runs (of course!) to the station, in the evening, a quarter past eight, just for the train of eight-thirty, exactly as he had been instructed... The woman is there, heavily veiled:

—It is me!

—But why go so far? Why...

I’ll explain on the way. Let’s flee! If we were seen!...

Here they are gone—and they arrived. In the full car, it was impossible to exchange a word: finally they can talk a bit, while walking, almost running: “...it was necessary that he would know this little house, quite secure, well-hidden, discovered and

just rented on purpose for him, for both of them, thanks to a little fortune fallen from the sky... But there will be the time to talk to each other about this—later...—Let's hurry!...

And she drags him, pulls him—him, somewhat indecisive, with a vague uneasiness, carried away toward the unknown by the darkness of the gloomy night...

Finally, here is the deserted little street.

—It's here!

A key---the second key...—opens the door...

—Come on, enter!

He is pushed into the darkness—and again pushed from the entrance into a second room... The two doors were closed behind him...

At that moment, all of a sudden, a flashing gleam bursts out from two hands: the executioners are before him, with naked blades...

He falls, riddled by blows...

*

Now the rest goes without saying: plans studied and studied again, everything well explained, stipulated, without possible contradiction, mistake, or surprise, the trio splits up, each taking his or her own way—and the avenging and avenged husband is led by the first passerby to the police station or to the town hall:

—Sir, here are the keys to a house where I just killed my wife's lover; you will find in the pocket of the young man a ticket that will prove to you that I did not mistake him for another; I make myself a prisoner.

Politely, you are offered a chair. So that the preliminary investigation is finished quickly and does not disturb you for too long, we will work twice as hard. As for the acquittal, the case is classic.

*

Not at all!

These brains, annealed under the sun of Midi, need melodrama, staging: they need to complicate, to do too much, to strike at the wall of Poe's cellar from where the denouncing meowing will come out. How many stories and how many tasks! The corpse, members folded, twisted, in order to keep it, they had to tie it with lead pipes, brought from Paris by the plumber; then painfully hoisted it onto a handcart, rented in advance; then they rolled it to the bridge, and from there—pluff!...to the water!—After all this, they finally return to Paris—en famille...

After everything, even like this, even admitting that the discovery of the murder will take place without a prior, unsolicited statement by the murderer, that is, in the worst-case scenario—Well! after all, what?

The fact remains, it will always remain the known, proven, irrefutable fact of adultery committed, adultery avenged. At the most, if there is anything to regret it is that they have deviated on a point of the consecrated rites, and of the usual practices.

And since there will only have been one transgression of the adopted observance, a simple defect in form, the condemnation will be more than benevolent—if condemnation there is.

—Wait!...

*

One month, six weeks, after the evening at Croissy, a sailor catches with his hook, under the bridge, an unformed mass, a hideous apparition in the silt...

It is the cadaver of a drowned man in total putrefaction, so abominably fashioned that the human form soon becomes illegible. The members had been taken and violently bent against the body: lead chains crush them into pallid turgescence and, thus, this gaunt mass seems like the pale belly of a giant toad. The skin of the hands and feet, all wrinkled, is raw white while the face has taken on a brownish tinge. The two eyeballs, the eyelids turned inside out, like two eggs and as if ready to burst, bulge out of the pallid head: between the lips swollen into folds, the mouth wide open leaves the swollen tongue hanging, torn into pieces by fish... The fleshy parts already were saponified; what remains of hair or beard no longer sticks. Punctured in many places, the skin of the abdomen, green in places and blue or violet in others, vomits by each of these holes the unraveled intestines, and these hoses float like banners, like the tentacles of an octopus... Never had decomposition by death resulted in something more horrible than this heap without a name, that infamous carrion, disemboweled, so deliquescent as to make even a gravedigger faint...

The men of law visit the scene, begin the process. They search, they search, they already have found.

But, before everything, the police has photographed the horror, and a devil of a newspaper, always on the look out, is provided with the first print: since yesterday, people have been swarming the newsroom of *Le Figaro*, and all of Paris will pass by there.

*

There is a unanimous outcry in front of the accursed image:

—Oh! The villains! Oh! The monsters!—Having reduced to such a state “*this poor young man!*—He was not even thirty years old, madame!--To death!... To death!!... To death!!!...

And for a moment, I thought I heard, shrill over all the other curses and clamor, this very sharp falsetto—from a very beautiful person, with a very respectable air, believe me!—which, in another time even more atrocious than this one, and as a countertenor to all the shouts, pierced my eardrum, in the middle of the boulevard, while a band of Communard prisoners were passing.

—Tear their nails out!...

Silence on the bench of the accused! Silence on that of the defense council! The defense is heard, the debate closed.

It is the photograph that has just pronounced THE SENTENCE¹⁶—the sentence without appeal: “TO DEATH!...”

The whole mob set out barking, howling on this trail of blood where no power could stop it now. And it is mainly the woman whom they are against, and it is mainly the women who are against her, the women in jealous hatred, in eternal hatred of woman—always ready to finish, with the relentless ferocity of the hen house, the wounded companion—always ruthless to the adulteress and furious as if this one had dishonored them all.

And why, then, this one—whom that other one, “*the poor young man*,” made a deceiver, an adulteress, a thief, the miserable one lost forever, in order to abandon her when she didn’t have even a penny to give him anymore—, why wouldn’t she have the right to vindicate herself, she, too? Who was betrayed more than her, indeed? But no: not one voice, not one claim, not one criticism should attempt to rise above this tornado of carnage! Jesus of Nazareth would be stoned next to the adulteress here.

—TO DEATH!!!...

*

In this drama, as monstrous as it is and *sensational* in its staging, and moreover vulgar in its conception and execution—above all necessarily stupid, like all crime—, what remains stupefying for us is the intellectual poverty of the judge—of the judges—and also of the defense, from the point of view of judgment, deduction, and the most simple psychological intuition.

Nevertheless, and despite the more serious reservations expressed, what a curious study for the “professionals,” what resources for the defense, the observation of coincidences, antecedents, all the early signs! But such is the disorder of Justice itself, since this is what it is called, in front of the accursed image of the perpetuated murder, that this photographic print ends up sovereignly substituting itself for all the rest: it drives everything. Not even a mention of that older sister, stupid or crazy; not even a glance at the very important statement about their private life, their earnings, everyday resources and their provenance in the infamous one, the *ex-mactotum* of the Fenayrou pharmacy, the newcomer, the initial author of so many ills!

—TO DEATH!!!...

*

And in what concerns me as I refuse my part in the social complicity of the unjust sentence, under the frenzied clamor of the universal hue, the savage maledictions, even worse the cruel irony, I see—pardoned, acquitted, almost crowned and even better

forgotten—, I see, in front of everyone, and forever calm in the vast and beneficent forgiveness of death, I see the first culprit, the primary cause, the first factor of this primary disturbance, of these lies, these ruses, these thefts, these anguishes, these rages, the traitor of the hearth, of friendship, of tenderness, the villain who pushes the wife, the mother, everyone: “*the poor young man*”—without whom these three ordinary beings, no more or less unhealthy than many others, would have continued to push ahead, one by one, all the more or less difficult days of this mundane life, which is everybody’s life: but, because of him alone, lost forever! I remain simultaneously seized by horror and infinite pity in front of the convicted who will pay for the one who, worthy of condemnation, is absolved, forever thrown, they and their little children—who *have done nothing*—into the horrible and the irreparable...

But PHOTOGRAPHY wanted it this way this time...

P.S. – At the moment in which I was writing these lines, by chance I encountered in Bagnots de Dax a young doctor of the Navy’s first class—Dr. Offret—who was for four years affiliated with the penitentiary of Nouvelle-Calédonie (New Caledonia) where Fenayrou had been transported, his wife having remained in France in a central prison.

—Fenayrou, Dr. Offret told me, had limited intelligence, but especially an unhappy character...gloomy, restless, always dissatisfied with everything and everyone. He at first had been placed at the pharmacy in Bourail, which was the natural center of the penitentiary colonization, an idea that was soon abandoned. There, because of his claims and complaints, he became so unbearable to everyone that he was sent to be, isolated, the ferryman to the almost deserted station of Houilou. This is where he died around 1887 of *stomach cancer*.

We know the affinities of this illness with hypochondria and melancholy...

Dr. Offret gave me information no less curious about another famous assassin, the medical student Lebiez, with whom he had studied in high school in Nantes. Lebiez, from the time he was in college, was an *epileptic*.

In the sinister and singularly propitious milieu where Dr. Offret had to spend these four years, he wasted no opportunity in continuing as a doctor his studies in psychology, looking for, in the autopsy reports, the confirmation of the various indications of facial asymmetry, of the development of the zygomatic bones, the protuberance of the maxilla, and an entirely new diagnostic of pilosity. When the analysis of the brain cannot comprehend the liquefied pulp of the young guillotined Menesclou, it arrests scientific evolution in general at the moment when the most serious disturbances were being produced...

All of these observations are entirely consistent with the theory of professors Bernheim and Lombroso—so sharply attacked by our old school of criminal medicine—that any villain who is not considered a madman is inevitably considered an idiot.

On the other hand, the softness that we attribute to our juries, especially in front of the application of the supreme penalty, this softness, always and everywhere increasing, would it not be, together with other signs of the times, the symptomatic guarantee of a future disruption of our idea of criminality? Does the human conscience have to wait long for the ancient formulaic question: “*The accused, is he guilty?*” to be finally replaced by: “*The accused, is he dangerous?...*”

THE FIRST ATTEMPT AT AEROSTATIC PHOTOGRAPHY¹⁷

“Nothing will ever be equal to the moment of hilarity (*sic*) that overtook all my being. As soon as I felt that I was fleeing the earth, I did not experience pleasure, but happiness. Having escaped from the terrible torments of persecution and calumny, I felt that I was responding to everything by rising above it all. This moral sentiment was soon succeeded by an even more vivid sensation: above us a sky without clouds; in the distance the most delicious sight... —Oh, my friend, I said to Mr. Robert, what happiness!...I wish I could hold here the last of our detractors and tell him: ‘Look at this, wretched man!!!...’”

In these affectionate terms, the physicist Charles—the first, with his companion Robert, that hydrogen gas lifted in the air—expresses himself after his initial ascent.

And forever, for all those who went up after Charles as well as for those who will go up in the basket of an aerostat, the prestigious impression, emotional or physical, invariably will remain the same.

Free, calm, as if devoured by the silent immensity of space, welcoming and beneficial, where no human power, no force of evil, can reach him, man seems to have the sense of living really for the first time, enjoying, in a plenitude until then unknown to him, the wholeness of his health in his soul and body. Finally he breathes, free from all the ties with this humanity which ends up disappearing in front of his eyes, so small even in its greatest achievements—the works of giants, the labors of ants—, by the struggles and the murderous strife of its stupid antagonism. Like the lapse of times past, the altitude that takes him away reduces all things to their relative proportions, to Truth. In this superhuman serenity, the spasm of the ineffable transport liberates the soul from the matter that forgets itself as if it no longer existed, volatilizes itself into the purest essence. Everything is far away, worries, bitterness, dislikes. How nicely they fall from up there, indifference, disdain, forgetfulness, and also forgiveness...

Another ecstasy, however, calls us back to the admirable spectacle offered to our charmed gazes.

Underneath us, as if to honor us by accompanying our step, the earth unfolds into an immense carpet without borders, without beginning or end, in varying colors of which green is dominant, in all its accents and in all its combinations. Fields in irregular grids have the air of those “*quilts*” in multicolored but harmonious pieces put together by the patient needle of the housekeeper. It seems that an inexhaustible box of toys has been abundantly spread on this earth, the earth that Swift revealed to us in Lilliput, as if all the factories of Karlsruhe had emptied their stock there. Toys these little houses with red and slate-grey roofs, toys this church, this prison, this citadel, the three dwellings to which all our present civilization comes down to. Even more of a toy this hint of a train which sends to us from down below its shrill little shrieking whistle, as if to draw our attention, and which, so cute, moves along slowly—, despite its fifteens leagues an hour—on its invisible rail, decorated with its small aigrette of smoke...And what is this other rather

white flake which I make out down there floating in space: the smoke of a cigar? No, a cloud.

This is indeed the planisphere, since there is no perception of differences in altitude. Everything is “*in focus*.”

The river flows at the top level of the mountain; there is no perceptible disparity between the fields of alfalfa equally leveled and the established forests of ancient oaks.

And what purity of lines, what extraordinary clarity of sight (sharpness of image) in the smallness of this microcosm where everything appears to us with the exquisite impression of a marvelous, ravishing cleanliness! I found neither slag nor stain. Nothing but distance to escape all ugliness...

*

The invitation to the lens was in this case more than formal, imperative, and, so intense that our absorption was pushed to the vagueness of a dream, in truth it would have been necessary never to have even half-opened the door of a laboratory so that we wouldn't have been immediately traversed by the thought of photographing these marvels.

And since chance had wanted that I apparently would be the first photographer to be lifted in a balloon, it happened that a precedence fell on me that very well could have belonged to anyone else.

*

First of all, I had glimpsed here two of the most interesting applications. From a strategic point of view, we are aware of what a good fortune it is for a general in a war campaign to encounter the bell-tower of a village from where a Master Sergeant can make his observations.

I was carrying my bell-tower with me and my lens was able, successively and indefinitely, to shoot positives on glass which I would send directly from my basket to the headquarters, by means of a very simple form of delivery: a small box which would slide down to the ground through the length of a rope that would bring instructions back up to me, if necessary.

These images immediately enlarged by projections under the eyes of the commander in chief would present to him the entirety of his chessboard, as they would register progressively the minutest details of action and ensure for him incomparable superiority in conducting his part in the game.

Then—*cedant arma!*¹⁸—I would pass to another no less important task.

*

Long ago, in Bretagne, when there was a division of property between two families, the parents of each side would take their children there. They would place indicative

markers, and immediately rushed to the children and covered them with punches:

—In this way, the memorable beating that you have just received always will remind you on this day of the place, always to be respected, where the markers have been put.

This somewhat primitive mnemonic procedure has been long abandoned; but with what have we replaced it?

“This gigantic work of registering the land,” I said to myself, “with its army of engineers, surveyors, chainmen, draftsmen, accountants, had required more than a billion and more than half a century of work—to be poorly made.

This year, today. I can, by myself, finish it in thirty days—and perfectly.

A good captive aerostat, a good camera, these are my only weapons.

No more preliminary triangulation, painfully built up on a stack of trigonometric formulas; no more dubious instruments, plane tables, compasses, alidades, graphometers; no more chains of convicts to drag through the valleys, hills, plowed fields, vineyards, swamps: we do not have to bother people at home anymore.

No more of these uncertain works, prepared without uniformity, pursued and completed by approximation, without cohesion, without control or guarantee, by unsupervised personnel who sometimes can be made to forget their hours of work by the billiard hall in the next town.

Miracle! I who all my life had professed a hatred of geometry that is equal only to my horror of algebra, I produce with the rapidity of thought plans more faithful than those of Cassini, more perfect than the maps of the Ministry of War!

And what simplicity of means! My balloon held captive at the same height from each of the points determined in advance, I automatically record in one blow the surface of a million square meters, that is to say, one hundred hectares. And since in a single day I can travel through some ten stations, I can record in one day the land register of a thousand acres!"

*

What a triumph!

In the future—thanks to me!—no more disputes, no more litigation—not even in Normandy.

And from the personal point of view of *business*, which I perhaps will be permitted not to forget entirely, I already foresee the pleasant perspective of a legitimate profit, which, well earned, will not be of those that one disdains.

I made inquiries.

England has no land registry. At most, a civil state of public property.

Nothing in Russia, nothing in Italy, nothing in Spain, nothing anywhere.

Even by us, in France, even though all our provinces, except Corsica, are registered, the work was done in such a way that a number of localities in the Seine, in Eure, etc., just decided to have everything done over again. For three or four provinces, this redoing will not cost less than six hundred thousand francs in the budget, not including the additional cents imposed extraordinarily on the municipalities. On this little point only, almost a million a year!

And all the rest!...It's enough to make one dizzy. The imagination works...

But, despite its enticing aspect, this "business" side is not the one that occupies me the most, and I must confess completely here: in my innermost depths, I surprise myself in being somewhat exalted at the thought that the year 1855 will perhaps not be too indignant of its elder, the year 1783, and that I will have, that I will be the first to have, the honor of developing two new and most precious applications of the French discovery of our Montgolfier...

Absolute certainty, after all, for who could prevent my lens from returning to me what, like my eye, it sees? And if it happens to lose itself in the eccentricity of some distortion, nothing seems easier than to rectify its spherical aberrations mathematically with any *mnb2* whatsoever.

But the inconvenience of the mobility of my basket still remains, as captive as it is, with all its movements, back and forth, forth and back, left or right, top to bottom and bottom to top, without forgetting the gyrations. But all my precautions are taken and, although we have yet neither the gelatin-bromide nor the always-victorious ingenuities of the glorious High Priest of the snapshot, our friend Marey, I do not wish to doubt that the distancing of the objects will make my task easy.

And without delving any further, passing immediately as always from the dream to action, I run to register my patent.

(I will have gotten so many of these patents!—And for what!...)

*

But in the Photographopolis already the word had spread, and, even before being launched, photography-from-the-balloon shakes our little world. Friends come running.

What is today—some thirty-five years later—an everyday, elementary work, at the level of the lowest assistant in the laboratory, seemed then to everyone impracticable, improbable. It is always necessary to repeat Biot's saying:

"Nothing is easier than what was done yesterday, nothing more impossible than what will be done tomorrow."

Practitioners shake their heads, but they are not the least of the suspicious, which includes all the top guns. It is Bertsch who left his astronomy laboratory to say to me that I am attempting the unrealizable. The elder Bisson confirms; the good Legray says to me:

—You'll spend the money that you don't have, and break the neck you do have, for nothing!

And my excellent master Camille d'Arnaud begs me to remain quiet.

But who or what could stop me once I have given in to one of my sudden bursts of enthusiasm?...

I already have chartered a balloon, plus a member of the Godard tribe to maneuver it—and the date is fixed.

*

Feverishly I prepared the organization of the laboratory that I have to install in my basket, since we are not yet in the blessed time when our descendants will carry a laboratory in their pocket and we must cook up there. —Thus, all our equipment is there, in its place. And we should not forget anything, since it will not be convenient to go up and down too often.

The basket, as spacious as the six hundred cubic meters of the aerostat allow, that has to lift with its cables only my technician and me, has been fitted to perfection. Everything is methodically within reach, stowed away or hung up in its place. We are there as if we were at home, and Bertsch would immediately exchange his narrow little sentry box on Rue Fontaine-Saint-Georges, this real umbrella cover from where he ogles his planets, for our aerial laboratory.

The tent is hung in the circle of the aerostat, impermeable to the slightest diurnal ray with its two-sided orange and black jacket, and with its all-too-little skylight of yellow aphotogenic glass which gives me just the light needed. It's hot down there, for the operator and for the operation. But our collodion and our other products do not know it, immersed as they are in their ice baths.

My lens, vertically fixed, is a Dallmeyer, this says it all, and the click of the horizontal guillotine that I have imagined (another patent!) in order to open and close it in one breath, works impeccably.

Finally, I have guarded against, in the best way possible, the movements of the basket: our upward force is such that our cables, departing not from the basket but from the equator of the aerostat, are so tight as to nearly make the balloon's jacket burst. I will operate only in calm weather and, if the elasticity of my ropes and cables is felt at my altitude, fixed at three hundred meters, I will reduce it to two hundred, to a hundred: I must succeed.

*

Finally, everything is here, everything is ready!

I board...

—First ascent: result—zero!...

—Second ascent: —nothing!!...

—Third ascent: —nothingness!!!...

I initially had been astonished—then anxious: here I am terrified...

What is happening?...

*

And I go up, I go up again and up again, always—without any success.

With each new failure, however hard I search, however hard I look and look again: nothing has been forgotten or neglected, nothing is wrong. Ten times, twenty times, my baths have been filtered, re-filtered, replaced, all my products changed.

How is it that invariable, inexorably, I obtain only a series of plaques veiled by a black soot, without a sign, without even the suspicion of an image? How is it that, as if

under a cast spell, I cannot get out of these opaque, fuliginous plates, from this night that pursues me?

"The others," would they have been right?

Impossible. I will never admit that the lens does not *render* at all what it *sees*. Of course, there must be, there is just an accident in the laboratory, unexplained until now, an accident which prolongs itself cruelly, indeed, and perseveres beyond the plausible—but about which I will be right!

I will not budge: whatever the cost, I will continue my ascent until I have my heart clear.

*

But “whatever the cost” is easily said. Every successive ascent, financed by me alone, costs a lot and exhausts my more than meager resources; everything that I earn, everything I have is spent there, and the thousand franc notes run out quickly...

In addition, here comes the winter, scarcely propitious to my attempts. Will I then have to stay with my shame of being defeated and to bite my fists until next spring, waiting to begin again?

One time, one more time, let's try! And with all my force of application, with all the concentration of my will, this last time, I try...

Again, nothing, nothing, nothing!!!

A spell!!!

*

In every one of these ascents, when, unable to extricate myself from the black series, weary, I would end up putting off the new attempt until the next time. I would not forget, as one might think, a good “Release!,” offering to myself, at least as a consolation and compensation, the pleasure of a free ascent. Like the pastry chef who, for lack of customers, eats his own sweets.

This last time, insisting, I had prolonged my useless struggle longer than the previous ascent, and the night was falling together with us as we were descending, very near Paris, in an unknown little valley, almost deserted and charming then, called Petit-Bicetre.

There was no wind. We had just sat gently next to a big apple tree. One of the Godard crew members was preparing to empty and fold his balloon:

—Stop!...

I was struck just then by an idea—why wouldn't I try one more time the next morning, independently of the results, since I am here, all ready? The expenses are incurred, the gas paid, and, my valve well-closed, there is no danger that gas will escape while the balloon is dilated tonight, since already the cold is biting. I will therefore leave the balloon in place, well-moored to this honest apple tree and, in any case, under good surveillance. I will load my basket with millstones and send to Paris my assistant, who will bring me other newer products.

A night passes quickly, even at Petit Bicetre—and who knows if tomorrow morning, finally?...

*

I am up since dawn. The weather is overcast, a gray and icy drizzle falls. Decidedly I am not lucky.

But there is something else, too: I do not see my balloon anymore!!!...Yes, here it is! But in what state?

This balloon to which we said goodnight a few hours ago, so tall and proud on its peduncle like a majestic mushroom, I find it again folded in on itself, collapsed, shapeless.

The cold of the night has condensed its gas, and in addition to the net, the ropes have been weighed down by this so inopportune drizzling rain. The bad luck continues. Will I be able to go up at least?

The basket is emptied of the millstone. While we maintain it without difficulty, I clear off the so carefully installed laboratory, the tent, everything, even my famous horizontal guillotine (in patent!), which I will substitute with my hand: I will only carry with me my camera obscura and my plate glass prepared with a frame.

I take my place in the basket: it barely makes a half-turn around itself without leaving the ground, as if discouraged and unable to make such a big effort.

In this almost nothing, there is nevertheless a small indication of ascent and it is evident that even a very small lightening will be enough to get me up, since this weighing in quintals is ultimately as delicate and sensitive as that of the centigrams on the pharmacist's balance.

There can be no hesitation: I will lighten the load by unfastening my basket: I will hold onto the circle. Then, despite the cold, I leave my coat, which I let fall on the ground, then my vest, and then my boots, then...But can I say this, and how to say it? Having taken off everything in regard to the exterior (there are no ladies?...), I even relieve myself of *everything* that can weigh me down—and I rise at last to approximately eighty meters...I have immediately opened and closed my lens and I shout impatiently:

—Descend!

I am pulled to the ground. With a leap, I rush into the inn where, palpitating, I develop my image...

What happiness! There is something!...

*

I insist and I try again: little by little the image appears, quite indecisive, quite pale—but clear, certain....

I emerge triumphant from my improvised laboratory.

It is only a simple positive on glass, very feeble in this so hazy atmosphere, all stained after so many adventures, but what does it matter! It is impossible to deny it: here

are under me the only three houses of the small town: the farmhouse, the inn, and the police station, as befits every traditional *Pétit Bicetre*. One can distinguish perfectly on the road a tapestry maker whose cart stopped before the balloon, and on the tiles of the roofs the two white doves that had just landed there.

I was right then!

*

But how, why, could I only this desperate time obtain what been refused to me so implacably until then?

Suddenly, an illumination, and I at last have the explanation that, my lay reader, more sagacious than me, already has guessed.

This time, not having gas to spare, I ascended with the valve *closed*—this valve that the elementary prudence of all aeronauts always leaves open, gaping, at every departure, in order to give vent to the excess gas which expands as the balloon rises and therefore to prevent the explosion.

Now, during each of my ascents, this valve, gushing, would spew out sulfured hydrogen in torrents onto my developing baths: silver iodide with hydrogen sulfur, nasty image irrevocably condemned to never produce children. By not having imposed here an immediate divorce, and from the very first encounter, I undoubtedly had deserved to pay even more dearly for my lack of observation and deduction.

But if I have had shortcomings, I forgive myself for them, as I am so happy finally to have "broken the spell."

Since the explanation of my mistakes has been revealed, I am, in all tranquility, quite sure to obtain up there all the perfect shots that I will want, to prove to the great scientists that I was right against them—and my son will be able to say that his father was the first to have the honor of performing aerostatic photography. He will do other things, too, more and better: "the first preoccupation of a father," my excellent cousin Charles wrote to me, "must be to leave behind a son better than him."

*

And to all those who come I display my negative, however imperfect it may be, explaining the how and whys it was transported...But what a new stroke of lightning in the evening itself of that beautiful morning!

A friend visits me at dinnertime. Naturally, he has barely come in and I already have shown him the famous negative, and all excited, with my usual lyricism when I have mounted a new hobbyhorse, I tell him both my theory and my continuous failures, and their explanation, and my experience of that morning and my expectations (patented!)...

And then the friend—like ice:

—But, my poor good man, it is known, your business, well-known! You're not at all the first. I read all this, not even eight days ago, printed fully...The book is very

curious. It's of a Mister...Mister...wait a second!—A gentleman who has something to do with compressed air...Mr. ...Andraud! This is it: Mr. Andraud! And *there were* even photographs at this year's exhibition obtained from the basket of a balloon...

*

The blow is hard!!!...

A bell ring, and two people already left for two directions, running in search of the book I have such a thirst to see...

They finally bring it to me: it has an entirely honest air, with its modest appearance, this villain of a book!

WORLD'S FAIR OF 1855

A FINAL SUPPLEMENTARY PRESENTATION

AT THE

THE PALACE OF INDUSTRY

Industrial Sciences, Fine Arts, Philosophy

BY

MR. ANDRAUD

The science of power would
benefit from using the power of
science.

—Napoleon

PARIS

GUILLAUMIN AND BOOKSELLERS Co.

Editors of the Journal of Economists, of the collection
of Principal Economists of the Dictionary
of Public Economy, etc.

14 RUE RICHELIEU, 14

and the author, Rue Mogador, 4

1855

I flip through the pages, feverishly—and I get to page 97...

There it is!!!

TOPOGRAPHY

No. II. Land Surveying by daguerreotype.

The book falls from my hands...

How had I not read this?... What a beautiful patrimony lost!...Not to mention all the thousand franc notes thrown there...

Painfully disappointed, I pick up the book again and I skim...

Suddenly:

—But, you brute! I shouted, you don't even know how to read!

"The brute" (it's my friend) had not know how to read, in fact, or rather, like many others, he had read only with his eyes.

The book of the learned engineer was a book of pure science fiction: this *Supplementary Presentation* at the World's Fair, it was Mr. Andraud himself who had put it together, magnificently, it must be said, without sparing millions, as if he were the State, Pereire or Rothschild, and the prodigious and transcendental dreamer had piled up there all the fantastical but no less precious treasures, all the accumulated *desiderata* in his fecund and three-sided imagination of the learned man, the poet, and the philanthropist.

We would find there successively exhibited, explained and described, everything that is still missing from our needs as civilized people—and part of which is achieved today:

- the escalator,
- the balanced-load wheelbarrow,
- a definitive system for paving,
- awnings to cover sidewalks
- instantaneous vegetation,
- a universal filter,
- plant meats,
- garment reform,
- a new combustible,
- an air clock,
- the universal prime mover
- the planimetry of a house
- the theater of science,
- the unlimited propagation of sound (Edison, watch out!...),
- land surveying by the daguerreotype*, etc.,
- And a whole host of other ingenuities disseminated handsomely,

without precautions or patents of any kind. What would it matter to this millionaire of ideas if he were robbed?

The episode had alarmed me so intensely that I wanted to see the terrible man who had caused it, which gave me the opportunity to make the acquaintance of a spirit absolutely superior and at the same time of the most modest and likable man. It is

unfortunately on a tomb that I lay this wreath in respectful and affectionate remembrance.

I never had the leisure or the curiosity to determine whether Mr. Andraud's book had appeared before or after I got my patent.

It did not matter much: I know now that its author was by himself too affluent to take anything from me and, as for me, I was quite sure that I had not taken anything from him.

There are at certain times endemic synchronisms in human thought, in the moments when our imagination finds itself ordered to respond to our needs. It is in this respect that it was necessary to formulate the saying: *this idea was in the air*.

*

Since the first days of the following spring—1856—I obtained, from the first attempt this time, together with a dozen other points of view, a snapshot of the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, with the top part of the Arc de Triomphe, the perspective from Ternes, Batignolles, Montmartre, etc.

This snapshot affirmed first,¹⁹ despite its imperfection, the practical possibility of aerostatic photography: this was above all what I had aimed at.

In regard to its cadastral application, my very eminent friend, the Colonel Laussedat, explained to me its impossibility.

My innate, absolute intractability in front of everything that is exact science prevented me in part from following the explanation; but in front of the assertion of such authority, I could only bow—and that's what I did.

Later, I had the satisfaction of seeing a number of magnificent aerostatic attempts effortlessly obtained by Paul Nadar, by the brothers Tissandier, Ducom, etc., and by many others still—and even by the very obstinate mahouts of the École aérostatique of Meudon who insist on raising flying fish that do not fly...

SUBTERANNEAN PARIS

IN THE CATACOMBS AND SEWERS

THE FIRST ESSAYS OF PHOTOGRAPHY UNDER ARTIFICIAL LIGHT

Four times a year, Madam, exactly at midday, it can happen to you to attend a rather strange meeting, often arranged several months in advance, between four or five hundred people who do not know each other.

You see them one by one or in groups of two, three, and four, converge at the

appointed hour at the formerly called “exterior boulevards” and the Rue d'Enfer—today Denfert-Rochereau—toward a kind of small temple with Doric columns, where the customs checkpoint at the ancient entrance gate was situated. All these people, of one sex or the other, carry a small package in their hands as a sign of recognition. Many brandished, not without some contained pride, a lantern, that one or two have even pinned to their lapel, in the manner of a decorative insignia.

Some take on a grave and even collected appearance; others radiate with a slightly excessive joy, so that it does not appear forced. They all have the special physiognomy, mysterious and somewhat conceited, of characters to whom a secret, and not unimportant, mission would have been entrusted. Moreover, the occasion to be solemn does not befall us every day.

By the door of the small Temple, they disappear, one after the other, under the earth.

These elected ones will visit the Catacombs. The various public administrations, from whom they have solicited, in terms of a very respectful vocabulary, this “favor” that rightfully belongs to everyone and is not refused to anyone, take advantage of the occasion of the four annual statutory visits in order to get rid of these solicitors without ambition by the numbers.

You do not know the Catacombs, madam; permit me to lead you there. Please take my arm and—let us follow the people!

*

In the courtyard where we are, with its somewhat neglected air, the company, already many, surrounds the well and especially the kind of small stone postern from which we will descend shortly. We have around us the various specimens of the genus curious—the insatiable curious and the indifferent curious, by which I mean the disdainful, the serious, the mocking, the eloquent, and the taciturn. Here is, a rare species, the Parisian familiar with Paris, who knows like the back of his hand its Artillery Museum, and for whom the manufacture of the Gobelins does not have any secrets, next to a real autochthonous Parisian who gives a glance to his Paris only when he happens to have a visitor from the provinces. Here is also, in addition, the special public that subscribes to the *Père La Chaize illustré*, the same that in the past would buy Volney's *les Ruines* and Young's *les Nuits* in the heroic times when we used to read everything, even Young and Volney. And here is finally the inevitable band of English tourists.

All these people are necessarily a little mixed and they familiarize themselves quickly with their neighbors; nothing is better than the proximity of danger to bridge distances and encourage fraternity. Everyone prepares, lighting his or her lantern. The laughter that erupts, here and there, quite forced, and some bewildered looks testify, to the glory of Noël and Chapsal's literature course, that everyone has not yet forgotten the unfortunate mortal lost in the catacombs and, to make his plight worse, put into verse by the abbot Delille. Another brave one in the center of the group has prudently brought with him, as if he was going to pass the winter here, two pounds of candles, a four-pound loaf of bread, and a supply of chocolate; for nothing, on second thought, if only he believed that he still had time, he would have run to double his ammunition. But I

wouldn't swear that the joker, who more than anyone else makes fun of our cautious pilgrim, would not conceal, if we were to search carefully in his pockets, some balls of thread, in memory of Theseus, the man in the Labyrinth. The classic is eternal.

Yet you do not doubt, madam, you who are brave—brave—like a man, that in these statutory visits there cannot be even the shadow of a danger. In line, one after the other, our tourists, counted at the entrance in order to be recounted at the exit, must only march in perfect security along the restricted route given to them at the ossuary, under the surveillance of guards on sentry duty at every false exit. Without these precautions, the outcome of the expedition through this immense entanglement of Roman quarries from which our Lutece came out between the third and the eighth century and which branch out into thousands of meanders on both sides of the Seine, from Vaugirard to Charenton, from Passy to Ménilmontant, could no doubt have been very different.

*

But the postern is opened. Everyone rushes in slowly through the narrow staircase with its sharp turn. Would it please you to find out that this entrance, the most frequented, is counted as one of the sixty leading into the Parisian Catacombs, and also that its staircase has ninety steps? I would like to believe that these statistics do not interest you any more than they interest me.

Besides, I do not know, to begin with, who could assume the responsibility of enumerating exactly the six or seven millions of skeletons that for more than ten centuries have been bequeathed to us here, unexploited mine of calcium phosphate and potassium nitrate.

Finally here we are at the bottom of the interminable and slippery staircase. Following the first ones in our single file, and followed by others, we walk through a narrow gallery with damp walls and whose crushed vault makes the tallest people bend over. The monotonous procession extends and, in order to make it even more unpleasant in this viscous atmosphere, the smoky smell of this succession of candles—and, in any case, isn't there some candlestick lagging behind?—is condensed and congealed in this long airless corridor.

But space becomes wider around us. A door appears to us: on it the inscription:

MEMORIAE MAJORUM

and on both sides:

HAS ULTRA METAS HEQUIESCUNT,
BEATEM SPEM EXPECTANTES²⁰

It's here. We are entering the ossuary.

Between the huge, roughly-squared pillars of stone, built in order to preserve this meridional part of Paris from the landslides that occurred very often (one could liken them to the immense site of a meticulous timber merchant), all the bones collected mostly since 1785 in abandoned cemeteries, ancient churches, and the excavations which, under

the Second Empire, have turned a large part of the Parisian soil upside down, are arranged in perfect order. From the time of the Caesars and the Norman invasions until the last bourgeois and peasants were extracted from the cemetery of Vaugirard in 1861, all those who lived and died in Paris sleep here, lowly multitudes and acclaimed great men, canonized saints and criminals executed in Place de Grève. In the egalitarian confusion of death, a Merovingian king keeps the eternal silence next to those massacred in September 92. The Valois, Bourbons, Orleans, Stuarts, end up rotting at random, lost between the wretched of the Court of Miracles and the two thousand "of the religion" that were killed on the night of St. Bartholomew.

But the nothingness of the human condition has no limits and the standards of eternity demand even more: these skeletons, all pell-mell, are themselves disaggregated, scattered in such a way as never to be able to find itself in order to be reunited on Judgment Day. By the hand of special workers, employed annually for this service, the ribs, vertebrae, sternums, carpi, tarsi, metacarpi, and metatarsi, phalanges, etc., the whole menu of the bones, are pushed back, compacted into more or less cubic masses under the crypts—in *jams*, as they say here—, and held in front by heads chosen from the best preserved of them: what we call the *facades*. The art of the excavation workers combines these strings of skulls with femurs arranged in a cross in certain symmetrical and varied arrangements, and our funerary decorators devote themselves to them—"in order to make the view interesting, *almost pleasant*," says the good Dulaure, evidently seduced, but a statement which Mr. Paul Fassy, in his very interesting work on the Catacombs, has some reason to treat as "partial."

Thus, the skulls that compose this "facade" in front of which we pass, come from the rue de la Ville-Levesque where a part of the executed of 1793 were thrown together. Among them, undoubtedly, is Philippe Égalite, Duke of Orleans. Which one?...

And this little verse of the first book of St. Luke, fatal like a sentence, is it pure chance that chose it to be engraved here?:

DEPOSIT POTENTES EXALTAVIT HUMILES²¹

It is established that they are all there in their mixed up fragments: St. Genevieve and Mirabeau, Marat with Nicolas Flamel "and his wife," St. Vincent de Paul and Cardinal Dubois, Marguerite de Bourgogne with the provost Marcel, Perrault, the architect storyteller, Marshal d'Ancre, Voiture, Cassini, Benserade, St. Médéric, Gaultier Garguille, Malherbe, Gassendi, Philippe de Champaigne, Lulli, Rabelais, Commynes, etc. Frédégonde perhaps lies intermixed with Miss de la Valliere and Miss de Scuderi by the shambles of Turlupin between Pichegru and Father Santeuil.

This is the parade of the grand names of France as well as the small ones. There is not even one of our old families that does not have someone to claim there, Condés and Contis, Soyecourt and Vendôme, La Rochefoucauld, Créqui, Rohan, Montmorency, Villars, Blacas, Brancas, Noailles, Du Lau, La Trémoille, Nicolai, Luxembourg, Molé, etc., lifeless here and there, every trace implacably lost in the uncountable clutter of the most humble, the anonymous, the Durand, Legrand, Petit, Lemaître, Berger, Lenoir or Leblanc.

This fragment that your foot just bumped into, this debris without a name, is perhaps one of your grandfathers, a grandmother perhaps, madam. And this one has

loved, this one has been loved...

What human vanity, what pride could stand before this final, inevitable promiscuity of our ashes, when, only yesterday, the jaw of a Cardinal Richelieu circulated among the antique stores followed on the track by reporters—when, as with papers in hand, one of the most serious, erudite scholars affirmed to me, the expiatory Chapel, this venerated place of pilgrimage for the last faithful ones, would not contain a vestige of the relics of Louis XVI, but precisely the detested bones of a Robespierre? What nobility, what titles, what cartularies, what seals? Search for it, your glorious register, in these heaps and heaps without end, poor fool!

It was decided, especially in recent years, to distinguish the bones of diverse origins. Lapidary inscriptions indicate that this cluster comes from Picpus, another of the convent of the Cordeliers or from the Market of the Innocents. These inscriptions alternate with Latin verses from the Bible and with French fragments, the majority of which are annoyingly unearthed from a tenacious selection of our *minor* poets, Lemierre, Ducis, Delille and others already named Campistrion.

A small stream of water, clear and always at the same level in its stone basin, serves as an asylum to five or six small fish imported by the fancy whim of a site worker, who presents them to us with a certain pride. I imagine that, in this almost perpetual darkness, these fish are in the process of becoming blind, like the atrophied vision of species found in underground lakes and cave-dwelling insects. Above the source:

SICUT UNDA DIES NOSTRI FLUXERUNT²²

This is certainly one of those deep thoughts to which neither Bourdaloue nor every Mr. Prudhomme could find the means to say no.

Further, but outside the ossuary, is a very large and deep well, into which we tried irresistibly to descend down the wide steps. But be careful: the water is so clear that one can only perceive it when one touches it and I warn you that the footbath is freezing: I have personal experience.

.....

THE PROFESSIONAL SECRET

Surely, this one had been loved...

He was stretched out, already rigid, under the white sheets from which the top of the body emerged, aligning two arms on the upturned bedcover.

He had been dressed in formalwear for this unique, ultimate reception *chez* Death: the ritual, shiny new black suit, with strict folds; the white collar, the tie, the shirt front, the pale violet gloves, all of an irreproachable correctness; the razor had clearly just passed one last time upon his dead face. The waxen face was set off from the brightness of the bedding and the porcelain starch of the underwear, by the opaque black of hirsuteness, thick hair, an ample mustache, and bushy eyebrows meeting like a large bar

traced with ink above his beak-shaped nose.

This dead man had hardly had the time to glimpse his thirty fifth year, at most. His features were of a classic, antique rectangularity. On his chest, an enormous crucifix stretched its arms, as if to preserve him, even now and hereafter. The rest of the bed disappeared under piles of freshly cut flowers and the whole bedroom was still so strewn with flowers, sumptuous bouquets and wreaths, that one hardly got a foothold amongst this profusion.

*

Yes, certainly, he had been loved, adored by all that surrounded him; the two maids, in great mourning, who received us in the antechamber, fled immediately, suffocated by tears. Still other women—one, two, three, an entire family—all uniformly dressed in long black mourning crêpes, appeared silently one after the other, and all these somber eyes, burnt by tears, watched us with an anxious, jealous, almost hateful defiance, as if we had something to do with this death, as if we had come to rip this dear dead man away from them....

In this confusion, we had trouble obtaining two or three indispensable words in French: the whole house was Spanish, which we were at least able to intuit from a few muffled words, almost fading out of pious respect, crushed under...

The sister of Charity who had remained kneeling at the foot of the bed, finally stood, and, without turning away from it, disappeared.

We got down to our work...

*

If there is a tiresome task in professional photography, it is the obligatory submission to these funeral calls—which can't be put off...

It is not only falling, like this time, into the middle of suffering against which one cannot do anything—at times such cruel, harrowing explosions, that while being foreign, they manage to make themselves yours without your being able to defend yourself; it is also the experience before long of feeling the recollection of personal sorrows evoked in oneself, suddenly finding old pains revived, ones that had been silenced, lulled asleep—badly healed wounds revive and begin bleeding, piercing...

At other times, it is true, and how many other times! did we not, entirely on the contrary, find behind the appearance of mourning and official regret, indifference icier than that the dead body itself, bitter greed, the only devotee for the remains of him or her who has just passed away, long impatient desires finally relieved, vile calculations, the falseness, the callow lies carried on for so long—cleared and finally rewarded, having a hard time repressing the overflowing joy of victory achieved: a compelling argument against inheritance.

But here, we were far from this muck, and as in the prostration of these pains, so in the smallest details of what surrounded us, we felt an atmosphere of infinite kindness, of unbridled adoration that persisted, still beating warm and more than ever around this idolized being, frozen forever...!

What was he not worth, thus, for having been loved so much, what had he not given in kindness to receive so much in return!

*

We had been urged to hurry with developing the prints.

Indeed, the next morning, at the earliest hour, a lady in long crêpe veils came for news, one no doubt amongst the others who had spoken to us the night before.

When the employee brought her the two still wet prints on a sheet of glass, the lady lifted her veil and contemplated them avidly, leaning over the dear images. Long tears flowed down her cheeks, misting up her eyes that her handkerchief was unable to dry, until suffocating, nervous and terrified, she finally turned away, lowering her veil, to tell us that she had to take these prints with her, as they were, and that we should print others immediately.

We could only bow to her wishes: the lady had left with the two photographs rolled up in the blotting paper.

*

Barely an hour had passed, that two other women scrupulously in great mourning like the first one, introduced themselves asking to see the prints...

*

What did this mean? Did these two people have no word of what had been delivered an hour earlier...?

I examined them: the younger one had a long, regular face with the tan paleness of creoles or Madrilènes, pitch-black eyes, encircled with bistre. These eyes had clearly cried too much to have kept a single tear; they were forever dry and hard. Anything that has suffered too much at once defies all other suffering. Surely, there had been and there remained a profound, absorbing and unique passion here, which cannot and does not want to be consoled. From now on these eyes of Erebus could only look inwards— forever fixed on the One who cannot be replaced...

The other one, the mother, manifestly: a tracing of the girl's features with years added. But that was all. The morose seriousness, the attractive despondency of the young woman's gaze took on a bad, haughty, combative and singularly disagreeable character in the mother's steely pupils.

Next to the daughter, crushed under her pain, the mother would however have been necessary—the tender mother, who also suffers, who cries, who soothes what cannot be soothed...

*

The two silent women looked at the prints... We stood waiting, my employee and I...

The mother finally muttered towards the daughter, in a short tone, a few words in the idiom that was foreign to us—and translating, the young woman said to me:
—Monsieur, it is understood that you will only give these prints to me *alone*...
An obedient interpreter, she emphasized the word “*alone*.”

I felt myself shudder...I had just caught sight of it...
This one was really the spouse, the legitimate spouse, without a doubt.
But then—the other?—the one who rose first this morning...?
A shiver passed over me, a premonition of the drama...What had I done...!!!

*

Suddenly, like lightening, the old woman fixed her gaze upon me, moved her head brusquely, first back then forwards, the two in one beat: the viper’s attack—and I heard her whisper in her daughter’s ear—(oh! This time I understood her well...!)

—*He has already given some out...!!*

—Have you already given these portraits to someone...? the young woman asked me breathlessly, each strangled syllable unable to come out.

My employee threw himself forwards: he was of an imperturbable composure—a strong man, a born liar, it was like breathing to him.

—To no one, Madame, to no one! Not one print has left here—since this is our first trial printing! Moreover, and besides...

And he talked, he went on talking, he was talking too much—as those who want to deceive always do...

But the old woman didn’t allow herself to be misled; her hellish gaze bore into me relentlessly. Under her dark glove of mourning, her long index finger, her thin hand, all of her was stretched towards me, accusing, denouncing, bringing my trouble to its height—and I could clearly hear the black viper whisper:

—*HIM! TO HIM, then!—Only speak to HIM!*

There wasn’t a mother here, in fact: there was only the cruel stepmother, the mother-in-law, eternal and implacable hatred—the only viper that does not reject non

living prey: this one was finishing off her dead son-in-law, gnawing with the same bites—and what did it matter to her loathing!—at her own daughter’s heart...
The young widow rose, and came right up against me, face to face:

—On your honor, monsieur—as a man of honor, say what is true: yes or no, have these portraits already been handed out...?

Why did I lack the force to forget myself, to disown myself, seeing only the unfortunate woman standing before me, awaiting her sentence? Would I now dare to claim that I had never lied—and would it then be so as to save?

What morality, which God would have reproved my lie?

But what! my trouble, this revealing, intractable trouble, hadn’t it already responded too much and how was I to refute this renunciation of myself by myself, when this truth that was being demanded of me was exploding, blindingly? Must a death sentence absolutely be uttered twice?

The ground beneath my feet finished crumbling... With difficulty, I muttered:

—You have already seen so much, Madame, that it is not possible for me to lie to you...

I thought that she was going to fall: I rushed forward...

But she straightened herself up, and, without a word, carrying the broken blade in her wound, she withdrew, followed by this mother, this executioner... whom I had helped...

*

Since then—for how many years already!—how many times have I seen her again in our Paris, the one woman to whom I have unwillingly caused so much pain, pain that I will never—intolerable thought!—be allowed to redress! A whole world of dear memories, an entire past of youth, love and confidence, shattered: instead of a bitter sweetness softened by the memory of beautiful days spent next to the beloved, there was inexorable resentment, the indignation of the betrayed, outraged wife—instead of respect and love, hatred and contempt forever...

How many, many times have I found her unexpectedly, at a street corner, at another, everywhere, suddenly arrested upon me, an always living reminder of that atrocious hour— motionless and piercing me with her ashen eyes—which I still see...

 NOTES

¹ Charles Baudelaire, “Curiosités esthétiques.”*

² Charles Bourseul (1829-1912) was one of the first experimenters with the telephone.

³ Charles Cros (1842-1888), French poet, inventor of the phonograph, as Nadar notes here, but also the inventor of color photography.

⁴ Louis de Lucy*

⁵ Nadar perhaps means 1822 and not 1842. This could be a typographical mistake or a mistake of Nadar’s, who sometimes has a more whimsical vision of the history of photography.

⁶ The word “recul” here also can refer to the distance necessary to take a photograph.

⁷ The two protagonists of the Molière’s 1659 play, *Les précieuses ridicules*.

⁸ Clément Ader (1841-1925) established the first telephone network in Paris in 1880 and he effectively realized the first flying machine, thirteen years before the Wright brothers.

⁹ It is truly impossible not to ask a question here: How many years have passed since the day when the balloon of the School of Meudon unexpectedly met, one nice morning, the neighboring Chaville, I think, and returned immediately, profiting in all haste from a brief spell of good weather, that, is, regaining the victory over the *absent* enemy?

It was then that, for the confusion of our country and of human intellect, a Minister of Public Instruction or rather of Public Ignorance dared to declare at the very heart of the Institute (Babinet being dead, Barrar set aside and Marey not yet there), these words that remain, scandalous, in peroration of his report:

“*Glory to the French Army, which has JUST DISCOVERED how to steer balloon!...*”

Assuredly—and who would contradict this?—assuredly on this most extraordinary discovery, the richest of human findings, never did the predestined, the admirable inventor tire of affirming and reaffirming again the glory of his conquest, of reducing to nothing all incredulity, all doubt, by a continuous succession of aerial voyages, accomplished daily, with days, hours, and itineraries of roundtrips announced, proclaimed in advanced.

Or how many times, after the so solemn affirmation of Minister H. M., has the School of Meudon only repeated its short hop to Chaville and back.

And how much after so many successive years did the unproductive student of these “*flying fish*”—that do not fly and that would never be able to fly—cost, how much does he still cost every year to our already heavy budget?*

¹⁰ Nadar refers here to the eighteenth-century French poet and romance writer, Jean-Pierre Claris de Florian, who was best known for his fables, published posthumously in 1802, and of which “The Monkey Showing the Magic Lantern” is among the best. In the fable, the monkey, Jacques, convinces himself that, while his master is away, he can exhibit the workings of the magic lantern, something he had seen his master do innumerable times. Forgetting to light the lantern, however, he is unable to offer a successful performance for his audience. The fable suggests the folly of pretending to be what one is not, of believing that a copy could be as convincing as the original, and,

because he convinces himself that he can imitate his master, the folly of believing rhetoric when common sense suggests something else. A story of the failure of imitation that begins in a story about visual presentation, it would have rich resources for thinking about photography's own capacity for reproduction.

¹¹ These expenses, like all others, including the one of the special train provided for us without our asking for it, were paid by us up to the last *silbergroschen*—something that the King *certainly* did not know. We similarly also paid for medical services, except for those provided by the excellent Dr. Muller, who declined all payments and received some days later, by our government then, the ribbon of the Legion of Honor. I have saved all my receipts, adding up to some six thousand francs (I say six thousand francs) for our weeklong stay... transports, indemnities for damages, etc.

This in order to response on this occasion to the Prussian newspapers, which, spiteful because of my balloon mail services during the siege and of an article of mine where I displayed no tenderness for Germany, did not hesitate then for a whole week, in choir, to accuse me on ingratitude—the most odious, for me, of human perversions.

¹² Nadar suggests that the architect in question is a pseudo-architect with a nice, sonorous play between “architecte” and “architoc.”

¹³ The French here is “La ‘*spécialité*’ est née trop maligne pour, s’étant laissé faire, se laisser refaire.”

¹⁴ The Latin here means: “The right to use and abuse.”

¹⁵ The Latin here means: “On all points.”

¹⁶ Here Nadar exploits the various connotations of “arrêt,” in French, which not only include a judicial “judgment” or “sentence,” but also “arrest” in a policial sense, and “arrest” as what a photograph does when it captures or freezes its subject.

¹⁷ The French word “épreuve,” which we are translating here as “attempt,” also means “test,” “trial,” and, in a photographic context, “print.”

¹⁸ The first hemistich of a line of Cicero: *Cedant arma togae: que les armes le cédent à la toge*; which means that the military government yields to the civil government.

¹⁹ An honorable scientific journal—*les Inventions nouvelles*—was taken by surprise by one of its editors who affirms flatly that the first aerostatic negative was obtained in 1881—by Mr. Paul Desmarest.

The incontestable notoriety of our experiment, which had figured in several exhibitions *much before* 1881, and the date of our patents responded in advance to this unexpected assertion, without any need to refer to the year of *Charivari* where everyone can find Daumier's lithograph reproduced on the cover of this book.

²⁰ The Latin phrases here translate as *In memory of the ancestors* and *Beyond these borders, they rest in the expectation of the hoped-for happiness*, respectively.

²¹ Luke, 1: 52: *He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and he hath raised the lowly ones.*

²² Here, the citation translates as *Our days passed like water.*