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Octave Mirbeau

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1904

Retrieved on 24th September 2020 from
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Translated by Walter Wykes

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[A wine shop. A door, left, opens onto the street. To the right of the door, a counter is covered with various bottles; behind the counter, more shelves, also covered with bottles, glasses, etc ... On the walls, various theater posters ... Tables, chairs.]

[CHAPUZOT, a large, red-faced figure, in shirt sleeves, arms bare, a towel around his neck, stands behind the counter rinsing glasses. A WOMAN, dressed very poorly, her face glazed over with the stunned mask of misery and drink, nurses a small glass of liquor. People pass in the street, behind the door, which reads: ... Wines and Liquors... Top-quality, 20 centimes.]

CHAPUZOT: So ... you know every morning won't be like this?

WOMAN: I know ... I know.

CHAPUZOT: What does he have?

WOMAN: A colic ... it's so pitiful. He's ... he's green ... really green ...

CHAPUZOT: What have you done?

WOMAN: Nothing ...

[She takes a big drink.]

... How do I know what to do? It isn't easy ... and we don't have any money ... so it's ... well, it's embarrassing.

CHAPUZOT: Give him two spoonfuls of coffee and bourbon ... in his milk.

WOMAN: You think so?

CHAPUZOT: It's amazing ... heats 'em right up ... cleans out the stomach ... any blockage ... it works wonders!

WOMAN: Two spoonfuls?

CHAPUZOT: Of coffee ... yes.

WOMAN: Well ... all right ... I'll try it, poor boy!

CHAPUZOT: For two, huh?

WOMAN: That's right!

[CHAPUZOT fills a small bottle.]

Ah ... it isn't fair ... three years ago, our oldest left for god knows where ...

CHAPUZOT: Well, yes ...

WOMAN: Last year ... the second died of a throat infection.

CHAPUZOT: Well, yes ...

WOMAN: And now this poor little one ...

[She drains the last bit from her glass.]

It's always the same ... anyway... we look after them the best we can ...

CHAPUZOT: It's not enough to look after them ... you have to give them what they need.

[Giving her the bottle.]

Let me know when he's better ... and try not to make yourself sick ...

WOMAN: Well ... how much?

CHAPUZOT: Four cents ...

[He serves a beer.]

THE INTERVIEWER: I'm going now.

[He drinks.]

I will interview your neighbors ... and neighbors of your neighbors ... because the neighbors to our neighbors are our neighbors ... Goodbye.

[He goes to the door, the glass still in his hand.]

CHAPUZOT: *[Counting empty glasses on the counter.]*

Wait!

THE INTERVIEWER: No ... No!

CHAPUZOT: Sir! ... But sir ...

THE INTERVIEWER: No, no ... Too bad for you ... It is too late!

CHAPUZOT: But you owe me for twelve glasses of beer! ...

THE INTERVIEWER: *[He stops and returns to the counter.]* The press should never pay for anything! ...

[He slams the last glass down on the counter. A tray falls, scattering glasses and bottles everywhere. As CHAPUZOT dives to save his glassware, THE INTERVIEWER makes a quick exit.]

CHAPUZOT: *[In the height of panic as he stares around at the piles of shattered glass.]* In the name of God! ... In the name of ... God! ...

[Silence.]

To what do you attribute the progressive decline of the population? ...

[Silence.]

Have you a clear opinion on state socialism? ... American capitalism? ... Malthusianism in the theatre? ... Universal disarmament?

...

[Silence. CHAPUZOT is backed into a corner. THE INTERVIEWER grabs him, shakes him, throws him violently on the table. In a thundering voice.]

In which direction do you think literature should be oriented?

...

[He reverses his hands on his chest at each new question.]

Optimistic? ... Pessimistic? ... Humanistic? ... Symbolistic? ... Naturalistic? ...

[Silence. CHAPUZOT cowers.]

Very well! ... I interpret your silence as a complete mockery of the Press! ... I will cook you, Mr Chapuzot! ...

[He crosses the stage to retrieve his hat and camera.]

I will cook you ... I will write ...

[A threat.]

One beer please ...

CHAPUZOT: [Suddenly himself again.] Here ... here ...

[He laughs.]

Less expensive than the pharmacist, huh?

WOMAN: That's true ...

CHAPUZOT: And tastes better?

WOMAN: For sure ...

[Paying.]

Four cents.

CHAPUZOT: Thank you.

WOMAN: I'd better go.

CHAPUZOT: Better health to you ...

WOMAN: Poor child!

[The WOMAN leaves. CHAPUZOT retrieves her glass and wipes it. Enter THE INTERVIEWER, a young man of twenty-five years with a pale complexion and a very thin, blonde moustache. A mixture of working-class stiff and shop clerk, he wears a flamboyant tie, flat-brimmed hat, and a camera around his neck.]

THE INTERVIEWER: Mr. Chapuzot, please?

CHAPUZOT: [Leaving the counter, very friendly.] That's me ...

THE INTERVIEWER: Very good.

CHAPUZOT: What can I do for you?

THE INTERVIEWER: [Examining him carefully.] Large ... dark hair ... forty-five years old ... short arms ... bestial face ... That's right.

CHAPUZOT: What's that?

THE INTERVIEWER: [He drops his camera on a table and hangs his hat on a hook.] First, a beer!

CHAPUZOT: Here ... here ...

THE INTERVIEWER: Top of the line.

CHAPUZOT: Here ... here ...

[He serves a glass of beer.]

THE INTERVIEWER: You call that top of the line? ... Fine!

[He drinks the entire glass without stopping. CHAPUZOT retrieves the glass and sets it on the counter.]

Now, roll up your left sleeve.

CHAPUZOT: My left sleeve Sorry but ...

THE INTERVIEWER: Show me your arm.

CHAPUZOT: *[Suspicious.]* Ah! that ... but ...

THE INTERVIEWER: *[Forcefully.]* Let's go ... c'mon ...

CHAPUZOT: *[Rolling up his sleeve.]* An inspector of vaccination, no doubt.

THE INTERVIEWER: *[Examining Chapuzot's arm.]* Tattooed ... I suspected as much ... a vase of wallflowers between two hearts ... Perfect, perfect ...

[He takes the camera from its case.]

All right ... ready?

CHAPUZOT: *[Anxiously.]* What are you doing?

THE INTERVIEWER: Don't move ... for god's sake ...

[He aims the camera.]

CHAPUZOT: So ... you're what—a photographer?

INTERVIEWER: *[Taking a picture.]* Very good ... now turn profile.

CHAPUZOT: *[Obeying.]* Another? ...

THE INTERVIEWER: That's it—don't move ...

[He takes another picture.]

The other side.

CHAPUZOT: *[Obeying.]* Again? ...

THE INTERVIEWER: That's it—don't move ...

Brunette, then? ...

[Silence. CHAPUZOT is completely stunned.]

Is she large? ... Well-endowed? ...

[Silence.]

Do you do dirty things to her?

[Silence.]

Is it you who are depraved ... or she?

[Silence.]

How many abortions has she had? ...

[Silence.]

One ... two ... you refuse to answer ... to help me in my investigation? ... Naturally! What else did I expect from you? ... You make me laugh, Chapuzot! But that's all right ... I don't mind ...

[He walks, rubbing his hands.]

A few words to conclude.

[He moves towards CHAPUZOT who takes a step backwards at each question.]

What do you think of telepathy? ...

[Silence.]

Are you a follower of the hypnotic phenomenon? ...

if you continue to mock the press now! ... The great voice of the Press!

CHAPUZOT: *[In a wild panic.]* I'm telling you ... I swear ... In the name of God! ... This man in the newspaper can't be me ... Since I am from Montmartre! ...

THE INTERVIEWER: Rouge ...

CHAPUZOT: Martre ... *Mont Martre* ...

THE INTERVIEWER: I will ruin you ... dishonor you ... You don't mess around with the Press! ... We are the great universal consciousness ... Where is your wife?

CHAPUZOT: My wife ... again ...

[He comes close to THE INTERVIEWER, begging.]

I have no wife!

THE INTERVIEWER: How ... if you don't have a wife ... how can you throw bottles at her head?

CHAPUZOT: *[Throwing his towel.]* In the name of god!

THE INTERVIEWER: Try to be logical in your denials ...

CHAPUZOT: But ...

THE INTERVIEWER: Now ... bring me your wife ... She will, perhaps, answer more rationally.

CHAPUZOT: *[In a choked voice.]* I can't ... because ...

THE INTERVIEWER: It's imperative that I see her ... that I question her ...

CHAPUZOT: Ah! Ah!

THE INTERVIEWER: That I document her psychology ...

CHAPUZOT: Pig!

THE INTERVIEWER: That I trace this atavism to its source ...

CHAPUZOT: Bastard!

THE INTERVIEWER: What kind of woman is she—your wife?

CHAPUZOT: On my life ... I've never ...

THE INTERVIEWER: Blonde? ...

[Silence.]

[He takes another picture.]

Now turn around—your back to me ... that's it ... The back is also a face ...

CHAPUZOT: What kind of photographer are you?!

THE INTERVIEWER: Smile ...

[He takes another picture.]

Good.

[He puts the camera on the table.]

Now, measurements.

[He pulls a measuring tape from his pocket and begins to measure Chapuzot.]

Height ... one meter and ... seventy centimeters ...

[He registers this in a notebook.]

CHAPUZOT: Now you're a tailor? ...

THE INTERVIEWER: Width of chest ... let's see ...

[He measures.]

Eighty-eight centimeters ...

[Shrugging his shoulders.]

No sense of aesthetic proportion ...

[He adds this to his notebook.]

CHAPUZOT: Must be a tailor! ...

THE INTERVIEWER: *[Examining Chapuzot's hand.]* Spatula fingers ...

[Feeling Chapuzot's cheeks.]

Prominent cheekbones ... asymmetrical face ...

[Tapping Chapuzot on the chin.]

Slightly protruding jaw ... Hah! Yes ... more dangerous than I thought ...

CHAPUZOT: What a strange tailor!

THE INTERVIEWER: *[Returning to the table where he sits.]* Now, talk.

CHAPUZOT: *[Following.]* Sorry ... what?

THE INTERVIEWER: What? Talk!

CHAPUZOT: I don't even know who I'm talking to!

THE INTERVIEWER: Oh, that's right ... the Interviewer-in-chief of *The Movement*.

CHAPUZOT: The what?

THE INTERVIEWER: The Interviewer-in-chief of *The Movement*.

CHAPUZOT: *[Obtusely.]* Ah!

THE INTERVIEWER: *[With pity.]* You're not familiar with *The Movement*?... The newspaper, the literary journal ... the best informed, most widely ... twelve million readers! ... newspaper that provides for its subscribers the best cars, country houses ... government bonds ... well-trained mistresses ... do you understand now?

CHAPUZOT: *[Playing along.]* Oh yes ... yes ...

THE INTERVIEWER: Sorry ... I'm in a hurry ... I must interview the Minister of Education at ten o' clock ... and the King of Belgium at noon ... Please answer the following questions as clearly and concisely as possible ... First, a beer.

CHAPUZOT: *[Rising.]* Here ... here.

CHAPUZOT: Yes ...

THE INTERVIEWER: Well, then ... Whether you are from Montrouge or Montmartre is immaterial ...

CHAPUZOT: But it isn't me ... it can't be ... since I've told you ...

THE INTERVIEWER: You refuse to answer my questions ... You waste my time with childish denials ... with puns ... and clowning ... Very well! ...

CHAPUZOT: But ... even a fool could understand ... As long as I am from Montmartre ...

THE INTERVIEWER: Rouge ...

CHAPUZOT: Martre ...

THE INTERVIEWER: Rouge ...

CHAPUZOT: Martre ... Martre ... Martre ... Montmartre!

THE INTERVIEWER: *[His anger gradually building.]* Yes ... yes ... go on ... go on ...

[He marches back and forth, knocking into furniture in his drunken anger.]

That's it! I've lost all patience! ... I will write in *The Movement*, the most literary, the best informed, the most widespread, twelve millions of readers ... I will write, Chapuzot ... that you put strychnine ... not ... not pepsin, in your wine. I will write that you have a child with your daughter, and even that you murdered it! ... After all, if you have neither wife nor mistress, or family, or even cooking pot, you may still have a daughter! ...

[CHAPUZOT begins to cough and choke. He tries to interrupt, but THE INTERVIEWER continues.]

I will write that your establishment is a den of anarchists, Freemasons, and counterfeits ... I will write that your wife sleeps with the whole neighborhood ... and your aunt ... your ... We'll see

“... a Mr. Chapuzot, wine merchant in Montrouge ...”

CHAPUZOT: *[Correcting.]* Montmartre.

THE INTERVIEWER: Montrouge.

CHAPUZOT: Montmartre.

THE INTERVIEWER: In Montrouge.

[Showing him the newspaper.]

It says “wine merchant in Montrouge.”

CHAPUZOT: But since I am from Montmartre!

THE INTERVIEWER: Well ... so what?

CHAPUZOT: So what? ... *So what?* ... Is the street we are on in Montrouge or Montmartre?

THE INTERVIEWER: Shut up ... It’s irrelevant ...

[Reading.]

“... Mr. Chapuzot, wine merchant in Montrouge!...”

CHAPUZOT: ... Martre.

THE INTERVIEWER: Rouge ...

CHAPUZOT: Martre ... Martre ...

THE INTERVIEWER: *[Reading.]* “... launched a bottle of cassis at the head of his wife pool of blood ... the condition of the victim is very serious ...” ... and so on ... There!

CHAPUZOT: But once again ... I’m not from Montrouge ... since I’m from Montmartre.

THE INTERVIEWER: Rouge ...

CHAPUZOT: Marrrrtre ...

THE INTERVIEWER: I tire of your games ... Is your name Chapuzot? ...

CHAPUZOT: Yes.

THE INTERVIEWER: Are you a wine merchant?

CHAPUZOT: Yes ...

THE INTERVIEWER: All this is recorded in the *Journal*?

[THE INTERVIEWER opens his notebook.]

THE INTERVIEWER: It’s time ... now is the moment ... the psychological moment of truth ...

[CHAPUZOT serves THE INTERVIEWER a beer which he drinks immediately. CHAPUZOT retrieves the glass and sets it on the counter.]

CHAPUZOT: I have maybe won a house.

THE INTERVIEWER: *[Leaning on the table and looking fixedly at Chapuzot.]* You are a wine merchant?

CHAPUZOT: *[Motioning to the shop around him.]* Look around! ... It would seem so ...

THE INTERVIEWER: An unsavory profession, sir ... an unpatriotic business, if ever there was one ... Drunkenness ... debauchery ... alcoholism ... degeneration ... depopulation ... socialism—

[On this last word, Chapuzot strongly protests.]

All poisons In the end, you will destroy us all—no?

CHAPUZOT: What are you saying?

THE INTERVIEWER: It’s not a question of that, for the moment ... I’m not saying anything ... I must continue the investigation ... soon Well, it is urgent that you answer the questions ...

CHAPUZOT: I don’t know what to say. I’m not unhappy ... Perhaps I’ve won a car?

THE INTERVIEWER: *[Gravely serious.]* So ... you are a wine merchant ... You admit this?

CHAPUZOT: Sure ...

THE INTERVIEWER: And you also admit that your name is ... Chapuzot?

CHAPUZOT: Of course ... Joseph Theodule ...

THE INTERVIEWER: Be careful how you answer This is very serious ... excessively severe ...

CHAPUZOT: *[Already confused.]* ... Of course I'm Chapuzot ... like my father.

THE INTERVIEWER: Very good ...

[Pause.]

And you have lived for a long time on bad terms with your wife?

CHAPUZOT: *[Disconcerted.]* With my wife?

THE INTERVIEWER: Yes ... by god!

CHAPUZOT: That ... it's quite ... I'm not married ...

THE INTERVIEWER: Perfect ... cohabitation ... worse and worse

...

[He takes notes.]

So, you live on bad terms with your mistress ...

CHAPUZOT: What? ... I don't know what you're ... With my mistress?

THE INTERVIEWER: Good lord, man! ... since you claim not to be married, how shall I refer to the woman with whom you live on bad terms—your cooking pot?!

CHAPUZOT: *[Laughing and clapping his thighs.]* My cooking pot! Yes—that's good! But no ... no, I don't have a pot ... or a mistress either ...

THE INTERVIEWER: *[Both mocking and severe.]* You're not married ... and you don't have a mistress ... or some other little thing stuffed under your bed, Mr. Chapuzot?

CHAPUZOT: I'm telling the truth ...

THE INTERVIEWER: The truth, yes ...

[Going to Chapuzot.]

You won't pull the wool over my eyes, you devil ... I know ... I know the facts ... It's pointless to deny the truth any longer ...

And here is what I read this morning in *le Petit Journal* ... You do not dispute that the *Journal* is an authority ...

CHAPUZOT: Of course not! I read it every day!

THE INTERVIEWER: Yes. Well ... listen ...

[Reading.]

“Following an altercation in which the cause has remained mysterious ...

[Speaking.]

Mysterious. You hear Chapuzot?

CHAPUZOT: I'm not deaf ...

THE INTERVIEWER: *[Reading again.]* “... whose cause has remained mysterious ... Mr. Chapuzot a ...

[Showing him the newspaper.]

Look ... there are many “Chapuzot” ...

CHAPUZOT: True ...

THE INTERVIEWER: Is it printed or not?

CHAPUZOT: *[Anxiously.]* My god, yes!

THE INTERVIEWER: And in *le Petit Journal* no less ... which you read every day?

CHAPUZOT: *[Disturbed.]* Ah! But ... Ah! But ... What does this mean? ...

THE INTERVIEWER: You are very pale, Chapuzot ...

CHAPUZOT: What else does it say there, in the newspaper ...

THE INTERVIEWER: You'll see ... You will see ... Ah! You are no longer the loudmouth ... the braggart ... the syphilitic dissimulator!

CHAPUZOT: That's not ... it's ... it's quite ...

THE INTERVIEWER: Let's continue ...

[Reading.]

What type of mental illness have you achieved? ...

[Pause. Walking towards him.]

Are you an unbalanced ... Un ...

CHAPUZOT: *[Interrupting.]* ... But ... by god ... I'm only ...

THE INTERVIEWER: *[Stalking him now.]* A Mystic? ...
Syphilitic? ... Alcoholic? ... Sadist? ... Atavist? ... Serial killer? ...
Pornographer? ... Pauper? ...

CHAPUZOT: *[Retreating behind his counter.]* Look, just leave me
alone ... I'm a wine merchant ... a bartender ... a sommelier ...

THE INTERVIEWER: *[Threatening with his finger.]* Chapuzot?

...

CHAPUZOT: No ... stop that ...

THE INTERVIEWER: *[Same game.]* Chapuzot? ...

CHAPUZOT: No, no ... go to hell ...

THE INTERVIEWER: So, you continue to deny it?

CHAPUZOT: Dammit! ...

THE INTERVIEWER: Do you deny all scientific experiments?

CHAPUZOT: The devil is in your experiments! ...

THE INTERVIEWER: You are determined to mock the Press?

CHAPUZOT: I don't give a damn! ...

THE INTERVIEWER: Very well ... I will now astound you ... I
will present you with irrefutable evidence ... Come back here ... Sit

...

CHAPUZOT: No ... I've had enough ...

THE INTERVIEWER: Sit.

*[CHAPUZOT returns to the table slowly and sits. THE
INTERVIEWER draws from his pocket a folded bit of
newspaper.]*

Now ... Here is *le Petit Journal*.

[He shows it to CHAPUZOT.]

... Was she unfaithful? ... your wife ... your cooking pot ... Am I
getting warmer?!

CHAPUZOT: For god's sake, you don't understand ... I'm telling
you ...

THE INTERVIEWER: *[Interrupting.]* Yes ... yes, but you speak
with the tongue of the Deceiver!

CHAPUZOT: My god! ... I tell you ...

THE INTERVIEWER: Do you think this is some sort of joke?!
You can't clown your way out of this with little word games! ...
Your tricks don't work with me!

CHAPUZOT: But ... I'm not ...

THE INTERVIEWER: You cannot deceive the press ... I warn you,
Chapuzot, not to try my patience ... the press is a powerful force ...

[Threatening.]

And I *am* the Press, Chapuzot ... Twelve million readers ...

CHAPUZOT: What do you want me to do?

THE INTERVIEWER: The press is the great modern force ... the
great educator ... the universal consciousness ... She denounces ...
judges and condemns ... A beer!

CHAPUZOT: Here ... here ...

[He serves a beer.]

THE INTERVIEWER: *[Beer in hand.]* The press, Chapuzot ...
stands alone ... above all else ... police, justice ... et cetera, et cetera

...

[He drinks.]

It rewards ... punishes ... forgives ...

[He finishes his beer.]

... depending on the price that one pays ... The press is everything ... Try not to forget that ...

[CHAPUZOT retrieves the empty glass and puts it on the counter.]

CHAPUZOT: And what does all this have to do with me?

THE INTERVIEWER: What does? ... with the fact ... Do you have a treaty of advertising with *The Movement*?

CHAPUZOT: What?

THE INTERVIEWER: I ask you if you have a treaty of advertising with *The Movement*?

CHAPUZOT: *[Confused.]* A treaty? ...

THE INTERVIEWER: Yes ... Everyone has one, Chapuzot ... Governments, administrations, banks ... Trade ... Industry ... judges, lawyers, litigants ... doctors ... patients ... society women ... adulteresses ... cuckolds ... painters ... But not you ... It isn't prudent ... Why don't you have a treaty? ... Well, too bad for you, Chapuzot.

CHAPUZOT: Why do I need a treaty?

THE INTERVIEWER: Fine ... taunt ... Scoff, if you like ...

[A little drunk now, he plays with the button on Chapuzot's jacket.]

Why did you throw a bottle of cassis at your wife's head?

CHAPUZOT: *[Flabbergasted.]* A bottle of cassis?

THE INTERVIEWER: Yes ... answer!

CHAPUZOT: A bottle of cassis ... what the devil ...

THE INTERVIEWER: You don't want to say ...

[Pause.]

Okay ...

CHAPUZOT: A bottle of cassis ... but I swear ...

THE INTERVIEWER: Shut up! Don't lie!

THE INTERVIEWER: Listen! ... After seven weeks of treatment, it was discovered that one of these poor people had inherited a sum of two hundred thousand francs.

CHAPUZOT: *[Stunned admiration.]* Ah!

THE INTERVIEWER: A second had won the jackpot in a drawing of the Panama bonds ...

CHAPUZOT: *[Same game.]* My god! ... Ah! My god!

THE INTERVIEWER: A third ... a modern-style Victorian mansion, one of several lotteries offered by The Movement, twelve million readers ...

CHAPUZOT: The lucky bastard!

THE INTERVIEWER: The fourth, happy man ... escaped the vigilance of his guards, and being out in the street ... had both legs crushed by a car ... which earned him a nice annual allowance of sixty thousand francs.

CHAPUZOT: Unbelievable!

THE INTERVIEWER: The others died ... They were taken too late ...

CHAPUZOT: *[Astonished.]* Is this really true?

THE INTERVIEWER: Nothing could be truer ...

CHAPUZOT: It's amazing!

THE INTERVIEWER: No, it's scientific ... Or rather ... Serve me a beer!

CHAPUZOT: Here ... here ...

[He serves a beer.]

THE INTERVIEWER: *[After drinking.]* And finally ... I wanted to come to this last, Chapuzot ...

CHAPUZOT: There's more?

THE INTERVIEWER: Chapuzot ... In what category of neuropathy would you classify yourself?

[Pause.]

Lombroso now held in his hands not only the scientific explanation for a chronic social problem, but the solution as well, not only to this problem, but to another important question which he had long sought to resolve ... the unification of the sciences ...

CHAPUZOT: *[Staring at his counter.]* Son of a bitch ...

THE INTERVIEWER: *[Leaning on the outside of the counter.]* I don't have time to give you the complete physiological description of these spots. You wouldn't understand, anyway ... it would be too difficult ...

[CHAPUZOT waves him away from the counter.]

Nevertheless ... Suffice it to say that after many experiments, Lombroso managed to determine the true nature of these spots ... The remainder of the puzzle was very simple for a scientist of his caliber ...

CHAPUZOT: Ah! What do I care? ... Damned scamp! ...

THE INTERVIEWER: He quarantined these ten subjects in cells specially constructed for the treatment he wanted to apply ... limited them to a strict diet ... prescribed iodized scrubbing of the cranial cavity ... along with a combination of ...

[Imitating the sound of the shower.]

Sterilized showers and a series of skillfully administered blood-lettings ... He was firmly resolved to continue this treatment until his patients were completely cured ... I mean, until the poor became rich ... You understand?

CHAPUZOT: *[With desperate gestures.]* My head! My God, my head!

THE INTERVIEWER: Forget your head, Chapuzot ... Doctor Sock, Mr. Deibler and I ... we will take care of your head later ...

CHAPUZOT: Mr Deib ... ?

[Declaiming loudly.]

Oh! Don't lie ... the lie is wicked ... And it's useless with the Press ... I will try ... although you have no treaty of advertising with *The Movement* ... I will try to understand ... Let's see ...

[He pats Chapuzot's shoulder.]

Let's see ... my dear Chapuzot ... Chapuzot, old man ...

[Very gently.]

What could be the motive for this act of brutality ... Because, really, you look like a decent man ... a fine fellow ... Is this a crime of vulgar vengeance? ... A sudden explosion of anger and rage? ... A suggestion? ... Congestion? ...

[Pause.]

Yes? ...

[Chapuzot denies this, tries to pull away.]

Let us continue ... very softly.

[He caresses Chapuzot's shoulder.]

Are we facing a case of mad passion? ... or purely physiological? ... or simply atavistic? ...

CHAPUZOT: *[Eyes nearly popping out of his head.]* Ata ... what?

THE INTERVIEWER: *[Forcefully.]* ... vistic ... atavistic!

CHAPUZOT: *[His head in his hands.]* My god! ...

THE INTERVIEWER: You don't know ... You cannot even analyze your own actions ...

[With great pity.]

Not a single scientific bone in your ... the mental aptitude of a cockroach ...

[He flicks Chapuzot on the forehead.]

CHAPUZOT: Ah, nonsense!

[CHAPUZOT disappears behind the counter and we hear the noise of glassware and dishes being knocked about.]

THE INTERVIEWER: I pity you, Chapuzot ... I see that, in your case, the problem is more intellectual debilitation than voluntary obstinance ... Lend me your full attention.

[THE INTERVIEWER notices that CHAPUZOT has disappeared. He goes to the counter, head tilted, and speaks in a stronger voice.]

I will ask the question in another form ... a form accessible to your limited intelligence ... Two beers!

CHAPUZOT: *[Rising suddenly.]* Here ... here ...

THE INTERVIEWER: We will toast ...

CHAPUZOT: *[Laughs.]* That's more like it ...

[He serves beers. They drink.]

THE INTERVIEWER: To your health!

CHAPUZOT: And yours!

[They are both at ease for the moment.]

THE INTERVIEWER: Chapuzot ... I am your friend ... Answer me as a friend ...

CHAPUZOT: *[Laughing and carrying glasses back to the counter.]* Sure ... sure ... sure ...

CHAPUZOT: Huh? ... What? ...

THE INTERVIEWER: *[Slowly.]* Ce-re-bro-spi-nal ...

CHAPUZOT: Ah! Good ...

THE INTERVIEWER: The famous scientist had never seen such spots on the brains of his rich patients ... or even the middle-class ... You hear? ...

CHAPUZOT: I ... well ...

THE INTERVIEWER: So it was proven ... beyond a shadow of a doubt ... this was the cause of the disease and demented neuropathy: poverty.

CHAPUZOT: Yes ... yes ... Of course ...

THE INTERVIEWER: What is the nature of these spots, you may ask ...

[While talking, he moves to the inside of the counter, picks up bottles, smelling them, and pours some sort of mixture into one of the glasses. CHAPUZOT rises and approaches the counter to monitor his actions.]

Much like those astronomers who study the periphery of the sun ... once this feature is understood, they soon formulate an understanding of the core as well ...

[He stirs his concoction with a spoon.]

Note in passing, Chapuzot, like any investigation ...

[He drinks.]

One discovery leads to another ... Star and brain, do you see? ...

[CHAPUZOT takes the glass from THE INTERVIEWER, places it in the growing pile of empty glasses, and pushes THE INTERVIEWER, little by little, back around the counter.]

born ... insensitivity to murderers and women? ... On his categorical assertions of the stupidity of Baudelaire ... and the abject senility of Verlaine ... of Tolstoy ... of Victor Hugo? ... On his glorification of the scientific spirit of Dubut du Laforest? ... Well? ... What you say? ...

CHAPUZOT: Nothing.

[Not knowing what to do, CHAPUZOT sits down and lights his pipe.]

THE INTERVIEWER: Do you support him in his marvelous and refreshing thesis that poverty ... poverty, Chapuzot ... is not a social disease ... an economic deficiency ... but a neurosis ...

CHAPUZOT: *[Puffing, without understanding.]* I want to ...

THE INTERVIEWER: *[With emphasis.]* A neurosis, Chapuzot!

CHAPUZOT: *[Same game.]* Possible ... possible ...

THE INTERVIEWER: And do you know how he resolved to solve this problem? ... Are you listening?

CHAPUZOT: Listening! ... Yes! My god! ...

THE INTERVIEWER: The famous doctor rounded up a dozen test subjects, each displaying all the symptoms of the most acute poverty ...

CHAPUZOT: *[Still puffing.]* It isn't hard to miss.

THE INTERVIEWER: Shut up ... He subjected them to X-rays ... Pay attention now ...

CHAPUZOT: *[Same game.]* I'm listening ... yes ...

INTERVIEWER: These ten poor patients showed ... in the stomach ... the liver ... the large intestine ... serious functional damage ... lesions ... very serious ... but nothing sufficiently characteristic ... In short, the tests were inconclusive Do you understand? ...

CHAPUZOT: Go on ... go on ... please continue ...

THE INTERVIEWER: The decisive discovery was a series of black spots ... which were presented in each patient's brain ... and in the cerebro-spinal fluid.

THE INTERVIEWER: Have you had a lot of murderers in your family? ... After all, if you have neither wife nor mistress ... you may still have a family ... eh?

CHAPUZOT: *[Desperate.]* Now it begins again ...

THE INTERVIEWER: You do not have a family ... Bizarre, but possible, after all ... The child lost his mother ... poor Chapuzot ... abandoned ...

[CHAPUZOT goes from the counter to the table and back again, wiping with a wet towel. THE INTERVIEWER follows his movements.]

So when you were born, your feeble little mind was immediately warped by unbearable suffering and loneliness, exposed to the deplorable conditions of vagrancy ... It would be an explanation ... an excuse maybe.

CHAPUZOT: *[Still going back and forth, raising his clenched fists.]* Ah! Ah! Ah!

THE INTERVIEWER: You do not answer ...

[Pause.]

You are determined, then, to subvert this interview?

CHAPUZOT: In the name of God! ... what do you want me to say?

THE INTERVIEWER: Anything! The truth! ... Do you understand the patience I have shown in the face of your ... tenacity ... the delicacy ... I have not accused you of being a traitor ...

[He stops for a moment in his comings and goings.]

... yet there was premeditation in your choice of the bottle of cassis ...

CHAPUZOT: *[Emerging and leaving the counter.]* The cassis again ... what do you mean?

THE INTERVIEWER: *[The prosecutor.]* Why a bottle of cassis, rather than curaçao, or some other liquor?

CHAPUZOT: My god ... My god!

[He returns to the counter where he stacks more bottles—then climbs a ladder, his back to the audience, and begins moving bottles and glassware to the higher shelves.]

THE INTERVIEWER: Be careful ... It's very important, Chapuzot ... The jury may find extenuating circumstances ... mitigating or aggravating ... depending on your answer ...

CHAPUZOT: The jury ... What jury?

THE INTERVIEWER: Perhaps the eminent Doctor Sock ... a true scientific genius, Chapuzot ...

[With a malicious joy.]

... who will certainly examine you ... autopsy you, perhaps ... will see fixed in this premeditated choice of a bottle of cassis ... anthropological phenomenon of moral responsibility or irresponsibility ...

CHAPUZOT: I'll be damned if I understand a word you're saying ...

THE INTERVIEWER: You don't understand? ... You don't understand that ... what I ask you is ... follow me ... the story of your crime ...

CHAPUZOT: *[Still facing the shelves.]* My crime now ...

THE INTERVIEWER: An exact and meticulous analysis of circumstances ... particular, general, social, and marital ... that preceded, accompanied and followed ... giving me a framework ... on which I can establish the psychology of this crime ... Ah!

CHAPUZOT: *[Without turning.]* My head ... my God!

THE INTERVIEWER: To document the mental chemistry of this crime ... Ah! ... Is it clear now? ... Do you understand?

CHAPUZOT: Well ... you seem to think you know everything ...

THE INTERVIEWER: No! You may no longer hide in the darkness of words or dodge my questions with riddles ... Answer!

CHAPUZOT: I have to get out of here ...

[He comes down from his stool and tries to flee, but THE INTERVIEWER holds him by the apron.]

THE INTERVIEWER: Wicked man!

[Taking him by the arm.]

Let us ... consider your options ... Do you know the famous doctor Cesare Lombroso?

CHAPUZOT: Lom ...?

THE INTERVIEWER: ... broso ... yes!

CHAPUZOT: *[Picks up a spray bottle and begins wiping down tables.]* I ... I know ... not really ... no ...

THE INTERVIEWER: A man of genius, Chapuzot ...

CHAPUZOT: All right ...

THE INTERVIEWER: *[Striking the counter.]* A man of unparalleled genius! ...

CHAPUZOT: ... yes ... yes ... all right ...

THE INTERVIEWER: A great scholar and formidable scientist ... who discovered that all men of genius were brutes and murderers ...

CHAPUZOT: Good ... good ...

THE INTERVIEWER: Degenerates ... killers of men ... all blessed with an uncommon mental capacity ... heightened intellectual discernment!

CHAPUZOT: Whatever you say ...

THE INTERVIEWER: *[Reaching a frenzy of excitement.]* So ... what is your opinion on the work of the illustrious doctor Cesare Lombroso ... on his admirable discoveries concerning the criminal