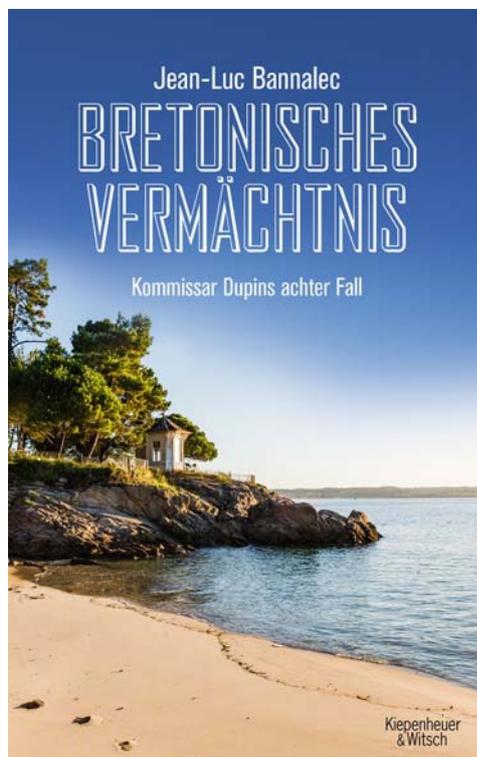


BRETON LEGACY COMMISSAIRE DUPIN'S EIGHTH CASE

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Sample Translation by John Reddick



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DAY ONE

There were days when the world seemed to consist of almost nothing but sky.

This particular day, the twenty-fourth of May, was a perfect example: flooded with radiant light, clear and bright, as though freshly washed.

The entire arc of the heavens appeared even higher than usual, even broader in its sweep, creating a sense of ever greater expansiveness, as if the earth's atmosphere were reaching out yet further into space. A gleaming sphere of blue, turning slowly paler towards the horizon; a peculiar, strangely vibrant blue that one might easily suppose to be some sort of force or physical entity in its own right. Beneath the vast breadth of this blueness the earth itself appeared to shrink, to become flatter and smaller.

Commissaire Georges Dupin of the Concarneau police was lying on his back in the grass. He had stretched out full length on a kind of plateau far above the sea, a green hilltop that loomed up behind precipitous cliffs, a full twenty seven metres above sea level - or so it said on a sign in the car park. The hilltop was carpeted with heather, bright yellow gorse, clumps of grass, and a richly coloured multitude of mosses - green, rust-red, yellow.

Pointe du Raz: that was the name of the final spur of land at the western-most extremity of Finistère, the towering rocks of which jutted far into the Atlantic like a jagged spearhead. Ferocious, turbulent currents surged around the legendary Pointe, the northern limit of the Bay of Biscay, which extended all the way down to the western coast of Spain. With its numerous relatively

shallow patches it was one of the most dangerous areas of the entire Atlantic, the waters of which battled their way around Brittany to surge into the Channel and from there into the North Sea.

The view from up here was bewitching: the majestic Atlantic, the strange cliffs like the tail of a mighty dragon, two lighthouses standing brazenly in the midst of the sea atop inhospitable rocks, and far away in the distance the Ile de Sein like something from a fabled land. Those wishing to experience the very ends of the earth are unlikely to find anywhere more dauntingly impressive than the Pointe du Raz. You could see it, you could feel it: this was *Finis terrae*. It was the final bastion daring to defy the tumultuous infinitude of the Atlantic Ocean. All of sudden, *terra firma* seemed giddyingly fragile.

And another of Brittany's secrets was especially evident here: the singular interplay of light and colour. There was more light in Brittany than in other places – or so it seemed to Dupin. Its luminosity lent an extraordinary intensity to colours that were essentially mere refractions of itself. Out here it seemed as though the colour spectrum discernible to the human eye - the spectrum from red through orange, yellow, green, blue and indigo to violet - were far more richly nuanced; as though the infinite refractions of light on the waters surrounding the Breton peninsula were split into a more delicate multiplicity of hues. This intensity of light had rendered even its most distinguished admirers drunk with delight: Monet, Gauguin, Picasso and many other painters had fallen under Brittany's spell.

Ever since his first visit here the Pointe du Raz had figured on Dupin's list of favourite places (albeit only out of season!) There had been two distinct reasons for this present trip. One was 'Le Fumoir de la Pointe du Raz', a new smokehouse in the area that Inspector Riwal had enthused about in the most glowing terms.

They smoked the very finest fish caught in the much feared stretch of water beyond the point, in particular *lieu jaune*, a magnificent variety of cod. The ‘incomparable aromas from the smoke of Breton oaks’ were a key factor in this process, along with a secret blend of different spices and varieties of pepper. The smokehouse belonged to the cousin of a cousin of Riwal’s. Dupin hadn’t been paying full attention at that point: he had always been baffled by the complexities of Riwal’s family relationships – which also included quite a few acquired by choice rather than birth. Be that as it may, Dupin had been seduced by Riwal’s effusions into paying a visit to the smokehouse. And besides that, it happened to be his and Claire’s first evening together for weeks, as she had been working extra-long shifts at the hospital. She liked smoked fish of any sort, but *lieu jaune* was her absolute favourite. Dupin was planning to surprise her.

The other reason for the outing was the renovation work being carried out at their police station. It had been going on for four weeks now, and it was a complete nightmare. The contractor had promised that police activities ‘would not be impeded in any way’. This was nonsense even in theory, and in practice of course things had turned out quite differently. Total chaos had broken out on the very first day. Every least manoeuvre of the contractors interfered with their work, not to mention the noise, the dust, the dirt. And needless to say, the unbearable stink of paint immediately spread everywhere despite the painter-decorators’ assurances that the whole business would be ‘absolutely odour-free’; even tearing open every door and window in the building had made not a scrap of difference. The one good thing was that the pervasive reek of paints and solvents disguised the vile miasma that normally pervaded the building, and which had been driving Dupin crazy ever since his first day there, albeit he was the only person who could smell it. With

luck, so Dupin hoped, the stink would have disappeared completely by the time the renovations were finished.

Everyone based at the station had cleared off over the last few weeks, with just a skeleton staff holding the fort on a strict rota basis. People had continually found new and ever ingenious reasons for staying away from their offices. Egregious incidents such as the plundering of a bed of carrots or the illicit gathering of mussels along the seashore had suddenly called for the most careful investigation, with sometimes as many as three or four officers attending at the scene of the crime. Cold cases from the distant past had been re-opened: the theft of three surf boards the previous October, the disappearance of a pink-coloured yacht-tender from the harbour. Everyone had been relieved when a genuine case turned up: six hundred Belgian gold coins dating from 1870 had been discovered during the demolition of an old house in Pont-Aven - a real treasure trove, valued at hundreds of thousands of euros, the finding of which had prompted much wild speculation.

Then, at the start of this very week, even Nolwenn, Dupin's PA, had finally run out of patience. A bucket of glutinous paint had been spilt right outside her office door and she had trodden straight in it. For weeks she had been bravely trying to keep her cool, but following this incident she had immediately decided to take some leave – an event that had cast Dupin into a state of great agitation, all the more so as she had given no indication of when she planned to return. Over the years Nolwenn must have accumulated months and months of leave due to the huge amount of overtime she put in. Dupin had never dared to check. Any prolonged absence on Nolwenn's part – especially one intended as a protest – would sooner or later cause mayhem: that much was certain. Without further ado she set off on a cycling tour with her husband that had originally been planned for September – a very special cycling tour, inspired by the Breton bestseller

Bistrot Breizh. Le tour de Bretagne des vieux cafés à vélo, which would take them to Brittany's most ancient, most unspoilt inns, handpicked by people who really knew what they were talking about. A tour that would take them literally from one tiny village to the next. The whole idea was that it wouldn't be an endurance test but a leisurely trip through wonderful, solitary countryside, and Nolwenn had plumped for an inland route rather than a coastal one. She had encouraged Riwal and Dupin to take time off as well, whereupon Riwal had immediately exiled himself to Belle-Ile for a few days with his wife and their two children. One of his sisters owned a house there which had stood empty ever since she had emigrated to Cape Cod on America's East Coast, her husband's home territory. Dupin hadn't been the slightest bit interested in taking time off. For one thing, there could be no question at present of Claire getting out of her work at the hospital, and secondly, holidays just weren't Dupin's thing. Kadeg, Dupin's other Inspector, was well off the hook: he had been on paternity leave for the last two and a half months, and wouldn't be back until July. He and his wife had had twins in March – Anne and Conan. Kadeg had bought one of those double buggies – a gigantic contraption – and occasionally turned up with it at the police station. He was quite often on his own with the babies for days at a time: his wife was a martial arts instructor in Lorient in kyokushin karate – 'the world's toughest full-contact form of martial arts', as Kadeg never tired of pointing out – and was regularly away at courses and competitions.

Dupin had set off at midday. He had bought the fish for supper and chatted for quite a while with the highly agreeable owner of the *fumerie*. He had gone on foot from the car park to the end of the point. Later, after his brief rest on the grass, he would enjoy a cold beer sitting in the sunshine on the splendid terrace of the Relais de la Pointe overlooking the imposing beach of the Baie des Trépassés. This was another of his rituals: he loved sitting in

that particular spot. He would tuck into a couple of *galettes apéritives au jambon*, small squares of crispy, buttery crêpe dough topped with delicious ham. He would be home by seven, seven-thirty. Claire had promised to make it back by eight-thirty, so he would have plenty of time to get everything prepared.

He was in luck with the weather. It felt as if this was the day on which spring would finally turn into summer – another of those long Breton summers that lasted right through to the beginning of October. Perhaps even a bit longer: the previous year Claire and Dupin had had their final swim of the season as late as 31 October. It was over twenty degrees today, and the gentle breeze carried the subtle tang of salt and iodine – a foretaste of the sea in summer. The sun warmed the skin without burning it. ‘*Beau et chaud*’ was the forecast for the next few days in *Le Télégramme*. Was there ever a more delightful promise?

Dupin had planned on lying down only for fifteen minutes or so, but he had already been stretched out in the soft grass for three quarters of an hour. He was finding it difficult to tear himself away. This wasn’t due solely to the comfort of his chosen spot and the spell cast by the vast dome of the sky: it was due above all to the soporific murmur of the even, unhurried waves breaking against the cliffs down below. Dupin, normally so restless, had drifted into a blissful doze.

He was jerked awake by the shrill sound of his mobile.

Sitting up, he reached for his phone. It fell silent. When he had finally managed to extract it from his pocket, it rang again.

‘Yes?’ he grunted

‘It’s me, boss.’

Inspector Riwal.

‘What’s the problem?’

‘No problem, boss. Just making contact.’

Riwal had already ‘made contact’ the previous day, and the day before that. Dupin had thought he could hear a hint of guilty conscience in his voice – over the fact that he had been so quick to abandon the sinking ship.

‘Everything’s in order back here, Riwal. How are things on the island?’

‘Fine. But I’ll return at once if anything comes up. You simply need to...’

‘Just enjoy yourself, Riwal!’

‘Great, boss. And just so you know: we usually don’t have any signal at the house. My sister gave up the landline when she left. I’m in a bar right now, but...’

‘Everything’s fine, Riwal. Forget about work. By the way, had you already tried to ring me just now?’

‘No, why?’

‘It doesn’t matter. Have a great break.’

Dupin ended the call.

His gaze wandered over the sea: it shimmered and sparkled wherever you looked.

The previous summer he had accompanied his friend Henri, owner of the Café du Port in Sainte-Marine, on a trip to Le Conquet. With a view to conjuring up one of his magnificent ragouts, Henri had bought some of the famously hearty sausage that was a speciality of Ile Molène just across the water, and also some *pétoncles*, tiny scallops with a delicious nutty flavour. They had left the car at the nearby Pointe de Corsen and gone for a short walk. They had rejoiced in the view: the deep blue sea,

away in the distance the fabled labyrinth of islets around Ile Molène. ‘All that’s missing is dolphins!’ Dupin had remarked. ‘But there they are!’ Henri had calmly replied, as though it were the most natural thing in the world, and he had pointed towards the water. There had been some ten to fifteen dolphins down there. For several minutes they put on a real show, performing daredevil leaps and thrilling high-speed manoeuvres. Then all of a sudden they were gone. Dupin knew how ridiculous it was – but from that day on he was always extra-attentive whenever he looked out to sea.

His phone rang again.

With a sigh, Dupin was on his feet within a matter of seconds.

‘Yes?’

‘Georges, thank goodness we’ve reached you!’

It was the measured voice of a woman.

‘We’re going to drive straight there – we’ve just decided; we’re near Laval right now. But we can’t get hold of Claire.’

Dupin had instantly recognised the voice. It was Claire’s mother.

‘We’ll be there around nine.’ There was a rustling noise. ‘Or what do you reckon, Gustave?’

In the background there was immediately a loud ‘Certainly! At the latest! If not sooner!’ Dupin could now also hear the sound of a car’s engine.

‘It’s wonderful, don’t you think?’ said Claire’s mother enthusiastically. ‘That way we’ll have the entire evening together! We’re so looking forward to it, Georges. Will you let Claire know?’

‘I ... I’m sure she’ll be beside herself – with pleasure, of course.’

‘That’s just what I think too! See you soon, Georges!’

And that was the end of the conversation.

It took a while for Dupin to muster his thoughts.

So much for their quiet evening *à deux*, then! Rather than tomorrow, Saturday, as planned, everything would kick off this evening instead. Dupin had resolutely put the whole thing out of his mind. A visitation from Claire’s parents – to all intents and purposes his parents-in-law. For the entire Whit weekend. Gustave and H  l  ne Lannoy. They lived near F  camp, a small town in Normandy. Since he and Claire had got back together again, Dupin had seen them only very occasionally. And now both were going to be staying at their house. For three whole days. Dupin was very happy with the house he and Claire had moved to the previous year – but as was now becoming apparent, a spacious house had disadvantages as well as advantages. Claire’s parents were as different from one another as it was possible to be. H  l  ne was a yoga teacher, while Claire’s father was head of a successful law practice. Officially speaking he had already handed it over to one of the senior partners, but in reality he had simply found it impossible to let go. Besides their liking for good food and drink and their intense love for Claire, the very few things they had in common included a partiality for lengthy discussions, in which Claire’s mother always did ninety percent of the talking. Given their very different views, there was never any shortage of topics – enough, in fact, to last them several lives. An interesting basis for a relationship, thought Dupin. Notwithstanding this state of affairs, however, both would unhesitatingly have described their marriage as ‘supremely happy’. ‘That’s just the way they are’, Claire had admonished him. ‘It’ll be fine.’

‘Damn!’ exclaimed Dupin. He’d been really looking forward to the evening, with just the two of them on their own for a while. ‘This can...’

His phone rang. For the fourth time now.

He answered, and once again his tone was brusque.

‘Yes?’

‘Am I speaking to Monsieur le Commissaire Georges Dupin?’

It was the voice of an elderly woman. Dupin pulled himself together. It wasn’t the caller’s fault that his evening had been ruined.

‘Yes, this is Dupin. May I ask who’s calling?’

‘I am Madame Chaboseau. Wife of Dr Pierre Chaboseau.’

Dr Chaboseau’s practice, the most up-to-the-minute one in Concarneau, was located in a spacious villa on Boulevard Katerine Wylie, right next to the sea – not far from where Claire and Dupin lived. Chaboseau worked as both a general practitioner and a cardiologist, and attached great importance to social status, as did his wife. They belonged to the *notables* of Concarneau, the prosperous, long-established, well-connected families that had presided over the city’s destiny for generations. Dupin knew them because they lived not in the villa housing the practice, but in the same building that contained L’Amiral, the restaurant he regarded as his home from home. It, too, was a magnificent building in a prime location, and the Chaboseaus owned the second and third storeys, along with the lavishly converted attic.

‘What did you want to talk to me about, Madame?’

‘He’s dead.’

‘I beg your pardon?!’

Had he misheard?

‘My husband,’ – there was a distinct tone of reproach in her voice – ‘he’s dead. I found him a few minutes ago, lying in the courtyard. He’s fallen from his study on the top floor.’

She spoke almost mechanically, clearly concerned to ensure that the details she was providing were absolutely accurate.

Dupin stood as though rooted to the spot.

‘Your husband is dead?’

‘Yes.’

‘He’s fallen from a window?’

‘He’s lying on the ground, his body’s completely broken.’

There was a pause.

‘I...’ Dupin stopped, then tried again: ‘Have you informed the police?’

It was a strange question, he had to admit.

‘I obtained your number from the police station. I told them it was urgent.’

‘And you didn’t say anything to *them* about what had happened?’

‘In my view it’s a matter that requires the personal attention of the most senior officer.’

Dupin was already on the move. He reached a narrow path.

‘You are certain your husband is dead?’

‘There’s a large pool of blood. He’s lying...’ – she was hunting for words – ‘...in a very *peculiar* position.’

‘Call an ambulance immediately, Madame. I’ll set off at once, but it’ll be three quarters of an hour before I get to you.’ In reality it would take him at least an hour – provided he drove like a cat out of hell.

‘I’ll notify my colleagues so that someone can come out to you straightaway.’

He began walking more quickly.

‘Do you think he was murdered?’

Madame Chaboseau took her time before replying.

‘Madame? Are you still there?’

‘You need to get here as fast as you possibly can, Monsieur le Commissaire.’

It was a grisly sight. And a strange one, too. An enormous pool of blood extended around the entire upper body – almost circular, and deep red in colour. Fragments of glass sparkled in the sunlight like decorative glitter: remnants of the large picture-window that Chaboseau had fallen through, they were spread all over the small inner courtyard. The front right-hand side of his body had hit the ground first. His shoulder protruded from his body at an unnatural angle. His hip, too, lay at a peculiar angle to his limp legs. Dupin estimated that he had fallen about fifteen metres. He was wearing dark corduroy trousers, a beige shirt and similarly coloured waistcoat, and expensive-looking black leather slippers which bizarrely enough had remained on his feet. His reddish hair looked freshly combed. Only the left-hand side of his face was visible. His left eye was slightly open.

After looking at the body for a while, Dupin went straight up to the Chaboseaus' apartment, using one of those retro-fitted lifts so common in old buildings; it looked like a sardine tin dangling from the end of a long piece of wire.

The forensic pathologist – old Dr Lafond, the least disagreeable member of his disagreeable profession – had of course long since arrived, as had the CSI team. Dupin had been by some considerable margin the last to get there, and Dr Lafond had been forced to wait for him before he could have the body removed to the pathology lab in Quimper.

During his mad dash back to Concarneau from the Pointe du Raz Dupin had repeatedly tried to reach Nolwenn and Riwal, but without success. He had left a message every second call, but it was no use: he would have to manage without them for the time being. Two of the only four people still manning the police station had quickly reached the crime scene – Rosa Le Menn and Iris Nevou. The station had been allocated two new posts at the beginning of the year – thanks largely to the dogged persistence of Nolwenn: they had been notoriously undermanned for a considerable period of time. The new arrivals were both women which was another change Nolwenn considered desperately necessary. Le Menn, who had come straight from the police training school, was in her early twenties, tall, broad-shouldered like a dedicated swimmer, and wore her light-brown hair in a plait. She was self-confident and bursting with energy. Iris Nevou was more on the small side – in her uniform she always looked a little bit lost – with very light-coloured skin, pageboy-style dark hair, and a strikingly deep and penetrating voice. Despite putting in very little time in the firing range she had twice won awards as the best female shot in the Brittany police force. She had spent fifteen years in the *gendarmerie* at Le Conquet, then at the end of last year she had abandoned both her

previous life and her husband and ‘gone south’ from Brittany’s north-western extremity.

Le Menn and Nevou had been the first to see the body, and now that Dupin had seen it for himself it struck him as highly likely that Madame Chaboseau had indeed been right on the phone in supposing that her husband was already dead. Nonetheless she should clearly have called an ambulance, but hadn’t done so despite Dupin’s emphatic insistence.

They had meanwhile reached the top floor of the building, Dupin having taken a cursory look at the rooms on the second and third floors. The converted loft was ‘Monsieur’s domain’, as Madame Chaboseau put it. They found themselves standing in a private, very spacious study – at least fifty square metres, Dupin guessed. On the side towards the harbour there were three smallish windows, and facing them on the opposite side were two large picture windows offering a magnificent view of the town beyond the roofs of the surrounding houses. The right-hand window, more than three metres wide and extending right down to the floor, was shattered: this was evidently where it had all happened.

To judge by its overall appearance the loft had been converted in the nineteen-seventies. The furniture consisted entirely of antiques: old-style standard lamps, two slender, elegant secretaires heaped with coffee-table books, Persian rugs on the well-kept dark wooden floor; in one corner was a chaise longue upholstered in red velvet, in another stood a black leather armchair with a padded footstool in front of it. Paintings hung on the walls in venerable gilt frames – a couple of dozen at least. There was an enormous desk, behind it an uncomfortable-looking high-backed chair. Everything was fastidiously just-so, almost obsessively tidy – it was all too familiar to Dupin from his

childhood home in Paris. It had been his mother's credo: leave a single speck of dust, and it's the beginning of the end.

'And just in case it occurs to you to think so, Monsieur le Commissaire,' said Madame Chaboseau in a now positively indignant voice, 'my husband was *not* unsteady on his feet, even if he did turn seventy-four this year. His hip did give him a bit of trouble, but there could be no question of him losing his balance on that account and falling through a window!'

Raising her sharp little chin she continued with a hiss: 'And furthermore – perish the very thought – there's even less question of his having committed suicide! It would be an infamy even to consider such a possibility.'

Le Menn, Nevou and the CSI people had already searched for a letter, a note, a message of any sort from Monsieur Chaboseau but had found nothing, either here or on the lower floors. This didn't mean much, however, as the majority of suicides don't leave a message. At present, though, there was no evidence to suggest suicide, or at any rate none that they were aware of.

Dupin judged Madame Chaboseau to be in her early seventies. Her chin-length hair was dyed chestnut brown and elegantly coiffed in a voluminous style that Dupin reckoned required daily visits to her hairdresser. Sparingly made up and with an expensive-looking pair of claret-red glasses, she was wearing a dark-green blouse and loose-fitting black slacks. Even now, two hours after she had found her husband dead, she was displaying no signs of any particularly marked emotion. Dupin well knew that shock manifests itself very differently in different people, and he was careful not to try to deduce her inner state from her outward appearance - indeed he was always vigorously opposed to any tendency to jump to conclusions or make rash assumptions.

‘Dr Lafond’s first priority in the forensic pathology lab will be to check the body for any bruises, scratches or contusions’ – Rosa Le Menn spoke clearly and quietly, but without any semblance of deference – ‘in order to see if there are any signs of a struggle, a physical confrontation.’

There was nothing in the entire room that pointed to a struggle, but the possibility had to be investigated all the same: it would have taken only a single well-executed push to send the doctor crashing through the window.

Dupin had meanwhile examined the second, still intact picture window, which was identical in design and construction to the broken one. It did not incorporate safety glass, nor was it double-glazed. At the time when the loft conversion had been carried out measures such as these, which would presumably have prevented the events from happening, were not yet mandatory. Such a large single sheet of ordinary glass would be bound to give way if a grown man crashed into it either accidentally or deliberately, or as a result of being pushed.

‘They’ll also check whether he suffered a heart attack or a stroke’, added Le Menn, who had meanwhile turned to Madame Chaboseau. ‘Either eventuality could have caused him to crash into the window.’

It’s true: unfortunate coincidences like that did sometimes happen; but Dupin thought it extremely unlikely.

‘That’s merely standard procedure, Madame Chaboseau’, added Le Menn. ‘We’ll soon have a better idea of what actually happened.’ Dupin had noticed over the last few weeks that although Le Menn punctiliously went through everything as per the police manual, the way she did it – her facial expressions, her voice, her body language – told a different story, and showed that in certain circumstances she viewed ‘official procedure’ with a

degree of scepticism – and this had caused Dupin to warm to her right from the outset.

Dupin wandered around the enormous room, stopping every now and then and muttering to himself.

Madame Chaboseau was standing next to her husband's huge desk: dark polished wood with a large felt overlay, on top of it a computer monitor. Dupin paid particular attention to the pictures, hung close together on the walls, just as on the two lower floors that they had taken a quick look at earlier on. Up here they were mostly works done on paper: pastels, water colours, drawings in pencil. Dupin could make out signatures by Gauguin, Berthe Morisot, Signac and Monet. Two water colours of Belle-Ile hung directly above the desk. Almost all the pictures were of Brittany. Dupin was no expert, but he knew enough to appreciate that there was a very great deal of money hanging on these walls. There were presumably even larger sums hanging on the walls of the lower floors, where the pictures were mostly oil paintings. Dupin had also taken note of the state-of-the-art air conditioning system, the extremely secure door, and the burglar alarm. But Madame Chaboseau had informed him as soon as he arrived, and before he could even ask about the pictures, that none of the art works were missing, nor anything else of value. It was clear that theft was not the issue here.

Dupin turned to Madame Chaboseau. 'And you really have no idea who might have called on your husband? Could you please have another think about that?'

'I have given it a very great deal of thought!' Madame Chaboseau made no attempt to disguise the irritation in her voice. 'There's nothing in his diary. Nothing whatsoever for the entire day. And that's the third time you have asked me the same question.'

It was clear from the pristine state of both door and door lock that no one had forced their way in. If it had been neither an accident nor suicide, then the likeliest explanation at this stage was that Chaboseau himself had let the perpetrator into the room; and this would mean that he probably knew the person or at least had been expecting them, and perhaps had specifically arranged the meeting. But plenty of other possible scenarios were conceivable. For instance, he could have left the building and then been covertly followed on his way back by someone who only revealed themselves at the moment the doctor unlocked his door. Or they may have convincingly pretended to be someone else – though Dupin guessed that Dr Chaboseau would not have been so easily fooled.

Iris Nevou was already in the process of finding out which of the other residents of the building had been at home during the afternoon, and whether they had noticed anything unusual. The Chaboseaus' portion of the second and third floors occupied two thirds of the considerable length of the venerable building, which also housed L'Amiral; in the remaining third, facing away from Place Jean Jaurès, were three further apartments. On the first floor there was an extra room belonging to L'Amiral, used for larger functions, and another apartment, occupied by a family with two children.

Dupin went across once again to the broken window. Stopping just short of the gaping abyss he looked down into the depths below. An involuntary shudder ran down his spine.

‘And you yourself, Madame Chaboseau: you were in town between 2 and 4, you said?’

She had phoned Dupin at 16.07.

‘I had an appointment at the hairdresser’s at 2. I was there until about 3.15. Then I had a few errands to run.’

‘Could you fill in a bit more detail about that?’

Dupin had been pacing around the room once more during this exchange, and he now stopped again by the broken window. Looking down, he suddenly recalled the 10-metre diving board he had mounted as a dare in a Paris swimming pool when he was twelve, following a bet with some friends. Stepping abruptly away he turned back to Madame Chaboseau.

‘I went to Galerie Gloux about a picture. Then I called at Maurite’s.’

Maurite was a Moroccan grocer in the city’s spectacular market hall. Dupin adored his shop: he was a great character who offered the most delicious eats imaginable. And of course Dupin was also well acquainted with Galerie Gloux: over the years Françoise and Jean-Michel Gloux had more or less become friends of his.

‘The maid is off today. I bought an exquisite *poulet noir*.’

Her language sounded like something from another age.

‘That’s all? Nowhere else?’

‘I called briefly at Hops, about their Black Angus sausages.’

Claire and Dupin were keen Hops customers too. Katell Cadic, the owner, sold fantastic cheeses and superb varieties of salami.

‘We’ll be checking on that’, said Dupin, aware that he was being distracted by delicious visions of salami. He pulled himself together. ‘Has anything occurred in your husband’s life recently that you think might connect with his murder?’

‘Of course not!’ Madame Chaboseau retorted indignantly. ‘No one had any reason whatever to want my husband dead. What a grotesque idea!’

Undeterred, Dupin pressed on with his questioning. ‘Some sort of episode with a patient? A wrong diagnosis, for instance? Such things happen.’ So far as Dupin was aware the doctor had an unblemished reputation – but given the sheer length of time he had been in practice it was statistically speaking unimaginable that some such event hadn’t occurred at some point.

Madame Chaboseau made no reply, instead skewering Dupin with an icy stare.

‘Or some other kind of conflict? A quarrel with someone that got out of hand? Please think carefully, Madame. It’s important.’

She shook her head vigorously.

‘Any rivalries? – His acquaintances can’t all have been friends, that’s for sure.’

The kind of power and status enjoyed by families like the Chaboseaus was not infrequently acquired and sustained at other people’s expense. ‘Collateral damage’ they called it – though usually they were so preoccupied with ‘more important’ things that they never even became aware of it.

‘My husband is highly respected.’ Madame Chaboseau had lowered her voice, but her undertone was distinctly aggressive. ‘He has an impeccable reputation. Not only in his profession as a doctor, but also as a philanthropist and a patron of the arts. He is involved in a whole range of projects.’

‘So you know of absolutely no one who might have spoken ill of your husband, or why?’ Dupin was now also talking quietly, but with an edge to his voice. ‘You will hinder our enquiries if you withhold information.’

‘How ridiculous!’

Dupin turned away and began walking around the room again. He was a tad agitated. This was only partly due to Madame Chaboseau and her supercilious, irritatingly chilly manner. He was gripped by a peculiar mood – a mixture of horror at what his intuition told him was probably murder, and profound indignation: if it was indeed murder, what a cheek to commit such a crime under their very noses, practically right in front of the police station!

Le Menn intervened at this point, clearly at pains to be polite and matter-of-fact in tone. ‘How did it happen to be *you* that found your husband? Or to put that another way: why did you choose to come in via the courtyard?’

The grander properties in the town commonly had small yards at the back that were mostly used for parking cars. The Chaboseaus’ yard also included a door into the house, which – like the main entrance door – gave access to the lift and stairwell.

‘I often use the back entrance. It’s extremely useful, especially when one has been shopping.’

‘What do you use the yard itself for?’ persisted Le Menn.

The yard was about four metres by three. To left and right were high walls. Leading to the street was a chest-high electronic gate.

‘I used to park my car here.’

‘And your husband’s?’

Madame Chaboseau raised her eyebrows. ‘He has always kept his car in the large courtyard opposite. He rents a parking space there.’

To Dupin’s ear at least, this could be translated as ‘*That’s* the right and proper place for the car of a man such as my husband’.

Both courtyards were in Rue de Guesclin, a narrow one-way street with little traffic, tucked away behind L'Amiral. At the corner of the street stood Dupin's favourite newspaper shop, run by Alain and Amélia. That was where he bought all his newspapers and a lot more besides: books, Claire's medical tomes and cooking magazines, his red Clairefontaine notebooks, and the dozens and dozens of ballpoint pens that he was forever losing.

'And what are you using the courtyard for at present?' Le Menn wasn't giving up.

Dupin took his notebook out and jotted a few things down.

'Just as a private entrance to the house.'

'To which only you and your husband have keys?'

'The janitor and the maid have keys as well. No one else.'

'And you only saw your husband's body once the gate was open?'

No one had yet come forward who had witnessed the fall, or who had seen the body any earlier than Madame Chaboseau. The street being so little frequented, this was scarcely surprising. And the entrance gate was a good one metre forty high.

Madame Chaboseau nodded.

'What did you talk about at lunch? Was there any particular topic?' Dupin was making a special effort to speak in a friendly tone of voice. Madame Chaboseau had already mentioned that she and her husband had had lunch together from 12 to 1.30 down in the brasserie of L'Amiral, as they did every Friday. According to her, she had then gone up to the second floor, and her husband to his study on the fourth floor. It appeared that for

the last few years he had no longer worked at the practice on Friday afternoons.

‘We read the newspapers. And we chatted about various things.’

‘Such as?’

‘The harbour.’

‘The harbour?’

‘The expansion going on down there.’

‘I see. What aspects of it exactly?’

Several articles had appeared that week about the new shipyard that had recently opened. And the town had also released land for a further extension of the harbour.

‘How very much we welcome all these developments.’

The extension of the harbour had long been a dominant issue in the town. For Concarneau, the beautiful *Ville Bleue*, was one thing above all others: a maritime city, with the harbour at its very core. Properly speaking there were in fact *three* harbours: the marina, devoted to amateur and professional sailors; the legendary fish harbour, which, though it had done less well in recent decades, was still one of the largest in France, and reflected the defining role that fishing had played in Concarneau’s history; and, not least, the flourishing industrial docks with their ship-building and ship-repair yards. Drive across the impressively high bridge over the River Moros, and a breathtaking view of Concarneau suddenly opens up, with the docks immediately below, where colossal ships either lie afloat in the water or sit in vast dry docks. *The port in the city, the city in the port*’ that was the motto of the expansion programme – and it also hinted at the fortunate geographical position of the city, which thanks to various tongues of land and the huge natural

basins of the River Moros was well protected from the ferocious pounding of the Atlantic and also from enemy attacks – of which there had been a goodly number during the city’s history.

‘But your chat about the harbour was presumably about some particular aspect of it?’

‘No. And anyway: how on earth could that be of any relevance?’

Dupin was getting nowhere.

‘What else did you talk about?’

‘The weather.’

Madame Chaboseau’s reply had not sounded at all brusque, and presumably reflected the truth. The weather was an extremely popular topic in Brittany, even though – in contrast to other parts of the world – it didn’t really have much impact on people’s lives: no self-respecting Breton would ever let himself be deterred from doing something important by adverse weather.

There was a knock on the door: Iris Nevou stepped into the room, and immediately launched into her report. ‘None of the neighbours saw any strangers in the building between 2 and 4 pm. I’ve talked to all of them myself.’ Taking her smartphone out of her pocket she tapped away on it for a moment or two. ‘Do you want me to send you the list?’ she asked, looking at Dupin. As always, he was fascinated by her deep voice, which contrasted so strikingly with her fragile-looking physique.

‘Yes, please do. And no one saw anything - or even heard anything: the noise of the window breaking? A scream?’

‘No one saw or heard a thing. Not even Paul Girard.’ Paul Girard was the proprietor of L’Amiral and had been a friend of Dupin’s since his very first day in Brittany. ‘And none of his staff either. I spoke to Ingrid.’ Ingrid was the marvellous, truly first-rate

woman in charge of the brasserie. ‘And by the way, Paul Girard himself is out at the moment, collecting fresh supplies from the oyster farm.’

‘What about the kitchen staff?’ The kitchen was at the back of the building, but a good ten, fifteen metres from the small courtyard.

‘They didn’t hear anything either.’ That rang true. Kitchens were noisy places anyway, and on top of that there was the din from the powerful air-conditioning unit, not to mention the market that took place on Fridays in the square in front of L’Amiral.

‘Good work!’

Dupin was well pleased: Nevou had thought of everything.

His emphatic ‘Good work!’ had brought a bemused expression to everyone’s face – including Nevou’s.

He turned abruptly and started to leave.

Stopping near the door, he faced back towards the room. ‘Many thanks indeed, Madame Chaboseau. If you need anything, do please let me know.’

Madame Chaboseau stood there with astonishment written all over her face.

‘If anything occurs to you, just give me a ring. You already have my number, of course. And Le Menn: you hang on here – the CSI people will be up here again very soon.’

They would be taking the computer away, too. Madame Chaboseau had claimed not to know the password – which meant that things would be complicated, as always. The same applied to Monsieur Chaboseau’s mobile, which they had recouped from one of the secretares. He hadn’t used the landline for years,

according to Madame Chaboseau; she had been the only one to use it, as she didn't possess a mobile.

The CSI people had started in the courtyard and then done some work on the top floor, before moving down to the second and third floors to enable Dupin and his team to talk to Madame Chaboseau in peace and quiet. Dupin had instructed them to photograph everything, which Madame Chaboseau had acceded to only under protest.

'And you, Nevou: you're coming with me', Dupin declared, beckoning to her. There were various jobs he wanted her to do.

'And before I forget, Madame: this room here counts as a crime scene for the time being, as does the courtyard. No one is allowed in here except the police.'

He opened the door and made for the stairs. He wasn't using that lift again.

He still had a whole series of questions to put to Madame Chaboseau, but he needed to get his thoughts together first. He also needed to get hold of Riwal and Nolwenn as soon as humanly possible. But above all: he wouldn't be able to manage a moment longer without a *petit café*. He'd been planning to have one that afternoon at the Baie des Trépassés, after a nice cold beer – but he had missed out on both, as also on his *crêpes au jambon*. It already seemed as if entire days had passed since his cosy little outing.

Dupin was sitting in his usual corner on the terrace of L'Amiral, with the whitewashed stone wall immediately behind him. It was a quarter past seven. Only one other table was occupied, right at the opposite end. Ingrid had just brought him his coffee, which

he had ordered on his way to his table. He breathed a sigh of relief.

As soon as Dupin had entered L'Amiral from Avenue Pierre Guéguin – Nevou had stayed outside to make a phone call – the reporters from *Ouest-France* and *Le Télégramme*, Donal and Drollec, had come rushing up to him. Both papers' offices were located less than two hundred metres away on Place Jean Jaurès, the spacious square facing L'Amiral on its southern side.

Needless to say, the news of Chaboseau's death would have spread like wildfire through the entire town. However much he sympathised with the two journalists, Dupin really hadn't been in the mood to offer them any information, and so had told them gruffly – and quite truthfully – that he had 'nothing to say, absolutely nothing at all'.

He leant back in his chair, took a sip of coffee, and gazed out idly over the square, already cleared of all trace of the day's market.

To his left loomed the mighty ramparts of the *ville close*, next to them the marina with its network of long wooden pontoons, alongside which lay dozens upon dozens of gently bobbing boats – yachts for the most part, their colourful sails hanging lazily in the calm air, pleasingly highlighted by the sun that still stood high in the sky. The days were certainly lengthening now.

Dupin couldn't prevent a smile suddenly stealing across his face. There were several reasons for this decidedly inappropriate flurry of emotion. If this was more than a tragic accident or an instance of suicide, if they were dealing with a crime – and his intuition told him that this was very probably the case – then he would often find himself sitting right here, and on 'official business', too. L'Amiral would become his office. What's more, there could be no question of him joining Claire's parents for supper;

in fact it looked as if he was going to miss whole swathes of the family's Whitsuntide arrangements.

'Ah, so there you are, Monsieur le Commissaire!' Iris Nevou had unexpectedly appeared by his table: he hadn't noticed her approaching. She looked disgruntled.

'Coffee for you too?' Dupin asked, lifting his empty cup.

'I don't drink coffee.'

Nevou sat down next to him.

'Have a chat with the staff at Dr Chaboseau's practice to try to find out if their boss had any enemies or was tangled up in any rows.'

'Understood.' Nevou pulled out a tattered brown notebook.

'Understood' was one of her favourite words, but rather than using it in a casual sort of way, as most people do, she always uttered it in a particularly emphatic manner.

'And then,' – Dupin already had his Clairefontaine open in front of him and was flicking through his notes – 'what are these projects that Dr Chaboseau was pursuing in such exemplary fashion as a "philanthropist and patron of the arts", as Madame Chaboseau put it? Get Le Menn to help you on this.'

Especially at the start of an investigation it was usually a matter of trying your luck and hoping it comes off. Poking around here, there and everywhere. Casting as many nets as possible in as many directions as possible, and seeing what turns up.

'Shouldn't we wait until we really know what we're dealing with here? What if it wasn't a murder at all? I'm not so sure.'

This was another phrase that Nevou was fond of using – and it conveyed more than simply a specific doubt about a specific issue. In Nevou's mouth 'I'm not so sure' betokened an attitude

that questioned absolutely everything and took absolutely nothing at face value. A good attitude, thought Dupin – all things considered.

‘Well, I...’ What could he say? Strictly speaking she was right. ‘But if it really *was* murder - and that’s by far the most plausible assumption at the moment - then we’d lose valuable time if we took that approach.’

She shrugged her shoulders. ‘Okay. In that case I’d take an interest in Chaboseau’s business dealings if I were in your shoes.’

‘What do you mean exactly?’

‘It’s common knowledge that he and his wife are both keen entrepreneurs and investors.’

This was new – new to Dupin, at any rate.

A dog had flopped down next to their table – a large dog, its coat long, dirty, and vaguely yellowish in colour. It lay with its snout resting on its paws, lifting its head every now and then to gaze at Dupin. He looked around in search of its owner, but couldn’t see anyone.

‘What sort of investments?’

‘They’re involved in several businesses and projects. Property, a brewery, the marina here in Concarneau. They’re the three things I know about, but there may well be others.’

Brittany had produced many successful entrepreneurs; people who were dedicated to business but who also saw it as their responsibility to help their community – a proud tradition in Brittany. There were countless examples, such as Yves Rocher, who had created his first cream, based on the lesser celandine, in his parents’ attic. Or François Pinault, the billionaire art patron,

who had founded one of the world's largest fashion empires: Gucci, Yves Saint Laurent, Puma – all were now in Breton hands.

Dupin's curiosity was mounting. 'Does anyone know how deep the Chaboseaus' financial involvement in these projects is?'

Nevou shrugged her shoulders. 'I'll look into it.' She still had a somewhat sullen air. Dupin very much wished he could have ordered her a coffee: he was convinced that everyone's mood was improved by caffeine.

'Did he have any business partners? Regular business partners?'

'I'll look into it.'

'Ask Madame Chaboseau about it too – go into every last detail.'

'Understood.'

Dupin said nothing more, instead jotting down brief details in his notebook, and signalling to Ingrid – who was collecting payment from the customer at the other end of the terrace – that he wanted another coffee.

Nevou furrowed her brow. 'There are several million euros hanging on the walls of that flat. More than your ordinary, everyday hobby, I reckon. That might be of some interest to us as well.'

Dupin had already had a case once involving a valuable painting, a Gauguin. None of the Chaboseaus' paintings had been stolen, that was clear; but in the art world criminality could take all kinds of different forms. One possibility among many was that Chaboseau had been duped by a skilled forger and that this had led to a dramatic dénouement.

'Madame Chaboseau did tell us that she called at Galerie Gloux around midday today in connection with a painting.'

Although he wasn't quite sure what Nevou was driving at, he decided he would call by at the gallery. It would be a good idea in any case, as Françoise and Jean-Michel were well informed about Concarneau – the town itself, its people, the way things worked.

'We...'

'Monsieur le Commissaire!'

All of a sudden there was Rosa Le Menn, standing right in front of them.

'The pathologist has phoned. He wanted to speak to you in pers...'

'Well?'

'Large ante-mortem haematoma on the right shoulder, and one on the upper arm, both new, caused shortly before death. I quote: "morphologically speaking all the evidence points to a violent push". Dr Lafond said to tell you he's already willing to commit pretty firmly to that as his finding. even though he's only made a preliminary examination of the body so far.'

She broke off, looking at Dupin as if waiting for him to digest the news.

'That would suggest that he was indeed murdered', interjected Nevou – though she followed this up even so with 'I'm not so sure.'

Dupin shot up from his chair, strode to the other end of the terrace, then slowly walked back. There wasn't really anything surprising about this piece of news – but on the other hand it was now fact, not supposition. And his sense of extreme indignation had returned: during all the time he had lived in Brittany there

had never yet been a murder on his particular territory in Concarneau – on his home ground, so to speak.

‘Did Lafond say anything else?’ Nearing the table where Le Menn had meanwhile sat down next to Nevou, Dupin stopped right in front of them.

‘There was nothing of note except the haematomas. A heart attack or stroke can be ruled out, he said.’

‘Did he say anything about the time of death?’

‘Officially speaking it’s “between 3 and 4 pm”. And all the indications are that death was instantaneous. If you want further details about that, he’ll gladly explain it to you himself, he said.’

‘What does “officially speaking” mean?’

‘Lafond’s own personal view is that death occurred close to 4 o’clock.’

It was quite remarkable: in all his previous dealings with Dupin, Lafond had never been so communicative. The fact that he was divulging his ‘personal view’, and at such an early stage, might prove decidedly helpful to their enquiries.

‘But’, Le Menn added, ‘he also said – and I quote – “it’s a matter of interpretation”, and his official report will simply say “between 3 and 4 pm”.’

That would mean it had happened only a short time before Madame Chaboseau arrived back home.

‘Is that all?’

‘Yes.’

‘We absolutely must talk to the Chaboseaus’ maid’, said Nevou. She didn’t sound at all surly any more. ‘She only lives a few houses away.’

Dupin should have thought of this himself.

‘Yes, we absolutely must. Make that your number one job.’

‘And maybe Monsieur Chaboseau *did* in fact have an appointment with someone’, she added. ‘Let’s see what the telephone records tell us.’

‘Don’t hold your breath.’ Getting phone records was a tiresome business, and Dupin was under no illusions about the time scale.

One thing was certain: he needed Nolwenn. And Riwal. As quickly as possible. They’d be stunned once they knew: a murder on their own patch! What’s more, Nolwenn knew practically everyone in Concarneau; and not only the people themselves: she knew their stories too. It also occurred to Dupin that he should definitely ring his own doctor, grumpy old Dr Garreg: he’d doubtless be able to tell him a fair bit about Chaboseau.

Dupin turned to his underlings. ‘You two can divide the current jobs between you.’

He felt a sudden sense of unease. Grabbing the cup of coffee that Ingrid had put on the table while he had been roaming up and down, he drained it in a single gulp, then without a further word turned on his heel and strode off across the road and onto Place Jean Jaurès. He was already holding his mobile to his ear.

Nolwenn’s voicemail – again!

Dupin sighed the deepest of sighs. He hadn’t the faintest idea where she might be on her travels through the backwoods of Brittany. Riwal would probably know, or at least have a rough idea of her whereabouts, as Nolwenn had discussed the trip with him at exhaustive length. Dupin could then have tried to get hold of her via the local gendarmerie or the hostelrys on her route – mostly named after the women who ran them, he seemed to remember; but that was out of the question unless he could

manage to reach Riwal. One thing he'd taken due note of was that the two of them had discussed a forthcoming pig-roast somewhere or other, a traditional *Fête du Cochon* – the cheerful motto of which was '*De la tête à la queue je suis délicieux*' – 'I never fail to regale from head to tail'. Dupin opened the browser on his smartphone: perhaps he could track it down?

More than a dozen such events were listed. He checked through the names of some of the venues, but didn't recognise any of them. This was getting him nowhere. Even though he had briefly contemplated doing so, he really could't roust out a whole army of gendarmes to go looking for Nolwenn and her husband in all the hostelrys of inland Brittany.

He'd give Riwal another try.

Voicemail yet again.

He gave up. He'd already left enough messages. He just hoped that at some point Riwal would turn on the radio or TV in his remote hideaway on Belle-Ile and by that means discover what had happened.

'What a bloody nuisance!'

Dupin now found himself standing by the steps of the magnificent nineteenth-century market hall, the town's grand palace of culinary delights.

His next phone call was no more successful than the others. 'Dr Claire Lannoy here. Please leave a message.' Claire ought really to have left the hospital by now and be on her way home.

The beep sounded on cue. 'Hi Claire. It's me. I...' Dupin paused. It wouldn't be a good idea to leave a message: there was too much to say, and each separate bit of it needed quite a lot of explanation – but it was too late now. 'Claire, we've got a murder on our hands – right here in Concarneau.' He tried to put

some drama into his voice. ‘Dr Chaboseau. A fall from the fourth floor. They live above L’ Amiral. We’re just starting on our enquiries.’ That was topic number one; now for the next one – which would likewise be news to her. ‘Your parents are arriving this evening. They’ve cancelled their stopover. They’re aiming to get here around nine.’ It suddenly occurred to him that the smoked fish was still in his car. ‘Please give them my apologies. And you know how it goes: looks as if we’ll be tied up here for the next few days. Tell them I’m really sorry.’ He paused for a moment. ‘I have to go, Claire. See you later.’

Dupin decided to make his way straight to the art gallery, but not before making a quick call to Dr Garreg.

He pressed the phone to his ear. It went straight onto voicemail.

‘Damn!’ He was jinxed! It was the fourth failed call in a row. He gave up. Then he suddenly remembered. When he’d gone for a check-up a few weeks previously Garreg had volunteered the information himself: he was visiting his daughter in Canada, she lived with her husband and children somewhere between Quebec City and Montreal, and they were going to go hiking together along the St. Lawrence River. For two weeks. The practice was closed.

Out of the corner of his eye Dupin noticed a small white Citroën van coming round the corner. It was Paul Girard, returning from his visit to the oyster farm. He had a parking place in the same courtyard as Dr Chaboseau. As Dupin approached he was just getting out. His sparse grey hair had an unusually bright sheen.

‘Hi.’

Paul was standing at the rear of his van. Dr Chaboseau had crashed to the ground only just across the street, a little further along. The gate to the yard had been closed off with multiple strips of police barrier tape.

Dupin normally relished the fact that Paul was the taciturn sort, but right now he was hoping for a rather fuller conversation.

‘So what d’you reckon about Chaboseau?’

Paul shrugged his shoulders. ‘Tragic business. Strange, too.’

‘How well did you know him?’

‘We said hello to each other, that’s all. – I wasn’t important enough.’

Paul’s expression spoke volumes.

‘You never talked to each other at any great length?’

‘Not really, no.’

‘Were the Chaboseaus already living here when you took over the restaurant?’

‘Yes.’

Paul had owned the restaurant for almost twenty years. Like almost all restaurateurs he had the extraordinary gift of getting on well with almost everyone – which is not to say that he regarded everyone as a friend.

‘I don’t belong to their world.’

‘Do you know of any confrontations or quarrels?’

‘He’s friends with Brecan Priziac, the drugstore man, and Jodoc Luzel, the wine merchant. They visit the restaurant pretty

regularly, mostly in the evening. At lunchtime they're occasionally in the brasserie. Chaboseau and his wife, too.'

That hadn't answered his question, but Dupin wrote the two acquaintances' names down all the same. He recalled having come across them at one time or another. Like Chaboseau, they enjoyed considerable prestige in the town, but Dupin didn't know much else about them. He was aware that Priziac was a widower, and an aristocrat. He belonged to one of the rich and powerful dynasties of the region. Over a period of several generations his family had built up an entire empire of drugstores. Old money, then. Luzel was a different matter altogether. A dyed in the wool bachelor in his early fifties, he had started ten years ago building up an ambitious wine-selling business, first of all in Brittany, then throughout the whole of western France. He had clearly been extremely successful. Only last year he had opened a large new shop near one of the major road junctions just above the town. With his outrageous price cuts he posed a serious threat to Dupin's favourite wine shops, Cave Moros and La Petite Cave.

'Are they in business together?'

Paul nodded. 'So I believe. But I don't know the details. I don't know of any rows, either.'

'Ok.'

Paul opened the rear door of the Citroën to reveal the ravishing spectacle of a dozen or so blue boxes full to the brim with oysters, crabs and mussels - not to mention clams, Dupin's favourite mollusc. His stomach rumbled noisily at the very sight of them. Only part of these delights would end up in the restaurant - the rest would be sold in Paul's new fish shop, La Roche, in Place Général de Gaulle, just a short distance away. It was a piscatorial paradise, offering every delicacy the sea could offer. Paul had taken it over from Gisèle, the woman who had

run it for decades, and he had also inherited her legendary recipes, not least her recipe for *Coquilles St. Jacques à la Concarnoise*, cooked using muscadet and plenty of butter, along with shallots, fennel seeds, parsley and sea salt. Concarneau's citizens had been greatly relieved to know that Gisèle's recipes had been saved for posterity.

Paul began busying himself with the boxes.

'I think Chaboseau kept his business dealings to himself – just like his friends', Paul suddenly volunteered, in a strikingly sombre tone of voice. 'How can I put it? They're the mafia – but not the good sort.'

Dupin knew exactly what Paul was alluding to. It had been the top story in the papers for days. There had been a headline-grabbing incident during a visit to the Pope by the French President and the Foreign Minister. The minister, a Breton, had encountered an old friend in the Vatican, a priest, also from Brittany, whom he had been to school with in Pontivy. So here they were, two old friends, greeting one another with great delight. Rashly, the President responded by exclaiming '*Bretons partout!*' – 'The Bretons are everywhere!' Taken on its own his response was harmless, indeed it encapsulated the dream of all Bretons; but then, turning to the Pope, the President had added, '*Les Bretons, c'est la mafia française*' – 'The Bretons are France's mafia'. A storm of outrage had immediately ensued, fired not least by the Bretons' injured pride. The quick-thinking Foreign Minister had saved the situation with a remark worthy of Solomon, and balm to a Breton's heart: '*La mafia bretonne, c'est la mafia du bien!*' – 'The Breton mafia is the good kind of mafia!', or better: 'the kind that does good'. And that was precisely the kind that Paul didn't mean.

'Are you referring to anything specific?'

‘No.’

‘You mean it just in general terms?’

‘Exactly.’

‘But with respect to these particular three individuals?’

‘Yes.’

And for the time being that was quite enough for Dupin.

[END OF SAMPLE]