



THE
Catacombs'

Extravagant Sculptor

by E.G. Montaigne

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THE CATACOMBS

UNEDITED MANUSCRIPT

A Professor's Enigma No3

THE CATACOMBS
A Disappearance. An Enquiry.
A Dive into the Sea of Crime.

E.G. MONTAIGU

unedited manuscript

À Paris la ville!
Un diamant qui brille dans un désert
de sable sans importance.

PREFACE

A word on the followings:

This book is based around the late 19th century Paris, during the Belle Epoque, which was an era of peace and of industrial development. The Catacombs is mostly based in the city of Paris, around Montmartre – which was then still a provincial *quartier* incorporated into the city, quite cheap and therefore home of many artists. Likewise for Montparnasse, though its golden era of being the home of artists, painters, sculptors, poets, writers and the whole bunch, came later in the 1930s.

The Catacombs, as you might have guessed from the title, is also a book which partially happens in those underground tunnels in the Rive Gauche – the leftbank of Paris, filled with skeletons dumped there by people in the 18th century – for there was no place for them in the cemeteries above. And so they dumped the bodies in those tunnels that had been dug to extract stone material, and it created a fabulous, yet dark labyrinth where one could easily lose oneself, and if not rescued by the modern Cataflic – literally meaning the Catacombs-policeman – one might have deadly consequences which I do not want to specify.

And such was Paris, just before the Exposition Universelles, the Universal Exposition, which housed the Eiffel Tower, now a landmark symbolizing not only all of Paris but all of France, and some people would say even the whole Francophone Sphere. I say no more, for you are probably tired of my endless, idle talks of no importance and somewhat off topic to the book, though as you advance you will see that the Catacombs, Montmartre, Montparnasse and the Exposition Universelles will pop up at some point or another.

Here forth Professor Eilfort appears again, the eccentric gentleman talented with the art of investigation as well as spectacular knowledge of butterflies – not to forget Peter Pratfield, his fellow assistant.

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PART I:

CHAPTER I

A Letter from Montmartre

“Do pass me the choucroute, Pratfield.” the Professor asked – we were eating lunch, hence the request.

“Right-ho.” I said.

“You know Pratfield,” as the Professor served himself some of the choucroute, “it tastes absolutely wonderful with the jambonneau – ham, is it?” asked Professor Eilfort, the eccentric gentleman of Paris, more known in the Parisian Criminal World as – that devil of a thief-catcher.

“It sure is a faithful sidekick to the *jambonneau*, though with a *poulet rôti* it can add more zest to it. It does not surprise me now why that is the reason it is the national dish of Alsace – the *rôtisserie* of the roasted chicken, the potatoes, the choucroute garnie and the rest – !” I passed the choucroute to the Professor, mindful not to spill anything.

He agreed with me, and took some of the choucroute. Having done so, he served himself some *champignon*, which I thought were much better than the mushrooms in Exeter – I come from Devonshire you know – because the French mushrooms are not only better, but what rendered it so good was that red and orange, zestful sauce that accompanied it, not to forget the various spices sprinkled on it to add an extra flavouring to it.

We were, as you no doubt would have now guessed, eating lunch at 25 Rue de Bellechasse, the Professor's residence – I was his assistant rather acting like a personal secretary yet at the same time his fellow companion in many adventures that fell on top of his head. I was in a semi-internship in a sense, for the Professor did not view me as some employee or anything of the kind. No – more of a close acquaintance, a fellow of a friend.

He was *de jure* a Professor in every aspect – giving lectures, studying botanics at the Jardin des Plantes in Paris, as well as the various species of butterflies – yet he was also, apart from being one of the most fashionable Parisian gentlemen, a great connoisseur in art and an amateur sommelier in wine, *de facto* a criminal-catcher.

For he was a man renowned in the criminal and police sphere as L'Homme – the fact that certain criminals bestowed the nickname of The Man is by no means any coincidence, for his presence overshadowed the illegal happenings when he was there, investigating.

Apart from those reputations he followed, Professor Eilfort had a calm, composed face which comprised of a very dignified, Bourbon nose; eyes which when looked into showed a deep, philosophical meaning portraying great wisdom; some brown, curly hair in a great wave, brown sideburns and a remarkable moustache which flicked up at each end, yet not over exaggerated to make it look grotesque.

All in all, he was a man of great knowledge, informed, dignified and the only thing which I have forgotten to say was that he carried a monocle on his right eye and sported a top hat.

“Some Beaujolais, Pratfield?” asked the Professor.

“Of course – my favourite.” I answered, and my glass was filled with that exquisite substance going by the name of red wine.

I did not take a gulp of it at once, for I barely gulped wine like some berserk man – but stared at it with one eye as I balanced the liquid in the glass, and then put it down, for I wanted to savour the thing.

I served myself some choucroute, the french equivalent of sauerkraut. I proceeded in taking some small, brown *champignons* served with a zesty sauce of bright red in colour



CHARACTERS

- The Head-Honcho** A man whose past is still unknown – mystic, dark, and only seen in rare glimpses. A man whose great genius, his incredible intellectuality has been applied to buying Indonesian cigarettes, smoking them with a thoughtful air, collecting morrocan carpets, and being the chef of his gang of gangsters.
- Mr Jackson-Potter** Another acquaintance of Eilfort, he works for the Institut Français. An American whose main hobbies include gulping down whiskey and sodas, shooting with his revolver, and speaking in a booming voice with a strong accent, who helps the Professor with the case.
- Charlotte Rodevine** An acquaintance of Professor Eilfort. She works for the Eilfort & Co, and has helped him in several cases so far.
- Louis Carmotaque** Part of the inner circle of the Head-Honcho. Though still a fashionable, respectable-looking fellow, he is a gangster by profession.
- Tai Baishu** A spy working for the Head Honcho who has been hired to track down Eilfort and Pratfield with the order of assassination, to leave no traces behind.
- Paul Sipplare** A French poet who has lived in Algeria, quite tanned, who is in every aspect a typical Parisian, grumbling, coughing, smoking innumerable cigarettes, with a scarf wrapped around his neck. He has been a witness in the case.
- Thomas Halphobbe** A gangster for the Head Honcho. The only trace he leaves is always his famous cigarettes. Supposed to be a Belgian.
- Dr Delcharreau** Formerly Inspector Delcharreau of the Nancy Police Force, having received the title when he had been studying. He is an acquaintance of the Professor, a great friend of Charlotte, and helps him in numerous cases.

CHARACTERS

- Professor Eilfort** Professor Eilfort is one of the most eccentric dandies of the Parisian society, renowned for his works at Le Jardin des Plantes, and for being one of the most successful amateur sleuths of the French capital.
- Peter Pratfield** Peter Pratfield is an Englishman from Exeter, Devonshire, fellow assistant of Professor Eilfort, a former boxman and faithful sidekick of the Professor, following and aiding him in numerous cases.
- Inspector Beltron** Works not only for the Official Police Force of Paris, but is also a great acquaintance of the Professor, and for many a-times he has worked with him on several problems, some resolved, others left mysteries.
- Henri Leblanc** A sculptor living high up in Montmartre, whose works have not given him much wealth, which has forced him to have other means of acquiring materials for his sculptures, dangerous ones, for they led to his disappearance.
- Antoine Geralde** Official police inspector summoned to Montmartre following the disappearance of the sculptor Henri Leblanc. He summons Professor Eilfort and Pratfield to help him with the case.
- Inspector Prudaloi** Inspector Prudaloi is an official police inspector, an acquaintance of Beltron and the Professor, sometimes when coincidences seem to be jumping out of every nook, he comes and collaborates with the Professor and Pratfield.
- Alain Duffarre** Alain Duffarre works for Eilfort & Co. A sleuth by profession, he is like a hound ready to be released to pursue and track down criminals.
- Jerome Paderroe** A Frenchman, whose main job is to clean the sewers. He has been a witness in the case.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Paul Ostroverhy is an aspiring artist writing under his nom de plume E.G. Montaigu. He has spent time living in Moscow, Paris, and the French Riviera. His travels, as well as his encounters with many unique artists – from Hungarian jazz composers to young Russian cinematographers – have inspired his profound appreciation of the arts, including black and white cinema, cubist paintings, and neo-classical architecture. His own novels pay homage to the works of Arthur Conan Doyle, Oscar Wilde, and F. Scott Fitzgerald. Paul is an ardent defender of classicism, having a strong interest in the tales of Ancient Greece and listening to classical Russian composers including Serge Rachmaninoff & Dmitri Shostakovich. Paul currently lives in London.



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THE CATACOMBS

by E.G. Montaigu

Paris, 1889.

Professor Eilfort, renown thief-catcher, and his fellow assistant Peter Pratfield are plunged once more into a criminal case – the disappearance of an eccentric sculptor of Montmartre. They are playing a dangerous game, as they soon plummet down into a world of criminals, with the devil on their trail! The storm is on its ways, and thunder and lightning is to be expected!



