

A Professor's mystery

# The Diamond of the Chess player



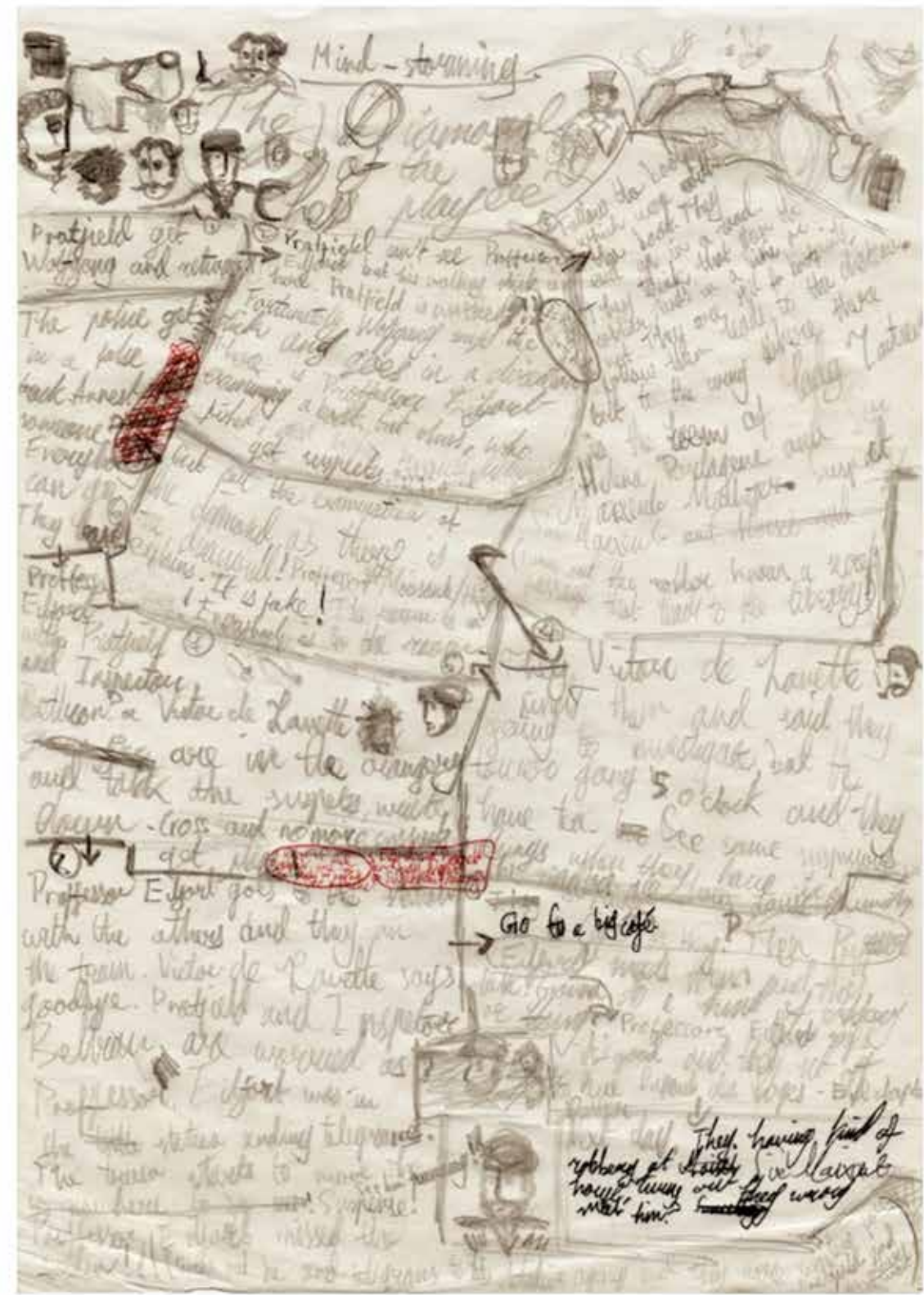
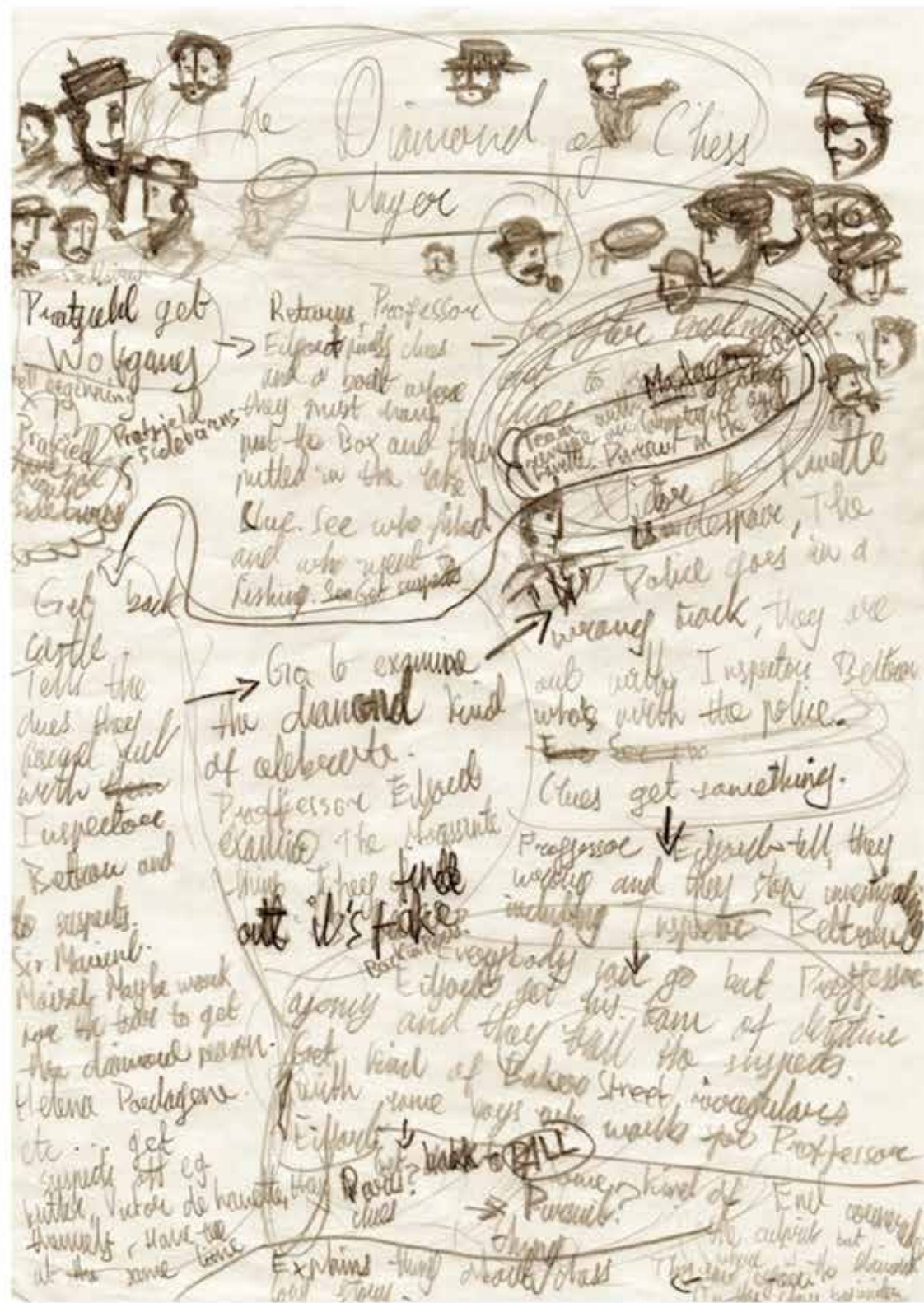
1888

E.G. Montaigu

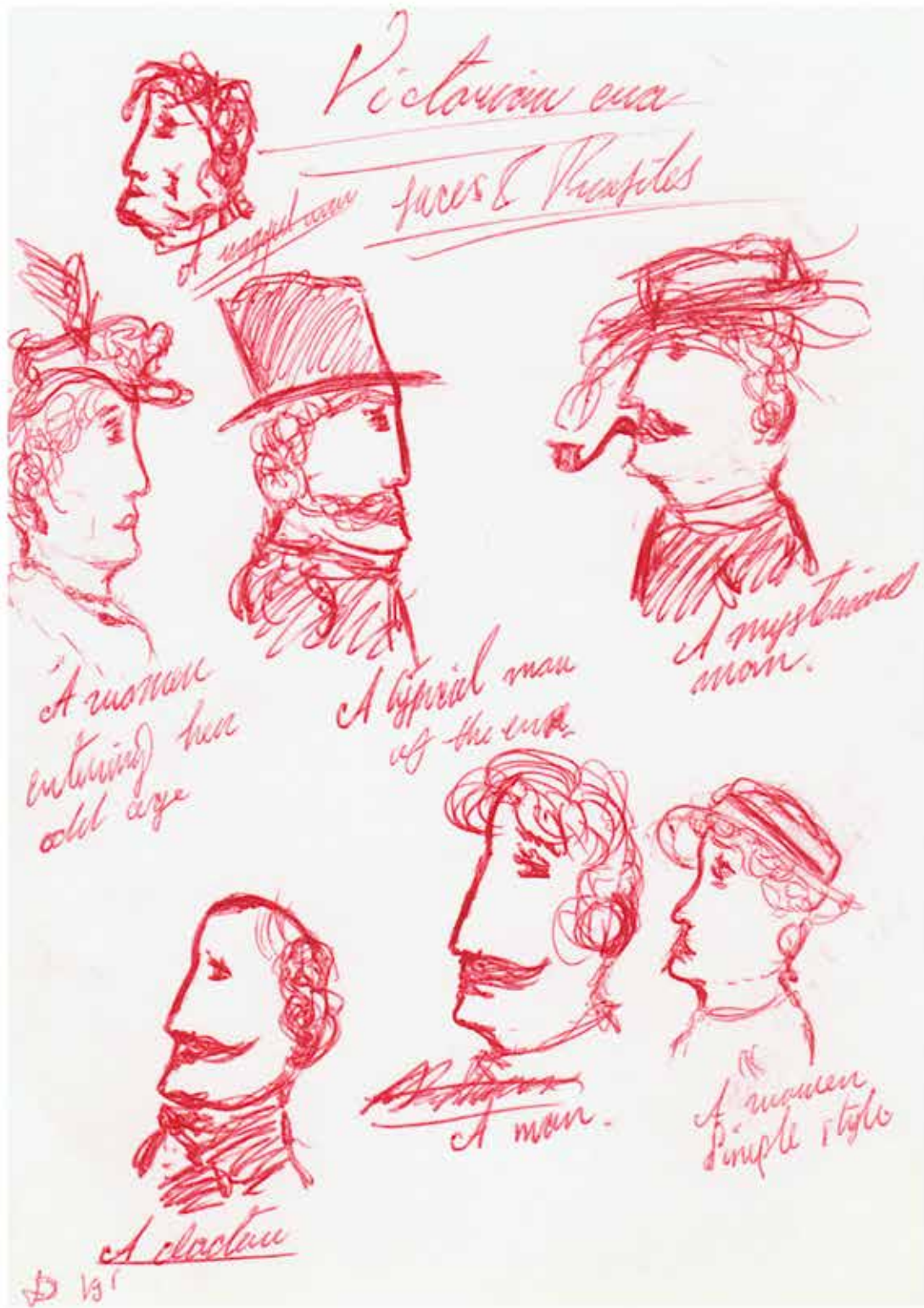
**The Diamond of the Chess Player**

OSTRO VERHY









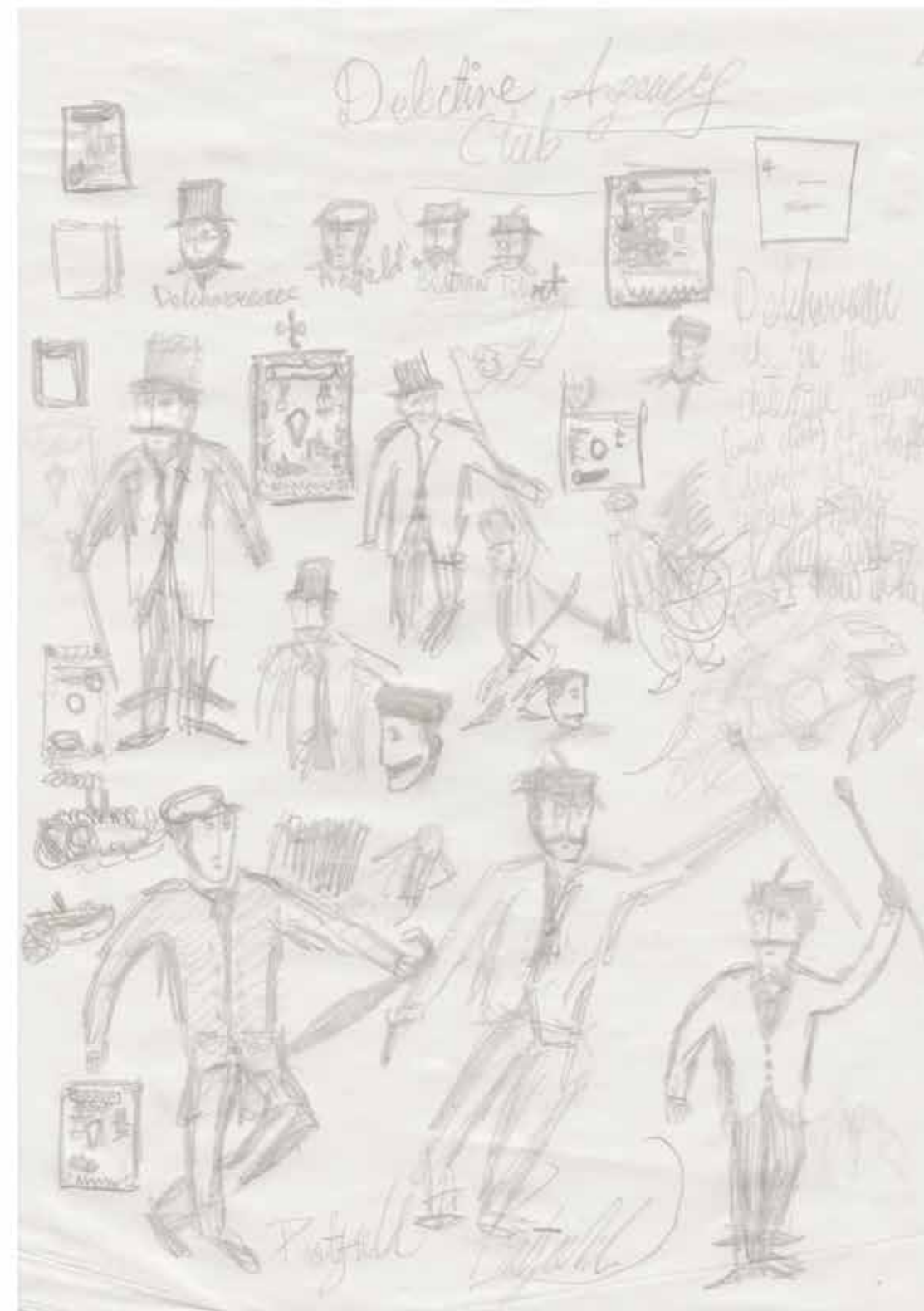
**Flâneur de la Nuit**

*Wandering amongst the fallen blossoms of autumn,  
Here I went thither, seeking I know not;  
Ho! Through rickety paths, and cobblestone alleys,  
I went hither, passed tiny yards and twisted streets.*

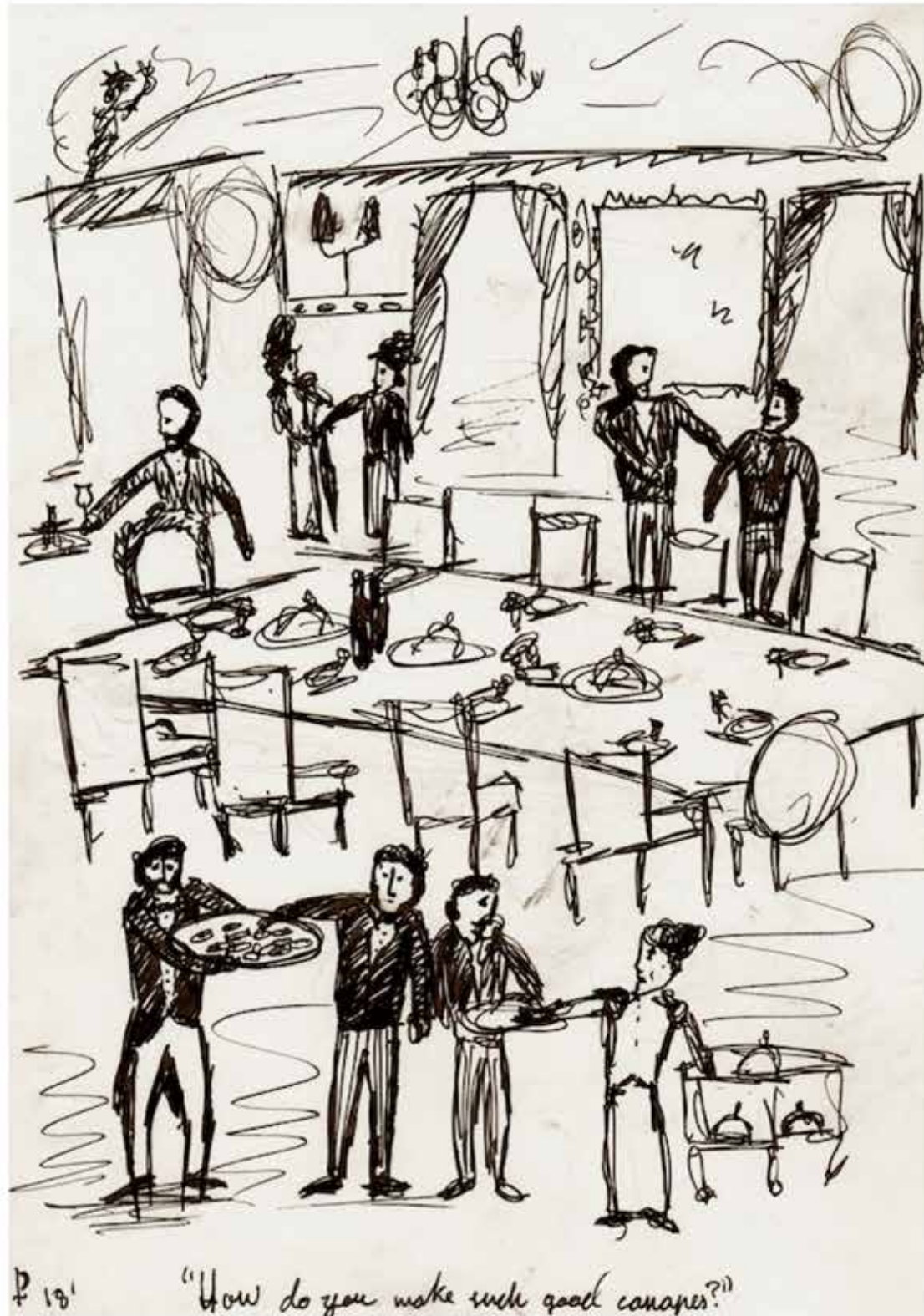
*Musing on great mysticalities, in a trance of deep naïvety,  
There a lamp twinkled of brooding orange I saw;  
Aye, enraptured was I in my own thoughtful reveries,  
Feeling the charms of nightly Paris, mystic Paris.*

*The waters and fogs I saw, the autumn warmness I felt,  
And with that mighty freshness now begone – I walked  
Onwards, past bridges, lamps and crooked alleys,  
Hearing Notre Dame's chime resound throughout the night.*

*Pavel Sergeievich*







A Professor's Enigma

# THE DIAMOND OF THE CHESS PLAYER

*A Nobleman's Diamond – thirsty for attention...*

E.G. MONTAIGU

To Luke Bradford,  
 For being the best editor I ever had,  
 And for helping make this book what it is,  
 I don't know what I would have done without you,  
 Thank you very much, indeed!

## INTRODUCTION

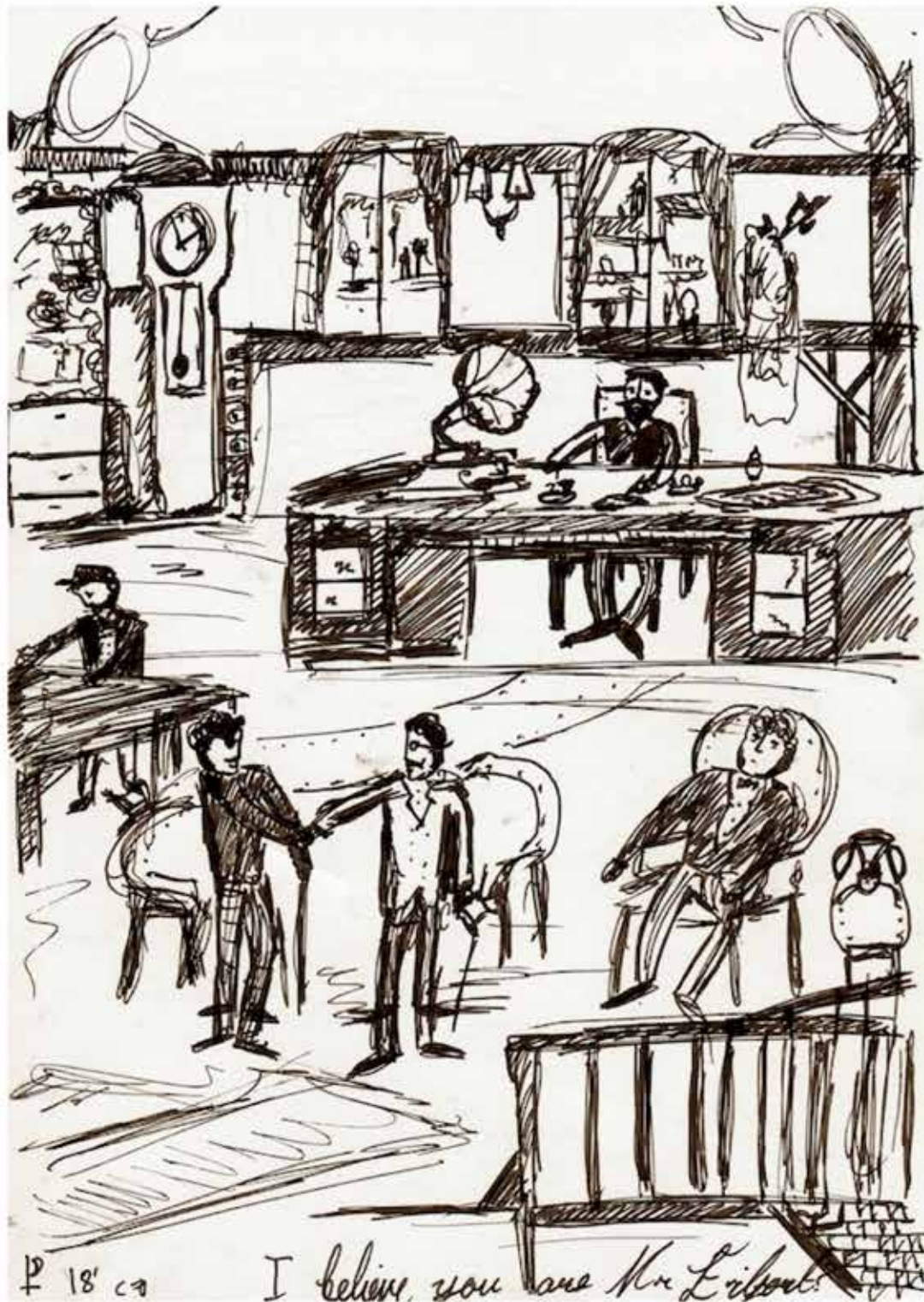
Professor Eilfort of number 25 rue de Bellechasse is an elegant dandy and one of the most significant persons in the botanical garden of Le Jardin des Plantes, Paris. He is a Professor, studying botany, with interest in a variety of other domains including, astronomy, physics, chemistry and of course anthroposophy. He is also a private detective, and has his own agency *Eilfort & Co*, consisting of over twenty agents, including of course his valet and assistant Peter Pratfield and Inspector Beltron.

This story is set in fin-de-siècle Paris, depicting the life of the aforementioned Professor Eilfort. It also tells the life of the city of lights at the time, and describes the horses, carriages, first electric lamps, clothing and of course, the upper classes displayed by Peter Pratfield, an Englishman in France, who does however also speak French fluently.

The main character lived in the year 1888, when the colonisation of Africa and the French Empire started to transition into the age of its glory. This book also takes place when an embarrassed Paris – them having lost Alsace-Lorraine during the Franco-Prussian war of 1871 – became impatient for the already famous tower to be finished for the Universal Exposition, because it would restore pride and show that their patriotic country was equal to the other European powers of the time. The engineer Gustave Eiffel was to name it after himself, and as such it became known as the Eiffel Tower. During this time, the capital of France was becoming popular with its famous shops, department stores and the latest Parisian fashions known all around the globe.

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*"I believe that you are Monsieur Eilfort," said the stranger.*



## PART I:

### The Tragedy of the Lavettes

#### CHAPTER 1

#### News in the Gendarmerie

It was the end of autumn in the year 1888, and a month and a half had elapsed since I joined the distinguished dandy who lived in the 7th arrondissement of Paris. I was the valet of Professor Eilfort, although I could also be considered as an assistant in – well, crime.

His homeland was Normandy, Northern France. Being an aristocrat, he owned a manor there that he had inherited a couple of years ago. It was located in the region where the best apple cider could be found. He himself owned quite a bit of farmland, and its produce of cider made large profits which was put to good use on some unfathomable scientific experiment or other.

But, the man, as I will refer to him for this introduction, was a person who had a diverse liking in most matters the earth presented. For instance, he was not a person to be found cocooned in his laboratory, accidentally blowing up the blasted Georgian rug that had been gifted by his great-aunt – I hate the very thought of such an unchivalrous act. But, he did not just create explosions during chemical experiments, as in some days, he could be found lounging around various Parisian galleries, his rare moments of free time spent seeing art. This passion of his could be reduced entirely to paintings, as he was, to my greatest surprise, a connoisseur of the late Renaissance era, having a particular liking for Caravaggio's art – always mentioning the time when the artist had slept with a sword that rested under his pillow.

His appearance, if I might state, was of a taste rather fashionable at the time – he had a half-the-usual-size top hat, with a white feather stuck in its side, the effect produced an eccentric figure that always made passersby stare. As for his flat cap that he used to wear, he shamefully admitted – after my protestations to know the truth – that he had burnt it during the night, his excuse being that it was unsuitable for him and that he only used the flat cap to enable him to roam through the low, filthy streets that Paris tried so desperately to hide its criminals in.

His clothing was made by the best couturier of Paris at the time, with his usual uniform



being a morning dress. Grey striped flannel trousers, the usual garment – a shirt that was changed daily; a bright, canary-coloured waistcoat, with its gleaming pocket watch to be seen dangling, restlessly trying to catch the master's attention for him to look at the time; a morning coat, black in colour; and of course an unforgettable pair of Oxford shoes that were regularly polished to make them gleam like a pair of oysters.

In addition to his spotless morning dress, he also wore a monocle on his right eye, because it was damaged permanently after a fight he had trying to recover some important military documents that were crucial for the French government. He had an extremely extravagant walking stick made from his homeland, the handle of which was to be described as the head of an African lion, with its mouth encrusted in a roar. Of course, nobody suspected that a sabre of fine quality was hidden inside the stick.

The facial make-up of the Professor, was one that had the stern and philosophical look that told you he wasn't just any man that you would happen to know at the public house down the road. His face sported brown sideburns, curly hair swept to one side, a remarkably straight nose and a medium-sized mouth.

The house in which Professor Eilfort resided in, was one of those large, luxurious ones to be found in the *quartiers des bon chic bon genre*. He had moved residence a short while ago, as he found new lodgings in a more strategic location. His new address was 25 Rue de Bellechasse, with Gare d'Orsay to the north and to the east, the district of Saint-Germain-des-Prés.

It consisted of four floors, including the Mansard roof, which was the Staffs' quarters, and also where my own bedroom was to be found, and indeed the housekeeper's too, that is to say Madame Delacroix, as well as the butler's – Charles Roqeloire – and another two housemaids, one of them being Helene Eloinierre, who was very good at maintaining the house.

The ground floor consisted of the entrance hall and the grand staircase that led upstairs, the kitchen, pantry, stables (the courtyard of which was shared with the neighbor's building) a scullery connecting to the kitchen and an *atelier*, for the Professor's experiments and works. The back garden was of a small size and if exaggerated one might even say minuscule, but nonetheless, to my disbelief, it held a Japanese pond, an overflowing amount of botanical wonders, a veranda and an orangery. All in the space of what one could call a large bedroom.

The first and second floor was the Professor's apartment, which hosted the dining room, drawing room, and the library, which was mine and the Professor's favourite place, especially in winter, when the wind was shrieking outside without mercy and the fire crackled inside as we sipped from good *tisane* to drink. Not only that, there were the best divans in the neighborhood and the armchairs were so comfortable one could fall asleep after barely resting their head on it.

The second floor was occupied by bedrooms – the Master's bedroom, an adjoining study and en-suite and of course two guestrooms, with en-suites too.

France was to me – after some deep reflection – a great move that I had made, as it had altered my life forever, not least due to being the assistant of Professor Eilfort, a man who was, as has been described, quite eccentric.

\* \* \*

Autumn arrived and October had begun. Paris was gleaming with its electrical lights as the churches gonged eight o'clock in the morning. The capital was stunning with all the bustler-bastler going on.

The main road was filled with the sound of the car's roaring engines; in particular taxis could be seen everywhere, waiting for passengers to hop in. The Parisian crowd were all walking together on the pavement, and when I say everybody, I mean everybody.

Bourgeois, strolling gracefully as if they had all the time in the world; Bakers, delivering the daily bread as the air was filled with the smell of attractive croissants and pain au chocolats; waiters from the café busily handing out highly-demanded coffee from the French; constables, on the lookout for any pickpockets; newspaper boys, shouting in shrill pitch about the latest news and running into the kiosk every so often to obtain more stock; workers, cleaning the houses and rebuilding them; chimney sweeps, who had come down from the chimney for a cigarette break; and finally, nurses, taking the children to the park to play.

In this tumultuous city bazaar, in a street nearby the boulevard, there was I – Peter Pratfield – sitting in the office belonging to Inspector Beltron, with the Professor. We were acquaintances and on this particular afternoon we had decided to 'pop' in for a visit to the Police station – as that was where we were, because the Inspector worked for the Gendarmerie, as well as the secret police; which was in a way the French 'Scotland Yard'.

Inspector Beltron was a man in his – what I would presume – early forties. He had a brown beard, quite sharp at the end and a moustache, which reminded me of the Crown Prince Nicholas' beard. From his mouth, there hung a smoking pipe, which I had never seen leave his lips. His hair was slicked back, nothing unusual, which when outside, hosted a trilby hat. He wore grey flannel trousers and a long overcoat that was rather smudged and dirty in appearance with stains all over gruesome thing. I, as a valet, despised the Inspector's choice of neglecting his clothes; his only excuse was to say that it was better that way for undercover duty as he could be less noticed when in public! Tcha! Utter gibberish!

What's more, Inspector Beltron's office was always in a mess, but the cosy fire, that was always illuminated when the weather outside was having one of its tempers, made up for it. It was small, but had a busy table and bureau, with a fire, and three squishy and restful armchairs just perfect after riding in a hansom through the cold boulevards of Paris. Talking of the seating, I must admit that the Professor and I sat in the armchairs closest to the fire, whilst Inspector Beltron sat behind his working bureau and as we spoke comfortably with Inspector Beltron in his office, I saw outside a drop or two of rain.

"Nothing interesting lately, Beltron?" asked Professor Eilfort. Taking a sip of *Eilfort-Elderflower* – his own personal drink he kept in his flask; ingredients being elderflower juice, tonic water, cold tea, a dash of ginger shot in it, and many more. He scuffled with a leaf that was stuck on his scarf, whilst Beltron replied.

"I'm afraid not, the most interesting was an accident involving two vehicles which were overtaking at the time." said Beltron, who was getting amused with the leaf problem.

"Well I do, in fact this morning someone telegraphed me saying that there was a most interesting affair waiting for us which involves examining some diamond or other."

"You are an absolute esteemed chap, to have the honour of being summoned to examine some valuable diamonds." Murmured the Inspector. The Professor seemed pleased, and chuckled at the remark. He continued with his talk.

"Yes, I studied geology and diamonds extensively a few years ago. That is the answer to your questioning thoughts. Anyhow, as I was saying, I am aware that the client is to meet here at the Gendarmerie, me telling him that I would be at this place. The client, should be here", at this moment, he extracted his pocket watch, and opened it, "in no less than a quarter of an hour," he said this with a Buddhist-like voice.

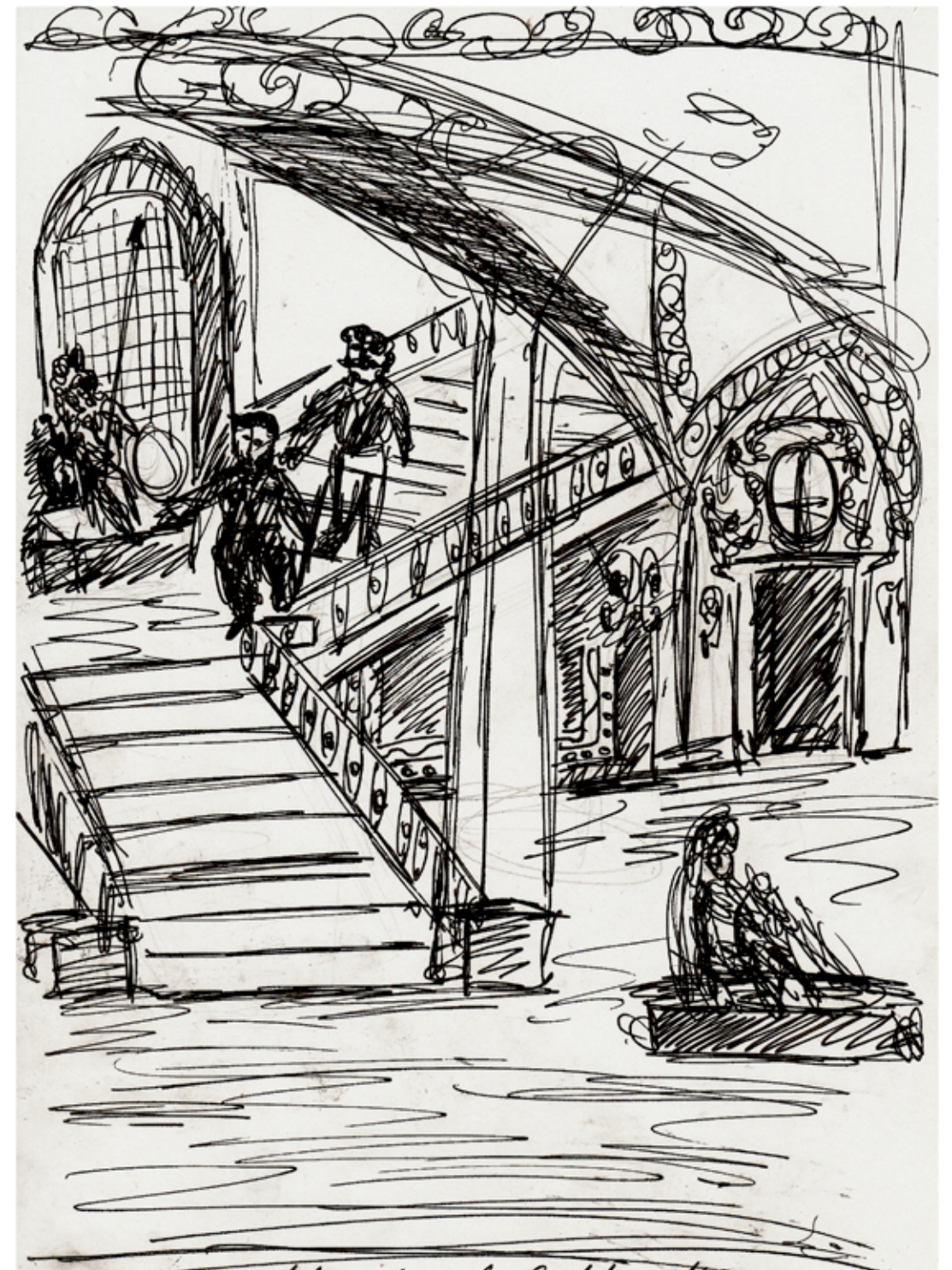
But, this calmness of his was broken, as he was still struggling with the same leaf that seemed glued to his scarf for some reason or other that I couldn't explain.

"It would please me greatly if I could be part of the affair! Even though there's no crime or anything in it, but still." exclaimed Inspector Beltron, as he jumped up from his chair. He hadn't anything interesting to investigate lately and he had been seen lounging around doing absolutely nothing, only to stare into space, as time went by.





18<sup>1</sup> 77 there was rented the name of the boat. "Le chanceux."



19<sup>1</sup> "What a beautiful statue this is."



"Of course you can, old chap," replied Professor Eilfort, who was getting agitated because he *again* tried to remove the leaf from his scarf. He was now quite annoyed at this interruption, as he didn't like his clothing to be imperfect in any way. He was a perfect dandy – him troubling over some tiny leaf instead of the appointment he was to have!

"This ruddy thing!" He muttered angrily. Inspector Beltron was about to burst into laughter.

"I am afraid, Beltron, that this unfortunate leaf is stuck to my scarf. There is nothing to laugh at, this scarf is made by the finest maître caoutchoutier in Paris, and I do *not* want it to be damaged by a silly little thing. *Nom d'une pipe!*"

I was wondering what this affair could be about. The only thing that the Professor had said was that it regarded an inheritance of a large sum of money, but the idea of a stranger linked to this case coming into the office in less than ten minutes was news to me.

After some time, a fellow came in walking right up to Professor Eilfort, without a single glance towards us. He seemed to be in a great hurry, but nonetheless had a straight and calm face. His demeanor was of a physical nature and he stood with an upright posture. He had exchanged a few words with the secretary and now stood face to face with Professor Eilfort. He put his cloak and hat on one of the free seats and began to speak.

"I believe that you are Monsieur Eilfort," said the stranger.

"I am indeed," replied Professor Eilfort, shaking the hand of the unknown man.

Professor Eilfort then turned to us with a smile on the back of his impeccable moustache – a feature of his that was very much cared for.

"I present you Mr Victor de Lavette who – as an excellent raconteur – will tell us his story. This, Mr de Lavette, is my valet, Peter Pratfield, and this is Inspector Beltron, a trusted friend and working for the official police force." We shook hands. For the first time, I now could closely examine this Mr de Lavette –

He was a handsome gentleman in his thirties, sported a short moustache and round glasses; his long brown hair was styled very fashionably, wild curling hair with a centre parting and wax. His clothes were clean, elegant and black in colour, except from his crisp white gloves and scarf. He had a dark grey waistcoat; with a pocket watch chain disappearing into a pocket. He had a bow tie, a black velvet frock cloak, with light grey trousers. His hat was a top hat which was exactly in the right position. He had an energetic face with green eyes that gleamed. Victor de Lavette was a man who was always in fashion.

"I am on important business as you will have read in my telegraphs Monsieur Eilfort. I have come about a will written by the famous chess player Nicolas de Lavette, my uncle. I am myself the last of the Lavettes, in fact. He passed away three days ago due to illness," said Monsieur de Lavette.

He stopped and looked at us.

"Can I speak freely in front of your compatriots here, Monsieur Eilfort?"

"Yes, you can. They have my complete confidence. Please do recount your telegraph so they may better understand the case, Monsieur."

"As you know, I telegraphed the Professor this morning; as I am the last of the Lavettes, I have in my possession the will of Mr Nicolas de Lavette, the famous chess player. He had a castle in Chartres. I myself live in Geneva, but have inherited this large mansion, as well as his fortune. One of his greatest belongings is a certain diamond from Madagascar. However, yesterday morning I telegraphed asking the Professor to evaluate the diamond. We have made an appointment for today in approximately five hours time, and I would very much appreciate your company, Mr Pratfield, and Mr Beltron. But we should be leaving in about a quarter of an hour, if we want to catch the earliest train to Chartres."

"I will certainly come if the Professor wants me to," I said.

"I will come with the Professor and Pratfield too. This Lavette affair could be worth

something," added Inspector Beltron.

"Then we should go at once. Let us order a cab to Gare Saint-Lazare, the train to Chartres will be leaving in half an hour."

We came out and found ourselves in the street. There was a slight breeze and we covered our faces against it, and a moment later hopped inside a taxi for refuge, the destination being –

"Cabman, to Gare Saint-Lazare and at once."

We arrived smoothly at the train station without any traffic on our way to disrupt the journey.

The building was just fascinating, and I envied Paris for having such beautiful architecture. I noticed that there were people everywhere, bustling hither and thither, going on with their daily business. There were a couple of newsboys, trying to sell their papers by shouting frantically the latest *événement* to be read in *Le Petit Journal*, until the people were so frustrated that they bought it just so that they would stop shouting and jabbing them with their fingers.

Outside St-Lazare, the place was filled with cabs that were practically – and physically – everywhere. Shouts were heard from the cab-men but not only that, the traffic outside the station was so terrific that everything was completely jammed together, with omnibuses running on their lines. In this total chaos, a woman was pushed vigorously and accidentally by the people inside the omnibus, because there were so many of them. The omnibus was stopped and some gentlemen argued, and it became even more chaotic. One of them assured the lady that this scandalous act made by the passengers of the omnibus would not happen again, and she thanked the man for his efforts, as she grumbled and put her hat back on her head.

This scene had so many elements of abstraction, that it was worth painting. I could almost see the artist swishing his brush to make a dramatic effect with the paint scattered all around. The liveliness of this all would make it not only interesting, but as if you were sharing the chaos itself. The grotesque and picturesque (although not described as a beautiful scene, but for its intensity and creativity) panorama was just perfect for the eye of an artist...

When we got to the doors of the station, a draught carried the delicious smell of bread and wafted through the air, followed by the succulent aroma of *viennoiserie* and *pâtisserie*. A little dog was barking furiously at some pigeons, which made Professor Eilfort shudder – he gave a terrified look at the pigeons, and so we quickly hurried inside the station.

I had never asked the Professor, Professor Eilfort, why he was so frightened of Pigeons. Maybe it was because of some memories he had from his past, but I knew I wouldn't know the answer for a long time to come.

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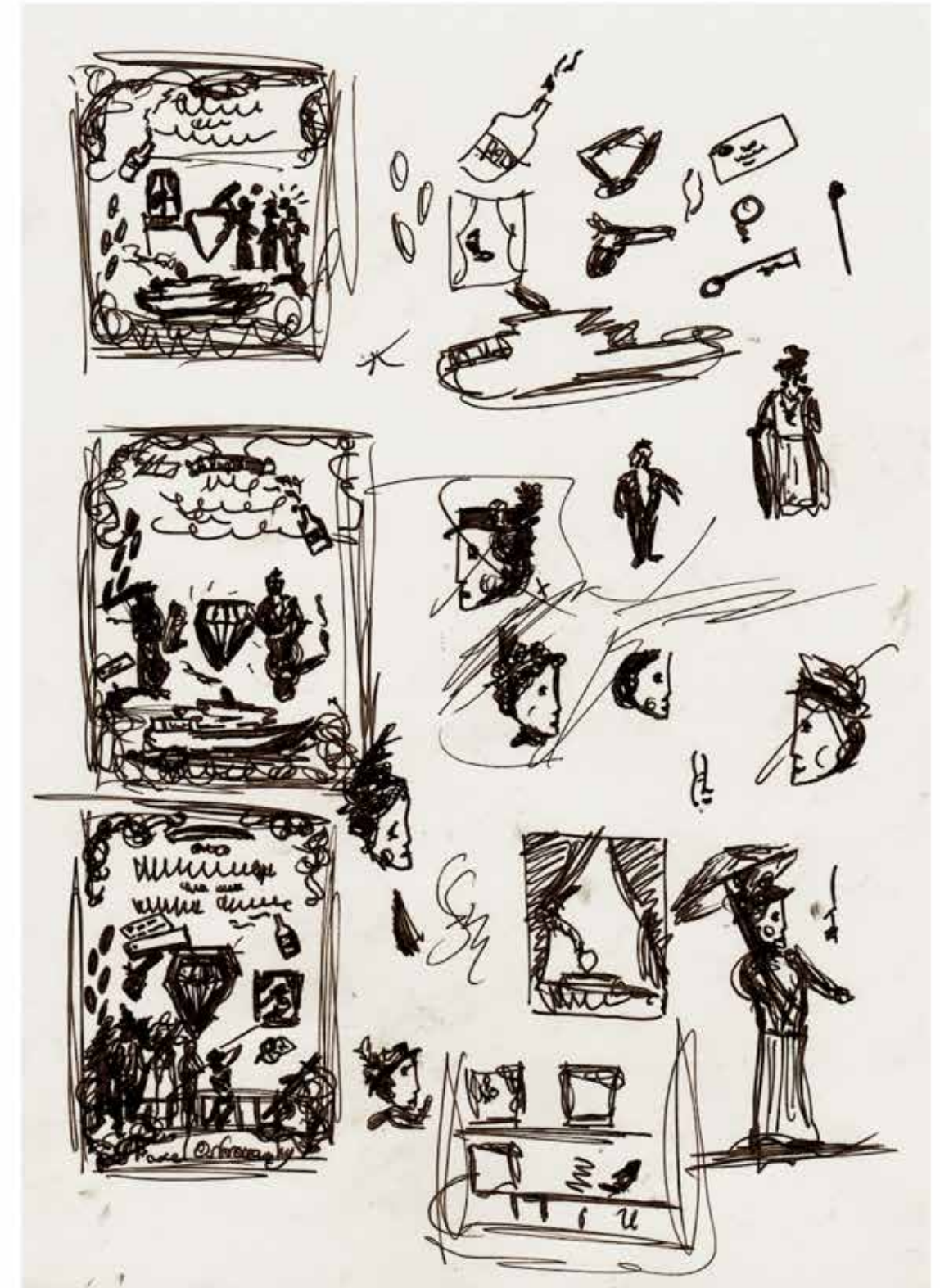






## GLOSSARY

- Exquisenduous** – Extraordinary. A mix of exquisite and stupendous.
- Blatablative** – Talking too much that are actually pointless facts.  
Someone who talks innumerable amounts of useless talk.  
Eg. The person I was having a conversation with was a very blatablative man.
- Nom d'une pipe** – French Exclamations to show surprise.
- Saperlipopette** – The French version of gosh and whatnot. Meaning surprise.
- Grabouille** – Professor Eilfort's own invented word.  
A word of to express a discovery or sometimes wonder.
- de Cracartroisse** – Professor Eilfort's own invented word.  
A word to express anger or surprise, but in the negative.
- Fluxiner et Flonerre** – Meaning something bustling, in a mayhem.
- Bustler-bastler** – The beginning of a word that you can say when you are angry
- Espèce de** – Eg. you (add a word like idiot or clumsy man) clums man!  
So, espèce de maladroit. Meaning in French you clumsy (man)
- Et bien zut alors** – French version of, well Dammit
- Bon sang** – Damn it.
- Blubbering (Idiot)** – Stupid idiot.
- Espec de merinos** – A word that links to a sheep, but means to insult someone.
- Non mais** – No but... often used like "What! But no..."
- Truc de Carpathes** – Carpathian thingy you-know-what-I-mean
- Spuddling knob** – Professor's own invention. Say it to articular exclamation.





Train Bleu

22 Student at Paris University

1. The Painting with Dust
2. The Diamond of the Chess Player
3. The Catacombs' Extravagant Sculpture
- 4.
5. In The Exotic Theat at the Bazaar
6. A Mysterious Apparition in Egypt
7. The Gaspard Frog Mystery

at the age of 25

35 Dr. Edouard Louppe

33

31

age 29, retired military, got title as doctor

young

Professor Edouard age 25 - At the time

Got Sergeant Edouard

Professor in history

Jardin des Plantes. Because an unofficial detective

Professor Edouard through the Ages

age 12

age 7

age 15

age 19

age 22 Student at University

age 28 Sergeant in the army

age 29 title Louppe Doctor, Manager

age 31 On Edouard French name

age 32 during course of the month in a year explosion

age 34 title Professor wrote some journal in the Planetes. Also creates an unofficial "detective" team which in time grows with you and is named into the Avenue

age 35 respectable elderly. Metis Painted

The today Professor age 36

age 60 Edouard





## CHARACTERS

**Professor Eilfort** – Professor Pierre Eilfort is one of the eccentric dandies of Paris, renowned for his botanical studies at Le Jardin des Plantes, and for being one of the highly successful amateur sleuths of the French Capital.

**Peter Pratfield** – Peter Pratfield is an Englishman of Exeter, fellow assistant of Professor Eilfort, a former boxman and the faithful sidekick of the Professor, following and aiding him in his adventures.

**Inspector Beltron** – Inspector Beltron, of the Gendarmerie and Police Force of Paris, is a friend of the Professor and has more than once collaborated with him in some criminal case, always accompanied by his faithful smoking pipe.

**Victor de Lavette** – Nephew of Nicolas de Lavette, famous chess player, is the inheritor of the Chateau de Lavette and of the immense fortune of his Uncle the Famous Chessplayer Nicolas de Lavette.

**Dr Marregrevier** – Local inspector of Chartres and its environs, a retired medical doctor, in his middle ages, is a man untroubled by the many misfortunes of the world, and his job as Inspector is not quite serious, for he has only dealt with small, provincial affairs of no grave importance.

**Dame Zaitseff** – Dame Zaitseff is one of the acquaintances of Victor de Lavette, prominent figure in the Parisian Society – a lady of idle manners, forgetting altogether the many trifles that life has to offer, for she is a woman of style, not worry.

**Louis Carmotaque** – In his sixties, once a great friend of Nicolas de Lavette, the deceased chess player. He is staying at the Chateau out of respect, spending most of his time either grumbling on his gout or reading whatever there is to read.

**Helena Porlagène** – She accepts the invitation of Victor de Lavette to attend the Chateau, and is one of the suspects in the case.

**Sir Maixent Machefer** – He is one of the friends of Victor de Lavette, jovial good-humoured and a snooker-loving fellow, though he is known for his debt problems.

**Moisei Kulakowski** – Moisei Kulakowski is a Russian nobleman, dignified-looking, a man of Cossack origin, those fierce horse-riding warriors from the Steppe, and one of the suspects at the Chateau.



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Paul Ostroverhy**  
alias **E.G. Montaigu**

Paul Ostroverhy was born in Paris in 2007. As an aspiring artist under the alias E. G. Montaigu, he has also lived in Moscow and the French Riviera. Inspired by these culturally rich locales, he developed a profound appreciation for the arts, including sculpture, painting, and architecture. His own novels pay homage to literary heroes Jerome K. Jerome, P. G. Wodehouse and Oscar Wilde. As a Greek mythology enthusiast, Paul is an ardent defender of classicism. He also enjoys cross-country running.



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Paris, 2019

## THE DIAMOND OF THE CHESS PLAYER

by **E.G. Montaigu**

Paris, 1888.

Renowned chess player Nicolas de Lavette has died, leaving his immense fortune to his nephew. The inheritance: the ancestral family home and a diamond estimated to bring in a hefty sum. The nephew summons Professor Eilfort to his newly acquired chateau to examine the diamond. But both are unaware of the trouble, crime and death that will slowly clasp the Sapphire of Madagascar and those who seek it.



© Paul Ostroverhy



# THE DIAMOND OF THE CHESS PLAYER

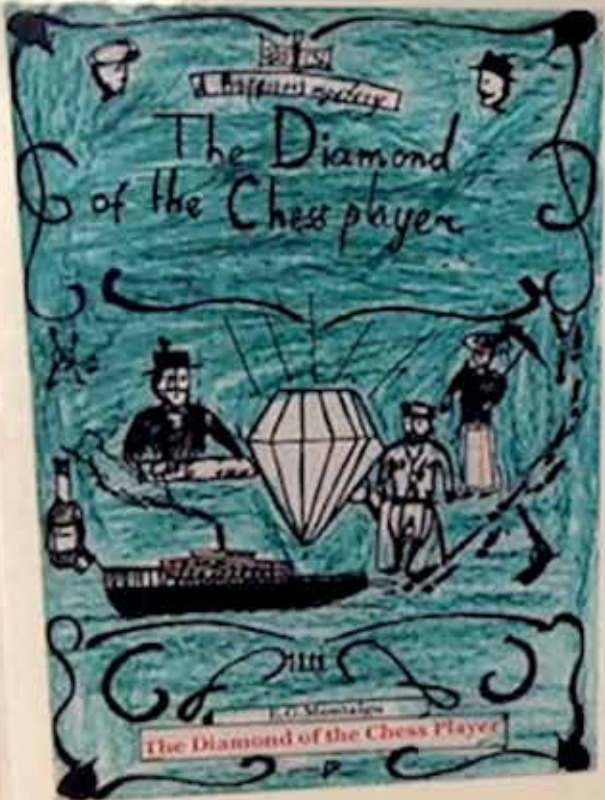
by E.G. Montagu

Paris, 1898.

Professor's stone which he carried for  
him, bearing his personal name in the middle.  
The professor the diamond being with a  
diamond attached to bring to a safe end. The  
professor, however, Professor Stone in the  
original version of the diamond. He had  
an account of the stone, stone and death, but all  
were about the Emperor of Madagascar and how  
she was it.



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## A Professor's Engine THE DIAMOND OF THE CHESS PLAYER A Professor's Diamond - thirsty for attention...

E.G. MONTAGU

### INTRODUCTION

*[The text in the introduction is too small to transcribe accurately.]*