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# LES AGAPES DE BOSANGE



A novel

Séditions  
Karthau

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To my mother,  
To our kitchen conversations,  
For what she passed on to me,  
Fonds de sauces et fonds de vérités.

## Chapter 1 - Mise en Bouche

Saint Koffe was right. But when he was alive, nobody listened to him, and when he was dead, even less.

The real question is, why do we persist in ingesting reconstructed sludge when the freshness of the season offers us in a vegetable or fruit all the felicity imaginable, just as the cow offers us its calf and its pretty little liver, notably the one I was about to feast upon?

But be careful! This is a very serious matter! Cooking veal liver is a ritual. You can't waste such a beautiful gift from nature: it has to be sublimated on the altar of taste!

Of course, the veal doesn't share this opinion. In fact, it shares none. And that's why I vouch for a worthy celebration of its present. For, since a certain age, I've had a certain idea of Gastronomy according to which it's only through its science and art that liver can reveal all its greatness.

As I was saying, there are some things that should be taken seriously, that border on the divine, and that should be respected.

Freshness, for instance. It's essential. It's like a joke, a bon mot or an idea in a dinner conversation. The further you get from the point of inspiration, from the word itself, the more bland, indigestible, even unpalatable the joke becomes. Freshness goes quickly, and you don't want to waste it, especially when it comes to l'Oiseau's liver.

Freshness is like *l'esprit de l'escalier*<sup>1</sup>: at the bottom of the staircase it is useless.

L'Oiseau is the nickname of “my” butcher. Why I appropriate this worthy fellow with such pride, I couldn't say. After all, what have I done to make this butcher *mine*? Nothing, really. He moved into the neighborhood, I chose him, and that was that! Besides, why should I be proud of him? Apart from being the guarantor of a long tradition, of high standards and constant renewal, there's nothing extraordinary about him - this concept of rejoiced fool, happy with what he hasn't done, puzzles me.

It's just that I invest such an emotional charge in my butcher that my posture is perhaps normal. He's my kitchen chaplain, a trusted spiritual figure. To discover that he's deceiving me in the pulpit would be tantamount to discovering that “my” priest is feeding me tainted ideas.

Fortunately, I don't belong to this parish. I don't have a priest, I only have preachers like my butcher, my cheesemonger or my wine merchant, even if I am a bit polygamous on that side.

But I'm going astray.

Butter, garlic, parsley, temperature. Layout is a cardinal virtue in the kitchen: it's essential to have ingredients, dishes and utensils in working order, at the risk of ruining or even outraging magnificent ingredients. Something was missing. The *fleur de sel*, in its little Japanese bowl. And pepper. I hesitated among the many pepper grinders in my collection. The emotion of the coffee gear becoming an

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<sup>1</sup> Staircase wit

aerial vehicle<sup>2</sup> mingled with that of the different fragrances that each of these mills could unveil. With so many bicentennials approaching, both my taste buds and my neurons exulted.

I picked up the rust-orange cast-iron Bali model, into which I had poured a very fragrant white pepper. There was only one thing missing, but I'd have to do without it: company.

It had been a tough choice - *cornélien* even - between imperious freshness and a partner on the plate. But even if you're a queen, you can't keep a calf's liver waiting. Of course, a good meal is a joy to share, and it's even a deep conviction: we'd made immense progress since the solitary *gueuletons* of our founders, Grimod and Brillat. However, the events I'm about to describe, which would follow on from one another like a poorly-constructed meal, took a first turn that would prevent me from sharing this immoderate pleasure. Let me be clear: this is not onanism, it's a tribute to Barnabé the calf.

Having to travel to the police station to make a statement, my bed and table companion was unable to join me at the late hour of the afternoon to enjoy this divine delicacy. Since the liver couldn't wait, I was obliged to honor it, alone.

The wait at the police station had been long and tiresome. Why I had been there shortly before noon, I had no idea. I blamed myself for my lack of anticipation. With my taste buds moistening with my own saliva, generous at the thought of feasting on that tasty flesh, at the ideal

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<sup>2</sup> Peugeot cars started off in the 1830' making gears to grind coffee. Maybe they will make flying cars soon

temperature, smooth in texture, embellished to near-perfection with those fine chisels of garlic, neither too browned nor too little, time seemed endless.

Especially as lunchtime had in the end long been over, leaving my stomach to take over from my palate.

This ordeal thus made the impertinent ringing of the bell all the more inconvenient. No matter - no one had announced themselves beforehand, I wasn't expecting a single person, no deliveries were planned - whether they were standing in line or walking around the pâté, I didn't care, apart from my frying pan, which was starting to heat up, just ready to receive my fresh butter from the market.

But the technicalities involved in cooking a calf's liver don't allow for any distractions, especially when they become insistent. Cursing the oddball who had come to disturb me at such a sacred moment, I pushed aside the frying pan and its bruised butter to go and castigate this bad-looking bird.

With age, my hearing was beginning to fail me. So, through a door, you can imagine the difficulty.

'I don't understand. Are you saying that my physical integrity is at stake? You're here to protect me?

Because it was like a thread through butter, it didn't matter to me how this lunatic had managed to get into the building. It was what he was saying that was the problem. I examined his face through the digital peephole. Aside from bad taste in clothing, it suggested nothing else, but that was bad enough. His outfit was almost aggressively plain, exceedingly ordinary. No subtlety, not the slightest ambivalence, not an ounce of *recherche*. Ordinary in all its splendor. Which I distrusted the most, because it was in

this forced banality that the worst of the enraged lurked, a kind of extremist without nuance.

*'Billevesée!*<sup>3</sup> I shouted.

'Mr. Grimoire, I assure you that the threat is very serious and that you must follow me.

'I've got my liver on the plate. Please come back a little later.

A hesitant silence punctuated the exchange.

'I assure you, the risk is imminent.

'Imminent, imminent, I'll give you imminent. What department are you with?

'Inrapol.

'Show me your card. There, against the sensor...no, not too close. It's blurry! That's it, don't move!

That's stupidity at its best when you don't know what to say. The detrimental influence of poorly crafted thrillers with calamitous dialogue: as if I knew how to recognize a counterfeit badge.

'Forget it, come in.

When the devil or fate is relentless, you have to invite it to the table.

'Close the door and come in.

'I assure you, we don't have time.

'To the table!

Equally resigned, or at least that was the only conclusion that seemed relevant to me, the tall fellow settled himself with ill-fitting mastery in a chair that seemed almost too small.

I put a second plate in the stove and turned the burner on again. Life's constraints had prompted me to take up

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<sup>3</sup> Nonsense, BS



this dwelling without gas, in effect without flame cooking, meaning little character and no soul. A fundamentalist particle in me had hesitated in the face of such fundamental deprivation, but temporal priorities had called me to order. From then on, I made it a challenge. The quest for the right temperature became all the more heroic. Isn't it said that to cook without peril is to make wine without glory<sup>4</sup>?

This conjecture proved true. Contemplating the mutation of butter, I wondered why I hadn't yet tried to cook veal with a clarified version of this delicious lipid. Perhaps because then, without the risk of burning this fatty luminosity devoid of its whey, without its delicious and revealing quiver, we'd lose a valuable indicator of the cooking of the flesh; we'd no longer see that ceiling of entropy and its menacing brown that, once exceeded, would disrupt the established order of the sapid riches of my exquisite dish! Without this irreversible risk, wouldn't we lose part of the flavor? Flavor is life!

'Don't you have a maxiwave?' asked my new guest. It would be quicker.

'Another low ceiling fanatic, I thought.

When it was launched, this new technological pill blew me away. The principle consists of inserting two new wave emitters in addition to the microwave emitter, which itself only stimulates water. These new emitters are tuned to heat lipid and carbohydrate molecules, the aim being to excite matter faster than a microwave, particularly that of Frankenstein foods.

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<sup>4</sup> Pun with the expression « A combattre sans péril, on vainc/ triomphe sans gloire »

That such a device could be imagined and designed fascinated and frightened me at the same time. The craze that followed its commercial launch was so contrary to my expectations that it left me shaking my head. How could I describe a collective concept as lacking in ambition as that of nibbling a few seconds while waiting for a dish? My Osso Bucco are prepared two days in advance! I was left speechless.

What decent answer could I give, Oh! great Brillat, to my big pluck of a visitor about his maxiwave and nanomax culture?

With a raised finger, I deflected a disparaging reply, inviting my impromptu to silence with a somewhat forced air of concentration, avoiding in the process to chastise him with my murderous gaze.

Instead, I inspected one last time in its natural state the vivid color of the flesh, this undulating red, guaranteeing a feast for the taste buds. Quality porcelain, discreetly transparent and as white as ever after so many years, served as a receptacle for this imminent happiness. The harmony of this white, singing to the still simmering carmine, aroused my mucous membranes to such a frenzy that I forgot to follow the precepts of the wise: sharing and *la cuisson juste*<sup>5</sup>. If I didn't stick to them, this poor bovine would pass a tear to the left in vain.

'You like calf's liver, I hope.

'I'm not hungry, thank you.

'Have you had breakfast yet?

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<sup>5</sup> La cuisson juste : the state of being cooked in accordance with its intrinsic requirements :))

'No, I haven't. I mean, it's not the right time. We're running out of time.

I nurtured my patience with sincerity.

'Listen, young man, I'm not giving up on this calf's liver, even if I have to sacrifice myself to the most outrageous nonsense afterwards. People always talk to me about urgency, and more often than not, all I find is the urge to press on others. So, until I've honored this veal, we're not leaving.

Noting his reluctance to press me beyond reason, I continued.

'I suggest we enjoy it together.

Finally, things were well done: I was offering myself freshness as well as company, even if I still hesitated to qualify my visitor as such.

'Actually, I don't like liver...it tastes like flour. Or well cooked in that case.

So many misunderstandings and sacrificed hopes. To spoil nature's true flavors with overcooking! Wasn't it the greatest of crimes to censor taste in this way?

'You're right, I said hastily. There's no reason to insist. Between sharing and sacrilege, I'll sacrifice the former to avoid the latter.

'I don't understand.

'The explanation will come if patience allows. In the meantime, I'm going to ask for silence as I now need the utmost concentration.

I checked my gustatory setting one last time. A light, tangy wine waited patiently in front of a fine-toothed knife next to the place reserved for the receptacle plate. Salt and pepper waited at hand. Everything seemed ready. But a moment's anxiety passed through me. Between the

maxiwave episode and the overcooked one, this silky wine had perhaps already ventured into a deliquescent temperature fringe. I grabbed my wire thermometer from the counter. Under the stunned gaze of my tablemate, I plunged the pointed stem into the balm of my liquid soon-to-come happiness. The dial slowly descended, then froze at 17°C. No extremism, I thought, this will do the trick. I still had enough time to enjoy it without the fever getting the better of me. It would be admirable even with one or two degrees more. Especially as I'd opened the bottle the day before, punctured a glass and laid it back in my cellar vestibule. A trick to bring out all the aromas, a bit like the preamble to a sensual evening to soften the flesh, or a tangy marinade.

The butter beckoned me with its light bubbles. I delicately placed the escalope on the lipid film.

We often say, to watch the milk on the stove, but that's nothing compared to a liver in butter. You have to follow the quivering of this other holy bovine gift, its little bubbles, whether they activate steadily or crescendo, whether their complexion glistens or darkens, even if it means removing the pan for a few moments.

Cooking liver is the ultimate shibboleth. If chefs use the egg-cooking test to evaluate their potential apprentices, perhaps it's because they prefer to spare the liver; and I can understand the profound suffering that would follow the botched cooking of just one of these ruby-garnet jewels. But the fact remains that, from my perspective, liver requires even more science and technique.

For the layman would instruct us to heat the cooking instrument beforehand, but then we'd have an organ that would turn inside out like a mollusk. On the other hand, the

faint-hearted would recommend excessive caution and moderation in the heat, but if the pan isn't lively enough, the inner core of the cutlet will turn a bland brown before the outside has even acquired that little brownish crust essential to a successful tasting experience. I'm telling you, I could write a thesis on the subject. But with my *escogriffe*<sup>6</sup> impatiently tapping his foot, that initiative would have to wait.

I delicately turned the liver over, making sure to rest it in a bed sufficiently profuse in butter; I moved the pan slightly away from the heat, thus finishing the cooking of the meat away from direct contact; I drew the remaining butter with the spatula towards the exposed part of the pan where I poured in the finely chopped garlic, varying between the translucent and the opaque, a paper equivalent between 80g and 160g. The former was too easily cooked, while the latter gave way to a garlicky taste slightly above my preference; between the two, perfectly tapered, these pistils of happiness perfectly matched the appetizing size of the bites.

My taste buds quivered, my heart pounded, my commissure deepened, betraying my impatient joy.

Concentration! In now way could I allow myself to botch the job. I needed to stay attentive to the end so as not to cut perfection short through impatience; nor, through indolence, to spoil it through lack of temerity.

It was about time. Let's hope Interpot doesn't ruin this meal for me with a derogatory comment.

'Are you sure you don't want any?

'Absolutely, thank you.

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<sup>6</sup> Tall, thin wavering fellow with awkward moves

It was then that a thought disrupted everything. This wasn't the time. Yet an inner force called me to order, even as my aesthetic alter ready to savor cried outrage and conspiracy. I huffed, removed the pan completely, closed the oven.

'Will you share a glass with me?

Not even waiting for an answer, with a celerity bordering on mastery, I took out a stemmed glass, which I planted with as much delicacy as possible in such an urgent situation.

'Not while I'm working, thank you.

Relieved, I answered nothing, preoccupied with my liver in the frying pan, which was in danger of withering forever under the persistence of this heat as ambivalent as Aesop's tongue.

Wooden planks lend themselves magnificently to the exercise of conserving heat. They don't steal heat from food like porcelain or other more deceitful materials. However, they lend themselves less well to meat accompanied by garlic. The blessed condiment quickly dries out and even loses its fragrant juices. The hot plate remained my preferred receptacle. I took one out of the oven.

Breaking one of my precepts, I cut the piece in half where it thickened. The second half would finish cooking on a low flame, while I feasted on the first. I placed it delicately on the plate with my wooden spatula. I dutifully returned the instrument to its place in the spatula rest; I took the plate with both hands, as if holding a sanctified offering, and placed it on the altar of our happiness, a rustic wooden table repainted a faded white, revealing through its worn film the veins of the walnut as well as the

black, invisible matter of past meals. The steady cadence of the last moments of cooking had to fall quickly for me to find a rhythm suited to delectation. I sat like a monk, breathing deeply. We were entering the climax of the ceremony.

'So, in short, digestible sentences, tell me what all the fuss is about.

My big fellow, somewhat bent over the table with both arms drooping, searched for words, as if confused by the situation, hampered by excessive politeness preventing him from expressing himself as he should for a representative of the order. I took the opportunity to smell the wine, letting it caress my little olfactory buds. A light sip reassured me that the wine's temperature was flirting with eighteen. We were still in the blessed zone.

'So, let's hear it!

'Mr. Grimoire, we have received information from reliable sources that your life is in danger. Our social network bots have detected a high level of animosity towards you, indicating a significant likelihood of violent action against you. Over the past twenty-four hours, your name has become progressively and exponentially associated with words such as revenge, sacrilege, irreverent, poisoner, syllabub, pickle and so on. Our protocol is that after a predefined number of threats, we dispatch a law enforcement officer to protect you. It's a protocol we've had time to fine-tune.

'I don't doubt it," I commented.

I finished chewing before continuing.

'If I summarize, because a few mindless starlings get excited alone in the virtual and in the presence of their real cretinism, it would be necessary to spoil such a meal?

'I wouldn't put it like that, but your physical integrity is paramount.

'Pardi, that's going to make some 100kg nannies to maintain if you have to protect all the well-tempered dissidents! It's a good thing you don't have to worry about psychological integrity either! And tell me, what does Intraball have to do with all this? This is a matter for national jurisdiction, don't you think?

Intrapol. I'm not in a position to say. It seems to be... geopolitical.

'Geopolitical? You've got to be kidding me! How is my case geopolitical?

'I think it has to do with the subject of your hobby.

'You presume it has to do with my gastronomic activity?

I seized the opportunity to put to the test a long-held theory that emotions added flavor to food or, at the very least, altered receptivity. These notes of surrealism did seem to confound the gustatory experience with a slight bitter note.

'That's right. Your 'Coco in the Pan' podcast is stirring up trouble far beyond the borders, it seems. And then there's the event you posted on the social networks. The outrage became...international. Hence Intrapol.

'What have I done with Coco in the Pan, apart from freeing people from their food lies?

Painpol regurgitated his text without conviction.

'In my opinion, you've crossed the line by inconveniencing people with some of your inappropriate opinions.

I glared at him. I saw in him a reflection of one of my wacky theories, that of the Great Reversal, where the uprooted world was walking on its head.



'It's your post, he continued, almost with a hint of remonstrance. It's triggered real indignation.

'A cabal, yes. Indignation is when you don't want to get out of your chair and do something, just moan like an old English lady. Now you're talking about a witch-hunt. I'm going to deglaze their opinions, these puddings, with some liqueur of common sense!

'I'm sorry you feel that way. However, time is of the essence. I have orders to take you to a safe place.

'A restaurant?

I seized the opportunity of his surprise to fetch the second piece of my guilty pleasure.

'To begin with, the police station. An escort is waiting there to take you to a place known only to the Intrapol commander.

'Near a market, I hope!

'Mr. Grimoire, I must ask you to take this very seriously. You've offended sensibilities, the whole thing has snowballed. Going back to the digital thread, it seems that it all started with a meal you wanted to organize. You must tell me where and when this meal is...

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw movement on the terrace. Turning my head, I discovered behind the bay window a lump of garish blue cloth, struggling to feed a flame, itself reluctant to consume the rag, as if repulsed by the tasteless object.

End of Chapter 1

Digital version for Biztronomy