



"You used to be a lot more fun, Paco. Now all you ever want to talk about is rescheduling the foreign debt."

were a Meursault and a Côte de Beaune.

IT had rained in the night, and Sunday morning was wet and cool and overcast. The rosebud in my cabin had passed from bloom to overblown. My croissant at breakfast turned out to have a chocolate filling. There was an unresolved argument at a table behind me about melons. ("The Persian is the king of melons." "We've always preferred the Colorado Rocky Ford." "Have you ever tasted a Santa Claus?") One of the Texans had found a copy of the *International Herald Tribune* in town the evening before, but by the time it was handed down to me someone had done the crossword puzzle and someone had solved the Jumble word game, and the book review (from the *New York Times*) was one that I had read a

week before I left home. And the Saône had changed its character. It looked darker and narrower, and its banks were heavily wooded. It began to drizzle. It seemed a good time to go back to "Maigret Meets a Milord," but the weather had also changed along the Canal de l'Aisne à la Marne. The sun was shining there. The consensus at noon, when Bernadette opened the bar, was that the ice was again hot ice.

We put in at around two o'clock at a village called Seurre, and a group led by Kirsty debarked for a visit to the ancient fortress of Châteauneuf-en-Auxois and the somewhat less ancient Château de Commarin, somewhere north of Beaune. I was one of several who chose to stay on the boat. We watched the others climb a crumbling ramp to a waiting bus and drive off past a ramshackle building with a

sign: "BAR DE L'ESPÉRANCE." But the place was more than just ramshackle. I looked again: it was boarded up. So much for hope.

Angie cast off, and we were back on the river. We would spend the night at Saint-Jean-de-Losne, at the entrance to the Canal de Bourgogne, and the excursionists would rejoin us there. I stayed on deck. The drizzle had stopped, and the sky had begun to brighten. Geert came out on deck in his white coat and lighted a cigarette. It was a Marlboro, the cowboy cigarette of Europe. We exchanged a nod, and I said I had much enjoyed our Burgundian dinner last night.

"Ah," he said. "I am happy. Did you know the beef, the Charolais? Good meat. But, you know, it has no fat, no marbling. I lard it to give juice and flavor. This country here is so good for eating. You have heard of the Bresse chicken. It is the best. It comes from near Mâcon. The river has good fish. Fish and crayfish. Burgundy has so much. You have seen the sheep. The goats. Even game. Woodcock."

I was getting hungry again. I asked him about dinner tonight.

"I will tell you," he said. "We start with a pâté—foie de canard. Salad with walnut oil. Very delicate, very good. Then lamb. What you would call chops. With a bouquet of turnips and green cabbage and sautéed potatoes. The finish is sorbet. A variety."

I looked at my watch. It wasn't even three o'clock yet.

The excursionists arrived in Saint-Jean-de-Losne at a little past six. We had been there since five, tied comfortably up below the Café de la Saône, with a view of a dozen freight barges moored two deep along the opposite quay. I asked one of the excursionists about the excursion. He reported that the Châteauneuf-en-Auxois was perched on a great, rocky hill and the Château de Commarin was sinking into a swamp. Talleyrand's mother, he added, had spent her girlhood at the Château de Commarin.

WE started early on Monday morning. We were already under way when I came up on deck. We slipped under a bridge, we swung sharply to the right. A narrow canyon loomed: the dark stone mouth of a lock. We had come through half a dozen locks on the Saône, but they were modern locks, of generous size, lined with steel and equipped with great steel sluice gates that were opened and closed by a lockkeeper at a

chairs on the sidewalk, and a sheltering awning overhead. We were sitting there in ease and comfort, listening to a bedlam of starlings hidden in the trees, when the Janine, tricolor flying and horn howling, finally came poking under the bridge.

THERE was some feeling that night that the ice was a bit colder than the ice of the night before. Dinner, Kirsty told us, would be a simple buffet. She hoped that after our big Burgundian lunch a buffet would be sufficient. We sat down to a country pâté en croûte, to sliced country sausages, to céleri rémoulade, to a salad of tomatoes and cucumbers and corn, to cheese from the Cistercian abbey at Citeaux, to baked Alaska (or omelette à la norvégienne), to Chablis and Beaujolais. I heard no complaints of unsatisfied hunger.

THERE is an outdoor market every Saturday morning in Tournus, on a narrow street behind the Café de la Marine. The Janine was not scheduled to cast off until around ten-thirty. I and several others went ashore for a look at the market. It was mostly a farmers' market, of fish and meat and fresh produce and cheeses and breads and pastries. There were one or two surprises and pleasures. The different varieties of fish were separated from one another by sprays of what looked like laurel leaves. I saw shallots the size of lemons, and an onion that looked like a thick red banana (*oignon banane rouge*), and rabbits skinned and gutted and with the feet removed but otherwise intact, including the head, and even the eyes. One of my companions managed to ask the seller the reason for that. The man shrugged. "*Comme ça, vous sauriez que ce n'est pas un chat,*" he said. We took that to mean that there are unscrupulous types who will try to pass off a cat as a rabbit.

THE Saône between Tournus and Chalon-sur-Saône is wide and wandering, and there is no prettier stretch on the river. Chalon-sur-Saône



was our next port of call, our mooring for the night. I sat on the bow with "Maigret Meets a Milord," but I didn't do much reading. It was difficult here on the sunny Saône to keep my mind on the dismal Canal de l'Aisne à la Marne. There was a feel of deep and peaceful country, but it was country ordered by man. The rows of plane trees, the poplar *allées*, even the patches of woods and the meadows of grazing sheep, had a look of arrangement, of traditional design. There were swans floating here and there along the riverbanks, geese grazing in the sheep meadows. A heron flapped from shore to shore. A flock of some cootlike ducks dived under our bow. A couple on horseback—a man and a woman in immaculate riding clothes—appeared on the left bank and cantered away on a path among the poplars. A village appeared on the right: thirteen stone houses, some long and low, some tall and thin, but all of them the color of yellowy autumn leaves, all of them with faded blue shutters, all of them roofed with rusty-black tiles—strung out in a tight little row behind a column of shapely plane trees, above a long stone quay. One building had a sign along its façade: "CAFÉ DE LA MARINE." One of the New York couples had joined me at the bow. The woman gave a little sigh. "Those houses," she said. "Those trees. Everything looks as if it ought to have a frame around it. Ev-

erything looks like those wonderful Impressionist paintings you've seen in some museum." It was not, perhaps, a stunning observation. But it was the simple truth.

THE approach to Chalon-sur-Saône from the south is dominated by an island with a climbing, prowlike headland. I watched it nearing and rising. The headland became an acre or two of garden, of red and white and yellow and orange and purple flowers, set off by lawns and surmounted by a colonnade of poplars. We came closer: the garden became a great floral bunch of grapes, flanked by a floral wineglass and a floral barrel of wine. Chalon-sur-Saône is a gateway to good eating. "In Chalon-sur-Saône," Alexis Lichine writes in his classic "Wines of France," "begins the famous food and fabulous eating for which Burgundy was always famed. . . . Just to the south is Charolles, from whose deep green pastures comes the famous Charolais beef . . . snails from the vineyard hills." We tied up at the Quai Gambetta, and I went for a walk before dinner. I walked no more than a dozen blocks, but I passed half a dozen restaurants that looked to be of some quality. Dinner on board that night was an affirmation of M. Lichine. The entrée was escargots de Bourgogne, and the main course was an entrecôte de Charolais in a sauce béarnaise. The wines

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