


ADVENTURES OF
MONSIEUR PIJOL
for
TELEVISION
Part 3



OLD 420

The adventures of

Monsieur

Pujol

In Six Parts

Arranged for
television by
Maurice Rowdon

Part 111

'Spitting in
the basket'

CAST

MONSIEUR ARISTIDE PUJOL

MISS BEATTY

CLERGYMAN

PARLOURMAID

CHRISTABEL SMITH

MR SMITH

MONSIEUR POIRON

HON HARRY RALSTON

EXTRAS, N.S.

BUTLER

SERVANT

COLLEGE GIRLS

GOVERNESS

RAILWAY PORTERS

PASSENGERS

SETS

INTERIORS

CLASSROOM---GIRL'S COLLEGE
HEADMISTRESS'S STUDY
ENTRANCE HALL LONDON HOUSE
DRAWING ROOM LONDON HOUSE
LIBRARY LONDON HOUSE
DINING ROOM LONDON HOUSE

LOCATIONS

EXTERIORS

GROUNDS---GIRL'S COLLEGE
RAILWAY STATION

Part 111

'Spitting in the
basket'

Open on the spacious grounds of a girl's college in Surrey. Sloping lawns and sycamores. We travel slowly towards the college as the TITLES come up. Ripples of girlish laughter come over. Then a hush. And again a ripple of laughter.

We reach the college and trace our way along the windows, peeping in. The first class shows girls crammed together in earnest study, under the guidance of a staid MISTRESS. The costumes announce England just before the First World War. The ripples of laughter are certainly not coming from them. But they are aware of the laughter and give each other glances. We track along to the next window and find much the same circumstance, only here the TEACHER (dumb show behind the window) is talking, and using a long pointer to indicate something on the board. Again the ripple of laughter and these girls tooe--this time to the visible annoyance of the TEACHER--- give each other giggling glances.

Cut for surprise to the classroom where MONSIEUR PUJOL is creating all this fun. He is a Frenchman in his thirties. This, for a Frenchman of the south, is a mature age. His eyes are bright with good will, curiosity, and a zest for anything with a risk in it. They have a touch of devilry too. He could clearly hold no job down for long. He looks like losing this one fast. He has a clear olive complexion, a black moutstache and a

short silky vandyke beard. He is agile, at a time in history when you could look puffy before thirty. But MONSIEUR PUJOL, being first himself and secondly a Provencal, knows how to look after the inner and the outer man, even in England.

He has his girls in fits of laughter. Even the GOVERNESS, placed in the front row to supervise class discipline, is having a whale of a time. He is teaching them French---but the rawest, the bawdiest French this college, or indeed any college in England, has ever heard. And he clowns everything he says in the most acrobatic way.

PUJOL: En avez-vous des-z-homards? Oh, les sales bêtes, elles ont du poil aux pattes! Which means, 'Have you any lobsters? Oh the dirty beasts, they have hair on their feet!' Yes, we are all saying this in Paris, my young friends. We don't know why! It doesn't mean nothing. But still are we saying it! And do you know the leettle French song from twenty years ago? (Singing) Sur le bi, sur le banc, sur le bi du bout du banc! (Dancing little steps on the rostrum)

Cut to the wide empty corridor outside where THE HEADMISTRESS is strolling along absorbed in her organisational thoughts. PUJOL's song drifts over. She stops. She frowns. She listens.

PUJOL(VO, in the distance) Sur le bi du bout du banc!

Her frown now fixed, she walks on, trying to locate the class. The singing becomes louder. PUJOL's song is now being sung by the GIRLS.

GIRLS (VO) Sur le bi du bout du banc!

fix this

THE HEADMISTRESS stands outside the class fascinated by the sheer horror of it. She even beats time to the music in a cruel, calculating way, her lips pursed with determination. She is going to Provencal songbird!

Cut back to PUJOL's classroom.

PUJOL: And you know what the apaches

say to each other when they invite each other to a glass of absinthe? (Imitating the meeting of two street ruffians in Paris by plunging his hat on his head and fixing a piece of chalk in his mouth as a cigarette) Allons étrangler un perroquet mon vieux! 'Let's go and strangle a parrot!' Yes, 'strangle a parrot' my angels! And do you know what Louis the king did when his head was cut off at the guillotine?---Il cracha dans le panier, 'he spat in the basket'! Yes that's the way we talk in Paris nowadays!

Cut to THE HEADMISTRESS hidden behind a bush in the grounds. She is spying on the PUJOL classroom. The girlish laughter ripples over. We see the classroom from her PV, then zoom in to PUJOL performing again. He still has his hat on, with the chalk at his mouth.

Cut to PUJOL performing.

PUJOL: A glass or two later (imitating the apaches drinking at a bistrot) ils sont saouls comme des porcs! (He staggers all over the place) Yes, they're as drunk as a couple of pigs!

Cut back to THE HEADMISTRESS to register her cold fascination.

Cut to MONSIEUR PUJOL still staggering, trying to grasp hold of the rostrum and failing, then trying to mount it and stumbling, as the laughter grows. THE GOVERNESS is splitting her sides.

PUJOL (speaking drunkenly) ils sont saouls comme des porcs!

Cut for surprise to the virginal quiet of THE HEADMISTRESS'S office. She is sitting behind her desk looking none too loving. A CLERGYMAN at her side is trying to make up for this with absurd placating little smiles towards MONSIEUR PUJOL, who is facing them on the other side of the desk, also seated. He is watching them with mildly pitying good will.

CLERGYMAN: You see Mr Pewjoll the ah pupils may have a command ah of the colloquial side of your language but ah let me give you an example---

HEADMISTRESS (BURSTING IN) I would like to know, Mr Pewjoll, what one of

my girls is doing writing in her French history paper that the king spat in the basket! Is that the kind of language you teach? If so---

PUJOL (holding up his hand) Miss Beatty! It can be explained! It can all be explained my dear!

MISS BEATTY: And teachers at this school do not call their headmistress 'my dear'!

CLERGYMAN (pouring oil) You see Mr Pewjoll I was rather surprised myself ah when I was marking the papers--- 'spitting in the basket'---(in horrible French) cracha dans le panier---

(PUJOL (Wincing, then to himself:)) Quel accent! But mon père---

MISS BEATTY: 'My father'! You call him your father---

CLERGYMAN (MORE OIL) Ah Miss Beatty the ah catholics call their ministers ah father!

PUJOL: What I was saying was it's historical fact Monsieur! He did spit in the basket!

CLERGYMAN (jaw drops into dog collar) What? He actually ah did?

PUJOL: He was guillotined no? (with a swift cutting gesture across his neck) Alors il a craché dans le panier! (with a superb gesture of finality) He spat into the basket!

Cut to a huge bunch of roses and pull back to find the COLLEGE GIRLS lined up at the main entrance of the College with sorrowing expressions. One of them is offering the roses to the travel-coated MONSIEUR PUJOL. He chucks the GIRL under the chin with a sad smile.

PUJOL (addressing the GIRLS) This is the saddest gift I have ever received. (Sniffs from THE GIRLS) I have loved England. Has England loved me in return? (Muted cries of 'Yes, yes!') I brought you all the excitement of Paris but your headmistress tells me I was here to teach not to excite! (Throwing out his arms in a baffled gesture) So, after this brief flirtation, I return to my country,

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hoping that I have planted France in your hearts! And especially Paris! More especially Provence! My Provence, where all that is best in Paris was conceived and brought to birth! Aigues-Mortes is not the loveliest town in Provence. But I was born there (a touch of gaiety which infects THE GIRLS)! That is something, you know! It adds to the local colour! So, if you should chance to pass the place, ask for Aristide Pujol and you will find a friend. And in my heart you will find the true Provence! Provence which brought chivalry into the world---which taught the world to sing---and to sing about women---to---

HEADMISTRESS (VO) Mr Pewjoll, I think you might miss your train.

He bows silently and mounts the open horse-drawn carriage behind him.

PUJOL (standing in the carriage) Good bye my angels. Adieu mes anges! (The carriage draws away) 'Sur le bi sur le banc!' (Conducting from the carriage) Sur le bi du bout du banc!

From THE GIRLS' PV, MONSIEUR PUJOL conducting as the carriage disappears into the distance.

Cut to Waterloo Station under torrential rain, with the girlish sniffs turning to the hiss of steam engines. Horse-drawn cabs are standing by. MONSIEUR PUJOL is there holding his roses, with a travelling valise at his feet, wondering whether to chance the little money in his pocket on a cab. He looks out into the rain.

PUJOL (to himself) Sacre mille cochons! Quel chien de climat!

Luggage-laden porters and passing passengers jostle him, disarranging his flowers. This is a beery, beefy, impersonal London where a Provencal is out of place.

But a smart FOOTMAN is about to walk past him when he stops suddenly and touches his cap.

FOOTMAN: Beg pardon sir. I'm from Mr Smith.

PUJOL (turning away sourly) I'm glad

to hear of it, my friend.

FOOTMAN: You're the French gentleman from Godalming?

PUJOL: Decidedly!

FOOTMAN: Then, sir, Mr Smith has sent the carriage for you!

PUJOL (with astonishment) That's very kind of him!

THE FOOTMAN takes PUJOL'S case and walks off down the platform with it. MONSIEUR PUJOL gazes after him with astonishment.

PUJOL (VO) 'And who the devil is Mr Smith? (With a Provencal shrug) Well, the best way to find out is to go and see him!

He walks after the FOOTMAN humming 'Sur le bi sur le banc!'

Cut to THE FOOTMAN holding open the door of a cosy brougham for MONSIEUR PUJOL. After a moment's hesitation PUJOL steps in. The door closes after him. PUJOL's inquisitive face appears in the window at once, following THE FOOTMAN WITH HIS EYES. The carriage draws away.

Cut to PUJOL inside the carriage as it jogs consolingly along, the rain beating down thunderously on its roof.

PUJOL (VO) Mr Smith! Tiens! There were two little Miss Smiths at the Academy! Dear little things! One had chiblains and the other had a running nose! Well, can you wonder at it, in this climate? So this must be their papa! Perhaps they wrote home and told him how kind I was to them! Of course! (Settling back into his seat with satisfaction) Well, Mr Pewjoll, no one can say that Providence frowns on you for long! Anyway, even if it isn't their papa it's a carriage and he's obviously a fairly well-bred monsieur. Tiens! (He bends down, feeling something at his feet) A hot-water can! How thoughtful! I feel I'm going to like Mr Smith! (Singing loudly) Sur le bi, sur le banc!

Cut to THE FOOTMAN making a sour face

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at this foreigner's song from inside the carriage.

Cut to the entrance hall of a fine London house as MONSIEUR PUJOL and THE FOOTMAN enter. A neat PARLOURMAID steps forward and takes his hat, great-coat and bouquet of roses.

PARLOURMAID: Mr Smith hasn't returned from the City yet, sir. But Miss Christabel is in the drawing room.

PUJOL (lighting up at this news) Ah then please give me back my bouquet.

He takes the flowers back and THE PARLOURMAID shows ^{him} into the drawing room.

Cut to the drawing room as MONSIEUR PUJOL enters with his flowers, ready to overwhelm someone new with Provencal charm. CHRISTABEL SMITH, pretty and 23, with dark hair and an upturned nose, rises from a fender-stool and comes towards him with a smile.

CHRISTABEL: Good afternoon, Monsieur le Baron.

PUJOL (VO, as he bows smoothly) 'Mon-
sieur le Baron!' Eh!

CHRISTABEL: I was wondering if Thomas would spot you. Neither father nor I could give him any description, you see, since we'd never seen you!

PUJOL comes forward with his flowers.

PUJOL (VO) But why a Baron? Oh well, the English love titles.

He is closer to CHRISTABEL than most Englishmen have ever been. She is flustered.

PUJOL: Mademoiselle, will you accept these roses as a token of my respectful homage?

She takes them with a blush.

CHRISTABEL (speaking almost to herself) An Englishman wouldn't have thought of that.

Aristide (with a roguish look, raising a finger at her) Oh yes he would. But he wouldn't have had---what you say---the neck to do it.

She laughs and gestures him to a seat by the fire. THE PARLOURMAID brings in a massive tray of tea and hot muffins.

PUJOL is clearly delighted as he gazes from the tray to CHRISTABEL and back again. THE PARLOURMAID leaves having deposited the tray on the knee-height table before the fire. CHRISTABEL pours. MONSIEUR PUJOL studies her with unashamed admiration.

PUJOL: Do you know something, mademoiselle? You have the air of a princess!

CHRISTABEL (almost dropping the pot) I once met a princess---at a charity bazaar---and she was the most matter-of-fact, business-like person you could find!

PUJOL: Nonsense! That was only a real princess! I was talking about a fairy princess!

CHRISTABEL (putting his tea before him) Do you know that when Englishmen pay such compliments they are apt to get laughed at?

PUJOL: But I am Provencal, mademoiselle (taking a muffin hungrily)! From a different world, where a lovely woman is a treasure! But here, why, an Englishman takes a week to think up a compliment, another week to find his tongue and when it finally pops out it is addled like a rotten egg! Yes, we of Provence compliment beauty straight from our hearts (plunging his hand to his heart violently)! It is true. It is sincere. And what comes out of the heart Mademoiselle is never ridiculous---never to be laughed at!

CHRISTABEL (in a state of flattered bewilderment) I've always heard that a Frenchman makes love to every woman he meets!

PUJOL: Naturally! If they're pretty of course! What else are pretty women for? Otherwise they might as well be ugly!

CHRISTABEL (not expecting this sweet logic) Oh!

PUJOL: So if I say how beautiful you are mademoisells, it is only your due.

CHRISTABEL (looking down) I wonder what my fiancé would say if he heard you.

PUJOL: Parbleu! A fiancé?

CHRISTABEL: Yes. There's his photograph. He's six foot one, and terribly jealous (with a laugh)!

PUJOL (disgruntled) The Turk! (Brightening up at once) But when this six feet of muscle and egotism is away, surely the pretty little mouse will play!

They giggle together almost conspiratorially.

CHRISTABEL: But you mustn't call my fiancé a Turk. He's a very charming man, and I hope you'll like him very much.

PUJOL (with a patient sigh) And the name of this lucky creature?

CHRISTABEL: Harry Ralston. He's the Honourable Harry Ralston, heir to a great brewery firm. He's terribly rich already! He's a Member of Parliament too. He's got a house in Hampshire and he collects the most wonderful works of art. That's how he and my father met. Over the works of art. (With a wave of her hand) We're supposed to have quite a fine collection here too.

PUJOL gazes round the walls in a perfunctory way, a fact which registers on her at once.

CHRISTABEL: I thought you were a connoisseur!

PUJOL (continuing to gaze at her with admiration) I am, mademoisells, I am!

CHRISTABEL (rising to hide her blush) I must go and dress for dinner. Perhaps you'd like to be shown your room?

PUJOL (rising at once too) Have I been too bold, mademoisells?

CHRISTABEL: I don't know! You see, I've never met a Frenchman before!

PUJOL (with a bow) Then undreamt-of possibilities are before you!

Cut to MONSIEUR PUJOL's bedroom. A fire is burning in the grate. He looks round the room at the curtains and soft couches and satin quilts and dainty writing tables. His own clothes are set out for him in preparation for dinner.

PUJOL (beginning to change) A corner of paradise! Just like that---zuk! From Waterloo station! (Getting out of his trousers) How do you do it, Pujol?

Cut to the drawing room. CHRISTABEL and her father, MR SMITH, a vast bald-headed, beefy-faced Briton with little pig's eyes and a hearty manner, are waiting. SMITH is warming his backside at the fire. MONSIEUR PUJOL comes in, frock-coated but none too elegant.

SMITH (coming forward with outstretched hand) My dear chap! Delighted to have you here! Heard so much about you, don't you know. My little girl's been singing your praises.

PUJOL (as they shake hands) Mademoiselle is too kind.

SMITH: Well, you must take us as you find us, Monsewer. We're just ordinary folk you know. But I hope you'll enjoy our company. And I can guarantee you a first-class bottle of wine and a decent cigar. I do believe it's only here in England, old chap, that you can find wine fit to drink and cigars worth smoking--- I'm sure you agree. And we can give you a taste of a real English home. That's something you haven't got in France eh? There isn't even a word for it I believe!

PUJOL: Ma foi no! In France, you see, the men live in cafés, the children are put out to nurse and the women--- well, the less said about them the better!

SMITH (missing the irony) Just so,

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old chap. England's the only place isn't it? Of course I don't say that Paris hasn't got its points. But, you know, the Moulin Rouge and the Folies Bergères and all that sort of thing do pall after a time, don't you agree?

PUJOL: But even Paris has its serious side, Monsieur. There is always the tomb of Napoleon.

CHRISTABEL: Daddy will never take me to Paris.

SMITH: You shall go there on your honeymoon dear.

THE BUTLER announces dinner. MONSIEUR PUJOL offers his arm to CHRISTABEL and struts proudly into the dining room. His shoes squeak and a CU of them shows creased brown boots.

Cut to the dining room where SMITH is seated at the head of a beautifully laid table. CHRISTABEL is on his right and MONSIEUR PUJOL on his left. They seem in the gayest of moods.

SMITH (downing half a glass of wine) And tell me, how is our dear old friend Jules Dancourt these days?

PUJOL (VO a CU of him thinking this out) Jules Dancourt! And who the devil would Monsieur Dancourt be?

They are watching him.

PUJOL (surfacing) Wonderfully well, apart from his gout, you know.

SMITH: Gout? That's my complaint too. I know what it feels like. (Downing another half-glass)

PUJOL: You and the good Jules were always sympathetic to each other. He speaks about you with tears in his eyes!

SMITH (to Christabel) Men cry in France my dear. They also kiss each other!

PUJOL (also to Christabel) Ah but Mademoiselle what an entrancing country! Do you know the woods of the Ile de France, the endless golden

fields! The scented vineyards of the south, the sparkling Mediterranean, sometimes Mademoisells I lose myself in ecstasy just to think---! (Watched by a SMITH so astonished that he has forgotten his belly) The village squares, the cafés! That hot dusty smell of the olive groves! Ah!

SMITH: Really? I thought you were always shut up in that chateau of yours.

PUJOL (VO) Tiens! I have a chateau!

CHRISTABEL: Do tell us about the chateau, Baron. Has it got a fosse and a drawbridge and an exciting Gothic chapel?

PUJOL: Which one do you mean, mademoiselle? For I have two.

SMITH (with a wink at him) She means the one in Languedoc.

PUJOL: Ah, my place in Languedoc! Fosse, you say? Drawbridge? Chapel? (Carried away, his eyes gleaming) These are nothing compared with the tourelles, the emblazoned gateways, the bastions, the donjons, the barbicans! How many rooms are there?---too many to count! In the salle des chevaliers 200 men at arms could be seated for a banquet in the old days! Francis I slept in one of the rooms, in another Joan of Arc was assassinated. I have an army of retainers, men and women who I might say live for me! There is the wizened old major-domo Marie-Joseph Loufoque (springing to his feet in an imitation of the bent old retainer) with his long white whiskers and his blue and silver livery! (Hopping round the room to the rapt astonishment of the BUTLER) 'Oui, monsieur le baron, bien sûr monsieur le baron! Toute suite! A ton service!' Then there is Madeline Mioules, the cook, Bernadet the groom, La Petite Fripette the goose-girl! And and you should see her sister, the young Francine---what flames in her cheeks, what blushing simplicity whenever I approach! You would think, at my Languedoc estate, that there had been no such thing as the French revolution!

CHRISTABEL: You have a wonderful farm, Monsieur?

PUJOL: There are horses and cows and ducks and hens---and a great pond where frogs are bred for the table!

CHRISTABEL:(with a shiver) I should hate to eat frogs!

SMITH: They eat snails as well.

PUJOL: I have in fact a snail farm. You never saw such interesting little animals. So intelligent, so receptive! If you're nice to them they come and eat out of your hand!

SMITH (with another wink) And the pictures on your walls?

PUJOL: Galleries full of pictures! Raphael, Michelangelo, Wiertz, Reynolds--- (searching for more names but drying up, hand in mid-air) A truly historical chateau.

CHRISTABEL: I should love to see it.

PUJOL (almost throwing himself across the table to take her hands in his) It is yours, mademoiselle, for your honeymoon!

Cut to the dining room a little later. SMITH AND PUJOL are now alone. Coffee and liqueurs are before them. They are both smoking enormous cigars.

PUJOL (downing a brandy) What cognac! My cellars contain no better!

SMITH (another wink) At the chateau? (Getting up) Come with me.

SMITH gestures him conspiratorially towards the door leading to the library.

Cut to the library where they are standing before an easel at present covered with a curtain. SMITH switches on a powerful light above the easel and pulls back the curtain.

SMITH: Now, sir, isn't it a stunner?

From his ~~PV~~we see a landscape of grey sky, grey water and grey feathery trees, and a little man in the foreground with a red cap.

PUJOL: Beautiful! Magnificent!

SMITH: Genuine Corot, what?

PUJOL: Without doubt!

SMITH (poking him in the ribs) I thought it'd bowl you over! Old Gottschalk did it. If you can tell it from a genuine Corot I'll eat my hat, I'm damned if I won't! And all for eight pounds. Now are you satisfied?

PUJOL (trying to keep pace) More than satisfied.

SMITH: Now if this was a copy of something Corot actually did it'd be illegal---very dangerous, don't you know. But you can't trip old Gottschalk up! Know what he did? Went and got bits out of various Corots and sort of stuck 'em all together! Stunning isn't it? If it hadn't been for the principles of business I'd have given him eight guineas instead of eight pounds, stack me if I wouldn't! He deserves it, don't you think so?

PUJOL: He does indeed.

SMITH: And now you've seen it what do you think you might ask me for it? (PUJOL busily trying to follow) I suggested something between two and three thousand. Shall we say three? You're the owner you know. (Digging him again) It came out of that old chateau of yours, eh? My God, the way you lay it on! You nearly convinced me!

PUJOL (VO) Tiens! I don't have a chateau after all!

PUJOL gazes at the picture gravely.

PUJOL: Certainly three thousand.

SMITH: That young feller thinks he knows a lot but he knows damn-all!

PUJOL: Ah.

SMITH: Not a bloody thing. He'll pay up, don't you worry about that. Being a partner in the family firm he doesn't have to worry where his dough comes from. It's a brewery,

you know. Ralston, Wiggins and Wix's. When his dad dies, and it looks like being any minute now, he'll be Lord Ranelagh and come into a million of money. Minus what we get out of him.

PUJOL (with growing understanding)
Has he seen the picture yet?

SMITH: Oh yes. Thinks it's a masterpiece. Didn't old Brauneberger tell you about that Lancret we planted on the American? My God---that was a beautiful deal! Never had it so easy. And this one looks like being the same. I told young Harry it might come to three thou. He jibbed a bit but stick to your guns. In fact you might kick off a lot higher.

PUJOL (VO) So this is the Honourable Harry, the ravishing Christabel's friend!

SMITH (slapping him on the back with frightening heartiness) Well, let's talk business you bloody old rascal! What do you want by way of commission? I mean, all the trouble's been mine, hasn't it? What about £400?

PUJOL: Five.

SMITH (with relief) Done!

They shake hands. A SERVANT enters.

SMITH (as THE SERVANT beckons him out rather urgently) Excuse me a moment old chap!

He leaves the room. MONSIEUR PUJOL lights another cigar and throws himself into a great leather armchair by the fire. He sits laughing to himself, gazing into the flames.

PUJOL (to himself) Pujol! What a man!

The door suddenly bursts open and in strides SMITH, red in the face with anger, with an elderly foxy-faced FRENCH GENTLEMAN who has a white moustache and the ribbon of the Legion of Honour in his buttonhole. SMITH makes straight for MONSIEUR PUJOL.

SMITH: Here! Who the devil are you?

MONSIEUR PUJOL rises and puts his hands behind his frock coat, smiling radiantly.

PUJOL: I, my dear friend, am the Baron de Je ne Sais Plus!

SMITH: You're a bloody impostor!

PUJOL (blandly) And this gentleman to whom I have not yet had the pleasure of being introduced?

FRENCH GENTLEMAN (defiantly) I am Monsieur Poiron, agent of Messrs Brauneberger et Compagnie, art dealers of the Rue Notre Dame des Petits Champs de Paris!

PUJOL: Ah, I thought you were a baron too!

SMITH: There's no damned baron about it. Are you Poiron or is he (looking wildly from one to the other)?

PUJOL: I would not have a name like Poiron for all the pictures in the world, Monsieur. My name is Aristide Pujol, soldier of fortune (with a bow), at your service!

SMITH: And how the blazes did you get here?

PUJOL: Your servant asked me if I happened to be the French gentleman from Godalming. And I said yes. Because it was indeed the truth. He said Mr Smith had sent a carriage for me. I thought it very hospitable of Mr Smith---and I jumped into the carriage---et voilà!

SMITH: Well you can get out of here right away (reaching for the bell)!

PUJOL (checking him) Pardon, my dear sir. It is raining, as you say, cats and dogs outside. I feel very much at home in your house. I am here, sir, and I am here to stay!

SMITH: I'll be damned if you are---! Will you get out now or will you be thrown out?

PUJOL (puffing cheerfully at his cigar) You forget, mon cher ami, that neither the beautiful Miss Christabel nor her affianced the Honourable Harry M.P.M

would care to know that the talented Gottschalk got only eight pounds, not even eight guineas, for painting this three-thousand-pound picture.

SMITH (dancing with rage) So it's blackmail is it?

PUJOL: Precisely. And I don't blush at it.

SMITH: You're a damned blackguard, sir, that's what you are!

PUJOL: Then I seem to be in congenial company. I don't think our friend Poiron here has any ~~right~~ more right to a better title than he has to this Legion of Honour ribbon (delicately lifting the ribbon on MONSIEUR POIRON's chest and being smacked away irrationally)!

SMITH: How much will you take to get out? I have a cheque book handy.

But MONSIEUR PUJOL sits down again.

PUJOL: I'll take £500 to stay in.

SMITH (apoplectic) To stay in?

PUJOL: Precisely. For you can't do without me! Your daughter and your servants know me as Monsieur le Baron--- by the way, what is my name? And where exactly is my historical chateau in Languedoc?

POIRON: At Mireilles. Near Montpelier.

PUJOL: I like to meet an intelligent man.

SMITH: I'd like to wring your Provencal neck! Now listen, if we do let you in, you'll have to sign and receipt the money, do you hear that? You'll have to implicate yourself up to the (with a quick gesture) the neck!

PUJOL: Anything you say. We shall all spit in the basket together or not at all!

They stare at him in surprise.

Cut to CHRISTABEL's bedroom. She is humming to herself and putting the

finishing touches to her hair in the mirror. A door bell sounds from below and she hurries away.

Cut to the library where the three men are now in close conference round the fire, seated with their heads together.

SMITH: Now, have you got it? You (to MONSIEUR PUJOL), the Baron de Mireilles, are being forced to sell your priceless collection for knock-down prices. I heard of this Corot thing through our dear common friend Jules Dancourt of Rheims (he pronounces it Reems).

PUJOL: Of where?

POIRON (laconically) Rheims.

PUJOL: Ah!

SMITH (with passing irritation) I then mentioned it to young Harry and arranged that you, the Baron, should bring the picture over and meet him. Now I'm a purely disinterested friend in all this, do you understand?

PUJOL (with irony) But of course.

SMITH (with a murderous glance) I've simply brought you all together.

PUJOL: And what about the good Monsieur Poiron here? I seem to have displaced him from his earlier function! May I suggest that he becomes the eminent Parisian expert who chances to be in London and has come along at your request? (With delight) It would not therefore be proper for Monsieur Poiron to stay here even for the night, let alone two or three days, much less a week, like myself. He must return to his hotel after the business has been concluded. After all, he's no longer a baron.

POIRON (outraged) Mais pardon! How can I go out into the wet?

PUJOL (with a smile, to SMITH) He's being unreasonable, cher ami. He must play his rôle. He has just been telephoned for. He has rushed over. And he must rush back again when the business is finished. (To POIRON) Surely for £500 it is worth one night in the cold?

POIRON: Mais---

PUJOL: And then you know we legionnaires (touching POIRON's ribbon again) are used to hardship!

POIRON: £500? Qu'est-ce que vous chantez là? I want more than £500!

SMITH: You're damned-well not going to get it! And as for you (turning to PUJOL) I'll wring your French neck even yet!

PUJOL (with a smile) Calm yourself, monsieur, calm yourself!

THE door opens and CHRISTABEL comes in. She sees the new stranger.

CHRISTABEL (with surprise) Oh! I beg your pardon!

SMITH (setting his angry face with great difficulty as they all rise) This, my darling, is Monsieur Poiron, the eminent art expert from Paris who has been good enough to come and give us the benefit of his opinion on the picture.

MONSIEUR POIRON bows.

PUJOL: Mademoiselle, your appearance is like a mirage in the desert!

CHRISTABEL (with a kind smile for him) I've been wondering what became of you all. Harry's been here for the last half hour.

SMITH: Bring him in, dear child, bring him in! (Settling back into the role of the fine old English gentleman, with a last leer at MONSIEUR PUJOL). My good friends are dying to meet him.

CHRISTABEL disappears from the room. A hurried, muttered conversation takes place.

SMITH: Now are you all set? (To POIRON) You're getting £500 and not a penny more. Start him off at four or even five. And come down slow.

POIRON: If he meets my price suppose we divide eet up and say one thousand each!

SMITH: Not on your Aunt Nellie! I think you'd better play the art expert and otherw~~ise~~ keep your mouth shut.

Or Monsieur Pujol here might help me to throw you out!

PUJOL: That's right.

POIRON: I could reveal you both!

PUJOL: You? No one believes you when you tell the truth, let alone when you tell a lie!

POIRON (about to burst, to SMITH)
£800!

SMITH: Not a penny more than five!

PUJOL: Give him four.

POIRON (jumping up) I'll---!

SMITH (grabbing him by the coat tails and plonking him back into his seat) Come here, you toad! Just you behave and then may be I'll keep to my agreement---

POIRON: 650!

SMITH: Ssstt!

The door opens and all three compose themselves into relaxed and well-wined attitudes. CHRISTABEL comes back with the HONOURABLE HARRY RALSTON in tow. RALSTON is tall and soldierly, with short blond curly hair and a fair moustache. His clear eyes seem incapable of seeing any harm in his fellow creature. Even the House of Commons seems to him full of honest folk.

SMITH leaps up and shakes RALSTON's hand with such violent effusiveness that the young man winces.

SMITH: Now, Harry, I want you to meet Baron de Miray.

RALSTON perks up at hearing a title and gives his hand to MONSIEUR PUJOL with genuine warmth. This is reciprocated.

SMITH: And Monsieur Poiron. He has kindly consented to come along (with a quick steely look of command at POIRON) to give his opinion as one of the leading art experts in Paris. He happened to be in London as a matter of fact, and his hotel is just across the way.

RALSTON shakes Poiron's hand and then

turns back to MONSIEUR PUJOL.

RALSTON: Well, Monsewer le Baron, you have a regular beauty there (nodding towards the picture). I wonder how you can manage to part with it!

PUJOL: Ma foi! I have so many glories of the same kind at the Chateau de Mireilles that---well, you know, when one begins to collect, and one's father and grandfather before one, all touched with the same divine mania--!

POIRON (playing his part with icy exactitude) You were saying, Monsieur le Baron, that your respected grandfather bought this picture direct from Corot himself---

PUJOL (with a casual wave of his hand) A commission. As a matter of fact, my grandfather was a patron of Corot (he leaves POIRON sourly stunned by his inventive flair).

RALSTON (to CHRISTABEL) Do you like it dear?

CHRISTABEL: Oh yes! I think it's lovely! (To her father) I feel the same as Harry! (To MONSIEUR PUJOL) But how can you part with it, Monsewer le Baron? Imagine all those others--- how lonely they're going to feel! They must look so wonderful side by side. Were you really serious when you said I could come along to see them one day?

PUJOL: For me, mademoiselle (with a bow), your visit would mean more than all the pictures in all the chateaux of France!

MONSIEUR POIRON turns away with disgust.

CHRISTABEL (to RALSTON) Then you must take me. The Baron has been telling us such gorgeous things about his chateau.

PUJOL: You will come, Monsieur?

RALSTON (with smiling courtesy) ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ Since I'm going to rob you of your picture I suppose I must agree to imposing on you a second time. Yes, I'd love to visit you at home!

(walking towards the picture) It's superb---it really is!

MONSIEUR PUJOL takes CHRISTABEL aside as the other three gather round the picture.

PUJOL (in a whisper) But he's charming, your fiancé! He almost deserves his happiness!

CHRISTABEL (shyly) why 'almost'?

PUJOL: Because, mademoiselle, it isn't a man but a demi-god who would deserve you!

On the other side of the room MONSIEUR POIRON is giving his opinion as an art expert.

POIRON: You see, it is painted at the beginning of Corot's later manner---it is 1864. Quite an old man, you see. Everything comes easily to him. If you put this up to auction at Christie's it fetches, I suppose---(screwing up his mouth) £5000!

RALSTON (with a laugh) That's more than I can afford. Mr Smith mentioned something between three and four thousand. I don't think I can go above three.

SMITH: Well, this is where I sort of fade out, dear boy. You wanted a Corot. And I provided you with one. It's for the Baron to state his price. What do you say, Monsieur le Baron?

RALSTON (as everyone waits) Well, Baron? What's your decision?

MONSIEUR PUJOL, fully aware that he has the stage, strolls forward to the picture, gazing at it. He comes to a firm halt, and stands before it with a solemn look.

PUJOL: I'll not take three thousand for it. A Picture like that? Never!

SMITH seems to want to throw himself on him.

POIRON (cutting) I assure you it would be a fair price, Monsieur le Baron!

SMITH (with a threatening gleam in his

eye) You mentioned that figure yourself only a few moments ago!

PUJOL: I presume, gentlemen, that this picture is my own property?
(to SMITH) Is it not, cher ami?

SMITH: Who said it wasn't?

PUJOL (to Poiron) Et vous, Monsieur, vous reconnaissez formellement que celui-là est à moi?

POIRON (through clenched teeth) Sans aucune doute.

PUJOL: Eh bien! (Throwing his arms open and gazing round with a sweet expression) I've changed my mind. I do not sell the picture at all!

SMITH (almost grabbing him) Not sell it? What the d---? (checks himself) What do you mean?

PUJOL: I do not sell. Listen, my dear friends! I have an announcement to make! I have fallen desperately in love with mademoiselle!

A gasp all round. SMITH's mouth has fallen open. He is too surprised to be aggressive. CHRISTABEL makes a sound half-way between a laugh and a scream. RALSTON's eyes flash.

RALSTON: My dear sir---!

PUJOL: Pardon (with a glance at RALSTON the sweetness of which disarms him) I have no intention of trying to take mademoiselle from you! No! My love is hopeless! I realise that! But it will nourish me to my dying day (a new demonstration of disgust from MONSIEUR POIRON, who almost doubles up). And in return for the joy of this hopeless passion I do not sell you the picture---I give it to you as a wedding present!

MONSIEUR PUJOL stands triumphantly with his arms extended towards the young couple while SMITH seems to be doing a silent war-dance. MONSIEUR POIRON is demonstrating with a long dry look at SMITH I-told-you-so.

PUJOL: I have only one wish---your happiness! And, after all, my chateau

de Mireilles has over a hundred others!

MONSIEUR POIRON nods sceptically.

SMITH (his bald head scarlet) But this is madness!

RALSTON (to MONSIEUR PUJOL) My dear fellow! This is unheard-of generosity on your part. We simply cannot accept it!

The relief in SMITH deflates him like a balloon.

SMITH: Of course not!

PUJOL (advancing dramatically to the picture once more) Then I take it under my arm! (Almost laying hands on the picture) I put it in a hansom cab and return with it to Languedoc!

SMITH grabs him by the wrist and starts almost pulling him out of the room.

SMITH (between his teeth) But Monsewer le Baron, let's settle this in another room---! (To CHRISTABEL) Excuse me, my dear, I shall settle it all in a moment! Trust me! The Baron and I have known each other more years than you have on your young shoulders, eh, Baron?

He slams the door to the drawing room and the others are suddenly alone.

Cut to the drawing room where SMITH is seething with rage.

SMITH: Now what are you up to, you bungling goat? Eh? Do you want your neck broken?

PUJOL: Do you want the marriage of your daughter to the rich and honourable Harry Ralston? Do you? Or shall I walk back in there and tell them the truth?

SMITH (beaten) !!!

MONSIEUR PUJOL goes to the library door and opens it again, too soon for SMITH to grab his coat tails and draw him back.

Cut to the library as MONSIEUR PUJOL returns.

PUJOL: The kind Mr Smith has consented. Mr Honourable Harry and Miss Christabel---here is your Corot! And now, may I be permitted?

SMITH appears from behind, exhausted, as MONSIEUR PUJOL strides across to the bell and pulls it. SMITH watches him with something like fascination.

CHRISTABEL (going to her father happily) Father!

SMITH (jelly-eyed) My sweetheart!

A SERVANT appears in answer to the bell and looks at SMITH questioningly.

PUJOL (to SERVANT) Some champagne to drink the health of the fiancés! Lots of champagne!

SERVANT looks with surprise at SMITH who nods helplessly.

SMITH (half-choked) That's it. Bring up a magnum.

SERVANT leaves.

SMITH (disentangling himself from his daughter and going to MONSIEUR PUJOL) My dear Baron! (Taking MONSIEUR PUJOL by the arm and walking him away) By God, you've got some nerve haven't you? But just think this one out, as you're so damned clever. What about your chateau when they're on their honeymoon? Are you still going to invite them? Even you can't build a castle in a month!

PUJOL: Tomorrow morning you will arrange to send me a telegram from Aigues-Mortes in Provence telling me that the historic chateau of Mireilles has been burned to the ground with all the pictures in it. And, just to think, the pictures weren't even insured!

SMITH: Good God! What a thorough crook you are!

PUJOL: He'll believe every word. He believes anything, even (as THE SERVANT enters the room with champagne) that you are a good man.

SMITH: I can see I've got a lot to learn from you. Why don't you stay

for the wedding in a month's time?

FUJOL: I don't mind if I do!

SMITH chuckles piggishly as they all gather round for the champagne to be popped. SMITH does the uncorking, taking the magnum roughly from THE SERVANT. And during the popping and the pouring and the drinking the credits come up.