

ONE DECADENT LIFE

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Angelique's Diary, December 17th, 1985

As I was heading home along Twenty Third Street, after sitting through a film (violent trash I won't here render to posterity) I crossed paths with Rene - his a hurried diagonal, making his beeline to the Chelsea Hotel. He was wearing a black peacoat covered with a surprisingly amount of lint - though crowned with an emerald green satin beret, figured with golden fleurs-de-lis.

When I shrieked in greeting, "REE !" he halted, granted me a strict appraisal from head to foot, and liking what he saw he shrieked in turn, "Angel, darling! Come on, come with me, I'm giving you a painting!"

At first I thought he meant he was dispensing the immense wealth of his private art collection. "Oh, THAT - my dear you are so behind the times! You didn't hear about the holocaust - the fire that burned up the entire lot?"

"Well all the artists are still alive, they can just get to work and paint me some more!"

I asked him if he had lost a Morgan "Ooooh, so we'd've liked to have copped a Morgan, now, wouldn't we've? No, doll, the Morgan went up in flames with the rest of them.

"Though you'd think maybe hell-fire would have spared its minion!"

"No, brat - I'm the one who's a painter now!"

A certain gallery had been writing Rene generous checks, paying for his Chelsea digs, all to support a new, prolific output of *painted poems* ...which he set down on anything at hand, brown paper bags, scraps of dirty wood, atop lousy paint-by-number paintings, on friend's shirts, leather jackets, along kitchen cabinetry...

“You know I painted ‘The Sycophant’s Lament’ on the trunk of Jude Nozzel’s Bentley. Now his wife won’t let him wash the car, and you know he loves washing that car, washing that car is his biggest fetish!”

Rene was at his wildest, giggling, capering, seeming to defy gravity... I recreate our dialogue to make my own portrait: “Rene and the Adamantine Wit.”

Dear Rene! We thrill to know the brilliance is intact; your tensile constitution springing you back to us! Once again you have proved your superior capacity for things Divine! (both the angelic and the demonic factions thereof...)

I had not been in the Chelsea lobby for ages - it has not changed a bit. Still the incredibly uncomfortable chrome apparati that pass as chairs; still the collection of grotesque art, including that tedious etagere with the Pop red-blue-yellow table-settings eternally undusted; ever the violently cranky desk-man. Stanley the owner must advertise for desk-clerks, thus: ‘Wanted: Most foul-tempered slave in Manhattan - must be incapable of taking coherent phone messages - must loathe bohemians and be willing to verbally abuse them - all for minimum wage.’

And still the elevator is so slow it may as well be broken. As we climbed the spiral of the great staircase, Rene began to tease me about David -

“I hear the obsession is mutual!”

“Don’t be insane!”

“No, really - Paula says David is obsessed with you!”

“Paula often has many bizarre and exaggerated things to say - about me, and David, and you too no doubt...”

“Well, did he get exorcised, or what?”

When I did not answer, rather amazed I had to answer to this in a public forum, Rene interjected -

“Ah, I see the Operation was not a success!”

When I said we were going to try again, Rene interpreted, “Stubborn little Devil Heroin is!”

When I complained that I just did not understand ‘why any genius would set upon himself in such a way, try to destroy his faculties, impair the instrument’ and so forth, Rene accused me, “The only way you’ll ever know is to take the Heroin yourself.”

“They say it has enhancing qualities?”

My friend expelled a long breath of exasperation, “You don’t want to go there... And you can’t do a thing for him. Nothing’s going to make the boy quit but the boy.

“Exorcised today, hag-ridden tomorrow, hag!”

When I asked him how he himself had quit, his irritation visibly increased, “Can we change the bloody subject? You ought to know better than to talk to an ex-junkie about junk. It just makes me want to cop... and how I quit anyhow has nothing to do with how David will quit!

“And you should know better than anyone - *take no slave out of his chains untimely!*”

“Why do you think the exorcism won’t help him?”

“Because, Angel, the spirits don’t like to be roused from their nice warm hiding places. You want to help the sad Beast who is our friend? Fine. Help. Help! Just expect plenty of backlash.”

Now he was running lightly ahead of me, dropping his cigarettes which I picked up, dashing down the hallway to his own warm hiding place, “I am BRUJO baby, BRUJO! Been to hell and come back again ... to tell the tale!”

My friend Rene embodies this axiom: there shall be no JUDGEMENTS against, nor any MORALITY as imperative as - the need of the Spirit to KNOW EVERYTHING.

This imperial Spirit inhabits the soul of the Artist... who, in their experiments in Matter, will assume the hideous royalty of Crime... all the degrading addictions... the fermenting obsessions... the exaltations of Violence... every approach to DEATH.

We artists take on that BLACKENING... let ourselves get sick, become ugly, go crazy even psychotic but still - fail to die!

For the point is to return from Hell - Return, and Tell the Tale!

“I am BRUJO baby, BRUJO! GONE TO HELL, AND COME BACK AGAIN!”

Rene’s room was as per Rene’s usual style of housekeeping. Glories amidst squalour.... Floor strewn with shredded pornography (as if after employing the pictures, he had fights with the perfect models), piles of dirty and clean laundry admixed, food cartons from a dozen different take-out places - (“Pardon the mess doll... Those are NOT fast-food wrappers!” - so relieved we are Monsieur to know your garbage is gourmet.) And this was just the passageway leading back to his room.

More madness therein. Above a maniacal clutter of books, canvasses, paint tubes, more clothes, food wrappings and pornography rose, in gorgeous contrast, vases of flowers. Huge urns of porcelain, Chinese and French, illed to overflowing with the conceivable beauties: eighteenth century profusion of lilies, blown roses, spiked chrysanthemum, fern of surpassing lusciousness... An enormous Moroccan bronze and blue glass oil-lamp was suspend from the crumbling ceiling, its ornate chain strung with deflated balloons...

I started when I realized a young man, calm as though sleeping, inhabited one of the beds. Still as a statue, as exquisitely modelled, his naked ebony chest and shoulders rose in majesty from the coverlet of thick brocade silk - and his countenance, from whence emanated this calm, was opulently masculine.

“Angelique, this is Bobby - isn't he gorgeous? I found him just the other night, he was begging, it was raining and he's been here ever since.”

I noted a pair of crutches next to the bed. Bobby met my gaze with a sage resignation... as Rene saw fit to add -

“He doesn't have any feet! He lost them to frostbite, living on the street!”

“Rene would you not talk about him in the third person?”

But then I saw Bobby receive Rene's caress, holding onto the Blessed's hand tightly. Rene was whispering in his ear - probably telling him I was a 'famous whore,' as he so enjoys introducing me. Rene I know is loving the handsome helplessness; what can Bobby do but acquiesce, in exchange for so much attention, and a warm place to abide. Who would be so base to revile the homosexual contract, filling in here to succour and console where no one else had bothered to care?

From the depths of a small desk buried in apparent trash Rene whisked forth a small wooden board - “Here's your painting!”

Right on dirty old cracked green paint, Rene in his spidery hand had written:

PLEASE DREAD NO CURSE

**I could not be more dead
The guardians of my tomb are fled
To those who walked over my head
Do not desecrate my bed**

“Isn't it beautiful? Don't you love it? I found the board on the sidewalk by the cemetery, so it made me think of an epitaph. It was the first one I did! I love writing them, I started doing a series.... it's for you - only a hundred dollars!”

“Rene! I thought you said...”

He viewed me narrowly, “Ooooh, that I was 'giving' it to you? What a cheapskate you are! It would go for thousands, THOUSANDS in the gallery!”

The presence of the crippled young man shamed me into fishing for my wallet. Anyhow they weren't buying drugs. As I produced the cash, Bobby broke into a broad smile.

Rene caught it, “See? What did I tell you? It's great being an artist! It's so easy, then, to get beautiful women to shower you with money!”

Bobby broke into a hilarious mood, shaking his head, slapping the brocade, his perfect shoulder development heaving in joy.

“Isn’t he BEAUTIFUL? Wasn’t I LUCKY to find him?” Rene once more exclaimed. I could not help the tears that came, something pathetic and selfless, even if advantageously The Blessed enjoyed that flesh hewn lovely by hardship.

Then, next instant, came burlesque insult: “Wanna see his feet? I mean, the ‘no-feet?’ I mean they just FELL OFF!” He actually started yanking the covers away...

“Oh, all right!” he desisted, then to Bobby, “You wouldn’t know she was a whore, would you - she’s almost pathologically modest!”

“Rene, you of all people should understand - a dominatrix is not a whore!”

“You still see naked men every day, don’t you?”

“Well so does a nurse!”

“Nurses are BIG whores! Everyone knows that!”

Now Bobby intervened in my discomfort. In a voice low and well-formulated, with an educated twang, he requested of Rene, “Did you happen to remember to ask Stanley about a television for me?”

“Television? TELEVISION! I will NOT allow you to lie here and watch TELEVISION! Read! Read - here, READ!” Rene raved at the hapless invalid, “Be THANKFUL now you have the leisure TO read!!” and he tossed several raggedly books on the bed.

“But Rene, I can’t read all day. You know I have to get glasses. My eyes start hurting.”

“Listen here, I never watched television as a child! I had an encyclopedia that danced when you played Chopin on the piano!”

The Blessed babbled on past this gem, “...we should buy a piano...” such as they are falling hourly from his lips. Oh profligate profusion of wit, dear Rene! At least he has yours truly to write some of it down for him!

To palliate this tyranny, I told Bobby that not so long ago Rene had himself been living on the street. “He came to my house one night BLACK - I mean absolutely BLACK with Filth!

Rene shrieked in fury, “The FILTH is a SIGN!”

“I know darling I’m coming to that. Anyhow, Rene appeared on my doorstep, filthy dirty, to tell me the tale of how he had discovered the Abode of the Spirit of Filth... a Spirit he believed was the ruling Daemon of the city of Manhattan.’

I went on to explain how I had tried, many times, to write Rene’s adventure down, but the experience had come from such a deep, strange crevasse of the Irrational, that a narrative line I think is poorly equipped to reproduce.

Rene agreed, "My brain had cracked from the crack cocaine, yes... I was out of my mind, yes, for Jay, my lover had just died from an overdose. I was insane in a new way... while the genius could pick up the 'crack'd' transmissions, and did lead me to Truth... the physical brain fizzled and popped... I was nothing more than a demented radio, charged with a transmission from Hell.

"But The Angel saved me that night, when I was fresh from The Horror. I knew she would hear me, and write it all down."

"But Rene I have not written it all down yet," I confessed, "maybe you could help me with it - read it, you know - and edit, or add to it?"

Rene gave me a long, long searching look, for more than a beat or two. Then he began to laugh in a manner sinister, "Ahh girlfriend, you are so sweet. 'Edit, or add to it'?" He imitated my sedulous sincerity... "HA!

"As if I could EVER forget! How you could POSSIBLY think that I would ever forget any of it?"

How am I supposed to know what people retain, in that state? Rene thus apprised me, "I am BRUJO baby, brujo! Gone to Hell and come back to tell the tale! That's the thing my darling, I was there, ALL there, and I brought it ALL back!"

"I can do pathetically better than 'edit or add to it'!" he sneered, "I will tell you the whole fucking story, again, from beginning to end!"

When I asked him if I could take some notes, he exploded, "Angelique you are such a fucking little Yuppie! I can't believe a sophisticated whore such as yourself is also such a ridiculous bourgeoisie."

"Would you please stop calling me a whore every ten minutes?"

"The manners would shame a Queen," he informed Bobby, "Overcompensation for being called a whore."

I told him he was the only one who ever called me that, to which he replied, "To your face, at least. The rest of Downtown just says it behind your back."

I begged him to get on with it, tell the tale, if indeed he could. In answer to my challenge he swept a pile of trash off a high-backed chair, placed it between the two beds, mounted it and gestured to me to take my place. Thus his audience reclined before him, I with my pad to the ready.

Still I confess Rene's story was so jaggedy, wild and dizzying, not to mention sublime, that I found myself forgetting to write, and only listened, immersed again in apocalyptic vision - that lies, if Rene be proof, but lightly sleeping below our watch.

The great brain assumed again that *conscious insanity* that he carried so heavily with him in the drug-burdened days, now with the enlightening overlay: his intact mind, gazing from this wiser distance. And so *from out of himself* Rene began to read -

Rene's Tale: An Alchemical Manifesto

THE ABODE OF THE SPIRIT OF FILTH

It was four o'clock in the afternoon. I woke up and checked on how much money I had left. Almost twenty dollars - enough for two bags of dope, and two of crack. So I was okay for the day. So I went to Avenue C to cop.

After I got my stuff I went to Leshko's to scarf up some coffee and a piece of pie. I had cherry pie. Or was it raisin? That weird Lithuanian raisin pie they make. I like it because it's full of cinnamon. I don't think I had the raisin. Must have been the cherry. Well anyway I took a bite then went into the john. As I stood in the stall, snorting up the dope for starters, there, on the wall, was His Name: JAY.

Jay! The name of a beautiful young man - once mine! Jay! I still found His Name painted on the East Village walls. Jay! Your colors are red, black and gold. And the 'J' is the only letter that bends to the left.

Maybe there was something else in the dope that day. Maybe I had done a little too much. Or maybe it was just The Day and The Time. To find Jay again. I knew I would find him. I need only follow The Name.

I came out of the toilet, The Name burning in the back of my eyes. I made it to the counter and finished up the pie. I thought I'd have another piece. But when I opened up the menu, I could not read a thing: because across the open flat was His name: JAY!

I left the restaurant, and began to walk East. I would find Jay - I would just follow His Name.

And the heraldic writing was upon every wall of the Village. Mixed in with the he other names, there would rest his perfect one. Jay, Jay! As if in nest of friends... friends who had killed you, killed you, with the very dope burning in my blood.

Dope had been our sacrament. Every day I found it again. And so found you. Or did I? You were dead. But don't the dead walk the streets of Manhattan?

In the snow - without a coat - I walked. I walked for hours. Reading the walls - reading His Name. Before letter over five feet tall I stood and read. I stood and read for hours - hours - through the night - into the day. Reading - reading - warming myself in the rapture - for there was something in the shape fo those few letters: J. A. Y. Each letter was an opera - J the only letter that bends to the Left... A the commencement of all Creation ... Y the perverse and nightmarish letter - decadent, tailed, and not quite at the end. Before the Y I writhed - before the A I stood baffled. The J continued to seduce. I saw what I was doing and I did not understand - I read again and Knew - and I knew

Jay might be dead but Death was not the end of it. There would never be an end to it. Neither it nor anything. JAY! In one sounding chord all his life and tragic death. Deep and circuitous returning mystery. I read and I read and I Knew all - of my sainted One and God.

Even now Jay is calling me, for I belong to Jay...

He called me - I went - I continued walking East. I was walking down Delancey Street - my feet took me to the Bridge. The ugliest, most broken-down bridge in the world: on one of its parapets shone The Name. I began to walk across the Bridge - walked along its center, looking down into the water. With the cars zipping by, threatening to crush me - motorists cursing and trying to hit me - to have fallen would have been more in the order of the universe. Than walking, pushing on.

I did not fall. I walked straight on. Before me walked The Name.

Upon putting foot down on that distant shore of Brooklyn, I knew I was hard upon the turf of JAY. Now fanning around me, on every ancient wall, the hieroglyphs of His Power. The letters glowed brighter here, near The Source. More fantastical elaborations swarmed upon the J - across the hoods of cars was blazoned The Name - dead trees threw back the scrawl - across the hunched back of a man's coat, unsuspecting... The Name led me on to the abandoned zones - towards a huge empty warehouse on the river's edge.

No cop, guard, nor any authority makes patrol in this burnt-out precinct - not where the young savages hold their Court. They have painted over grim merchantile facades with their triumphant Names and Codes.

Along the flank of the massive rotting structure blazed The Name in letters twelve feet high. They had not been painted by human hands alone. Here was his dwelling place - here the Abode of Jay.

I stopped to do some crack. In case I had to fight. The drug was not an evil thing, it took me to Jay, helped me follow The Name... I had to know more - my brain crack'd afire - the urgency mounted - I entered the House of Jay.

Within was a space as broad and ringing as any Cathedral. On every wall was written The Names of The Generations! The Tribe had made a new Temple there - there they worship - there they punish.

Yes it is true that PUNISHMENT is the greater part of the cultures of religion, each new cult must invent its proper PUNISHMENTS. In the wastelands of industry the new Tribes are gathering. They start the firs anew -they make their sacrifices - they wait for this degenerate culture to die off.

In the center of the Hall were the remains of a bonfire. Upon its ashes lay the remains of a human body. After the flames had gone out... the white of the thigh-bone pierced my eye - I screamed - I screamed - they had eaten him.

Was this a Temple, then, of Death? The gold of His Name upon those inner walls was dull - evidence of frequent burnings. But Death is something given to us by the Divine... no, this was a place far, far worse. The only Divinities here were the Demons. So what was worshipped was -?

FILTH. FILTH - a thing made only by humans. Filth that would never be cleaned. FILTH - a pungent bed for the hungry Demons, open-mouthed, ever ready for a new meal of WASTE. Shit of the body, shit of the mind, a very white, very intellectual very pristine disease: MENTAL WASTE. Made constantly! Upon our breath! So ever are fed the Demons.

And I was of this Filth. Because I am a white man.

But I wanted to be one of the men of Jay. I wanted to be in that Tribe. I would undergo every Trial - persevere in my Initiation.

But no-one ever came. Not even to reject me. Only now I understand why. It was because of this brain, this jabbering machine, jittering away with my Ideals and their phrenzies. Though this brain of mine was once a fine-wrought thing, a sharp and subtle instrument for the job of poesy, it has been shredded by my Demon - the hungry white powders of self-destruction.

But I set myself to live in that Temple! I am certain I stayed there at least a year. But I am not certain. It seems to me I did sometimes leave. How could one hit of dope, and one hit of crack, keep me for a year, without a bite to eat? Yet it seems to me that it did.

Perhaps I did leave. But each time I woke up, I was in the Temple again, lying on the ground beside the burnt-out fire.

I wondered, Was my soul dying? Or was it already dead? Just another prey of the Demon, waste-product, rising from me to add to the reddish tinge of that miasma of Filth over Manhattan.

I called for JAY. He did not come. I was left alone with FILTH, in its undying agony. I ran into every corner of the room - North, West, South and East - trying to find some place to hide. But every time I thought I was hid, from the corner of my eye I would espy the yellow-white thigh-bone. I hurt all over as if my own bones were crying. At last, in one corner, I was allowed to cower in peace. Beneath the rotted floorboards the river rapidly flowed by. There I quietly cried The Name.

I do not know how much time went by. It might have been two hours - it might have been three days. It felt like livid centuries. Consciousness was eternal torture - stopping, and starting - recalling, forgetting - dying, and renewing. And every time I came to myself - Rene, Rene Lepine - still I squatted in that fetid corner. Was that my place - where I belonged?

The longer I stayed the worse the stench grew. It seems I rested in the Tribe's common toilet. The increasing stench assured me they'd been lately there. Why was I damned to entertain a thousand gigantic flies - it did not seem to me the proper function of a man of letters. The yellow-white thigh bone gleamed at me in irony. But there was something else in that Temple's putrid corner...

Something alive. Right by my foot. I saw a thing very beautiful, living and true. A bird! A blue, blue bluejay, with that tiny crest upon its head. JAY! A sign from the God! Blue-gem turquoise feathers shining. A bluejay - standing in the shit. Why didn't it fly? Why stood it there, in its velvet plumage, so very oddly still?

I saw its tiny heart fluttering in the pale-blue breast. Why did it not fly from me? Why did it meet mine eye with a look of unfathomable sadness?

Beneath us, in the rotting floorboards, hunching in the crawl-space, was a rat. In its teeth it held one leg of the jay. The bird, unwisely resting for an instant from flight had dropped its foot into a crack - then did the rat seize upon it. Now slowly - slowly - the rat moved the bird towards a larger hole - where it would be pulled through, and devoured entire. Meanwhile, as if to amuse itself, the rat

chewed upon the living flesh of the bird's leg.

As this sound - of chewing - reached me, I began to weep. The bluejay held my gaze. And while bluebirds might, in this loathesome universe, be the proper prey of rats, what glorious creature, living in Hell, will ever accept its being devoured?

I could not leave the bird. Yet neither could I stand to see Filth conquer - to watch Beauty dissolve in the mouth of a rat. I sat there for hours - through the night - I might have sat there a week. All the time I stared into the eye of that tormented bird. Slowly chewed the rat. And the bird did not move of its own accord, but once - to open its beak. As if it would cry out, 'Not !! Not !!'

With that bird I too cry, 'Not I' !

When the mouth of the jay closed at last, to submit through night after eternal night I knew - Knew I was in Hell - After The Fires Burned Out. Never again the cleansing Flames - nothing to purify abounding Filth - such was the new-and-improved modern-day HELL! Only the torments of Beauty in Hell, after Hell, after rotary of Hell. And no Afterlife anymore, either! Only Afterhell - here, now, HELL! After The Fires Have Burned Out.

Many are the mornings s I still awaken, and find I am again in that House of Hell, Locked in gaze with the doomed bird of blue. If you came with me now, crossed that Bridge, and entered that Temple - I swear to you that bird would still be there! My Jay! And why? How can it be? An infinity of torment? Why is there no end?

At least there is something still in me - something still pure, and perhaps alive - that

believes as long as I hold the gaze of that bird - as long as I Return, to let Beauty show me its sorrow - we may NOT be devoured entire.

[Finis Rene's Tale]

When Rene came to the end of his recitation, he fairly flew from his perch, lunged for his sketch book, and was halfway out the door before Angelique had a moment to cry her acclaim, "Darling - Rene - Stop!" she grabbed hold of his shirt-tail.

"Lemme go! Gotta get to the Studio - 'Afterhell after the fires have burned out.' Gotta get it down, paint it down, I have to. Let go! Before it fades again."

Angelique managed to get to her purse, bid the sublime Bobby farewell, and to trail after Rene down the stairs. His pace grew more sedate - his gaze was abstracted, fixed in the middle distance. As Angelique caught up with him,, she took out her gloves and began to draw one on. Rene stopped then and glared upon her.

"Those - are EXACTLY - what I NEED!" and he snatched the other glove out of her hand. They were her favorite white kidskins, a little old and yellowed, but most sensuously pleasing to her. "Rene," she began to protest.

"I NEED THEM!! Look."

He held out his palms to her. The phenomenon was precisely as she had read of it - the stigmata! Glowing in the center of each hand, covered with but the thinnest membrane of skin, she could see his blood pulsing awfully just beneath that transanguent film.

She stared in horror, disbelief at the shining wounds... Tears came to her eyes, as she looked into his face - it was not a trick, no joke. His face shone waxily, as if lit from within, his hair stiffly curling, like a wood carving. What specie of immortal was he truly?

"I am SO tired of being Christ, " he muttered. "Don't tell anyone - they'd just think I did it to myself."

She rendered up the other kidskin, which he pulled gently over his fingers. On the sidewalk she bid him a solemn adieu, with promises to visit, to call, to never forget...

Angelique fell into the nearest cafe, shaking all over. Rene always left her feeling slightly hallucinated, but this was the most profoundly disturbing. Could he have possibly made those marks on his

hands himself? But then how explain that strange, clear film? She felt that she had Seen too much. Her nerves at their best were never terribly good, and after this display of potent genius and miracle, she was not sure if she should have a coffee, or a vodka, or go home and try again to write it all down

It had begun to snow thickly, but she would walk a bit, then take a taxi home. As she approached the corner of Fifth and Twenty-Third, she balked for a moment - was that Rene? She noted with interest the especial dread that came over her, at the supposed sight of the poet.

Was he waiting for her? No - it was not Rene -

It was a man without an overcoat standing in the snow, holding in his arms a great bouquet of flowers. He stood as still as a stone figure in a garden, but was a living thing in the stony growth of Manhattan. What was that word Rene had used - *heraldic*. That described this derelict's stance. Though apparently pitiable, there was about him something powerful. Something of omen.

Angelique understood he was herself, standing alone in the cold holding up a great bouquet of flowers to no-one.

...a transient dream of matter, that nonetheless glowed with exquisite meaning?

As Angelique reached the corner, the old bum extended the flowers towards her. Angelique's vision was blurred by the snowfall... The man did resemble Rene. Then the cracked voice whispered, "Will you marry me?"

Angelique's eyes teared - she saw his dirt-caked clothes, filth in the creases of his face, the blackened hands. The Filth could not be rejected - the Filth a sign of Holy Abjectness.

She tried to give him alms but he stepped back, shaking his head vigorously. He kept on urging the flowers upon her - eighteenth-century profusion of dahlia, forced iris, orange-blossom, asters, great roses - the conceivable beauties of summer. The bum's eyes shone with his strange and beautiful joy - for he was giving these flowers to his great beloved, and not a startled stranger.

Angelique at last accepted them. His pleasure became immense. He grinned, bowed and scraped as she marvelled at the sumptuousness. As she tried to give him her hand in thanks, he bowed again hastily and scrambled away

...but wasn't that an emerald-green cap he wore, figured with golden fleurs-de-lis?