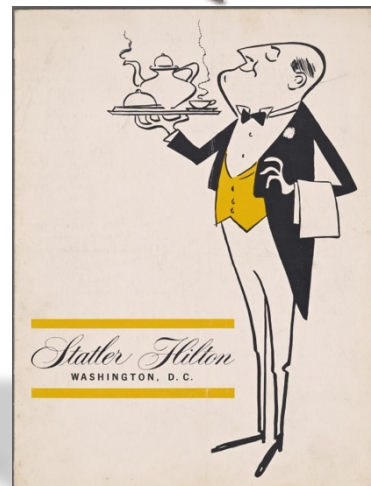
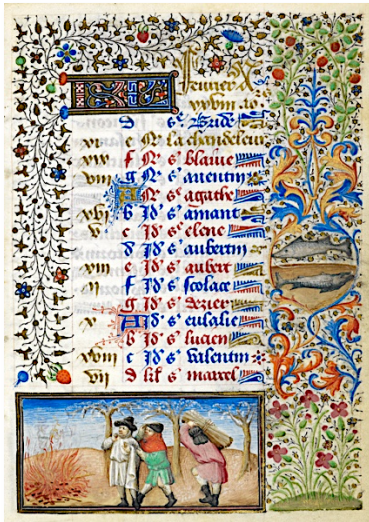


A Banquet at Mrs. Grosseteste's
Part One





Mrs. Roberta Grosseteste was returning from the Farmers' Market, where she had purchased one kilo of tomatoes (*Solanum lycopersicum*, she murmured with some amount of self-gratification, for she considered herself to be a passable Latinist for having been married to Mr.



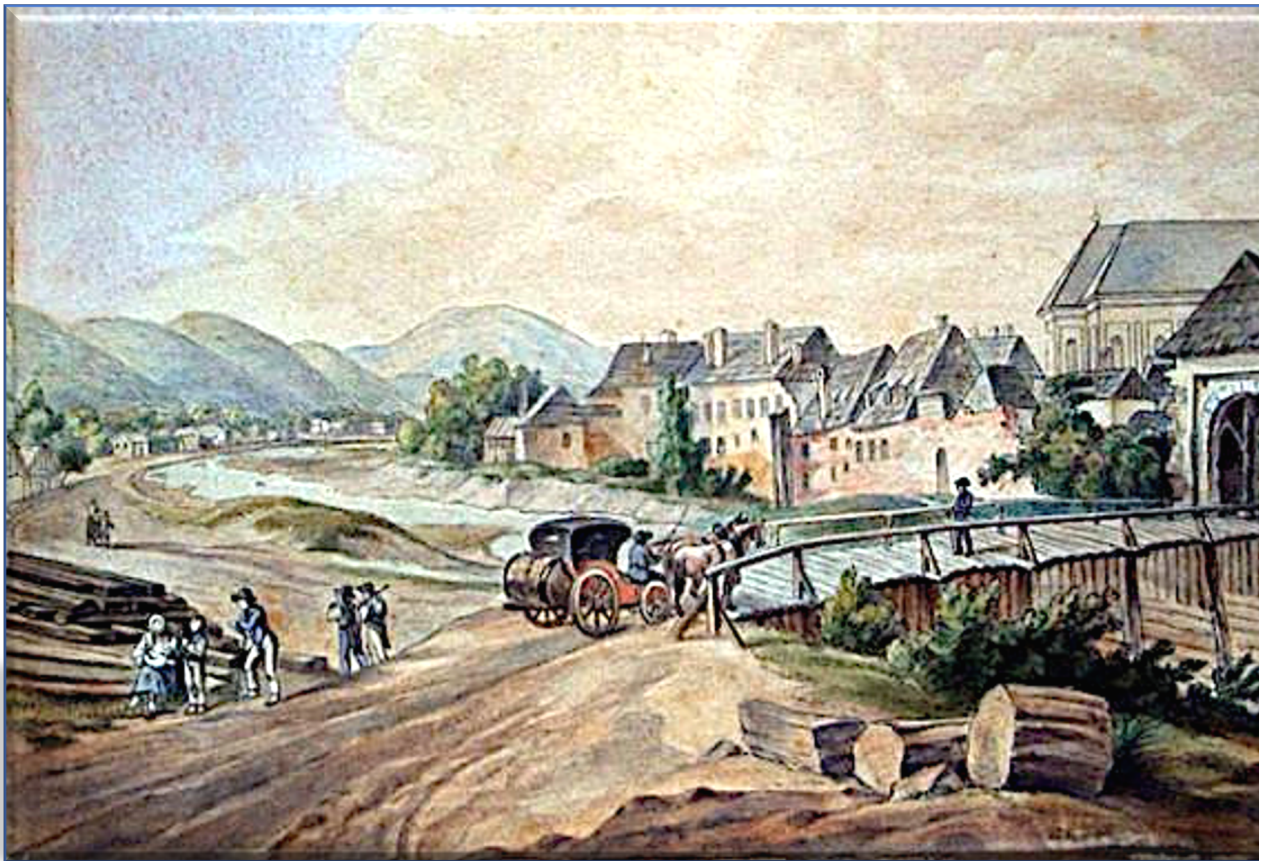
Grosseteste, a descendant of the famous thirteenth-century Bishop of Lincoln); one kilo of potatoes (*Solanum tuberosum*); a few onions (*Allium cepa*); a bunch of parsley (*Petroselinum crispum*); and a broom (for the latter, Mrs. Grosseteste did not know the Latin word, so she decided to look it up in a dictionary when she got back home). A satisfied smile was still lingering on her lips, for the vendors, including the person who'd sold her the broom, had given assurance that the produce had been grown in their own respective vegetable gardens, and it was guaranteed to be organic. Dressed as they were in their traditional attire, she had found them quite a picturesque sight; but not on that day, not on the morrow, and not on any of the following days or weeks did Mrs. Grosseteste suspect all those folks were a bunch of impostors who'd purchased the merchandise wholesale from the large grocery store recently opened on the South side of our town, while their costumes had been bought from the second-hand clothing shop on Green Street (the donkey [*asinus*], though, was an authentic twenty-first century beast). Ignorance is bliss.

She was now in the area of Old Town, and as she approached the Fountain of Youth, which was softly gurgling in the middle of the square, as was its wont, she caught a glimpse of Fra Dolcino, the owner of the venerable *Le Roman de Fauvel* wine shop. He was rearranging the bottle display in the shop window while apparently being engaged in a private conversation with a jug, a glass, and a few of the bottles then and there present. Mrs. Grosseteste, who was by all accounts a sensible lady with an exemplarily discerning ear caught the final word of that verbal address, and the word was "*Penitenziagite!* [repent]." This was Fra Dolcino's favorite pastime: once or twice a month he'd align all the bottles in straight rows, sometimes according to their respective vinification method: reds, whites, rosés, and so on; at other times the rows were arranged according to vintage. He would then position himself in front of the bottles and deliver a fiery diatribe against corruption (in general), while also castigating (in particular) various instances of administrative malpractice in the mayor's office.

Mrs. Grosseteste had arrived just in time for the concluding section of such a speech.

Having said "*Penitenziagite*" for the last time, Fra Dolcino turned to Mrs. Grosseteste and spoke in a clear, resounding voice:

"Good morning, my dear lady. It is my hope and fervent wish that you should be doing well today."



*Rivulus Dominarum:
Vineyard Bridge in the 1700s*



*Orkham's Razor
Barber Shop*

*Le Roman de Fauvel
Wine Shop*

He was standing firmly on his feet, his back erect, his eyes bright. None of this took Mrs. Grosseteste by surprise, for it was common knowledge among folks in our town that no close encounter with jar, bottle, or glass (provided they were full) would impede Fra Dolcino's posture, speech, or, indeed, critical thinking. The general belief was that such character strength could have been one of the reasons he had been voted, some years back, a member of the local chapter of the APMAAU (the Association for the Protection of the Middle Ages Among Us).

"Good morning, Brother. I wonder if you could help. I am organizing a little banquet in honor of Mrs. Bonaventure's election, last year, to the position of Vice President of the APMAAU, and I'd like to take advantage, if I may, of your expertise in matters of fine wining and dining."

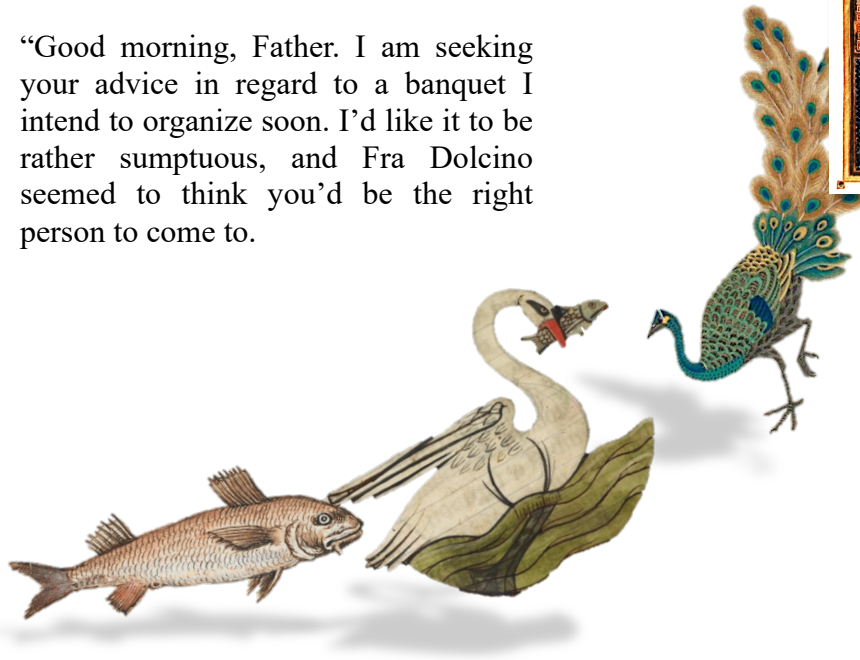
"Always a pleasure, Mrs. Grosseteste. I am doing OK when it comes to wines, but I must confess I've got no claim to being a food connoisseur. In my family we were mostly peasants, and you may be aware of the fact that my ancestor and namesake of the early fourteenth century and his companions ate peasant food, and ate it like savages on top of that Italian mountain of theirs. I suggest you better talk to Father Philippe, and I'll tell you why: the Padre, as we all know, is a descendant of Master Philippe de Vitry, the celebrated fourteenth-century bishop, musician, and poet, and the author of a few motets incorporated into the *Roman de Fauvel*, from which my own shop takes its name. Well, there is a banquet or two described in that poem, and I have it from a trustworthy source that our own Padre is in possession of a copy kept in the family to be handed down from one generation of bishops to the next. If so, he must have read the text and might be able to shed some light on that wondrous and most noble art of assembling the elements of the perfect menu for a distinguished table of the kind you have in mind. As for me, I have plebeian tastes in food: I find corn mush and stuffed cabbage to be sufficient and satisfactory, although every now and then I buy a piece of goat cheese from Friar Ambrose at the Carthusian House on Flower Hill."

"It's sheep, not goats they raise, I'm sure, but never mind that. Much obliged, though, for the information; I'm going to see Father Philippe right away. Have a nice day, and perhaps you'll be kind enough to accept an invitation to the banquet."

Fra Dolcino couldn't help but think that Mrs. Grosseteste must have known something he didn't, for had those animals been goats, her own billy goat would have long ago wreaked havoc at the Carthusian establishment. He made a mental note to have a word with Brother Ambrose on sheep cheese being sold as goat cheese.

Mrs. Grosseteste turned around and walked back to Vineyard Bridge, then on to Red Creek Street, entered the Municipal Park through the main gate, and found herself in front of St. Joseph's church. Some of Father Philippe's ancestors, perched on the branches of his tree of consanguinity waved and shouted at her, but Mrs. Grosseteste ignored them and stepped into the building, where Father Philippe could be seen busying himself in front of the altar. The van Tcheluk brothers, Hippo and Lionel Richard Coeur de Lion, standing on a ladder, were painting the Northern wall.

"Good morning, Father. I am seeking your advice in regard to a banquet I intend to organize soon. I'd like it to be rather sumptuous, and Fra Dolcino seemed to think you'd be the right person to come to.



He mentioned something, I believe it's a book, called *Le Roman de Fauvel* ..."

"Good morning, my dear lady. Fra Dolcino is not mistaken, I may be the answer to your prayers," the Padre said with his customary modesty. "In fact, I own a copy of that celebrated book, and I recall some very enlightening passages in it, which refer to the sort of festivity you have in mind. Please excuse me for just one moment."

Father Philippe entered the sacristy. Mrs. Grosseteste was left in the nave, which gave her the opportunity to once again admire the recently restored fifteenth-century murals representing *Via Crucis*, or Stations of the Cross, on the Southern wall. Five or six minutes of silence went by, then Father Philippe reappeared, holding a rather large book, which, contrary to Mrs. Grosseteste's expectations, didn't look old:

"It's a facsimile edition," he said. "The manuscript itself is in the National Library of France, *fonds français* 146." He put the book on a stand and started turning the pages. "Here. The passage is on folio 32 recto. It appears, my dear lady, that you have lots of choices from an astounding variety of meats, fish, and venison. How about some *chapons*, which, of course, are roosters; or *oisons gelines*—obviously, these would be jellied birds ..."

"God, no, Father, I wouldn't know the first thing about cooking jellied birds ..."

“Or, perhaps, you could have some *cignes*—that is, swans; or *paons*: clearly, these are peacocks. No? Well then, do you think partridges would do? Or maybe herons?”

Mrs. Grosseteste’s head was spinning. She made no attempt to translate all those bird names into Latin, and could barely bring herself to speak: “Oh, Father, and where exactly do you think I’d be able to get swans and peacocks?”

They both fell silent.

“I could probably grab a swan or two from the lake down by the fanfare pavilion, or some peacocks from the zoo up on Garlic Creek Road,” Mr. Hippo van Tcheluk intervened from the top of the ladder. “I am pretty good at grabbing things.”

“Yeah,” Father Philippe thought, “you have quite a reputation as a grabber of things, don’t you.” *Sotto voce* he spoke to Mrs. Grosseteste: “You probably recall he recently stole Monsignor Marignolli’s bike, as well as all the letters ‘O’ from Mrs. John’s *Caballero* wine bottle labels. One must admit Mr. van Tcheluk is not an unskilled man.”

“I heard you,” Mr. van Tcheluk replied from the top of the ladder, shaking his paint brush with what could be termed an excess of vigor. A constellation of paint drops rained on his brother’s head, who was standing below. “Those were unfortunate accidents.”

“Unfortunate because you were caught,” the Padre whispered.

“*Vade retro Satana*,” Mrs. Grosseteste murmured.

“Stealing is unchristian,” they both declared in unison.

Father Philippe went back to reading the passage:

“Wait a second, Mrs. Grosseteste, you could maybe use some wild boar meat instead—it’s mentioned here on folio 32 verso: *sanglers sauvages*. It’s got two advantages: first, we have plenty of wild boars roaming around in the surrounding hills; second, they are a nuisance and a public scandal. Getting rid of just one of them would be nothing short of a blessing, and you’d be doing a service to this town.”



“Speaking of which, I’m not a bad shooter, and I’ve got a hunting permit,” Mr. Lionel Richard Coeur de Lion van Tcheluk cut in, still standing on the ladder.

“I wonder why hasn’t anyone thought of you when scheming and planning how to do away with that nasty billy goat of Mrs. Grosseteste’s,” Father Philippe thought to himself.

“I could shoot the beast, and skin and quarter it,” Mr. Lionel continued. “All you’d have to do is cure the meat and pop it in the oven.”

Mrs. Grosseteste was all against it:

“Mr. Lionel, you are a drunkard, a letter forger, and a gossipmonger. I have it from a reliable source that you spend your afterwork hours drinking beer and playing cards at *Friar John’s*, and once you asked Father Philippe for a drink of beer while on church premises. That’s one thing, and if that doesn’t amount to blasphemy, I don’t know what does. The other is that, according to the same source, you and your twin brother Hippo wrote, while under the influence, that malicious letter to Teddy, Mr. MacRobius’s son in Texas, insinuating old Mr. Macrobius’s life might be in danger on account of his *liaison* with a younger actress of ill repute.”

Father Philippe couldn’t, in good conscience, stand by and watch Mrs. Grosseteste carry alone the burden of a discourse comprised of so many words. She had not a drop of oratorical skill about her, he thought. He simply HAD to help this woman achieve that goal of every good public speaker which is building marvelously long statements with elegance and ease, while bringing the speech to a formidable conclusion to crush the enemy. He knew he was unbeatable at such things; he knew he could do it to perfection, so he chimed in:

“To which I feel the moral obligation to add that afterwards both of you authored another letter, signed Péronelle or Péronette, accusing Ms. Wilhelmina Machault of pretending to be in love with old Mr. MacRobius so she could, after marrying and subsequently poisoning him with laurel leaves, inherit his house and orchard. Moreover ...”

Mrs. Grosseteste gave him a disapproving look, took a deep breath, and said quickly, before he could interrupt her again:

“Not to mention the fact that you ‘lifted’ Mrs. Bonaventure’s alms purse in retaliation for her opposing, as the Vice-President, your application for membership in the Association for the Protection of the Middle Ages Among Us. I couldn’t trust you with lacing my shoes, so help me God, let alone with shooting wild boar.”

“I beg your pardon, Mrs. Grosseteste, but I’ve already made penance on the day, last month, when I joined Fra Dolcino’s bottles, as he was shouting *Penitenziagite* at us at the top of his lungs. God is my witness: I was perfectly sober, and cried my eyes out on that occasion.”

“Allow me,” Father Philippe intervened. “*Retournons à nos moutons*. We still have lots of fish and other sea animals to choose from: *esturions*, *saumons*, *plays*—which is to say sturgeons, salmon, and ... on my word, I’ll have to look up that one in a dictionary ... then there’s *morue* and *gournaud*—cod and gurnard, *pourpois* and *barbue*—porpoise and barbel ...”

“None of these are found in our waters or at the local stores.” Mrs. Grosseteste was clearly disappointed.



“No, but we do have plenty of *troites* swimming in Garlic Creek—that is, trout, which one could cook *en pâte* as they say here. In other words, trout baked in pastry. Served with *sausse vert et cameline*. Frankly, I don’t know exactly what that is, but it surely is a type of sauce.”

“Oh, I recall Sister Chiara having mentioned she found recipes for *sauce vert* and *sauce cameline* in a book the Minoresses keep at the apothecary: it’s called *Le Ménagier de Paris*. I’ll go ask her. Meanwhile,” she turned to Mr. Lionel van Tcheluk

“would you kindly disregard what I just said about you and plan for a bit of trout fishing? I’d be grateful, and could say a word or two to Mrs. Bonaventure—I may even suggest that she reconsider her decision with regard to your membership application.”

“I don’t care anymore,” Mr. van Tcheluk said. “She can keep her decision and wash her hair with it. I’ve already applied for membership in the Association for the Protection of the Renaissance Among Us. But I will go trout fishing for you.”

“I appreciate that. Thanks so much, Mr. Lionel, and please rest assured I don’t really believe you’re a bad man. In fact, you just need a little moral guidance. Well, gentlemen, I still have to see Sister Chiara regarding those sauce recipes, so good bye for now.”

Mrs. Grosseteste was now standing in front of the kitchen sink, looking admiringly at the huge rainbow trout Mr. Lionel Coeur de Lion van Tcheluk had brought a short while ago.

“A splendid exemplar. A true king of rainbow trout as species,” she murmured.

She had already prepared the *sauce cameline* according to the recipe Sister Chiara had found in *Le Ménagier de Paris*, including ginger, cinnamon, saffron and almonds ground in a mortar, soaked in wine, then mixed with ground bread, boiled in water, and sprinkled with sugar. Having set aside the sauce bowl, she was now concentrating on gutting the fish with a dagger her deceased husband had inherited from his father (that is to say, Mrs. Grosseteste’s father-in-law, also deceased, who had inherited it from his own father, similarly gone; the latter’s father, no less dead, had gotten it in his turn from his own male genitor; and so on).

Mrs. Grosseteste’s friends found it impressive that so many people had to pass away so that she herself could now be in possession of and fully enjoy such a marvelous kitchen tool. All these deceased people’s ghosts seemed to form an invisible yet glorious aura that surrounded not only her head, but the whole of her person, and was to a large extent responsible for the respect she enjoyed in our town’s high society. This was especially flattering, considering that various members of the Grosseteste clan had maintained for a long time that the dagger was a mid-thirteenth-century weapon the Bishop of Lincoln had kept and probably intended to use as a last resort in fighting adversaries who’d support the idea of mathematics not being the highest of all sciences.

In her moments of brutal honesty, though, and only when she was alone—like now—Mrs. Grosseteste questioned the veracity of the story. Consequently, being a woman of particular practicality, she, without further ado, began slicing the fish’s belly with hand movements that were somewhat delicate yet not lacking vigor. At some point she felt the dagger’s progress slowing down, so she stopped cutting and made a quick mental note to take it to William of Ockham, the owner of the Old Town barber shop, to be sharpened in accordance with the principle of parsimony. She then made one more attempt at slicing the belly but lost control of the fish, which left her hand of its own accord and fell on the floor (“fish are slippery, it’s in their genes,” she thought, for besides a minimal knowledge of Latin, she also had a smattering

of zoology). As the trout hit the floor, there was a metallic noise and she saw a small object rolling under the kitchen table.

It was a ring.

Mrs. Grosseteste picked it up, held it in the palm of her left hand, and saw that it was a beautifully crafted thing of pale golden color, set with five stones; the blue one in the middle she judged to be a sapphire; she didn't know what to think about the four smaller ones, symmetrically disposed around the central stone. With her remaining hand (the right hand, to be more specific) she was picking up the fish when the doorbell rang. She placed both objects on the kitchen table, next to the dagger, and went to open the door.

Monsignor Marignolli was standing on the front steps, donning his usual oiled leather leggings (which Bombonica Hopartean had priorly identified as *housiaus ot oins*) and a pair of leather shoes painted with flowers (*souliers pains a flor*); a leather purse (*bourse*) was attached to his leather belt (*ceinture* or *corroie*). Mrs. Grosseteste recalled Bombonica having mentioned that these were essential components of the repertoire of seductive attire mentioned in thirteenth-century French motets from the Montpellier Codex.

"Decidedly, the Bishop hasn't lost his sense of fashion," Mrs. Grosseteste thought. "He must be getting it from his grandmother, whose accoutrements were so greatly admired by Chaucer. 'Whit was her smok, and broyden all before ...'" she dreamingly quoted to herself.

The Monsignor's wicker bike, purchased at Marty Cappella's shop on Vineyard Bridge was parked against the fence, tightly secured with a piece of thick rope. ("To prevent people like Mr. Hippo van Tcheluk from stealing it," Mrs. Grosseteste further ruminated.)

"Good day, my dear lady. I hope I'm not interrupting anything ..."

"Oh, no, my dear Bishop! On the contrary, you've come at the right moment. Please come in, I need to show you something."

Mrs. Grosseteste led the Bishop to the kitchen and pointed to the table: "Here, Monsignore, what do you think of this?"

"You mean the fish? Well, I think it's a beautiful exemplar of rainbow trout ..."

"No, I mean the ring."

The Bishop glanced at the ring. An expression of sheer puzzlement spread over his face, and he started rubbing his eyes. Then he took a deep breath and began:

"Mrs. Grosseteste, I don't know how you came in possession of this object, but I assure you it is my own episcopal ring, which has been missing for some weeks."

"It was in the trout's belly."

"Really? Well then, I propose it was theft."



“You mean the fish stole it?”

“God, no. I submit that someone stole it from a drawer in my desk, where I used to keep it, then unknowingly dropped it in the creek, and subsequently the fish swallowed it. Obviously, the culprit must have been a total ignoramus in matters of theology: he or she had no idea that an episcopal ring typifies the union of Christ with his Church, as expressed by Pope Innocent III: “*Annulus est fidei sacramentum, in quo Christus sponsam suam Sanctam Ecclesiam subarravit, ut ipsa de se dicere valeat: Annulo suo subarravit me Dominus meus, id est, Christus. Cuius custodes et paedagogi sunt episcopi et prelati annulum pro signo ferentes in testimonium.*” So you see that the man (or woman) who stole it is twice culpable: first, the appropriation alone of someone else’s property—theft, to you and me, my dear lady—is serious enough to deserve being considered by our esteemed Constable Johannes Des Muris as a major illegality; second, the seriousness of such offence is necessarily compounded by the ring being a religious object. I think I’ll have to ask you to come with me to Constable Des Muris’s office: we need to make a report and present a united front.”

He put the ring in his purse, took a few steps towards the door, stopped, turned around, and added:

“I almost forgot: kindly take the fish with you. It’s evidence.”

Constable Des Muris was sitting on a swivel chair in front of his desk, reading the front page of *The Rivulus Dominarum Clarion*—the local newspaper—while sipping lemonade from a cup he believed to be of silver. Some folks in town, though, were of the opinion that the object in question, having been purchased from a stand at the local farmers’ market from an anonymous yet dubiously looking person, was most probably made of some cheap alloy. It should be understood that many of these detractors could be and, in fact, were counted among Mr. Des Muris’s intimate friends.

“Good day to both of you. I swear this has got to be the heist of the century ...”

Monsignor Marignolli was completely taken aback:

“Good day, Constable. I don’t see how you can already be aware of the newest developments in the unfortunate Odyssey of my ring?”

“Of your ring? Oh, no, Monsignore, I was talking about the recent Netherlands theft. It’s in today’s news: you may be aware that a few months ago a bunch of thieves broke into the Drents Museum in Assen and stole three gold bracelets and the famous gold Dacian helmet, which were on loan from the National History Museum of Romania.”

“That happened in January, if I am not mistaken.”

“Indeed. Well, they say in this article”—and he pointed to the page he was reading—“that the Dutch police have now arrested a couple of people involved in the theft—and what do you know, it turns out that one of them is originally from Transylvania. Northern Transylvania, I might add, so we may even know him personally ...”

“I hope that was a joke,” Mrs. Grosseteste intervened.

“Only partially,” Constable Des Muris replayed. “It says in *The Clarion* that the newspaper received an anonymous letter suggesting that it’s not unconceivable that one or more of our concitizens might have inherited from an ancestor (genetics is a funny thing) the propensity towards appropriating other people’s possessions—and that such propensity is undeniable, as proven by the history of the trees of note shapes in the Municipal Park. You may recall that the largest tree of all grew from a drop of color one of our fifteenth-century men stole from folios 48 recto or 49 verso of manuscript Bodley 515 in the Bodleian Library.”



“Truth is,” the Bishop cut in “we all benefit nowadays from having these magnificent trees to delight the eyes and ears of passersby, so some folks maintain the whole town should be grateful to the man who scratched off that bit of color, hid it in his alms purse, and brought it back to be buried in a hole dug in the ground. I take this opportunity to remind you that the trees lining the main alley in the Municipal Park were planted many centuries ago by our City Fathers from seeds of *triplex longa* coming from the original Bodley 515 tree, and that tree came from the bit of color stolen from Oxford in the early fourteen hundreds.”

“Never mind that, Monsignore. With all due respect, you’d better be telling me how I can be of help with regard to your ring. I am all ears.”

“Right. Constable, Mrs. Grosseteste found my ring in the belly of a fish given to her by Mr. Lionel Richard Coeur de Lion ...” began the Bishop.

“And we’ve brought the fish for you to take a look at,” said Mrs. Grosseteste. “The Bishop thinks it may provide a clue ...”


Constable Des Muris took the fish and placed it on his desk, next to the newspaper.

“Hmm, now that’s a glorious exemplar of rainbow trout. Why, pray, did Mr. Lionel give it to you?”

“I asked him to. I intended to cook it in red wine and serve it accompanied by some *sauce cameline* at the little banquet I am organizing to celebrate one year from Mrs. Bonaventure’s election to the position of Vice President of the APMAAU.”

“Where did you find the recipe?”

“In *Le Ménagier de Paris*, which I borrowed from Sister Chiara.” From her right pocket she extracted a pice of paper, unfolded it, and read: “*Truite soit cuite en eaue et foison vin vermeil, doist estre mengiée a la cameline et doit estre mise cuire par tronçons de deux dois.*” Which means that trout should be cooked in water and plenty of red wine, should be eaten with sauce cameline, and should be boiled after cutting it into pieces, each two fingers in length.” I had Father Philippe do the translation for me.”



“Oh, it’s a foreign book. Well then, it’s obvious I must keep the fish as evidence. It may be part of an international conspiracy involving the French, you never know. What with the Monsignor being quite fond of French fashion, and the trout presumably being cooked according to a French recipe translated by the Padre, who is of French extraction, I believe one can see the connection. I’ll put it in the freezer—the fish, you understand, not the connection—we have a small one down the corridor—a freezer, I mean, not a ...”

“Jesus, it really could be like in that movie, remember?” Mrs. Grosseteste couldn’t contain her excitement: “*The French Connection*, starring Gene Hackman ...”

Constable Des Muris—who thought Mrs. Grosseteste had taken it a bit too far—looked at his watch, cleared his throat, and said:

“Ladies and gentlemen, would you please excuse me, I have work to do. Should anything else come to mind, please let me know.”

He got up from his chair and led Mrs. Grosseteste and the Bishop to the door, which he then softly closed behind them.

Mrs. Grosseteste and the Bishop were passing Mrs. Rogeria Bacon’s house on their way to the former’s residence (for the Bishop had to get back his bike), when Mr. Hippo van Tcheluk materialized in front of them out of nowhere. His sudden appearance was so startling that it prompted Ludovica, Mrs. Bacon’s chimaera, which had been quietly chewing a laurel leaf, to start roaring furiously from behind the fence.

“Be quiet, for Pete’s sake, you abominable, abhorrent, monstrous beast. I wish you gulped down all of Mrs. Bacon’s laurel tree’s leaves and died on the spot, you atrocious, repugnant, vile animal,” Mr. van Tcheluk shouted. The chimaera gave him an offended look, fell quiet, and walked away from the fence. There was some hurt dignity in that walk, but Mr. van Tcheluk was oblivious to it.

He extinguished the smuggled Ukrainian cigarette he’d been smoking, threw the butt on the sidewalk, and turned to Mrs. Grosseteste:

“Excuse me, Madame, but my brother gave you the wrong fish.”



“He gave me the wrong fish?! How’s that?”

“You heard me well: my brother gave you the wrong fish, and he’s asking you to give it back. Look,” and he pulled a plastic bag from his backpack “the fish in this bag is the right one. So please return the wrong fish to me right away. We could walk together to your place.”

“No can do. That trout is now in the hands of the police.”

“What?! Why, did it go bad? I didn’t think the police dealt with food poisoning cases.”

“Flippancy and nonsense. The fish has been retained as evidence. But I’ll take the one you brought as replacement, thank you.”



With a firm hand-and-arm movement, Mrs. Grosseteste grabbed the new fish in its plastic bag. Then, turning her back to Mr. Hippo van Tcheluk, she signaled that the conversation was over. Monsignor Marignolli took her arm (the one not holding the bag), and, without saying another word to Mr. Hippo, they both started walking up the street towards her house.

Before they reached the street corner, Mrs. Rogeria Bacon's gate opened with a dolorous screech, and the lady herself was seen (not by these two, as their backs were turned to her, but by one of our brave concitizens living across the street from Mrs. Bacon) closing the gate behind her and starting to walk briskly in the opposite direction, holding an envelope. From her vantage point at the window, the neighbor lady could clearly see the foreign stamps, but, to her dismay, couldn't figure out the handwriting.

Mrs. Bacon continued walking past *Chez les poor Claires*, the Minoresses's herb shop and apothecary, and entered Constable Des Muris's office in the next building. She went straight to his desk, said hello and, without further ado, opened the envelope; from it, she extracted a piece of paper, explaining: "It's a letter from Teddy McRobius. What do you make of it?" She unfolded the paper and gave it to Mr. Des Muris, who, after sipping a bit of lemonade (it was his second cup of the day) started reading it aloud:

"My dear Mrs. Bacon," the letter began. "This is Theodore (Teddy), Mr. MacRobius's son from Dallas. This time I am writing from Keukenhof in the Netherlands, where I've come (as I do every year) for the flower show. The tulips here are absolutely fabulous. I fell in love with a pastel pink variety called *Dreamer*, which looks rather like a double peony, and of which I purchased fifty bulbs which I will take back with me when I return to the U.S. To be fair, I must also make a special note of the rhododendrons, which are stunning. Have you ever thought of giving a companion to your laurel tree? If so, I suggest acquiring a rhododendron called *Percy Wiseman*, a spectacular variety which your own laurel tree would be sure to enjoy. Perhaps you could read Pseudo-Aristotle's *Secreta secretorum* to both of them."

Constable Des Muris stopped reading.

"Mrs. Bacon," he said "with all due respect, why on Earth are you showing me this?"

"Go on reading. It gets more interesting."

"In my previous letter of a few months ago (how time flies!) I expressed my gratitude for the joy you provided—perhaps unknowingly—by encouraging me to study Latin when I was a boy of fifteen, back in the old country. There were other things I wrote about at the time, if not more serious than learning Latin, then certainly more disturbing. I believe the matter I am writing about today to be equally disturbing as well as extremely pressing. To make a long story short, it was getting close to closing time at Keukenhof Gardens, and the majority of visitors had already left. I was walking alone on an alley which I thought would take me to the main gate, when I realized I had lost my way (the place is huge, its topography rather complicated). I was getting a bit worried, when I remembered I had a map of the place in my pocket, so I took it



out and was about to unfold it when I heard someone saying ‘The object in question is now in Rivulus Dominarum’.”

Constable Des Muris remarked:

“I didn’t know Teddy MacRobius spoke or even understood Danish.”

“Not Danish, Constable. Dutch. Danes speak Danish; the Dutch speak Dutch. But please continue reading, you’ll see what he means.”

“As you wish: ‘The man’s voice, speaking in Romanian’ ...”

He slapped his forehead somewhat forcefully, exclaimed “I get it now!” and went back to reading:

“Let’s see, where was I? Oh: ... the man’s voice ... was coming from behind one of the magnificent rhododendrons in full bloom (it was a *Rhododendron maximum*, to be specific). Another man’s voice answered: ‘Yeah, I suppose they hid it in one of the now-closed gold mines.’ ‘No, why go to such lengths to hide something so small? It’s not a helmet, you know.’

I may be exaggerating, my dear Mrs. Bacon, but I can’t help thinking that was a reference to the Dacian helmet stolen from the Drents Museum in Assen a few months ago. I further submit that those men were in some ways related to the thieves, for how else would they know the ‘object in question’ (which, if smaller, could have been one of the gold bracelets) was now hidden somewhere in the town of Rivulus Dominarum? Who on Earth has ever heard of our insignificant little town, other than people either born or living there?

Anyway, I couldn’t stay any longer in front of that glorious rhododendron, for, looking at my watch I realized I only had a few more minutes to get to the main gate before they closed the gardens for the day.

I tried to be as succinct as possible in my narrative so as not to take up too much of your time. After all, I am only hypothesizing, so don’t take my suspicions too seriously: I am simply trying to share my thoughts with a person of high intellectual standing and moral prowess—and that person, my dear Mrs. Bacon, is you.

I hope things are going well for you these days, and that both your laurel tree and your chimaera are in good health.

Yours sincerely,

Teddy

“It may be an innocent prank, or it may be more than that,” Constable Des Muris murmured. You know that *The Clarion* just published an article about an anonymous letter they’ve got, suggesting a local connection to the Netherlands heist. That, too, might have been from

someone looking to make fun of the whole thing. Or not. Hmm ... Did I ever tell you about a similarly strange adventure I once had in California?”

He got up from his chair, took a few steps towards the window, stopped in front of a large armoire, opened a drawer, took out a manila envelope, and gave it to Mrs. Bacon:

“Every now and then, my dear lady, the Muse visits me. When that happens, I write. In this particular case, it’s a story I wrote some years ago, when I was temporarily living in Berkeley, across the bridge from San Francisco—a city I shall forever love with undiminished passion. If you’d like to read it now and tell me your opinion afterwards, you’re more than welcome to have a seat.”

Mrs. Bacon took a seat, opened the envelope, took out a bunch of typewritten papers, and started reading.

Notes

The digital facsimile of the *Roman de Fauvel* in the edition by Chaillou de Pestain (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS Fonds français 146) can be found at <https://www.diamm.ac.uk/sources/88/#/images>

A printed facsimile is in *Le Roman de Fauvel in the edition of Mesire Chaillou de Pesstain: A Reproduction in Facsimile of the Complete Manuscript, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds français 146*, with Introduction by Edward H. Roesner, François Avril, and Nancy Freeman Regalado. New York: Broude Brothers, 1990.

The edition used for Pope Innocent III’s comments on the symbolism of the episcopal ring is *Innocentii Papae, hoc nomine tertij, De sacro altaris mysterio, Libri sex*. Lovanii, apud Hieronymum Wellaeum, ad Intersigne Diamantis, 1566. The passage quoted is from Chapter 60: “De annulo,” fol. 33r-v.

For the trout recipe, see *Le Ménagier de Paris, Traité de Morale et d’Économie domestique, composé vers 1393 par un bourgeois parisien*. Publié par la première fois par la Société des Bibliophiles François. Paris: Crapelet, 1846, 2: 190. An electronic edition is at https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/44070/pg44070-images.html#page_vol-2-124

For the *sauce cameline*, see *ibid*, 2: 230: “Cameline. *Nota* que à Tournay, pour faire cameline, l’en broyé gingembre, canelle et saffren et demye noix muguet: destrempé de vin, puis osté du mortier; puis aiez de pain blanc, sans bruler, trempé en eaue froide et broyez au mortier, destrempez de vin et coulez, puis boulez tout, et mettez au derrain du sucre roux: et ce est cameline d’yver. Et en esté la font autelle, mais elle n’est point boulie.”

Illustrations

Title page: Mrs. Grosseteste. Fashion plate, New York Public Library Digital Collections, <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/search/index?q=fashion%20coats>
Public domain. Accessed July 10, 2025

Page 28: Market scene: British Library, MS Yates Thompson 3 (*Book of Hours*), folio 2. Open access: <https://www.imagesonline.bl.uk/asset/170692>

Broom vendor: Anonymous, *Basenhändler*, The Albertina Museum, Vienna. Public domain.

Page 31: British Library, MS Harley 2788 (*The Golden Gospels; Codex Aureus*), folio 12v. Open access: <https://www.imagesonline.bl.uk/asset/170202> accessed July 15, 2025

Swan: British Library, MS Harley 4751 (*Bestiary*), folio 41v. Accessed July 15, 2025

Fish: British Library, MS Burney 97 (Manuel Philes [poet] and Angelo Vergetio [illuminator], *De animalium proprietate*), folio 45. Open access: <https://www.imagesonline.bl.uk/asset/167472>

Accessed July 14, 2025

Page 32: British Library, MS Add. 18855 (Simon Bening, illuminator, *Book of Hours*), folio 108v. Open access: <https://www.imagesonline.bl.uk/asset/14098>

Accessed July 25, 2025

Page 35: Monsignor Johannes Marignolli's shoes. *Chaussure*, 1750. Palais Galliera. Musée de la Mode de la Ville de Paris. Public domain

Page 37: Constable Johannes des Muris. Draner (Jules Joseph Georges Renard), *Lebrun, policeman*. Costume design for Victorien Sardou's *Les merveilleuses*. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. Public domain; electronic image at <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10464747f.r=policier?rk=536483;2#>

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Couple cooking and kissing. British Library, MS Royal 10 E. IV (The Smithfield Decretals), folio 109. Open access: <https://www.imagesonline.bl.uk/asset/163445>

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Page 40: British Library, MS Stowe 955 (Pierre Sala, *Petit Livre d'Amour*), folio 6. Open access: <https://www.imagesonline.bl.uk/asset/13200>

Accessed July 16, 2005.

Old Rivulus Dominarum postcards: Nagybanya.ro <https://fotoarchivum.nagybanya.ro/>. Public domain. Accessed July 5, 2025.