

Celebration at Nougatine

For Kay's birthday, we went to Nougatine, the restaurant-bar adjoining Jean-Georges. I thought it was in the Time Warner Center. By the time I realized it was on the other side of Columbus Circle on the ground floor of one of the Demagogue's hotels, it was too late.

The room was decorated in matte creams and beige, in contrast to the chrome table legs and the women's jewelry glinting in ochre lighting. I wore Brunello Cucinelli in winter-weight wool as protection against the autumn chill and to signal my right of place among the elite who dined there. I wondered if the Demagogue would make an appearance. I imagined him floating through the dining room like an effigy hastily assembled for the evening, the scent of fresh *papier-mâché* trailing behind him.

I gave Kay a pair of bleu-de-France kid leather gloves and a matching scarf from Coach. The milanese was superb, but the sea-salt caramel pudding a trifle cloying. When we left, we skirted the metal barricades, saying good night to the policemen on guard. Hailing a cab, we were struck by a gust of early winter rounding the corner at Central Park West.

The Marquis de Levallois Dishes the Neighbors after Dinner

They act like they're in love in public, but there's nothing dove-like about them. They're particles in the Hadron Collider, dressed up in evening clothes. It's said when they first ran into each other at the Dutch embassy in Paris, it was nearly tectonic – the Himalayas forming over pheasant, purée and a mediocre red.

Her people are the Charbonneaus, and that black line has left its mark on her beauty – she has the mouth of a monkfish. His father was the monarch of a principality absorbed into Nice, and he is now, more or less, the king of all those nice Niçois.

I rarely have them over; they're too volatile for bridge, and they frighten the dogs. May I offer you another digestif?

Austin Wallson Confesses

I had a Known Traveler Number with TSA Pre-Check from the Department of Homeland Security. I'd received the Latin Award in junior high school. Certainly, I was up to the task.

My mentor was a scion of the Scranton Lace Company. He advised I wear a hand-tied wig to disguise myself. We chose a holiday when the staff flew kites in the park and the Marsh of Epidemics was uncharacteristically illness-free.

Once inside the reception hall, I located the Fragonard that hid the safe where the Compendium was kept. The adjoining rooms were filled with enamelware, mostly from the Middle Ages.

As I began to spin the tumblers, I noticed the tessellated floor had been mathematically tiled by a pattern-burring machine. It could mean only one thing: metaphorically, the music was about to stop, and I was without a chair.

Qui gladio ferit, gladio perit. I sat cross-legged on a tufted velvet settee and reviewed my Miranda rights, as lasers striated the gallery and alarms began to shriek.

Death Comes with Luggage

When Death arrived at the door, it was not as a hooded figure shrouded in black, but rather a dark, shapeless mass with hands. The hands clutched the retractable handle of a large black suitcase, the kind too many people check on overseas flights.

All she said was – *Time to go*. Previously, on similar occasions, I'd tried to cry out but could produce only a faint rasping sound. This time, I yelled as loudly as I could – *No! No!*

I woke, certain I'd actually shouted. But no one came running to my room to see if I were all right. The old house remained silent, and beyond the bedroom window, the darkness was all around us.