

PART ONE

I. The Origin of Poequilon; his debut in Society.

Selenos is the tutelary Genius of the Planet we call the Moon; that Genius or God was present at the birth of Poequilon¹ and declared loudly that when the child had reached his fourteenth year, he would form marvelous wishes, and that they would be accomplished, but he imposed these conditions: that Poequilon would not make the same wish twice, that he would never request the help of others, and that he could only pass on from accomplished wishes to others after the revolution of two suns; all of which was to satisfy the decrees of destiny and secondary causes.

No one really knows the reason for Selenos' predilection for Poequilon. Some attribute it to the Laws of destiny, others to the favor of his mother Helyone, who, after having increased the number of the Moon's stains, had become the splendor of that Planet. Whatever it was, Poequilon was born in Verticephalia, the Capital of the Empire of the same name and the largest city on the Planet. No one ever said anything about his father, and that is why nothing can be said about him here. When he had reached the fortunate age of fourteen, the advantages of his uterine birth were simply revealed to him, and he was abandoned to his own devices.

Poequilon thought seriously about what he desired; right away, he would have liked to get his teeth into the Moon, but he thought that for a first wish it was necessary to be modest, and only asked for a mountain of gold. Selenos indicated the place where he would find that bagatelle; Poequilon transported himself there, and in no time at all consumed his mountain.

II. Anyone would have done the same,

The favorite of the God, very nearly reduced to mendacity, thought about imploring Selenos again. He recognized clearly that all the mountains of gold and all the mines on the Moon were too few for him; in his embarrassment he consulted a certain Chrysope, an Alchemist, who had helped him to consume his mountain and who had been consuming himself for twenty-five years, along with the coal of the Moon, in the discovery of the Great Work. As one might expect, that lunatic blowhard advised Poequilon to wish for the philosopher's stone. He did, indeed, wish for it, and Selenos granted to him that, for him, all the dust on the Planet would be projection powder.

So there he was, as rich as ever and sheltered from any vicissitude of fortune.

He maintained in Verticephalia a retinue worthy of his inexhaustible opulence; his slaves, his houses, his carriages and his mistresses were innumerable; his Stewards had no accounts to submit, they were merely agents of his pleasures; they had only one concern: that every day, fifty cartloads of dust should be poured out in his palaces. The elegant men and beautiful women of the Moon came from all directions to pay court to him. The Palaces of Kings were deserted, and to amuse his mistresses, he threw the powder in the eyes of Emperors, Judges and Inquisitors—for there are all of those on the Moon, as there are here.

III. Belated but moral ideas; admirable but unfortunate wishes.

In the midst of so many delights, however, Poequilon perceived that he was growing old, and suspected that women cared less for his person than his wealth. On the Moon, reflections are not precocious, and that idea poisoned his happiness; he confided his pains to a Selenopolite, originally from the fourth continent of the globe, a man of great experience. That voyager said to him:

¹ Like most of the improvised names in the story, this one comes from the Greek, and might be translated as "Changing" or perhaps "Fickle."

“Seigneur, I am the possessor of ancient manuscripts, which I inherited from my ancestors, in which one learns that half-white men, great drinkers of blood and gold, once carried out fruitless searches to discover a rejuvenating spring, which was called in consequence the Fountain of Youth. If that spring exists, there is nothing better you can do than wish for it.”

Poequilon wasted no time in asking the Genius for the Fountain of Youth. As the spring was a long way from Verticephalia, and Selenos wanted to spare his favorite the journey to the waters, he had the spring filtered by invisible channels all the way to Poequilon’s Park.

Walking in that place, the favorite discovered the miraculous jet of water, which was only visible to him. He perceived that the precious source followed in his footsteps and fixed itself in accordance with his command, which appeared to him to be a great convenience for the future. He drank the divine liquid several times, and the crystal of its waters produced for his eyes the image of a young and handsome Narcissus.

In that new form he appeared before his slaves, who were unable to recognize him; he presented himself at his Seraglio, but the Guards and Eunuchs threw him out, calling him “youngster.”

Embarrassed as he was by his face, he issued threats, speaking as a master. The chief of the Seraglio then took him for a young man driven insane by the love of women; he took pity on him and thought he might cure him of his madness by putting him in a state to guard his own mistresses.

He was captured with so much artifice that he did not have time to invoke Selenos, or even to think of it. As they believed that he had lost his reason, they pretended to recognize him as Poequilon, and, having introduced him into the midst of his most cherished favorites, while he was being stripped of his red robe and was preparing to enjoy his new youth, an adroit hand robbed him in an instant of all the splendor of the Seraglio.

“O Fountain of Youth!” he cried, “Are these the pleasures that you prepared for me?”

He was given an employment in the Seraglio appropriate to his condition, and every time he said that he was Poequilon, two black slaves lashed him with stirrup-leathers.

He was on the point of picking up dust and making gold in order to prove that he was Poequilon, but he thought that all the gold on the Moon would not return what had been taken away from him, and he made the decision to wait in silence for the end of his term, for the unfortunate situation ought only to last for two years, in accordance with Selenos’ oracle.

It was very easy to remain a spectator, during his invisibility of sorts, of everything that went on in the Seraglio, and as his reason had returned, he obeyed everyone’s commands, so well that he acquired the confidence of the Chief Eunuch, and was appointed to serve the women in their most intimate needs. They often made him sing, because he had a beautiful voice—a talent for which he had not wished, and which the Chief of the Seraglio had procured for him without being Selenos.

It was in the interior of the Palace that he saw and heard things in his new estate that he would never have suspected otherwise.

IV. Very ordinary adventures.

One day, when he was serving Phasea, his favorite Sultana, in her bath and was bemoaning in a low voice that so many charms, of which he had been the master, were forbidden to him in more ways than one, she put her arm around his neck and said to him:

“Handsome Poequilonet!”—for that name had been given to him on the day of his sad incarceration—“take this note to Rhetorical, the Chief Steward of the Gardens, and tell him that voluptuousness awaits him in my bosom, that your hands have perfumed me for his delight, and come back promptly to introduce him to my arms.”

Poequilon obeyed in spite of the harshness of his role, and Thezorical flew to the Sultana’s feet; the young Eunuch was a witness to their infidel frolics.

“Dear Thezorical,” said Phasea, “it was you who put me in Poequilon’s arms, you who distinguished me among all the beauties of Vertocaphalia, so it is to you that I give the first fruits of amour; was Poequilon worthy to respire the first breath of my tenderness?”

After Phasea and Thezorical had amused themselves at Poequilon's expense, the unfortunate favorite of Selenos retired very pensively. Passing through the women's apartments, he found them all occupied in consoling themselves in his absence, not with parrots, as was customary, but with soldiers, courtiers and, worse still, muleteers. Some were saying the Poequilon would never return, others, laughing: "There he is passing by."

As for the administration of his wealth, Poequilon scarcely worried about it, since he had the virtue of rendering his riches inexhaustible. The secret inspection of his women was his principal concern. There was a kind of anarchy in Poequilon's domains; everyone took what he could. Gold was the prey of the Eunuchs and the women were at the mercy of the Stewards; everywhere there are Eunuchs, the Stewards who have their five senses only play the secondary role in the art of amassing treasures.

Thezorical, unworried about his master and believing him to be at the bottom of a river, thought only of enjoying himself and making his pile during the "interpoequilonat." It happened that at carnival time, at a public ball, he was dancing with a young Verticephalienne, whose graces, intelligence, talents and, above all, beauty turned his head. In order to enjoy fortune with her he thought there was no other means than to court her on Poequilon's behalf, and he convinced her to come to the Seraglio. She was introduced there with all the magnificence of a valet playing the role of his master.

The young and beautiful Fascia—that was the new Sultana's name—did not take long to comprehend that she could not reach the absent Poequilon without smiling at the present Thezorical. Poequilon, charged with the preparations for the feast, was a witness to the Steward's zeal. In his chagrin, he resolved to avenge himself, but, as he was as impotent in that respect as in his person, and everything else, he secretly informed Phasea of Thezorical's infidelity, and the outraged Sultana stabbed the Steward in a moment of privacy. Poequilon gladly threw two feet of moon over the corpse, and everyone thought that Thezorical had gone up in smoke, like his master.

V. Everyone passes this way.

Time went by, however, and the wealth dissipated, because the malicious Poequilon left the dust uncultivated, in order not to augment the prosperity of his ingrate following.

The two years of his Pupation finally expired, and then he asked Selenos to restore that which a barbarian had cruelly removed. He also asked that everything that his slaves had stolen should return to dust, that all his concubines who had betrayed him should become ugly, and finally, that he should be recognized by everyone as Poequilon without quitting the fortunate form that the Fountain of Youth had given him.

All these metamorphoses took place in the blink of an eye. He found himself more brilliant than ever, all his slaves prostrated themselves at his feet; he made a review of all the women of the Seraglio and, showing them the sparkling sign of his authority, he said to them: "I am Poequilon."

Among the six thousand women who composed his delights, however, he did not find one that was not disfigured by an extreme ugliness.

"O Heaven!" he cried. "Am I then the Sultan of she-apes? What! Not one of them loved me sincerely? Selenos! Selenos!"

He reproached Phasea for her shameful weakness, and handed her over to his Eunuchs—an exemplary punishment, the mere idea of which makes the women of Verticephalia shiver.

After the first impulse given to his vengeance, he threw out all that rabble; he had first class slaves recruited, and restored his Palace to its original magnificence. This time, he did not want a Seraglio; he made a stern decision to marry, and to limit his pleasures to a single woman. His principal slaves murmured, but what could they do? He was the master and he was obstinate—I do not say like all great men, but like a great many rich ones.

One day, he was taking the air on his balcony, fulminating against women and cursing celibacy—for experience made him hate them on the one hand, while on the other, the Fountain of Youth made him love them—when he saw the young and beautiful Cyclae coming out of the Temple, whose beauty and majestic figure suddenly inflamed him with the most violent lover.

“There, surely,” he said, “is the woman that Selenos has destined for me.”

He asked her parents for her hand, and the Superminister married them solemnly in the Temple of the Crescent. (That Temple would have been a bad omen on Earth.)

Poequilon was delighted with his new spouse; he recognized in her intelligence, tenderness and, above all, a good deal of devotion for the great Alma.

“I shall be perfectly happy,” he said. “I’m handsome, young and full of vigor. Cyclae, satisfied, will be faithful to me, her virtue and piety are guarantees of her conjugal faith.”

He spent two days in the sweetest ecstasy, but one evening, when she imprudently took a mixture of peaches and chocolate, Cyclae lost her life. Poequilon tore out his hair and begged Selenos to return his dear Cyclae to the light, if she had been faithful to him—of which he had no doubt—and, in the contrary case, that she should merely give him a fleeting sign of existence.

Selenos grated that prayer as a merciful gesture; Cyclae opened her eyes and closed them again forever.

“What! In two days!” cried Poequilon. In the bitterness of his grief, he was on the point of asking Selenos for the favor of not being cuckolded again in future, but he thought that the Genius, in spite of his power, could not prevent that which had been from having been.

*VI. A Violent Remedy of the Great Men of the Moon,
scorned today because that would be
incessant repetition.*

Notwithstanding his double misfortune, Poequilon found himself still intent on marriage. He did not want to owe everything to Selenos, nor to his fortune; he set out to capture a beauty on his own merits.

He thought he had found the charm of the heart in the tender Semirame; he offered her his hand, and the marriage was concluded in the time prescribed by the law. He lived, the happiest of men, in that sweet engagement.

Semirame, as tender and attentive as she was beautiful, made the days go by in delights.

Poequilon was so fortunate that he no longer thought about asking anything of Selenos, except for another soul in order to feel his happiness more; but he considered that the pains with which life is necessarily mixed would be regulated to the measure of that double faculty of sensing pleasures, and that reflection determined him to be content with one soul.²

He cherished his tender spouse with all of his heart, and any pleasure that he had not shared with her would have seemed insipid to him. He would have been only too happy to remain in that situation, but the continuous passion to make sure of his happiness devoured Poequilon.

Fatal curiosity! The rapid infidelity of Cyclae presented itself to his memory.

He thought that nothing would be lacking to his joy if Selenos could assure him of the constancy of his dear and tender Semirame.

It was more than two years since he had asked anything of the Genius; he made him this short prayer:

“O Selenos, since I have possessed Semirame, you know that she alone has been my pleasure; I shall be at the peak of human felicity if you can inform me that she is faithful. Give me certain evidence³ of her love and her constancy.”

Scarcely had he uttered those words that he felt himself afflicted by the most agonizing pain in—how shall I put it?—that which Selenos had regrown for him in an instant after two years of privation and servitude.

² Author’s note: “The humans of the Moon are so feebly provided in the matter of the soul that it seems that Poequilon, by such a wish, might have tempted the power of the Genius, or demanded the property of another, which would not have been in accord with the conditions prescribed by Selenos.”

³ Author’s note: “*Pignora certa petis, do Pignora certa timendo.* Ovid.” [You seek certain proof; I’m giving you certain proof in fear.]

He understood that certificate of conjugal infidelity only too well. I do not think that it is necessary to be an inhabitant of the Moon to understand what I mean; if one is not unaware of how much analogy there is between our world and that one, one ought to comprehend that Poequilon sensed that he had been struck by the malady known on the Moon as Aphrodise. That name comes very close to the one well known on our world. I shall not give the history of the malady in question here; it will be sufficient for the reader that I inform him briefly that it is a contagious disease communicated in the bosom of pleasure, with which a certain Jason of the Moon has gratified the entire Planet.

When Poequilon was aware of his condition, he did not want to recognize his wife any longer, and he had her swallow an obedience in a silver-plated cup, by which means he became a widower again.⁴

VII. He who embraces too much grips poorly.

Poequilon spent two years in the pleasures of widowhood; that was one benefit that he did not owe to Selenos. Nor did he have any need of the Genius to cure his infirmity, because a certain Mountebank, very afflicted in his limbs and who had written a great deal about Aphrodise, made him swallow a good deal of false silver,⁵ for which he gave him a considerable quantity of gold in bars.

Nevertheless, in view of the affection that he had for Poequilon, Selenos might well have had something to do with that cure, for the Mountebanks of the Moon, when they have cured someone, employ the formula “with the aid of Selenos, etc.” And to accelerate his convalescence, Poequilon drank a few drops of the rejuvenating fountain. It must not be imagined that the waters of Youth are a radical cure, but without that faculty the Moon would fall into stagnation, according to the Doctors.

Meanwhile, Poequilon made profound reflections regarding the opposite sex; he understood that a woman could not be faithful, because men are sufficient in name only; that is why, when the term of his wish had arrived, he asked Selenos for the vigor of an entire squadron. The prodigal Selenos submerged him with his favors, and the Poequilon ran furiously hither and yon; Priestesses and Loose Women alike, all succumbed to his amorous rage, and he never enjoyed himself but his pleasures were a carnage,

As one can imagine, such a monstrous disposition disturbed the order of society somewhat; the sovereign of Verticephalia used force and skill to make Poequilon stop, and the favorite’s erotic vapors were confined between four walls; furthermore, he was alimeted in a fashion that when he had furnished the marvelous dispositions of all the heroes of the Mirebalais, his flag was lowered. The Prince thought he ought to administer justice to Poequilon, at the request of all the outraged families. He was put on trial, and his sentence was announced to him; they would cut off his...let us suppose the head...and display it publicly on the “turnip of infamy.”⁶

He offered in exchange for clemency more riches than had ever been possessed on Earth by the Peruvians and the Solipses. The Prince held firm and generously refused to yield to that seduction, with the result that, when he was about to go to the scaffold, he begged Selenos with all imaginable fervor to render him invisible and to take away his dangerous and supernatural passion. Fortunately, the two years had expired.

If it seems surprising that two years had already gone by since Poequilon’s last wish, take note that on the Moon, where everything is done maturely, legal procedures take a long time, and besides which, Poequilon was a criminal of high status, which required that nothing be rushed.

⁴ Author’s note: “A vengeance of that nature is not commonplace in Verticephalia, especially in this sort of case, but Poequilon was then affected by the vapors of the austral lands, for it is as well to observe that the Earth influences the Moon, by vertical or oblique ascension, as the Moon does the Earth by gravitation; there are many people who do not want to believe that, but I give fair warning that I do not stand for any argument.”

⁵ I have translated *argent faux* literally, as “false silver,” rather than the more usual “false coin” (*argent* also meaning “money” in French) in order to retain a link with quicksilver, mercury poisoning being the standard treatment for syphilis at the time, under the inspiration of Paracelsus.

⁶ Author’s note: “*Natibus raphano oppletis.*” The quotation is from Lucian; the middle term refers to the root vegetable, the first to the buttocks and the third to ordure.

When they came into his prison to take possession of his person, he was invisible, and realized by virtue of the surprise of the guards that the Genius had granted his wish. He went out in the middle of the escort and was delighted by everyone's astonishment. Singularly enough, the people, who believe so easily in miracles, could not be persuaded that Poequilon had been saved from the scaffold by an entirely divine providence, because of an opinion long credited on the Moon that a rich man cannot be hanged.

In order to appease the people, they pretended to have recaptured Poequilon, and substituted for him a man who had merited the satisfaction of the sentence; the people were not fooled, and it is probable that would have refused to believe it even if it really had been Poequilon—the people of the Moon are like that.

VIII. Good Advice.

The invisible man, attenuated by hunger, fear and detention, first went to his Palace, which had been seized to the profit of the Prince and was in the greatest disorder; he saw his slaves pillaging everywhere, in spite of the oath they sworn to the agents of justice. He let them do it, thinking that confiscation was as good by one hand as another. He went to the kitchen, where he fortunately found what he needed to assuage his devouring hunger. It was a true testament to Poequilon's opulence that after a descent by Officers of the Law, there was still enough to procure him a modest meal.

He amused himself by beating and fustigating the lawyers and policemen who were pocketing things, and everyone cried out that the executed man had returned, which amused Poequilon greatly. Then he drank a few glasses of the water of Youth to get his strength back, for he had no need as yet to be rejuvenated, only being in the fifth lustrum of his second life. However, that little refreshment took him back to adolescence; he wanted to contemplate himself in the spring, and found that he was invisible to himself. He was annoyed to be deprived of the spectacle of his face, but his portrait, which he still had in his pocket, consoled him.

No longer knowing where to rest his head, Poequilon thought that he would only be able to lead a furtive and vagabond life during his invisibility, and that his gold would serve him, at the most, to acquit his conscience for the petty larcenies that he would be obliged to commit in order to live. At least, however, he wanted to take advantage of that rare state of invisibility to observe the secret actions of hypocrites, relieving the unfortunate and consoling afflicted beauties. There was some good in those projects.

He also conceived the plan of seeing at close range what happened in the Palace of Kings, but the elixir of Youth that was seething in his veins deflected him from that serious enterprise.

"Let's respect our Masters," he said. "Anyway, the secrets of Courts are the stuff of Comedy, and I'm bound to find out more than I want to know, and where will that lead me? To journalism. And where does journalism lead? To invisibility. No, no, I want to be seen."