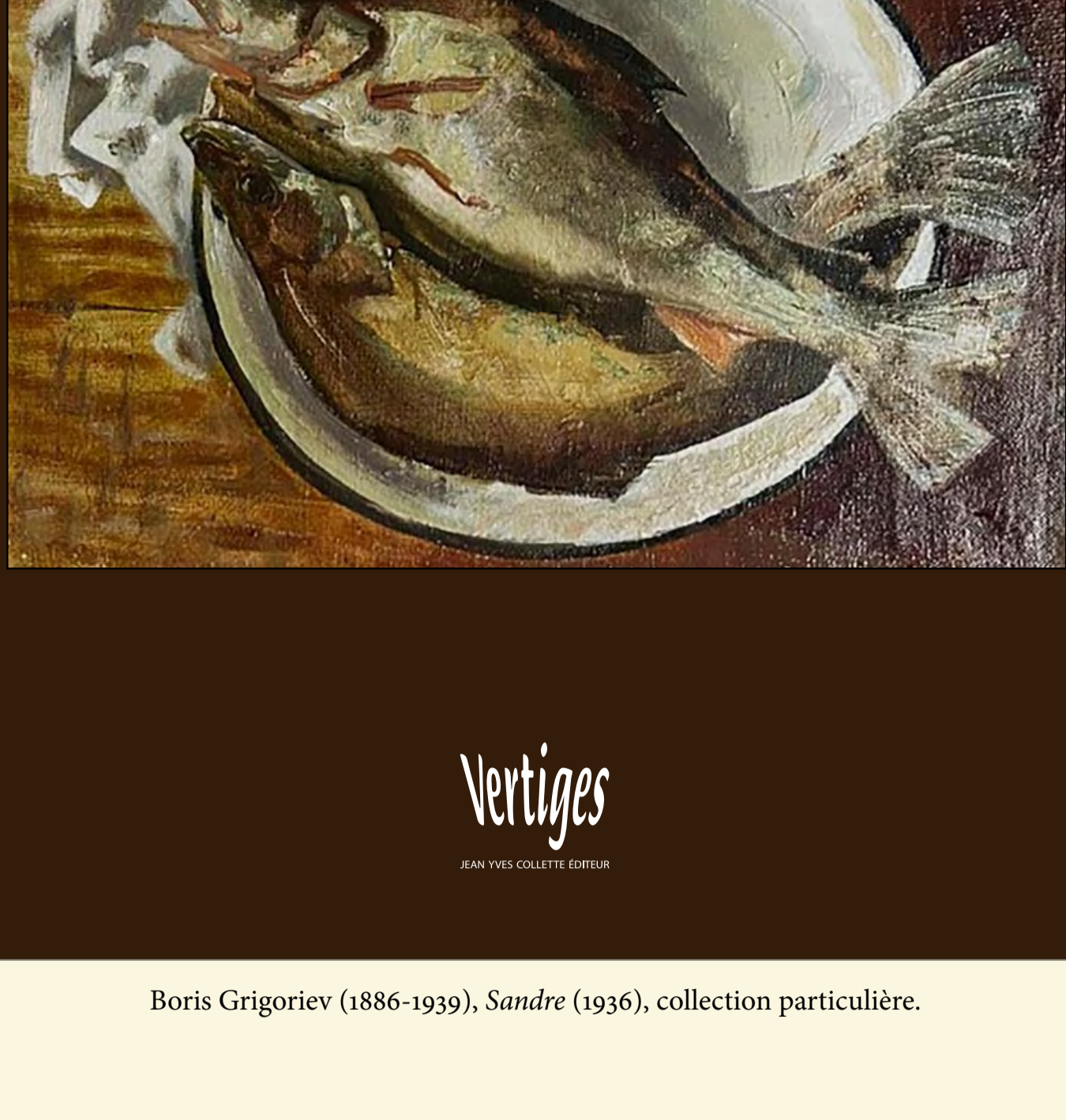


Ignát Herrmann

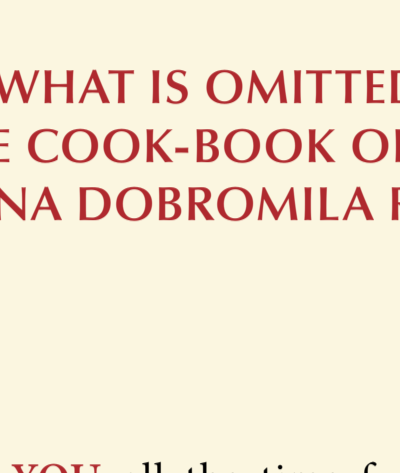
## What is omitted from the cook-book of madame Magdálena Dobromila Rettigová



Vertiges

JEAN-YVES COLLETTE ÉDITEUR

Boris Grigoriev (1886-1939), *Sandre* (1936), collection particulière.



Ignát Herrmann (1854-1935) en 1895.

### WHAT IS OMITTED

### FROM THE COOK-BOOK OF MADAME MAGDÁLENA DOBROMILA RETTIGOVÁ

“WHY ARE YOU all the time fussing in those shelves?” howled out the chief counsellor at Konopásek, the dayclerk who alone of the force remained in the office on Christmas day. It was late in the afternoon. The attorney was hastily completing some documents in order not to have so much to do after the holidays and was angry at the clerk, who had already arisen several times from his copying work and had been rooting around in the cabinet where the supplies were kept. First, he needed writing-sand, next he looked for a longer ruler, again he picked around among pieces of sealing wax. Up to this moment the counsellor had said nothing and had only pulled at his nose, as was his habit when inward wrath overpowered him—but finally the constant running about of the lean, gray-haired clerk exasperated him to such a pitch that he burst out on him. “It’s nothing, Mr. Counsellor, nothing,” answered Konopásek quickly and his ashen cheeks reddened with a faint flush. “I just ran out of twine and I’d like to sew up that inventory. I’m just going for a fresh ball—” “Zounds, man! Don’t you see right there on the table before you a ball as big as thunder?” howled the counsellor angrily and pointed to a ball of black and yellow twine lying right in front of Konopásek’s nose, so to speak. “You’re so excited about your Christmas dinner of fried carp that you’re absolutely stupid, it seems to me. It’ll not run away.” Konopásek with red cheeks sat down at his place and sewed on. After a while, however, he rose again, stepped quickly to the door, took the key from the wainscot and hastily walked out of the office. When he had left, the attorney arose as if something had pierced him and with short steps approached the cabinet. He opened it and looked at the supplies in which Konopásek had been rummaging. There was almost nothing inside. Some paper, a bit of string, a few sticks of sealing wax and two pairs of scissors. In a corner of the compartment were several small circular boxes on the lid of each of which was pasted a round white wafer, about the size of a cent, a hardened thin disk of flour or gelatin used for sealing official documents. One of the boxes stood at a little distance from the others. The counsellor involuntarily took hold of it to push it closer to the others, but suddenly lifted it. It was suspiciously light-empty. The counsellor raised a second box, shook it—it was empty. He took a third, fourth, fifth—all were empty and only the last two were filled with the round, white wafers. The counsellor pushed his spectacles up on his forehead. What did this mean? . . . Why, he himself had bought a supply only two weeks ago on what things could they all have been pasted in so short a time? He was still standing beside the cabinet when Konopásek reentered the office. Observing the attorney beside the cabinet, he turned as white as the wall.

“Well, where did you put all the wafers? Speak up!”

“Oh, Mr. Counsellor!” cried out the pale, trembling clerk, clasping his hands imploringly. “Do not destroy me I have a wife and six children!”

Until that moment the counsellor had not a thought of anything irregular, but now he suspected something was wrong, yet he could not grasp what it might be. The wafers—what had happened?

The crushed, deadly pale, shivering clerk reached with his bony fingers into the tail of his shabby, greenish-colored coat and drew therefrom a pocket-handkerchief, filled up, the corners being drawn together and tied.

“Here they are every one of them,” he stammered with chattering teeth. “I will put them all back into the boxes.” He untied the corners of the handkerchief and poured out on a sheet of paper a small pile of wafers.

Now at last the attorney comprehended that the clerk had taken them, but why—for what possible purpose! And curiosity overpowering his obligatory official wrath, the counsellor impatiently exploded.

“What did you intend to do with them, Konopásek?”

“Supper an evening meal, your honor!” stammered Konopásek. “It is Christmas day. I haven’t even a sixpence. I promised my wife I’d bring some wafers she wanted to bake them with shreds of fat. I have six children and I must make some sort of Christmas for them. They haven’t eaten all day—there was nothing in the house—”

The counsellor slid the spectacles down from his forehead to his eyes, gazed at the pile of white, tasteless, unsalted, starchy wafers and then he meant to look at Konopásek, but suddenly his glance shifted from the miserable, twitching face with its blue lips on which trembled the gray streaked moustache and fixing his eyes on the clerk’s faded, stained necktie, he asked, “Have you ever eaten them before, Konopásek?”

“Yes, sir,” uttered the quivering lips of the clerk.

“Is the stuff really eatable?” asked the amazed attorney.

“Indeed, yes, Mr. Counsellor. Dear Lord, if one only had enough of them—”

“Put them back into the boxes!” commanded the counsellor in a voice bristling suddenly as he turned to his own desk.

The clerk raked the wafers with his thin, ink-spotted fingers and filled the emptied boxes. When he had finished this, he sat down on his chair to continue his work. But he could not go on. His fingers trembled, in his eyes a mist formed and there was a roaring in his temples. Shame, dismissal, wretchedness—and after all, the children will have nothing to eat today!

The attorney glanced at Konopásek several times and wiped his glasses and his eyes, after which he sneezed violently a number of times. He, too, could not work. He was doubtless angry at the good-for-nothing clerk who stole wafers in order to bake them up with shreds of fat, for a Christmas dinner for his children. He twisted for a while in his chair, rose finally and approached the door. The clerk shivered anew. Now he was to hear his fate.

The attorney stepped a little closer to the transgressor, and not looking at Konopásek, ordered, “Take your coat and hat and go to the market. Buy a carp, a good big one and take it home to the wife at once, you understand? So that she’d have time to get it ready. Then buy the children nuts and apples and for your wife get a bottle of punch or tea or whatever you want to drink after supper. Here, take this and get out!”

At the concluding words, he drew from his pocket a wallet, opened it, took out a bit of paper and laid it on the table. The astonished Konopásek saw before him a ten-florin note.

“Jesus Mary, Mr. Counsellor!” broke from the lips of Konopásek. But further words he was unable to utter. Perhaps, because the attorney made a violent gesture of protest or more likely, because the poor clerk’s whole face and body quivered as with chills and fever. He was choked with amazement, surprise, joy—all!

In an instant after, the counsellor remained alone in the office, but he had no more inclination to work. He arose after a while, put on his handsome fur cloak, thrust his hands into his shaggy modern woolly mittens and, closing the office, departed. He walked lightly, joyously and thought of his own six children looking forward to the delight they would have over the gifts which for many weeks were being collected in a rear room. But at times a sort of dejection and melancholy oppressed him. That was whenever his thoughts involuntarily reverted to Konopásek and his “wafers with shreds of fat,” as the clerk had described the dish.

FIN

*What is omitted from the cook-book of madame  
Magdálena Dobromila Rettigová,*

un conte de l’écrivain tchèque Ignát Herrmann (1854-1935)

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