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Martin Malone

THE BISON'S IDEA OF PLEASURE

i.m.Saki

In the *estaminet* of the Fortunate Rabbit,
you find yourself lending matches
to a man working hard on the square egg.
He claims to be a victim of the war,
before going on to recount a tale
of the visionary brought low by sharp practice
and a cunning aunt. *Some of you English
are men of private means, are you not?*
Then the request for a loan of eighty francs;
an opportunity for which you give thanks
but decline in favour of marriage to his aunt.
Biting muddy biscuits with muddy teeth
among chance-foregathered men,
you later consider, for the mud of a moment,
a badger's-eye view of the honey-combed earth,
dwelling, at length, upon all that is not *estaminet*.
And all that is not *estaminet* is mud
and the bison's idea of pleasure:
muck-bath, hell-broth, quagmire, filth,
engulfing you as cheese engulfs cheesemite
knee-deep and greasy to souse you for hours, days, weeks.
The streaming clay walls of a narrow-dug support trench
when thaw and heavy rain have come atop a frost,
send you to your hands and knees in the dark,
crawling through the thick soup of mud to a dug-out
where you stand deep in mud, lean against mud,
grasp a mud-slimed fork with mud-caked fingers,
clearing clay from your ears, winking mud from your eyes
which close upon a grit-free instant's dream of warm beds,
fresh eggs and the guileless quiver of a maiden aunt.

