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Literature And Poetry
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Max Jacob

From *Le cornet à dés*

LITERATURE AND POETRY

It was in the neighborhood of Lorient, there was a brilliant sky and we were strolling, watching in these September days how the sea rose, rose and covered the woods, the landscape, the cliffs. Soon there was nothing left for the sea to battle with except the meanders of paths under the trees, and the families got closer together. There was among us a child dressed in a sailor suit. He was sad; he took my hand: "Sir," he said, "I have been in Naples; do you know that in Naples there are many small streets; in the streets you can stay all alone without being seen: it isn't that there are many people in Naples, but there are so many little streets that there is only one street per person." "What kind of lie has this child been telling you again," said the father. "Sir, your son is a poet." "That's fine, but if he is a man of letters, I'll wring his neck!" The meanders in the path left dry by the sea made him daydream about the streets of Naples.

Translated from the French by James Vladimir Gill