

Selected Readings  
from

In Search of Lost Time  
Volume IV

Sodom & Gomorrah

by  
Marcel Proust

sort of magical deep background which, in spite of the strong sunlight, was plunged in semi-darkness either because of the twilight of my indistinct memories or because of the nocturnal hour of the Month of Mary. And then, in the flower which opened up before me in the hedge and which seemed to be animated by the clumsy flickering of my blurred and double vision, the flower that rose from my memory revolved without being able to fit itself exactly on to the elusive living blossoms in the tremulous hesitancy of their petals.

The hawthorns brought out the heaviness of the blossom of an apple-tree sumptuously established opposite them, like those dowryless girls of good family who, while being friends of the daughters of a big cider-maker and acknowledging their fresh complexions and good appearance, know that they themselves have more chic in their crumpled white dresses. I did not have the heart to remain beside them, and yet I had been unable to resist stopping. But Bloch's sisters, whom I caught sight of without their seeing me, did not even turn their heads towards the hawthorns. The latter had made no sign to them, had said nothing to them; they were like those devout young girls who never miss a Month of Mary, during which they are not afraid to steal a glance at a young man with whom they will make an assignation in the countryside, and by whom they will even allow themselves to be kissed in the chapel when there is no one about, but would never dream—because it has been strictly forbidden—of speaking to or playing with children of another religion.

## Synopsis

### PART ONE

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### PART TWO

#### Chapter One

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## PART ONE

*The women shall have Gomorrah and  
the men shall have Sodom*

ALFRED DE VIGNY

The reader will remember that, well before going that day (the day on which the Princesse de Guermantes's reception was to be held) to pay the Duke and Duchess the visit I have just described, I had kept watch for their return and in the course of my vigil had made a discovery which concerned M. de Charlus in particular but was in itself so important that I have until now, until the moment when I could give it the prominence and treat it with the fullness that it demanded, postponed giving an account of it. I had, as I have said, left the marvellous point of vantage, so snugly contrived at the top of the house, commanding the hilly slopes which led up to the Hôtel de Bréquigny, and which were gaily decorated in the Italian manner by the rose-pink campanile of the Marquis de Frécourt's coach-house. I had thought it more practical, when I suspected that the Duke and Duchess were on the point of returning, to post myself on the staircase. I rather missed my Alpine eyrie. But at that time of day, namely the hour immediately after lunch, I had less cause for regret, for I should not then have seen, as in the morning, the footmen of the Bréquigny household, converted by distance into minute figures in a picture, make their leisurely ascent of the steep hillside,

feather-brush in hand, behind the large, transparent flakes of mica which stood out so pleasingly upon its ruddy bastions. Failing the geologist's field of contemplation, I had at least that of the botanist, and was peering through the shutters of the staircase window at the Duchess's little shrub and at the precious plant, exposed in the courtyard with that assertiveness with which mothers "bring out" their marriageable offspring, and asking myself whether the unlikely insect would come, by a providential hazard, to visit the offered and neglected pistil. My curiosity emboldening me by degrees, I went down to the ground-floor window, which also stood open with its shutters ajar. I could distinctly hear Jupien getting ready to go out, but he could not detect me behind my blind, where I stood perfectly still until the moment when I drew quickly aside in order not to be seen by M. de Charlus, who, on his way to call upon Mme de Villeparisis, was slowly crossing the courtyard, corpulent, greying, aged by the strong light. Nothing short of an indisposition from which Mme de Villeparisis might be suffering (consequent on the illness of the Marquis de Fierbois, with whom he personally was at daggers drawn) could have made M. de Charlus pay a call, perhaps for the first time in his life, at that hour of the day. For with that eccentricity of the Guermentes, who, instead of conforming to the ways of society, tended to modify them to suit their own personal habits (habits not, they thought, social, and deserving in consequence the abasement before them of that worthless thing, society life—thus it was that Mme de Marsantes had no regular "day," but was at home to her friends every morning between ten o'clock and noon), the Baron, reserving those hours for reading, hunting for old curios

and so forth, paid calls only between four and six in the evening. At six o'clock he went to the Jockey Club, or took a stroll in the Bois. A moment later, I again recoiled, in order not to be seen by Jupien. It was nearly time for him to set out for the office, from which he would return only for dinner, and not always even then during the last week since his niece and her apprentices had gone to the country to finish a dress for a customer. Then, realising that no one could see me, I decided not to let myself be disturbed again for fear of missing, should the miracle be fated to occur, the arrival, almost beyond the possibility of hope (across so many obstacles of distance, of adverse risks, of dangers), of the insect sent from so far away as ambassador to the virgin who had been waiting for so long. I knew that this expectancy was no more passive than in the male flower, whose stamens had spontaneously curved so that the insect might more easily receive their offering; similarly the female flower that stood here would coquettishly arch her "styles" if the insect came, and, to be more effectively penetrated by him, would imperceptibly advance, like a hypocritical but ardent damsel, to meet him half-way. The laws of the vegetable kingdom are themselves governed by increasingly higher laws. If the visit of an insect, that is to say the transportation of the seed from another flower, is generally necessary for the fertilisation of a flower, that is because self-fertilisation, the insemination of a flower by itself, would lead, like a succession of intermarriages in the same family, to degeneracy and sterility, whereas the crossing effected by insects gives to the subsequent generations of the same species a vigour unknown to their forebears. This invigoration may, however, prove excessive, and the species de-

velop out of all proportion; then, as an antitoxin protects us against disease, as the thyroid gland regulates our adiposity, as defeat comes to punish pride, as fatigue follows indulgence, and as sleep in turn brings rest from fatigue, so an exceptional act of self-fertilisation comes at the crucial moment to apply its turn of the screw, its pull on the curb, brings back within the norm the flower that has exaggeratedly overstepped it. My reflexions had followed a trend which I shall describe in due course, and I had already drawn from the visible stratagems of flowers a conclusion that bore upon a whole unconscious element of literary production, when I saw M. de Charlus coming away from the Marquise's door. Only a few minutes had passed since his entry. Perhaps he had learned from his elderly relative herself, or merely from a servant, of a great improvement in her condition, or rather her complete recovery from what had been nothing more than a slight indisposition. At this moment, when he did not suspect that anyone was watching him, his eyelids lowered as a screen against the sun, M. de Charlus had relaxed that artificial tension, softened that artificial vigour in his face which were ordinarily sustained by the animation of his talk and the force of his will. Pale as a marble statue, his fine features with the prominent nose no longer received from an expression deliberately assumed a different meaning which altered the beauty of their contours; no more now than a Guermantes, he seemed already carved in stone, he, Palamède XV, in the chapel at Combray. These general features of a whole family took on, however, in the face of M. de Charlus a more spiritualised, above all a softer refinement. I regretted for his sake that he should habitually adulterate with so many violent out-

bursts, offensive eccentricities, calumnies, with such harshness, touchiness and arrogance, that he should conceal beneath a spurious brutality the amenity, the kindness which, as he emerged from Mme de Villeparisis's, I saw so innocently displayed upon his face. Blinking his eyes in the sunlight, he seemed almost to be smiling, and I found in his face seen thus in repose and as it were in its natural state something so affectionate, so defenceless, that I could not help thinking how angry M. de Charlus would have been could he have known that he was being watched; for what was suggested to me by the sight of this man who was so enamoured of, who so prided himself upon, his virility, to whom all other men seemed odiously effeminate, what he suddenly suggested to me, to such an extent had he momentarily assumed the features, the expression, the smile thereof, was a woman.

I was about to change my position again, so that he should not catch sight of me; I had neither the time nor the need to do so. For what did I see! Face to face, in that courtyard where they had certainly never met before (M. de Charlus coming to the Hôtel de Guermantes only in the afternoon, during the time when Jupien was at his office), the Baron, having suddenly opened wide his half-shut eyes, was gazing with extraordinary attentiveness at the ex-tailor poised on the threshold of his shop, while the latter, rooted suddenly to the spot in front of M. de Charlus, implanted there like a tree, contemplated with a look of wonderment the plump form of the ageing Baron. But, more astounding still, M. de Charlus's pose having altered, Jupien's, as though in obedience to the laws of an occult art, at once brought itself into harmony with it. The Baron, who now sought to disguise the impression



that had been made on him, and yet, in spite of his affectation of indifference, seemed unable to move away without regret, came and went, looked vaguely into the distance in the way which he felt would most enhance the beauty of his eyes, assumed a smug, nonchalant, fatuous air. Meanwhile Jupien, shedding at once the humble, kindly expression which I had always associated with him, had—in perfect symmetry with the Baron—thrown back his head, given a becoming tilt to his body, placed his hand with grotesque effrontery on his hip, stuck out his behind, struck poses with the coquetry that the orchid might have adopted on the providential arrival of the bee. I had not supposed that he could look so unappealing. But I was equally unaware that he was capable of improvising his part in this sort of dumb show which (although he found himself for the first time in the presence of M. de Charlus) seemed to have been long and carefully rehearsed; one does not arrive spontaneously at that pitch of perfection except when one meets abroad a compatriot with whom an understanding then develops of itself, the means of communication being the same, even without having seen each other before.

This scene was not, however, positively comic; it was stamped with a strangeness, or if you like a naturalness, the beauty of which steadily increased. Try as M. de Charlus might to assume a detached air, to let his eyelids nonchalantly droop, every now and then he raised them, and at such moments turned on Jupien an attentive gaze. But (doubtless because he felt that such a scene could not be prolonged indefinitely in this place, whether for reasons which we shall understand later on, or possibly from that feeling of the brevity of all things which makes us

determine that every blow must strike home, and renders so moving the spectacle of every kind of love), each time that M. de Charlus looked at Jupien, he took care that his glance should be accompanied by a word, which made it infinitely unlike the glances we usually direct at a person whom we scarcely know or do not know at all; he stared at Jupien with the peculiar fixity of the person who is about to say to you: "Excuse my taking the liberty, but you have a long white thread hanging down your back," or else: "Surely I can't be mistaken, you come from Zurich too; I'm certain I must have seen you there often at the antique dealer's." Thus, every other minute, the same question seemed to be put to Jupien intently in M. de Charlus's ogling, like those questioning phrases of Beethoven's, indefinitely repeated at regular intervals and intended—with an exaggerated lavishness of preparation—to introduce a new theme, a change of key, a "re-entry." On the other hand, the beauty of the reciprocal glances of M. de Charlus and Jupien arose precisely from the fact that they did not, for the moment at least, seem to be intended to lead to anything further. It was the first time I had seen the manifestation of this beauty in the Baron and Jupien. In the eyes of both of them, it was the sky not of Zurich but of some oriental city, the name of which I had not yet divined, that I saw reflected. Whatever the point might be that held M. de Charlus and the ex-tailor thus arrested, their pact seemed concluded and these superfluous glances to be but ritual preliminaries, like the parties people give before a marriage which has been definitely arranged. Nearer still to nature—and the multiplicity of these analogies is itself all the more natural in that the same man, if we examine him for a few min-

utes, appears in turn a man, a man-bird, a man-insect, and so forth—one might have thought of them as a pair of birds, the male and the female, the male seeking to advance, the female—Jupien—no longer giving any sign of response to this stratagem, but regarding her new friend without surprise, with an inattentive fixity of gaze, doubtless considered more disturbing and the sole practicality now that the male had taken the first steps, and contenting herself with preening her feathers. At length Jupien's indifference seemed to suffice him no longer; from the certainty of having conquered to getting himself pursued and desired was but a step, and Jupien, deciding to go off to his work, went out through the carriage gate. It was only, however, after turning his head two or three times that he disappeared into the street, towards which the Baron, trembling lest he should lose the trail (boldly humming a tune, and not forgetting to fling a "Good-day" to the porter, who, half-tipsy and engaged in treating a few friends in his back kitchen, did not even hear him), hurried briskly to catch up with him. At the same instant as M. de Charlus disappeared through the gate humming like a great bumble-bee, another, a real one this time, flew into the courtyard. For all I knew this might be the one so long awaited by the orchid, coming to bring it that rare pollen without which it must remain a virgin. But I was distracted from following the gyrations of the insect, for, a few minutes later, engaging my attention afresh, Jupien (perhaps to pick up a parcel which he did take away with him ultimately and which, in the emotion aroused in him by the appearance of M. de Charlus, he had forgotten, perhaps simply for a more natural reason) returned, followed by the Baron. The latter, deciding to precipitate

matters, asked the tailor for a light, but at once observed: "I ask you for a light, but I see I've left my cigars at home." The laws of hospitality prevailed over the rules of coquetry. "Come inside, you shall have everything you wish," said the tailor, on whose features disdain now gave place to joy. The door of the shop closed behind them and I could hear no more. I had lost sight of the bumble-bee. I did not know whether he was the insect that the orchid required, but I had no longer any doubt, in the case of a very rare insect and a captive flower, of the miraculous possibility of their conjunction when I considered that M. de Charlus (this is simply a comparison of providential chances, whatever they may be, without the slightest scientific claim to establish a relation between certain botanical laws and what is sometimes, most ineptly, termed homosexuality), who for years past had never come to the house except at hours when Jupien was not there, had, by the mere accident of Mme de Villeparisis's indisposition, encountered the tailor and with him the good fortune reserved for men of the Baron's kind by one of those fellow-creatures who may even be, as we shall see, infinitely younger than Jupien and better-looking, the man predestined to exist in order that they may have their share of sensual pleasure on this earth: the man who cares only for elderly gentlemen.

All that I have just said, however, I was not to understand until several minutes had elapsed, to such an extent is reality encumbered by those properties of invisibility until a chance occurrence has divested it of them. At all events, for the moment I was greatly annoyed at not being able to hear any more of the conversation between the ex-tailor and the Baron. Then I noticed the vacant shop,

which was separated from Jupien's only by an extremely thin partition. In order to get to it, I had merely to go up to our flat, pass through the kitchen, go down by the service stairs to the cellars, make my way through them across the breadth of the courtyard above, and on arriving at the place in the basement where a few months ago the joiner had still been storing his timber and where Jupien intended to keep his coal, climb the flight of steps which led to the interior of the shop. Thus the whole of my journey would be made under cover, and I should not be seen by anyone. This was the most prudent method. It was not the one that I adopted; instead, keeping close to the walls, I edged my way round the courtyard in the open, trying not to let myself be seen. If I was not, I owe it more, I am sure, to chance than to my own sagacity. And for the fact that I took so imprudent a course, when the way through the cellar was so safe, I can see three possible reasons, assuming that I had any reason at all. First of all, my impatience. Secondly, perhaps, a dim memory of the scene at Montjouvain, when I crouched concealed outside Mlle Vinteuil's window. Certainly, the affairs of this sort of which I have been a spectator have always been, as far as their setting is concerned, of the most imprudent and least probable character, as if such revelations were to be the reward of an action full of risk, though in part clandestine. I hardly dare confess to the third and final reason, so childish does it seem, but I suspect that it was unconsciously decisive. Ever since, in order to follow—and see controverted—the military principles enunciated by Saint-Loup, I had been following in close detail the course of the Boer War, I had been led on from that to re-read old accounts of travel and explo-

ration. These narratives had thrilled me, and I applied them to the events of my daily life to give myself courage. When attacks of illness had compelled me to remain for several days and nights on end not only without sleep but without lying down, without tasting food or drink, at the moment when my pain and exhaustion became so intense that I felt that I should never escape from them, I would think of some traveller cast up on a shore, poisoned by noxious herbs, shivering with fever in clothes drenched by the salt water, who nevertheless in a day or two felt stronger, rose and went blindly on his way, in search of possible inhabitants who might turn out to be cannibals. His example acted on me as a tonic, restored my hope, and I felt ashamed of my momentary discouragement. Thinking of the Boers who, with British armies facing them, were not afraid to expose themselves at the moment when they had to cross a tract of open country in order to reach cover, "It would be a fine thing," I thought to myself, "if I were to show less courage when the theatre of operations is simply our own courtyard, and when the only steel that I have to fear, I who have just fought several duels unafraid on account of the Dreyfus case, is that of the eyes of the neighbours who have other things to do besides looking into the courtyard."

But when I was inside the shop, taking care not to let the wooden floor make the slightest creak, as I realised that the least sound in Jupien's shop could be heard from mine, I thought to myself how rash Jupien and M. de Charlus had been, and how luck had favoured them.

I did not dare move. The Guermantes groom, taking advantage no doubt of his master's absence, had, as it happened, transferred to the shop in which I now stood a

ladder which hitherto had been kept in the coach-house, and if I had climbed this I could have opened the fanlight above and heard as well as if I had been in Jupien's shop itself. But I was afraid of making a noise. Besides, it was unnecessary. I had not even cause to regret my not having arrived in the shop until several minutes had elapsed. For from what I heard at first in Jupien's quarters, which was only a series of inarticulate sounds, I imagine that few words had been exchanged. It is true that these sounds were so violent that, if they had not always been taken up an octave higher by a parallel plaint, I might have thought that one person was slitting another's throat within a few feet of me, and that subsequently the murderer and his resuscitated victim were taking a bath to wash away the traces of the crime. I concluded from this later on that there is another thing as noisy as pain, namely pleasure, especially when there is added to it—in the absence of the fear of pregnancy which could not be the case here, despite the hardly convincing example in the *Golden Legend*—an immediate concern about cleanliness. Finally, after about half an hour (during which time I had stealthily hoisted myself up my ladder so as to peep through the fanlight which I did not open), the Baron emerged and a conversation began. Jupien refused with insistence the money that M. de Charlus was trying to press upon him.

Then M. de Charlus took one step outside the shop. "Why do you have your chin shaved like that," asked the other in a caressing tone. "It's so becoming, a nice beard." "Ugh! It's disgusting," the Baron replied.

Meanwhile he still lingered on the threshold and plied Jupien with questions about the neighbourhood. "You

don't know anything about the man who sells chestnuts round the corner, not the one on the left, he's a horror, but on the other side, a big dark fellow? And the chemist opposite, he has a very nice cyclist who delivers his medicines." These questions must have ruffled Jupien, for, drawing himself up with the indignation of a courtesan who has been betrayed, he replied: "I can see you're a regular flirt." Uttered in a pained, frigid, affected tone, this reproach must have had its effect on M. de Charlus, who, to counteract the bad impression his curiosity had produced, addressed to Jupien, in too low a tone for me to be able to make out his words, a request the granting of which would doubtless necessitate their prolonging their sojourn in the shop, and which moved the tailor sufficiently to make him forget his annoyance, for he studied the Baron's face, plump and flushed beneath his grey hair, with the supremely blissful air of a person whose self-esteem has just been profoundly flattered, and, deciding to grant M. de Charlus the favour that he had just asked of him, after various remarks lacking in refinement such as "What a big bum you have!", said to the Baron with an air at once smiling, moved, superior and grateful: "All right, you big baby, come along!"

"If I hark back to the question of the tram conductor," M. de Charlus tenaciously pursued, "it is because, apart from anything else, it might provide some interest for my homeward journey. For it happens to me at times, like the Caliph who used to roam the streets of Baghdad in the guise of a common merchant, to condescend to follow some curious little person whose profile may have taken my fancy." At this point I was struck by the same observation as had occurred to me in the case of Bergotte.

If he should ever have to answer for himself before a court, he would employ not the sentences calculated to convince the judges, but such Bergottesque sentences as his peculiar literary temperament suggested to him and made him find pleasure in using. Similarly M. de Charlus, in conversing with the tailor, made use of the same language as he would have used in speaking to fashionable people of his own set, even exaggerating its eccentricities, whether because the shyness which he was striving to overcome drove him to an excess of pride or, by preventing him from mastering himself (for we are always less at our ease in the company of someone who is not of our milieu), forced him to unveil, to lay bare his true nature, which was indeed arrogant and a trifle mad, as Mme de Guermantes had remarked. "In order not to lose the trail," he went on, "I spring like a little usher, like a young and good-looking doctor, into the same tram-car as the little person herself, of whom we speak in the feminine gender only so as to conform with the rules of grammar (as one says in speaking of a prince, 'Is *Her* Highness enjoying *her* usual health').<sup>1</sup> If she changes trams, I take, with possibly the germs of the plague, that incredible thing called a 'transfer'—a number, and one which, although it is presented to *me*, is not always number one! I change 'carriages' in this way as many as three or four times, I end up sometimes at eleven o'clock at night at the Gare d'Orléans, and then have to come home. Still, if only it was just the Gare d'Orléans! Once, I must tell you, not having managed to engage in conversation sooner, I went all the way to Orléans itself, in one of those frightful compartments where all one has to rest one's eyes upon, between those triangular objects made of

netting, are photographs of the principal architectural features of the line. There was only one vacant seat; I had in front of me, by way of historic monument, a 'view' of the Cathedral of Orléans, quite the ugliest in France, and as tiring a thing to have to stare at in that way against my will as if somebody had forced me to focus its towers in the lens of one of those optical penholders which give one ophthalmia. I got out of the train at Les Aubrais together with my young person, for whom alas his family (when I had imagined him to possess every defect except that of having a family) were waiting on the platform! My sole consolation, as I waited for a train to take me back to Paris, was the house of Diane de Poitiers. For all that she charmed one of my royal ancestors, I should have preferred a more living beauty. That is why, as an antidote to the boredom of returning home alone, I should rather like to make friends with a sleeping-car attendant or a bus conductor. Now, don't be shocked," the Baron wound up, "it is all a question of type. With what you might call 'young gentlemen,' for instance, I feel no desire for physical possession, but I am never satisfied until I have touched them, I don't mean physically, but touched a responsive chord. As soon as, instead of leaving my letters unanswered, a young man starts writing to me incessantly, when he is morally, as it were, at my disposal, I am assuaged, or at least I would be were I not immediately seized with an obsession for another. Rather curious, is it not?—Speaking of 'young gentlemen,' those that come to the house here, do you know any of them?" "No, my pet. Oh, yes, I do, a dark one, very tall, with an eyeglass, who keeps smiling and turning round." "I don't know who you mean." Jupien filled in the portrait, but M. de Char-

lus was unable to identify its subject, not knowing that the ex-tailor was one of those persons, more common than is generally supposed, who never remember the colour of the hair of people they do not know well. But to me, who was aware of this infirmity in Jupien and substituted "fair" for "dark," the portrait appeared to be an exact description of the Duc de Châtellerault. "To return to young men not of the lower orders," the Baron went on, "at the present moment my head has been turned by a strange little fellow, an intelligent little cit who shows with regard to myself a prodigious want of civility. He has absolutely no idea of the prodigious personage that I am, and of the microscopic animalcule that he is in comparison. But what does it matter, the little donkey may bray his head off before my august bishop's mantle." "Bishop!" cried Jupien, who had understood nothing of M. de Charlus's last remarks, but was completely taken aback by the word bishop. "But that sort of thing doesn't go with religion," he said. "I have three Popes in my family," replied M. de Charlus, "and enjoy the right to mantle in gules by virtue of a cardinalate title, the niece of the Cardinal, my great-uncle, having brought to my grandfather the title of Duke which was substituted for it. I see, though, that you are deaf to metaphor and indifferent to French history. Besides," he added, less perhaps by way of conclusion than as a warning, "this attraction that I feel towards young people who avoid me, from fear of course, for only their natural respect stops their mouths from crying out to me that they love me, requires in them a superior social position. Even then their feigned indifference may produce nevertheless a directly opposite effect. Fatuously prolonged, it sickens me. To take an example from

a class with which you are more familiar, when they were doing up my house, so as not to create jealousies among all the duchesses who were vying with one another for the honour of being able to say that they had given me lodging, I went for a few days to a 'hotel,' as they say nowadays. One of the room waiters was known to me, and I pointed out to him an interesting little page who opened carriage doors and who remained recalcitrant to my proposals. Finally, in my exasperation, in order to prove to him that my intentions were pure, I made him an offer of a ridiculously high sum simply to come upstairs and talk to me for five minutes in my room. I waited for him in vain. I then took such a dislike to him that I used to go out by the service door so as not to see his villainous little mug at the other. I learned afterwards that he had never had any of my notes, which had been intercepted, the first by the room waiter who was jealous, the next by the day porter who was virtuous, the third by the night porter who was in love with the little page, and used to couch with him at the hour when Dian rose. But my disgust persisted none the less, and were they to bring me the page like a dish of venison on a silver platter, I should thrust him away with a retching stomach. There now, what a pity—we have spoken of serious matters and now it's all over between us as regards what I was hoping for. But you could be of great service to me, act as my agent . . . Why no, the mere thought of such a thing makes me quite frisky again, and I feel it isn't all over."

From the beginning of this scene my eyes had been opened by a transformation in M. de Charlus as complete and as immediate as if he had been touched by a magician's wand. Until then, because I had not understood, I



had not seen. Each man's vice (we use the term for the sake of linguistic convenience) accompanies him after the manner of the tutelary spirit who was invisible to men so long as they were unaware of his presence. Kindness, treachery, name, social relations, they do not let themselves be laid bare, we carry them hidden. Ulysses himself did not recognise Athena at first. But the gods are immediately perceptible to one another, like as quickly to like, and so too had M. de Charlus been to Jupien. Until that moment, in the presence of M. de Charlus I had been in the position of an unobservant man who, standing before a pregnant woman whose distended waistline he has failed to remark, persists, while she smilingly reiterates "Yes, I'm a little tired just now," in asking her tactlessly: "Why, what's the matter with you?" But let someone say to him: "She is expecting a child," and suddenly he catches sight of her stomach and ceases to see anything else. It is the explanation that opens our eyes; the dispelling of an error gives us an additional sense.

People who do not care to refer, for examples of this law, to the Messieurs de Charlus of their acquaintance whom for long years they had never suspected until the day when, upon the smooth surface of an individual indistinguishable from everyone else, there suddenly appears, traced in an ink hitherto invisible, the characters that compose the word dear to the ancient Greeks, have only to remind themselves, in order to be persuaded that the world which surrounds them appears to them naked at first, stripped of a thousand ornaments which it offers to the eyes of others better informed, of the number of times in the course of their lives they have found themselves on the point of committing a gaffe. Nothing upon the blank,

undocumented face of this man or that could have led them to suppose that he was precisely the brother, or the fiancé, or the lover of a woman of whom they were about to remark: "What a cow!" But then, fortunately, a word whispered to them by someone standing near arrests the fatal expression on their lips. At once there appear, like a *Mene, Tekel, Upharsin*, the words: "he is engaged to," or "he is the brother of," or "he is the lover of" the woman whom it is inadvisable to describe in his hearing as a cow. And this single new notion will bring about an entire re-grouping, thrusting some back, others forward, of the fractional notions, henceforward a complete whole, which we possessed of the rest of the family. Although in the person of M. de Charlus another creature was coupled, as the horse in the centaur, which made him different from other men, although this creature was one with the Baron, I had never perceived it. Now the abstract had become material, the creature at last discerned had lost its power of remaining invisible, and the transformation of M. de Charlus into a new person was so complete that not only the contrasts of his face and of his voice, but, in retrospect, the very ups and downs of his relations with myself, everything that hitherto had seemed to my mind incoherent, became intelligible, appeared self-evident, just as a sentence which presents no meaning so long as it remains broken up in letters arranged at random expresses, once these letters are rearranged in the proper order, a thought which one can never afterwards forget.

I now understood, moreover, why earlier, when I had seen him coming away from Mme de Villeparisis's, I had managed to arrive at the conclusion that M. de Charlus looked like a woman: he was one! He belonged to that

race of beings, less paradoxical than they appear, whose ideal is manly precisely because their temperament is feminine, and who in ordinary life resemble other men in appearance only; there where each of us carries, inscribed in those eyes through which he beholds everything in the universe, a human form engraved on the surface of the pupil, for them it is not that of a nymph but that of an ephēbe. A race upon which a curse is laid and which must live in falsehood and perjury because it knows that its desire, that which constitutes life's dearest pleasure, is held to be punishable, shameful, an inadmissible thing; which must deny its God, since its members, even when Christians, when at the bar of justice they appear and are arraigned, must before Christ and in his name refute as a calumny what is their very life; sons without a mother, to whom they are obliged to lie even in the hour when they close her dying eyes; friends without friendships, despite all those which their frequently acknowledged charm inspires and their often generous hearts would gladly feel—but can we describe as friendships those relationships which flourish only by virtue of a lie and from which the first impulse of trust and sincerity to which they might be tempted to yield would cause them to be rejected with disgust, unless they are dealing with an impartial or perhaps even sympathetic spirit, who however in that case, misled with regard to them by a conventional psychology, will attribute to the vice confessed the very affection that is most alien to it, just as certain judges assume and are more inclined to pardon murder in invertes and treason in Jews for reasons derived from original sin and racial predestination? And lastly—according at least to the first theory which I sketched in outline at the time, which we

shall see subjected to some modification in the sequel, and in which, had the paradox not been hidden from their eyes by the very illusion that made them see and live, this would have angered them above all else—lovers who are almost precluded from the possibility of that love the hope of which gives them the strength to endure so many risks and so much loneliness, since they are enamoured of precisely the type of man who has nothing feminine about him, who is not an invert and consequently cannot love them in return; with the result that their desire would be for ever unappeased did not their money procure for them real men, and their imagination end by making them take for real men the invertes to whom they have prostituted themselves. Their honour precarious, their liberty provisional, lasting only until the discovery of their crime; their position unstable, like that of the poet one day fêted in every drawing-room and applauded in every theatre in London, and the next driven from every lodging, unable to find a pillow upon which to lay his head, turning the mill like Samson and saying like him: "The two sexes shall die, each in a place apart!"<sup>2</sup> excluded even, except on the days of general misfortune when the majority rally round the victim as the Jews round Dreyfus, from the sympathy—at times from the society—of their fellows, in whom they inspire only disgust at seeing themselves as they are, portrayed in a mirror which, ceasing to flatter them, accentuates every blemish that they have refused to observe in themselves, and makes them understand that what they have been calling their love (and to which, playing upon the word, they have by association annexed all that poetry, painting, music, chivalry, asceticism have contrived to add to love) springs not from an ideal of



beauty which they have chosen but from an incurable disease; like the Jews again (save some who will associate only with those of their race and have always on their lips the ritual words and the accepted pleasantries), shunning one another, seeking out those who are most directly their opposite, who do not want their company, forgiving their rebuffs, enraptured by their condescensions; but also brought into the company of their own kind by the ostracism to which they are subjected, the opprobrium into which they have fallen, having finally been invested, by a persecution similar to that of Israel, with the physical and moral characteristics of a race, sometimes beautiful, often hideous, finding (in spite of all the mockery with which one who, more closely integrated with, better assimilated to the opposing race, is in appearance relatively less inverted, heaps upon one who has remained more so) a relief in frequenting the society of their kind, and even some support in their existence, so much so that, while steadfastly denying that they are a race (the name of which is the vilest of insults), they readily unmask those who succeed in concealing the fact that they belong to it, with a view less to injuring them, though they have no scruple about that, than to excusing themselves, and seeking out (as a doctor seeks out cases of appendicitis) cases of inversion in history, taking pleasure in recalling that Socrates was one of themselves, as the Jews claim that Jesus was one of them, without reflecting that there were no abnormal people when homosexuality was the norm, no anti-Christians before Christ, that the opprobrium alone makes the crime because it has allowed to survive only those who remained obdurate to every warning, to every example, to every punishment, by virtue of an innate dis-

position so peculiar that it is more repugnant to other men (even though it may be accompanied by high moral qualities) than certain other vices which exclude those qualities, such as theft, cruelty, breach of faith, vices better understood and so more readily excused by the generality of men; forming a freemasonry far more extensive, more effective and less suspected than that of the Lodges, for it rests upon an identity of tastes, needs, habits, dangers, apprenticeship, knowledge, traffic, vocabulary, and one in which even members who do not wish to know one another recognise one another immediately by natural or conventional, involuntary or deliberate signs which indicate one of his kind to the beggar in the person of the nobleman whose carriage door he is shutting, to the father in the person of his daughter's suitor, to the man who has sought healing, absolution or legal defence in the doctor, the priest or the barrister to whom he has had recourse; all of them obliged to protect their own secret but sharing with the others a secret which the rest of humanity does not suspect and which means that to them the most wildly improbable tales of adventure seem true, for in this life of anachronistic fiction the ambassador is a bosom friend of the felon, the prince, with a certain insolent aplomb born of his aristocratic breeding which the timorous bourgeois lacks, on leaving the duchess's party goes off to confer in private with the ruffian; a reprobate section of the human collectivity, but an important one, suspected where it does not exist, flaunting itself, insolent and immune, where its existence is never guessed; numbering its adherents everywhere, among the people, in the army, in the church, in prison, on the throne; living, in short, at least to a great extent, in an affectionate and per-

ilous intimacy with the men of the other race, provoking them, playing with them by speaking of its vice as of something alien to it—a game that is rendered easy by the blindness or duplicity of the others, a game that may be kept up for years until the day of the scandal when these lion-tamers are devoured; obliged until then to make a secret of their lives, to avert their eyes from the direction in which they would wish to stray, to fasten them on what they would naturally turn away from, to change the gender of many of the adjectives in their vocabulary, a social constraint that is slight in comparison with the inward constraint imposed upon them by their vice, or what is improperly so called, not so much in relation to others as to themselves, and in such a way that to themselves it does not appear a vice. But certain among them, more practical, busier men who have not the time to go and drive their bargains, or to dispense with the simplification of life and the saving of time which may result from co-operation, have formed two societies of which the second is composed exclusively of persons similar to themselves.

This is noticeable in those who are poor and have come up from the country, without friends, with nothing but their ambition to be some day a celebrated doctor or barrister, with a mind still barren of opinions, a person devoid of social graces which they intend as soon as possible to adorn, just as they might buy furniture for their little attic in the Latin Quarter, modelling themselves on what they observe among those who have already "arrived" in the useful and serious profession in which they also intend to establish themselves and to become famous; in these their special predisposition, unconsciously inher-

ited like a proclivity for drawing, for music, a tendency towards blindness, is perhaps the only inveterate and overriding peculiarity—which on certain evenings compels them to miss some meeting, advantageous to their career, with people whose ways of speaking, thinking, dressing, parting their hair, they otherwise adopt. In their neighbourhood, where for the rest they mix only with brother students, teachers or some fellow-provincial who has graduated and can help them on, they have speedily discovered other young men who are drawn to them by the same special inclination, as in a small town the assistant schoolmaster and the solicitor are brought together by a common interest in chamber music or mediaeval ivories; applying to the object of their distraction the same utilitarian instinct, the same professional spirit which guides them in their career, they meet these young men at gatherings to which no outsider is admitted any more than to those that bring together collectors of old snuff-boxes, Japanese prints or rare flowers, and at which, what with the pleasure of gaining information, the practical value of making exchanges and the fear of competition, there prevail simultaneously, as in a stamp market, the close co-operation of specialists and the fierce rivalries of collectors. Moreover no one in the café where they have their table knows what the gathering is, whether it is that of an angling club, of an editorial staff, or of the "Sons of the Indre," so correct is their attire, so cold and reserved their manner, so modestly do they refrain from any but the most covert glance at the young men of fashion, the young "lions" who, a few feet away, are boasting about their mistresses, and among whom those who now admire them without venturing to raise their eyes will learn only

twenty years later, when some are on the eve of admission to the Academy, and others middle-aged clubmen, that the most attractive among them, now a stout and grizzled Charlus, was in reality one of themselves, but elsewhere, in another circle of society, beneath other external symbols, with different signs whose unfamiliarity misled them. But these groups are at varying stages of evolution; and, just as the "Union of the Left" differs from the "Socialist Federation" or some Mendelssohnian musical club from the Schola Cantorum, on certain evenings, at another table, there are extremists who allow a bracelet to slip down from beneath a cuff, or sometimes a necklace to gleam in the gap of a collar, who by their persistent stares, their cooings, their laughter, their mutual caresses, oblige a band of students to depart in hot haste, and are served with a civility beneath which indignation smoulders by a waiter who, as on the evenings when he has to serve Dreyfusards, would have the greatest pleasure in summoning the police did he not find profit in pocketing their gratuities.

It is with these professional organisations that the mind contrasts the taste of the solitaries, and in one sense without too much contrivance, since it is doing no more than imitate the solitaries themselves who imagine that nothing differs more widely from organised vice than what appears to them to be a misunderstood love, but with some contrivance nevertheless, for these different classes correspond, no less than to diverse physiological types, to successive stages in a pathological or merely social evolution. And it is, in fact, very rarely that the solitaries do not eventually merge themselves in some such organisation, sometimes from simple lassitude, or for con-

venience (just as the people who have been most strongly opposed to such innovations end by having the telephone installed, inviting the Iénas to their parties, or shopping at Potin's). They meet with none too friendly a reception as a rule, for, in their relatively pure lives, their want of experience, the saturation in day-dreams to which they have been reduced, have branded more strongly upon them those special marks of effeminacy which the professionals have sought to efface. And it must be admitted that, among certain of these newcomers, the woman is not only inwardly united to the man but hideously visible, convulsed as they are by a hysterical spasm, by a shrill laugh which sets their knees and hands trembling, looking no more like the common run of men than those apes with melancholy ringed eyes and prehensile feet who dress up in dinner-jackets and black ties; so that these new recruits are judged by others, themselves less chaste, to be compromising associates, and their admission is hedged with difficulties; they are accepted nevertheless, and they benefit then from those facilities by which commerce and big business have transformed the lives of individuals by bringing within their reach commodities hitherto too costly to acquire and indeed hard to find, which now submerge them beneath a plethora of what by themselves they had never succeeded in discovering amid the densest crowds.

But, even with these innumerable outlets, the burden of social constraint is still too heavy for some, recruited principally among those who have not practised mental constraint and who still take to be rarer than it actually is their way of love. Let us ignore for the moment those who, the exceptional character of their inclinations making

them regard themselves as superior to the other sex, look down on women, regard homosexuality as the appurtenance of genius and the great periods of history, and, when they wish to share their taste with others, seek out not so much those who seem to them to be predisposed towards it, like drug-addicts with their morphine, as those who seem to them to be worthy of it, from apostolic zeal, just as others preach Zionism, conscientious objection, Saint-Simonianism, vegetarianism or anarchy. There are some who, should we intrude upon them in the morning, still in bed, will present to our gaze an admirable female head, so generalised and typical of the entire sex is the expression of the face; the hair itself affirms it, so feminine is its ripple; unbrushed, it falls so naturally in long curls over the cheek that one marvels how the young woman, the girl, the Galatea barely awakened to life in the unconscious mass of this male body in which she is imprisoned has contrived so ingeniously, by herself, without instruction from anyone else, to take advantage of the narrowest apertures in her prison wall to find what was necessary to her existence. No doubt the young man who sports this delicious head does not say: "I am a woman." Even if—for any of the countless possible reasons—he lives with a woman, he can deny to her that he is himself one, can swear to her that he has never had intercourse with men. But let her look at him as we have just revealed him, lying back in bed, in pyjamas, his arms bare, his throat and neck bare too beneath the dark tresses: the pyjama jacket becomes a woman's shift, the head that of a pretty Spanish girl. The mistress is appalled by these confidences offered to her gaze, truer than any spoken confidence could be, or indeed any action, which his actions indeed, if they

have not already done so, cannot fail later on to confirm, for every individual follows the line of his own pleasure, and if he is not too depraved, seeks it in a sex complementary to his own. And for the invert vice begins, not when he enters into relations (for there are all sorts of reasons that may enjoin these), but when he takes his pleasure with women. The young man whom we have been attempting to portray was so evidently a woman that the women who looked upon him with desire were doomed (failing a special taste on their part) to the same disappointment as those who in Shakespeare's comedies are taken in by a girl disguised as a youth. The deception is mutual, the invert is himself aware of it, he guesses the disillusionment which the woman will experience once the mask is removed, and feels to what an extent this mistake as to sex is a source of poetical imaginings. Moreover it is in vain that he keeps back the admission "I am a woman" even from his demanding mistress (if she is not a denizen of Gomorrah) when all the time, with the cunning, the agility, the obstinacy of a climbing plant, the unconscious but visible woman in him seeks the masculine organ. We have only to look at that curly hair on the white pillow to understand that if, in the evening, this young man slips through his guardians' fingers in spite of them, in spite of himself, it will not be to go in pursuit of women. His mistress may castigate him, may lock him up, but next day the man-woman will have found some way of attaching himself to a man, as the convolvulus throws out its tendrils wherever it finds a pick or a rake up which to climb. Why, when we admire in the face of this man a delicacy that touches our hearts, a grace, a natural gentleness such as men do not possess, should we be dismayed

to learn that this young man runs after boxers? They are different aspects of the same reality. And indeed, what repels us is the most touching thing of all, more touching than any refinement of delicacy, for it represents an admirable though unconscious effort on the part of nature: the recognition of sex by itself, in spite of the deceptions of sex, appears as an unavowed attempt to escape from itself towards what an initial error on the part of society has segregated it from. Some—those no doubt who have been most timid in childhood—are not greatly concerned with the kind of physical pleasure they receive, provided that they can associate it with a masculine face. Whereas others, whose sensuality is doubtless more violent, feel an imperious need to localise their physical pleasure. These latter, perhaps, would shock the average person with their avowals. They live perhaps less exclusively under the planet of Saturn, since for them women are not entirely excluded as they are for the former sort, in relation to whom women have no existence apart from conversation, flirtation, intellectual loves. But the second sort seek out those women who love other women, who can procure for them a young man, enhance the pleasure they experience in his company; better still, they can, in the same fashion, take with such women the same pleasure as with a man. Whence it arises that jealousy is kindled in those who love the first sort only by the pleasure which they may enjoy with a man, which alone seems to their lovers a betrayal, since they do not participate in the love of women, have practised it only out of habit and to preserve for themselves the possibility of eventual marriage, visualising so little the pleasure that it is capable of giving that they cannot be distressed by the thought that he whom they

love is enjoying that pleasure; whereas the other sort often inspire jealousy by their love-affairs with women. For, in their relations with women, they play, for the woman who loves her own sex, the part of another woman, and she offers them at the same time more or less what they find in other men, so that the jealous friend suffers from the feeling that the man he loves is riveted to the woman who is to him almost a man, and at the same time feels his beloved almost escape him because, to these women, he is something which the lover himself cannot conceive, a sort of woman. Nor need we pause here to consider those young fools who out of childishness, to tease their friends or to shock their families, obdurately choose clothes that resemble women's dresses, redden their lips and blacken their eyelashes; let us leave them aside, for it is they whom we shall find later on, when they have suffered the all too cruel penalty of their affectation, spending what remains of their lifetime in vain attempts to repair by a sternly protestant demeanour the wrong that they did to themselves when they were carried away by the same demon that urges young women of the Faubourg Saint-Germain to live scandalous lives, to defy all the conventions, to scoff at the entreaties of their families, until the day when they set themselves with perseverance but without success to reascend the slope down which they had found it so amusing to slide or rather had not been able to stop themselves from sliding. Let us, finally, leave until later the men who have sealed a pact with Gomorrah. We shall speak of them when M. de Charlus comes to know them. Let us leave all those, of one sort or another, who will appear each in his turn, and, to conclude this first sketch of the subject, let us simply say a word about those whom

we began to speak of just now, the solitaries. Supposing their vice to be more exceptional than it is, they have retired into solitude from the day on which they discovered it, after having carried it within themselves for a long time without knowing it, longer, that is, than certain others. For no one can tell at first that he is an invert, or a poet, or a snob, or a scoundrel. The boy who has been reading erotic poetry or looking at obscene pictures, if he then presses his body against a schoolfellow's, imagines himself only to be communing with him in an identical desire for a woman. How should he suppose that he is not like everybody else when he recognises the substance of what he feels in reading Mme de La Fayette, Racine, Baudelaire, Walter Scott, at a time when he is still too little capable of observing himself to take into account what he has added from his own store to the picture, and to realise that if the sentiment be the same the object differs, that what he desires is Rob Roy and not Diana Vernon? With many, by a defensive prudence on the part of the instinct that precedes the clearer vision of the intellect, the mirror and walls of their bedroom vanish beneath coloured prints of actresses, and they compose verses such as:

I love but Chloe in the world,  
 For Chloe is divine;  
 Her golden hair is sweetly curled,  
 For her my heart doth pine.

Must we on that account attribute to the opening phase of such lives a taste which we shall not find in them later on, like those flaxen ringlets on the heads of children which are destined to change to the darkest brown? Who can tell whether the photographs of women are not a first sign of

hypocrisy, a first sign also of horror at other inverts? But the solitaries are precisely those to whom hypocrisy is painful. Possibly even the example of the Jews, of a different type of colony, is not strong enough to account for the frail hold that their upbringing has upon them, and for the skill and cunning with which they find their way back, not, perhaps, to anything so sheerly terrible as suicide (to which madmen return, whatever precautions one may take with them, and, having been pulled out of the river into which they have flung themselves, take poison, procure revolvers, and so forth), but to a life whose compulsive pleasures the men of the other race not only cannot understand, cannot imagine, abominate, but whose frequent danger and constant shame would horrify them. Perhaps, to form a picture of these, we ought to think, if not of the wild animals that never become domesticated, of the lion-cubs, allegedly tamed, which are still lions at heart, then at least of the negroes whom the comfortable existence of the white man drives to despair and who prefer the risks of life in the wild and its incomprehensible joys. When the day has dawned on which they have discovered themselves to be incapable at once of lying to others and of lying to themselves, they go away to live in the country, shunning the society of their own kind (whom they believe to be few in number) from horror of the monstrosity or fear of the temptation, and that of the rest of humanity from shame. Never having arrived at true maturity, plunged in a constant melancholy, from time to time, on a moonless Sunday evening, they go for a solitary walk as far as a crossroads where, although not a word has been said, there has come to meet them one of their boyhood friends who is living in a house in the

neighbourhood. And they begin again the pastimes of long ago, on the grass, in the night, without exchanging a word. During the week, they meet in their respective houses, talk of this and that, without any allusion to what has occurred between them—exactly as though they had done nothing and would not do anything again—save, in their relations, a trace of coldness, of irony, of irritability and rancour, sometimes of hatred. Then the neighbour sets out on a strenuous expedition on horseback, scales mountain peaks, sleeps in the snow; his friend, who identifies his own vice with a weakness of constitution, a timid, stay-at-home life, assumes that vice can no longer exist in his emancipated friend, so many thousands of feet above sea-level. And, sure enough, the other takes a wife. Yet the forsaken one is not cured (although there are cases where, as we shall see, inversion is curable). He insists upon going down himself every morning to the kitchen to receive the milk from the hands of the dairyman's boy, and on the evening when desire is too strong for him will go out of his way to set a drunkard on the right road or to "adjust the dress" of a blind man. No doubt the life of certain inverts appears at times to change, their vice (as it is called) is no longer apparent in their habits; but nothing is ever lost: a missing jewel turns up again; when the quantity of a sick man's urine decreases, it is because he is perspiring more freely, but the excretion must invariably occur. One day this homosexual hears of the death of a young cousin, and from his inconsolable grief we learn that it was to this love, chaste possibly and aimed rather at retaining esteem than at obtaining possession, that his desires have turned by a sort of transfer as, in a budget, without any alteration in the total, certain expenditure is

carried under another head. As is the case with invalids in whom a sudden attack of urticaria makes their chronic ailments temporarily disappear, this pure love for a young relative seems, in the invert, to have momentarily replaced, by metastasis, habits that will one day or another return to fill the place of the vicarious cured malady.

Meanwhile the married neighbour of our recluse has returned; and on the day when he is obliged to invite them to dinner, seeing the beauty of the young bride and the demonstrative affection of the husband, he feels ashamed of the past. Already in an interesting condition, she must return home early, leaving her husband behind; the latter, when the time has come for him to go home also, asks his host to accompany him for part of the way; at first, no suspicion enters his mind, but at the cross-roads he finds himself thrown down on to the grass without a word by the mountaineer who is shortly to become a father. And their meetings begin again, and continue until the day when there comes to live not far off a male cousin of the young wife's, with whom her husband is now constantly to be seen. And the latter, if the twice-abandoned friend calls round and endeavours to approach him, indignantly repulses him, furious that he has not had the tact to sense the disgust which he must henceforward inspire. Once, however, there appears a stranger, sent to him by his faithless friend; but being busy at the time, the abandoned one cannot see him, and only afterwards learns with what object his visitor had come.

Then the solitary languishes alone. He has no other diversion than to go to the neighbouring watering-place to ask for some information or other from a certain railwayman there. But the latter has obtained promotion, has



been transferred to the other end of the country; the solitary will no longer be able to go and ask him the times of the trains or the price of a first-class ticket, and, before retiring to dream, Griselda-like, in his tower, loiters upon the beach, a strange Andromeda whom no Argonaut will come to free, a sterile jellyfish that must perish upon the sand, or else he stands idly on the platform until his train leaves, casting over the crowd of passengers a look that will seem indifferent, disdainful or abstracted to those of another race, but, like the luminous glow with which certain insects bedeck themselves in order to attract others of their species, or like the nectar which certain flowers offer to attract the insects that will fertilise them, would not deceive the connoisseur (barely possible to find) of a pleasure too singular, too hard to place, which is offered him, the confrère with whom our specialist could converse in the strange tongue—in which at best some ragamuffin on the platform will put up a show of interest, but for material gain alone, like those people who, at the Collège de France, in the room in which the Professor of Sanskrit lectures without an audience, attend his course only for the sake of keeping warm. Jellyfish! Orchid! When I followed my instinct only, the jellyfish used to revolt me at Balbec; but if I had the eyes to regard them, like Michelet, from the standpoint of natural history and aesthetics, I saw an exquisite blue girandole. Are they not, with the transparent velvet of their petals, as it were the mauve orchids of the sea? Like so many creatures of the animal and vegetable kingdoms, like the plant which would produce vanilla but, because in its structure the male organ is separated by a partition from the female, remains sterile unless humming-birds or certain tiny bees

convey the pollen from one to the other, or man fertilises them by artificial means, M. de Charlus (and here the word fertilise must be understood in a moral sense, since in the physical sense the union of male with male is and must be sterile, but it is no small matter for a person to be able to encounter the sole pleasure which he is capable of enjoying, and that "every soul here below" can impart to some other "its music or its fragrance or its flame"), M. de Charlus was one of those men who may be called exceptional because, however many they may be, the satisfaction, so easy for others, of their sexual needs depends upon the coincidence of too many conditions, and of conditions too difficult to meet. For men like M. de Charlus (subject to the compromises which will appear little by little and which the reader may already have sensed, enforced by the need of pleasure which resigns itself to partial acceptations), mutual love, apart from the difficulties, so great as to be almost insurmountable, which it encounters in the ordinary run of mortals, entails others so exceptional that what is always extremely rare for everyone becomes in their case well-nigh impossible, and, if they should chance to have an encounter which is really fortunate, or which nature makes appear so to them, their happiness is somehow far more extraordinary, selective, profoundly necessary than that of the normal lover. The feud of the Capulets and Montagues was as nothing compared with the obstacles of every sort which have been surmounted, the special eliminations to which nature has had to subject the chances, already far from common, which bring about love, before a retired tailor, who was intending to set off soberly for his office, can stand quivering in ecstasy before a stoutish man of fifty; this Romeo



and this Juliet may believe with good reason that their love is not a momentary whim but a true predestination, determined by the harmonies of their temperaments, and not only by their own personal temperaments but by those of their ancestors, by their most distant strains of heredity, so much so that the fellow-creature who is conjoined with them has belonged to them from before their birth, has attracted them by a force comparable to that which governs the worlds on which we spent our former lives. M. de Charlus had distracted me from looking to see whether the bumble-bee was bringing to the orchid the pollen it had so long been waiting to receive, and had no chance of receiving save by an accident so unlikely that one might call it a sort of miracle. But it was a miracle also that I had just witnessed, almost of the same order and no less marvellous. As soon as I considered the encounter from this point of view, everything about it seemed to me instinct with beauty. The most extraordinary stratagems that nature has devised to compel insects to ensure the fertilisation of flowers which without their intervention could not be fertilised because the male flower is too far away from the female—or the one which, if it is the wind that must provide for the transportation of the pollen, makes it so much more easily detachable from the male, so much more easily snatched from the air by the female flower, by eliminating the secretion of the nectar, which is no longer of any use since there are no insects to be attracted, and even the brilliance of the corollas which attract them—and the device which, in order that the flower may be kept free for the right pollen, which can fructify only in that particular flower, makes it secrete a liquid which renders it immune to all other pol-

lens —seemed to me no more marvellous than the existence of the subvariety of inverts destined to guarantee the pleasures of love to the invert who is growing old: men who are attracted not by all other men, but—by a phenomenon of correspondence and harmony similar to those that govern the fertilisation of heterostyle trimorphous flowers like the *lythrum salicaria*—only by men considerably older than themselves. Of this subvariety Jupien had just furnished me with an example, one less striking however than certain others which every human herbalist, every moral botanist, will be able to observe in spite of their rarity, and which will show them a frail young man awaiting the advances of a robust and paunchy quinquagenarian, and remaining as indifferent to those of other young men as the hermaphrodite flowers of the short-styled *primula veris* remain sterile so long as they are fertilised only by other *primulae veris* of short style also, whereas they welcome with joy the pollen of the *primula veris* with the long style. As for M. de Charlus's part in the transaction, I noticed later on that there were for him various kinds of conjunction, some of which, by their multiplicity, their scarcely visible instantaneousness, and above all the absence of contact between the two actors, recalled still more forcibly those flowers that in a garden are fertilised by the pollen of a neighbouring flower which they may never touch. There were in fact certain persons whom it was sufficient for him to invite to his house, and to hold for an hour or two under the domination of his talk, for his desire, inflamed by some earlier encounter, to be assuaged. By a simple use of words the conjunction was effected, as simply as it can be among the infusoria. Sometimes, as had doubtless been the case with

me on the evening on which I had been summoned by him after the Guermites dinner-party, the relief was effected by a violent diatribe which the Baron flung in his visitor's face, just as certain flowers, by means of a hidden spring, spray from a distance the disconcerted but unconsciously collaborating insect. M. de Charlus, the dominated turned dominator, feeling purged of his agitation and calmed, would send away the visitor who had at once ceased to appear to him desirable. Finally, inasmuch as inversion itself springs from the fact that the invert is too closely akin to woman to be capable of having any effective relations with her, it relates to a higher law which ordains that so many hermaphrodite flowers shall remain infertile, that is to say to the sterility of self-fertilisation. It is true that inverts, in their search for a male, often content themselves with other inverts as effeminate as themselves. But it is enough that they do not belong to the female sex, of which they have in them an embryo which they can put to no useful purpose, as happens with so many hermaphrodite flowers, and even with certain hermaphrodite animals, such as the snail, which cannot be fertilised by themselves, but can by other hermaphrodites. In this respect the race of inverts, who readily link themselves with the ancient East or the golden age of Greece, might be traced back further still, to those experimental epochs in which there existed neither dioecious plants nor monosexual animals, to that initial hermaphroditism of which certain rudiments of male organs in the anatomy of women and of female organs in that of men seem still to preserve the trace. I found the pantomime, incomprehensible to me at first, of Jupien and M. de Charlus as curious as those seductive gestures addressed, Darwin tells us,

to insects by the flowers called composite which erect the florets of their capitula so as to be seen from a greater distance, like certain heterostyled flowers which turn back their stamens and bend them to open the way for the insect, or which offer him an ablution, and indeed quite simply comparable to the nectar-fragrance and vivid hue of the corollas that were at that moment attracting insects into the courtyard. From this day onwards M. de Charlus was to alter the time of his visits to Mme de Villeparisis, not that he could not see Jupien elsewhere and with greater convenience, but because to him just as much as to me the afternoon sunshine and the blossoming plant were no doubt linked with his memories. Moreover he did not content himself with recommending the Jupiens to Mme de Villeparisis, to the Duchesse de Guermites, to a whole brilliant clientele who were all the more assiduous in their patronage of the young seamstress when they saw that the few ladies who had resisted, or had merely delayed their submission, were subjected to the direst reprisals by the Baron, whether in order that they might serve as examples or because they had aroused his wrath and had stood out against his attempted domination. He made Jupien's position more and more lucrative, until he finally engaged him as his secretary and established him in the state in which we shall see him later on. "Ah, now! There's a happy man, that Jupien," said Françoise, who had a tendency to minimise or exaggerate people's generosity according as it was bestowed on herself or on others. Not that, in this instance, she had any need to exaggerate, nor for that matter did she feel any jealousy, being genuinely fond of Jupien. "Oh, he's such a good man, the Baron," she went on, "so gentlemanly, so de-

trying on our costumes—it would amuse you. But we should only waste time talking, it's nearly midnight and we mustn't be late in getting there or we shall spoil the show."

I too was in a hurry to get away from M. and Mme de Guermantes as quickly as possible. *Phèdre* finished at about half past eleven. Albertine must have arrived by now. I went straight to Françoise: "Is Mlle Albertine here?" "No one has called."

Good God, did that mean that no one would call! I was in torment, Albertine's visit seeming to me now all the more desirable the less certain it had become.

Françoise was upset too, but for quite a different reason. She had just installed her daughter at the table for a succulent repast. But, on hearing me come in, and seeing that there was no time to whip away the dishes and put out needles and thread as though it were a work party and not a supper party: "She's just had a spoonful of soup, and I forced her to gnaw a bit of bone," Françoise explained to me, to reduce thus to nothing her daughter's supper, as though its copiousness were a crime. Even at lunch or dinner, if I committed the sin of going into the kitchen, Françoise would pretend that they had finished, and would even excuse herself by saying: "I just felt like a *scrap*," or "a *mouthful*." But I was speedily reassured on seeing the multitude of dishes that covered the table, which Françoise, surprised by my sudden entry, like a thief in the night which she was not, had not had time to whisk out of sight. Then she added: "Go along to your bed now, you've done enough work today" (for she wished to make it appear that her daughter not only cost us nothing and lived frugally, but was actually working

herself to death in our service). "You're only cluttering up the kitchen and disturbing Monsieur, who is expecting a visitor. Go on, upstairs," she repeated, as though she were obliged to use her authority to send her daughter to bed when in fact she was only there for appearances's sake now that supper had been ruined, and if I had stayed five minutes longer would have withdrawn of her own accord. And turning to me, in that charming, popular and yet highly individual French that was hers, Françoise added: "Monsieur can see that her face is just cut in two with want of sleep." I remained, delighted not to have to talk to Françoise's daughter.

I have said that she came from a small village which was quite close to her mother's, and yet differed from it in the nature of the soil and its cultivation, in dialect, and above all in certain characteristics of the inhabitants. Thus the "butcheress" and Françoise's niece did not get on at all well together, but had this point in common, that when they went out on an errand, they would linger for hours at "the sister's" or "the cousin's," being themselves incapable of finishing a conversation, in the course of which the purpose with which they had set out faded so completely from their minds that, if we said to them on their return: "Well! will M. le Marquis de Norpois be at home at a quarter past six?" they did not even slap their foreheads and say: "Oh, I forgot all about it," but "Oh! I didn't understand that Monsieur wanted to know that, I thought I had just to go and bid him good-day." If they "lost their heads" in this way about something that had been said to them an hour earlier, it was on the other hand impossible to get out of their heads what they had once heard said by "the" sister or "the" cousin. Thus, if

the butcheress had heard it said that the English made war on us in '70 at the same time as the Prussians (and I explained to her until I was tired that this was not the case), every three weeks the butcheress would repeat to me in the course of conversation: "It's all because of that war the English made on us in '70 with the Prussians." "But I've told you a hundred times that you're wrong," I would say, and she would then answer, implying that her conviction was in no way shaken: "In any case, that's no reason for wishing them any harm. Plenty of water has flowed under the bridges since '70," and so forth. On another occasion, advocating a war with England which I opposed, she said: "To be sure, it's always better not to go to war; but when you must, it's best to do it at once. As the sister was explaining just now, ever since that war the English made on us in '70, the commercial treaties have ruined us. After we've beaten them, we won't allow one Englishman into France unless he pays three hundred francs admission, as we have to pay now to land in England."

Such was, in addition to great decency and civility and, when they were talking, an obstinate refusal to allow any interruption, going back time and time again to the point they had reached if one did interrupt them, thus giving their talk the unshakeable solidity of a Bach fugue, the character of the inhabitants of this tiny village which did not boast five hundred, set among its chestnuts, its willows, and its fields of potatoes and beetroot.

Françoise's daughter, on the other hand (regarding herself as an up-to-date woman who had got out of the old ruts), spoke Parisian slang and was well versed in all the jokes of the day. Françoise having told her that I had

come from the house of a princess: "Oh, indeed! The Princess of Brazil, I suppose, where the nuts come from." Seeing that I was expecting a visitor, she pretended to believe that my name was Charles. I replied innocently that it was not, which enabled her to get in: "Oh, I thought it was! And I was just saying to myself, *Charles attend* (charlatan)." This was not in the best of taste. But I was less unmoved when, to console me for Albertine's delay, she said to me: "I expect you'll go on waiting till doomsday. She's never coming. Ah, these modern flappers!"

And so her speech differed from her mother's; but, what is more curious, her mother's speech was not the same as that of her grandmother, a native of Bailleau-le-Pin, which was so close to Françoise's village. And yet the dialects differed slightly, like the two landscapes, Françoise's mother's village, on a slope descending into a ravine, being overgrown with willows. And, miles away from either of them, there was a small area of France where the people spoke almost precisely the same dialect as in Méséglise. I made this discovery at the same time as I experienced its tediousness, for I once came upon Françoise deep in conversation with a neighbour's housemaid, who came from this village and spoke its dialect. They could more or less understand one another, I could not understand a word, and they knew this but nevertheless continued (excused, they felt, by the joy of being fellow-countrywomen although born so far apart) to converse in this strange tongue in front of me, like people who do not wish to be understood. These picturesque studies in linguistic geography and below-stairs comradeship were renewed weekly in the kitchen, without my deriving any pleasure from them.

grain of intelligence can ever have believed for a moment that there was anything." Whenever any revelation came out that was "damning" to Dreyfus, and the Duke, supposing that now he was going to convert the three charming ladies, came to inform them of it, they burst out laughing and had no difficulty in proving to him, with great dialectic subtlety, that his argument was worthless and quite absurd. The Duke had returned to Paris a fanatical Dreyfusard. And of course we do not suggest that the three charming ladies were not, in this instance, messengers of truth. But it is to be observed that, every ten years or so, when we have left a man imbued with a genuine conviction, it so happens that an intelligent couple, or simply a charming lady, comes into his life and after a few months he is won over to the opposite camp. And in this respect there are many countries that behave like the sincere man, many countries which we have left full of hatred for another race and which, six months later, have changed their minds and reversed their alliances.

I ceased for some time to see Albertine, but continued, failing Mme de Guermantes who no longer spoke to my imagination, to visit other fairies and their dwellings, as inseparable from themselves as is the pearly or enamelled valve or the crenellated turret of its shell from the mollusc that made it and shelters inside it. I should not have been able to classify these ladies, the problem being insignificant and impossible not only to resolve but to pose. Before coming to the lady, one had to approach the fairy mansion. Now as one of them was always at home after lunch in the summer months, before I reached her house I would be obliged to lower the hood of my cab, so scorching were the sun's rays, the memory of which,

without my realising it, was to enter into my general impression. I supposed that I was merely being driven to the Cours-la-Reine; in reality, before arriving at the gathering which a man of wider experience might well have derided, I would receive, as though on a journey through Italy, a delicious, dazzled sensation from which the house was never afterwards to be separated in my memory. What was more, in view of the heat of the season and the hour, the lady would have hermetically closed the shutters of the vast rectangular saloons on the ground floor in which she entertained. I would have difficulty at first in recognising my hostess and her guests, even the Duchesse de Guermantes, who in her husky voice bade me come and sit down next to her, in a Beauvais armchair illustrating the Rape of Europa. Then I would begin to make out on the walls the huge eighteenth-century tapestries representing vessels whose masts were hollyhocks in blossom, beneath which I sat as though in the palace not of the Seine but of Neptune, by the brink of the river Oceanus, where the Duchesse de Guermantes became a sort of goddess of the waters. I should never get to the end of it if I began to describe all the different types of drawing-room. This example will suffice to show that I introduced into my social judgments poetical impressions which I never took into account when I came to add up the sum, so that, when I was calculating the merits of a drawing-room, my total was never correct.

Certainly, these were by no means the only sources of error, but I have no time left, before my departure for Balbec (where to my sorrow I am going to make a second stay which will also be my last), to start upon a series of pictures of society which will find their place in due

course. Here I need only say that to this first erroneous reason (my relatively frivolous existence which made people suppose that I was fond of society) for my letter to Gilberte, and for that reconciliation with the Swann family to which it seemed to point, Odette might very well, and with equal inaccuracy, have added a second. I have suggested hitherto the different aspects that the social world assumes in the eyes of a single person only by supposing that it does not change: if the selfsame woman who the other day knew nobody now goes everywhere, and another who occupied a commanding position is ostracised, one is inclined to see in these changes merely those purely personal ups and downs which from time to time bring about, in the same section of society, in consequence of speculations on the stock exchange, a resounding collapse or enrichment beyond the dreams of avarice. But there is more to it than that. To a certain extent social manifestations (vastly less important than artistic movements, political crises, the trend that leads public taste towards the theatre of ideas, then towards Impressionist painting, then towards music that is German and complicated, then music that is Russian and simple, or towards ideas of social service, ideas of justice, religious reaction, outbursts of patriotism) are nevertheless an echo of them, distant, disjointed, uncertain, changeable, blurred. So that even salons cannot be portrayed in a static immobility which has been conventionally employed up to this point for the study of characters, though these too must be carried along as it were in a quasi-historical momentum. The thirst for novelty that leads men of the fashionable world who are more or less sincere in their eagerness to keep abreast of intellectual developments to frequent

the circles in which they can follow them makes them prefer as a rule some hostess as yet undiscovered, who represents still in their first freshness the hopes of a superior culture so faded and tarnished in the women who for long years have wielded the social sceptre and who, having no secrets from these men, no longer appeal to their imagination. And every period finds itself personified thus in new women, in a new group of women, who, closely identified with whatever may be the latest object of curiosity, seem, in their new attire, to be at that moment making their first appearance, like an unknown species born of the last deluge, irresistible beauties of each new Consulate, each new Directory. But very often the new hostesses are simply, like certain statesmen who may be in office for the first time but have for the last forty years been knocking at every door without seeing any open, women who were not known in society but who nevertheless had been entertaining for years past, for want of anyone better, a few "chosen friends." To be sure, this is not always the case, and when, with the prodigious flowering of the Russian Ballet, revealing one after another Bakst, Nijinsky, Benois and the genius of Stravinsky, Princess Yourbeletieff, the youthful sponsor of all these new great men, appeared wearing on her head an immense, quivering aigrette that was new to the women of Paris and that they all sought to copy, it was widely supposed that this marvellous creature had been imported in their copious luggage, and as their most priceless treasure, by the Russian dancers; but when presently, by her side in her stage box at every performance of the "Russians," seated like a true fairy godmother, unknown until that moment to the aristocracy, we see Mme Verdurin, we shall be able to tell

the society people who may well suppose her to have recently entered the country with Diaghileff's troupe, that this lady, too, had already existed in different periods and had passed through various avatars from which this one differed only in being the first to bring about at last, henceforth assured, and more and more swiftly on the march, the success so long awaited by the Mistress. In Mme Swann's case, it is true, the novelty she represented had not the same collective character. Her salon had crystallised round one man, a dying man, who had progressed almost overnight, at the moment when his talent was exhausted, from obscurity to a blaze of glory. The craze for Bergotte's works was unbounded. He spent the whole day, on show, at Mme Swann's, who would whisper to some influential man: "I shall say a word to him: he'll write an article for you." He was, in fact, in a condition to do so, and even to write a little play for Mme Swann. A stage nearer to death, he was not quite so ill as at the time when he used to come and inquire after my grandmother. This was because intense physical pain had enforced a regime on him. Illness is the most heeded of doctors: to kindness and wisdom we make promises only; pain we obey.

It is true that the Verdurins and their little clan were at this time of far more lively interest than the faintly nationalist, more markedly literary, and pre-eminently Bergottesque salon of Mme Swann. The little clan was in fact the active centre of a long political crisis which had reached its maximum of intensity: Dreyfusism. But society people were for the most part so violently against reconsideration that a Dreyfusian salon seemed to them as inconceivable a phenomenon as, at an earlier period, a

Communard salon. True, the Princesse de Caprarola, who had made Mme Verdurin's acquaintance over a big exhibition which she had organised, had been to pay her a long visit in the hope of seducing a few interesting specimens of the little clan and incorporating them in her own salon, a visit in the course of which the Princess (playing a poor man's Duchesse de Guermantes) had taken the opposing view to accepted opinion and declared that the people in her world were idiots, all of which Mme Verdurin had thought most courageous. But this courage did not subsequently take her to the point of daring, under the gimlet eyes of nationalist ladies, to bow to Mme Verdurin at the Balbec races. As for Mme Swann, on the other hand, the anti-Dreyfusards gave her credit for being "sound," which, in a woman married to a Jew, was doubly meritorious. Nevertheless, people who had never been to her house imagined her as visited only by a few obscure Jews and disciples of Bergotte. In this way women far better qualified than Mme Swann are placed on the lowest rung of the social ladder, whether on account of their origins, or because they do not care about dinner-parties and receptions, at which they are never seen (an absence erroneously assumed to be due to their not having been invited), or because they never speak of their social connexions but only of literature and art, or because people conceal the fact that they go to their houses, or they, to avoid impoliteness to yet other people, conceal the fact that they entertain them—in short for countless reasons which, added together, make of this or that woman, in certain people's eyes, the sort of woman whom one does not know. So it was with Odette. Mme d'Epinoÿ, when busy collecting some subscriptions for the "Patrie



française," having been obliged to go and see her, as she would have gone to her dressmaker, convinced moreover that she would find only a lot of faces that were not even despised but completely unknown, stood rooted to the ground when the door opened not upon the drawing-room she imagined but upon a magic hall in which, as in the transformation scene of a pantomime, she recognised in the dazzling chorus, reclining upon divans, seated in arm-chairs, addressing their hostess by her Christian name, the highnesses, the duchesses whom she, the Princesse d'Epinoÿ, had the greatest difficulty in enticing into her own drawing-room, and to whom at that moment, beneath the benevolent gaze of Odette, the Marquis du Lau, Comte Louis de Turenne, Prince Borghese, the Duc d'Estrées, carrying orangeade and petits fours, were acting as cupbearers and pantlers. The Princesse d'Epinoÿ, as she instinctively took people's social status to be inherent in themselves, was obliged to disincarnate Mme Swann and reincarnate her in a fashionable woman. Ignorance of the real existence led by women who do not advertise it in the newspapers draws a veil of mystery over certain situations, thereby contributing to the diversification of salons. In Odette's case, at the start, a few men of the highest society, anxious to meet Bergotte, had gone to dine in privacy at her house. She had had the tact, recently acquired, not to advertise their presence; they found when they went there—a memory perhaps of the little nucleus, whose traditions Odette had preserved in spite of the schism—a place laid for them at table, and so forth. Odette took them with Bergotte (whom these excursions, incidentally, finished off) to interesting first nights. They spoke of her to various women of their own world who

were capable of taking an interest in such novelty. These women were convinced that Odette, an intimate friend of Bergotte, had more or less collaborated in his works, and believed her to be a thousand times more intelligent than the most outstanding women of the Faubourg, for the same reason that made them pin all their political faith to certain staunch Republicans such as M. Doumer and M. Deschanel, whereas they visualised France on the brink of ruin were her destinies entrusted to the monarchists who were in the habit of dining with them, men like Charette or Doudeauville. This change in Odette's status had been achieved with a discretion on her part that made it more secure and more rapid but allowed no suspicion to filter through to the public, which is prone to refer to the social columns of the *Gaulois* for evidence as to the advance or decline of a salon, with the result that one day, at the dress rehearsal of a play by Bergotte given in one of the most fashionable theatres in aid of a charity, the really dramatic moment was when people saw coming in and sitting down beside Mme Swann in the centre box, which was that reserved for the author, Mme de Marsantes and the lady who, by the gradual self-effacement of the Duchesse de Guermantes (glutted with honours, and taking the easy way out), was on the way to becoming the lioness, the queen of the age: the Comtesse Molé. "We never even imagined that she had begun to climb," people said of Odette as they saw the Comtesse Molé enter the box, "and look, she has reached the top of the ladder."

So that Mme Swann might suppose that it was from snobbery that I was taking up again with her daughter.

Odette, notwithstanding her brilliant friends, listened with close attention to the play, as though she had come



## THE INTERMITTENCIES OF THE HEART

My second arrival at Balbec was very different from the first. The manager had come in person to meet me at Pont-à-Coulevre, reiterating how greatly he valued his titled patrons, which made me afraid that he had ennobled me until I realised that, in the obscurity of his grammatical memory, *titré* meant simply *attitré*, or accredited. In fact, the more new languages he learned the worse he spoke the others. He informed me that he had placed me at the very top of the hotel. "I hope," he said, "that you will not interpolate this as a want of discourtesy. I was worried about giving you a room of which you are unworthy, but I did it in connexion with the noise, because in that room you will not have anyone above your head to disturb your trepan" (tympan). "And do not worry, I shall have the windows closed, so that they don't bang. Upon that point, I am intolerable" (this last word expressing not his own thought, which was that he would always be found inexorable in that respect, but, quite possibly, the thoughts of his underlings). The rooms were, as it proved, those we had had before. They were no lower down, but I had risen in the manager's esteem. I could light a fire if I liked (for, on the doctors' orders, I had left Paris at Easter), but he was afraid there might be "fixtures" in the ceiling. "See that you always wait before alighting a fire until the preceding one is extenuated" (extinguished). "The important thing is to take care not to avoid setting fire to the chimney, especially as, to cheer things up a bit, I have put an old china pottage on the mantelpiece which might become damaged."

He informed me with great sorrow of the death of the president of the Cherbourg bar: "He was an old foggy," he said (probably meaning "foxy") and gave me to understand that his end had been hastened by the dissertations, otherwise the dissipations, of his life. "For some time past I noticed that after dinner he would take a catnap in the reading-room" (catnap, presumably). "The last times, he was so changed that if you hadn't known who it was, to look at him, he was barely recognisant" (presumably recognisable).

A happy compensation: the senior judge from Caen had just received his "carton" (cordon) as Commander of the Legion of Honour. "Surely enough, he has capacities, but seems they gave him it principally because of his general impotence." There was a mention of this decoration, as it happened, in the previous day's *Echo de Paris*, of which the manager had as yet read only "the first paraph," in which M. Caillaux's foreign policy was severely trounced. "I consider they're quite right," he said. "He is putting us too much under the thimble of Germany" (under the thumb). As the discussion of a subject of this sort with a hotel-keeper seemed to me boring, I ceased to listen. I thought of the visual images that had made me decide to return to Balbec. They were very different from those of the earlier time, for the vision in quest of which I had come was as dazzlingly clear as the former had been hazy; they were to prove no less disappointing. The images selected by memory are as arbitrary, as narrow, as elusive as those which the imagination had formed and reality has destroyed. There is no reason why, existing outside ourselves, a real place should conform to the pictures in our memory rather than those in our

dreams. And besides, a fresh reality will perhaps make us forget, detest even, the desires on account of which we set out on our journey.

Those that had made me set out for Balbec sprang to some extent from my discovery that the Verdurins (whose invitations I had never taken up, and who would certainly be delighted to see me, if I went to call upon them in the country with apologies for never having been able to call upon them in Paris), knowing that several of the faithful would be spending the holidays on that part of the coast, and having, for that reason, taken for the whole season one of M. de Cambremer's houses (La Raspelière), had invited Mme Putbus to stay with them. The evening on which I learned this (in Paris) I lost my head completely and sent our young footman to find out whether that lady would be taking her chambermaid to Balbec with her. It was eleven o'clock at night. The porter was a long time opening the front door, and for a wonder did not send my messenger packing, did not call the police, merely gave him a dressing-down, but with it the information that I desired. He said that the head lady's-maid would indeed be accompanying her mistress, first of all to the waters in Germany, then to Biarritz, and at the end of the season to Mme Verdurin's. From that moment my mind had been set at rest, content to have this iron in the fire. I had been able to dispense with those pursuits in the streets, wherein I lacked that letter of introduction to the beauties I encountered which I should have to the "Giorgione" in the fact of my having dined that very evening with her mistress at the Verdurins'. Besides, she might perhaps form a still better opinion of me when she learned that I knew not merely the middle-class tenants of La Raspelière but

its owners, and above all Saint-Loup who, unable to commend me to the chambermaid from a distance (since she did not know him by name), had written an enthusiastic letter about me to the Cambremers. He believed that, quite apart from any service that they might be able to render me, Mme de Cambremer, the Legrandin daughter-in-law, would interest me by her conversation. "She is an intelligent woman," he had assured me. "She won't say anything definitive" (*definitive* having taken the place of *sublime* with Robert, who, every five or six years, would modify a few of his favourite expressions while preserving the more important intact), "but she's a real personality, she has character and intuition, and throws out quite pertinent remarks. From time to time she's maddening, she dashes off nonsense to 'put on dog,' which is all the more ridiculous as nobody could be less grand than the Cambremers, she's not always 'in the swim,' but, taking her all round, she is one of the people it's most bearable to talk to."

No sooner had Robert's letter of introduction reached them than the Cambremers, whether from a snobbishness that made them anxious to oblige Saint-Loup, even indirectly, or from gratitude for what he had done for one of their nephews at Doncières, or (most probably) from kindness of heart and traditions of hospitality, had written long letters insisting that I should stay with them, or, if I preferred to be more independent, offering to find me lodgings. When Saint-Loup had pointed out that I should be staying at the Grand Hotel at Balbec, they replied that at least they would expect a call from me as soon as I arrived and, if I did not appear, would come without fail to hunt me out and invite me to their garden-parties.

No doubt there was no essential connexion between Mme Putbus's maid and the country round Balbec; she would not be for me like the peasant girl whom, as I strayed alone along the Méséglise way, I had so often summoned up in vain with all the force of my desire. But I had long since given up trying to extract from a woman as it were the square root of her unknown quantity, the mystery of which a mere introduction was generally enough to dispel. At least at Balbec, where I had not been for so long, I should have the advantage, failing the necessary connexion between the place and this woman, that my sense of reality would not be destroyed by habit as in Paris, where, whether in my own home or in a bedroom that I already knew, pleasure indulged in with a woman could not give me for one instant, amid everyday surroundings, the illusion that it was opening the door for me to a new life. (For if habit is a second nature, it prevents us from knowing our first, whose cruelties it lacks as well as its enchantments.) But I might perhaps experience this illusion in a strange place, where one's sensibility is revived by a ray of sunshine, and where my ardour would be finally consummated by the chambermaid I desired. However, we shall see that circumstances conspired in such a way that not only did this woman fail to come to Balbec, but I dreaded nothing so much as the possibility of her coming, so that the principal object of my expedition was neither attained nor indeed pursued.

It was true that Mme Putbus was not to be at the Verdurins' so early in the season; but pleasures which we have chosen may be remote if their coming is assured and if, in the interval of waiting, we can devote ourselves to the idleness of seeking to attract while powerless to love.

Moreover, I was not going to Balbec in a frame of mind as little practical as on the first occasion; there is always less egoism in pure imagination than in recollection; and I knew that I was going to find myself in one of those very places where fair strangers must abound; a beach offers them in no less profusion than a ball-room, and I looked forward to strolling up and down outside the hotel, on the front, with the same sort of pleasure that Mme de Guermantes would have procured me if, instead of getting me invited to brilliant dinner-parties, she had given my name more often for their lists of partners to hostesses who gave dances. To make female acquaintances at Balbec would be as easy for me now as it had been difficult before, for I was now as well supplied with friends and resources there as I had been destitute of them on my first visit.

I was roused from my meditations by the voice of the manager, to whose political dissertations I had not been listening. Changing the subject, he told me of the judge's delight on hearing of my arrival, and said that he was coming to pay me a visit in my room that very evening. The thought of this visit so alarmed me (for I was beginning to feel tired) that I begged him to prevent it (which he promised to do) and, as a further precaution, to post members of his staff on guard, for the first night, on my landing. He did not seem overfond of his staff. "I am obliged to keep running after them all the time because they are lacking in inertia. If I was not there they would never stir. I shall post the lift-boy on sentry outside your door." I asked him if the boy had yet become "head page." "He is not old enough yet in the house," was the answer. "He has comrades more aged than he is. It would cause an outcry. We must act with granulation in every-

thing. I quite admit that he strikes a good aptitude at the door of his lift. But he is still a trifle young for such positions. With others in the place of longer standing, it would make a contrast. He is a little wanting in seriousness, which is the primitive quality" (doubtless, the primordial, the most important quality). "He needs his leg screwed on a bit tighter" (my interlocutor meant to say his head). "Anyhow, he can leave it all to me. I know what I'm about. Before I won my stripes as manager of the Grand Hotel, I smelt powder under M. Paillard." I was impressed by this simile, and thanked the manager for having come in person as far as Pont-à-Coulevre. "Oh, that's nothing! The loss of time has been quite infinite" (for infinitesimal). Meanwhile, we had arrived.

Upheaval of my entire being. On the first night, as I was suffering from cardiac fatigue, I bent down slowly and cautiously to take off my boots, trying to master my pain. But scarcely had I touched the topmost button than my chest swelled, filled with an unknown, a divine presence, I was shaken with sobs, tears streamed from my eyes. The being who had come to my rescue, saving me from barrenness of spirit, was the same who, years before, in a moment of identical distress and loneliness, in a moment when I had nothing left of myself, had come in and had restored me to myself, for that being was myself and something more than me (the container that is greater than the contained and was bringing it to me). I had just perceived, in my memory, stooping over my fatigue, the tender, preoccupied, disappointed face of my grandmother, as she had been on that first evening of our arrival, the face not of that grandmother whom I had been astonished and remorseful at having so little missed, and

who had nothing in common with her save her name, but of my real grandmother, of whom, for the first time since the afternoon of her stroke in the Champs-Élysées, I now recaptured the living reality in a complete and involuntary recollection. This reality does not exist for us so long as it has not been re-created by our thought (otherwise men who have been engaged in a titanic struggle would all of them be great epic poets); and thus, in my wild desire to fling myself into her arms, it was only at that moment—more than a year after her burial, because of the anachronism which so often prevents the calendar of facts from corresponding to the calendar of feelings—that I became conscious that she was dead. I had often spoken about her since then, and thought of her also, but behind my words and thoughts, those of an ungrateful, selfish, cruel young man, there had never been anything that resembled my grandmother, because, in my frivolity, my love of pleasure, my familiarity with the spectacle of her ill health, I retained within me only in a potential state the memory of what she had been. No matter at what moment we consider it, our total soul has only a more or less fictitious value, in spite of the rich inventory of its assets, for now some, now others are unrealisable, whether they are real riches or those of the imagination—in my own case, for example, not only of the ancient name of Guermantes but those, immeasurably graver, of the true memory of my grandmother. For with the perturbations of memory are linked the intermittencies of the heart. It is, no doubt, the existence of our body, which we may compare to a vase enclosing our spiritual nature, that induces us to suppose that all our inner wealth, our past joys, all our sorrows, are perpetually in our possession. Perhaps it is equally in-

exact to suppose that they escape or return. In any case if they remain within us, for most of the time it is in an unknown region where they are of no use to us, and where even the most ordinary are crowded out by memories of a different kind, which preclude any simultaneous occurrence of them in our consciousness. But if the context of sensations in which they are preserved is recaptured, they acquire in turn the same power of expelling everything that is incompatible with them, of installing alone in us the self that originally lived them. Now, inasmuch as the self that I had just suddenly become once again had not existed since that evening long ago when my grandmother had undressed me after my arrival at Balbec, it was quite naturally, not at the end of the day that had just passed, of which that self knew nothing, but—as though Time were to consist of a series of different and parallel lines—without any solution of continuity, immediately after the first evening at Balbec long ago, that I clung to the minute in which my grandmother had stooped over me. The self that I then was, that had disappeared for so long, was once again so close to me that I seemed still to hear the words that had just been spoken, although they were now no more than a phantasm, as a man who is half awake thinks he can still make out, close by, the sound of his receding dream. I was now solely the person who had sought a refuge in his grandmother's arms, had sought to obliterate the traces of his sorrow by smothering her with kisses, that person whom I should have had as much difficulty in imagining when I was one or other of those that for some time past I had successively been as now I should have had in making the sterile effort to experience the desires and joys of one of those that for a time at least

I no longer was. I remembered how, an hour before the moment when my grandmother had stooped in her dressing-gown to unfasten my boots, as I wandered along the stifflingly hot street, past the pastry-cook's, I had felt that I could never, in my need to feel her arms round me, live through the hour that I had still to spend without her. And now that this same need had reawakened, I knew that I might wait hour after hour, that she would never again be by my side. I had only just discovered this because I had only just, on feeling her for the first time alive, real, making my heart swell to breaking-point, on finding her at last, learned that I had lost her for ever. Lost for ever; I could not understand, and I struggled to endure the anguish of this contradiction: on the one hand an existence, a tenderness, surviving in me as I had known them, that is to say created for me, a love which found in me so totally its complement, its goal, its constant lodestar, that the genius of great men, all the genius that might have existed from the beginning of the world, would have been less precious to my grandmother than a single one of my defects; and on the other hand, as soon as I had relived that bliss, as though it were present, feeling it shot through by the certainty, throbbing like a recurrent pain, of an annihilation that had effaced my image of that tenderness, had destroyed that existence, retrospectively abolished our mutual predestination, made of my grandmother, at the moment when I had found her again as in a mirror, a mere stranger whom chance had allowed to spend a few years with me, as she might have done with anyone else, but to whom, before and after those years, I was and would be nothing.

Instead of the pleasures that I had been experiencing

of late, the only pleasure that it would have been possible for me to enjoy at that moment would have been, by touching up the past, to diminish the sorrows and sufferings of my grandmother's life. But I did not remember her only in that dressing-gown, a garment so appropriate as to have become almost symbolic of the pains, unhealthy no doubt but comforting too, which she took for me; gradually I began to remember all the opportunities that I had seized, by letting her see my sufferings and exaggerating them if necessary, to cause her a grief which I imagined as being obliterated immediately by my kisses, as though my tenderness had been as capable as my happiness of making her happy; and, worse than that, I who could conceive of no other happiness now but that of finding happiness shed in my memory over the contours of that face, moulded and bowed by tenderness, had striven with such insensate frenzy to expunge from it even the smallest pleasures, as on the day when Saint-Loup had taken my grandmother's photograph and I, unable to conceal from her what I thought of the childish, almost ridiculous vanity with which she posed for him, with her wide-brimmed hat, in a flattering half light, had allowed myself to mutter a few impatient, wounding words, which, I had sensed from a contraction of her features, had struck home; it was I whose heart they were rending, now that the consolation of countless kisses was for ever impossible.

But never again would I be able to erase that tightening of her face, that anguish of her heart, or rather of mine; for as the dead exist only in us, it is ourselves that we strike without respite when we persist in recalling the blows that we have dealt them. I clung to this pain, cruel

as it was, with all my strength, for I realised that it was the effect of the memory I had of my grandmother, the proof that this memory was indeed present within me. I felt that I did not really remember her except through pain, and I longed for the nails that riveted her to my consciousness to be driven yet deeper. I did not try to mitigate my suffering, to embellish it, to pretend that my grandmother was only somewhere else and momentarily invisible, by addressing to her photograph (the one taken by Saint-Loup, which I had with me) words and entreaties as to a person who is separated from us but, retaining his personality, knows us and remains bound to us by an indissoluble harmony. Never did I do this, for I was determined not merely to suffer, but to respect the original form of my suffering as it had suddenly come upon me unawares, and I wanted to continue to feel it, following its own laws, whenever that contradiction of survival and annihilation, so strangely intertwined within me, returned. I did not know for certain whether one day I would draw a little truth from this painful and for the moment incomprehensible impression, but I knew that if I ever could extract that little truth, it would only be from this impression and from none other, an impression at once so particular and so spontaneous, which had neither been traced by my intelligence nor deflected or attenuated by my pusillanimity, but which death itself, the sudden revelation of death, striking like a thunderbolt, had carved within me, along a supernatural and inhuman graph, in a double and mysterious furrow. (As for that forgetfulness of my grandmother in which I had been living until now, I could not even think of clinging to it to find some truth; since in itself it was nothing but a negation, a weakening



of the faculty of thought incapable of re-creating a real moment of life and obliged to substitute for it conventional and neutral images.) Perhaps, however, the instinct of self-preservation, the ingenuity of the mind in safeguarding us from pain, already beginning to lay the foundations of its necessary but baneful edifice on the still smoking ruins, I relished too keenly the sweet joy of recalling this or that opinion held by the beloved being, recalling them as though she had been able to hold them still, as though she existed, as though I continued to exist for her. But as soon as I had succeeded in falling asleep, at that more truthful hour when my eyes closed to the things of the outer world, the world of sleep (on whose frontier my intelligence and my will, momentarily paralysed, could no longer strive to rescue me from the cruelty of my real impressions) reflected, refracted the painful synthesis of survival and annihilation, in the organic and now translucent depths of the mysteriously lighted viscera. World of sleep—in which our inner consciousness, subordinated to the disturbances of our organs, accelerates the rhythm of the heart or the respiration, because the same dose of terror, sorrow or remorse acts with a strength magnified a hundredfold if thus injected into our veins: as soon as, to traverse the arteries of the subterranean city, we have embarked upon the dark current of our own blood as upon an inward Lethe meandering six-fold, tall solemn forms appear to us, approach and glide away, leaving us in tears. I sought in vain for my grandmother's form when I had entered beneath the sombre portals; yet I knew that she did exist still, if with a diminished life, as pale as that of memory; the darkness was increasing, and the wind; my father, who was to take me to

her, had not yet arrived. Suddenly my breath failed me, I felt my heart turn to stone; I had just remembered that for weeks on end I had forgotten to write to my grandmother. What must she be thinking of me? "Oh God," I said to myself, "how wretched she must be in that little room which they have taken for her, as small as for an old servant, where she's all alone with the nurse they have put there to look after her, from which she cannot stir, for she's still slightly paralysed and has always refused to get up! She must think that I've forgotten her now that she's dead; how lonely she must be feeling, how deserted! Oh, I must hurry to see her, I mustn't lose a minute, I can't wait for my father to come—but where is it? How can I have forgotten the address? Will she know me again, I wonder? How can I have forgotten her all these months? It's so dark, I shan't be able to find her; the wind is holding me back; but look! there's my father walking ahead of me"; I call out to him: "Where is grandmother? Tell me her address. Is she all right? Are you quite sure she has everything she needs?" "Yes, yes," says my father, "you needn't worry. Her nurse is well trained. We send a very small sum from time to time, so she can get your grandmother the little she needs. She sometimes asks what's become of you. She was told you were going to write a book. She seemed pleased. She wiped away a tear." And then I seemed to remember that shortly after her death, my grandmother had said to me, sobbing, with a humble look, like an old servant who has been given notice, like a stranger: "You will let me see something of you occasionally, won't you; don't let too many years go by without visiting me. Remember that you were my grandson, once, and that grandmothers don't forget." And seeing again

that face of hers, so submissive, so sad, so gentle, I wanted to run to her at once and say to her, as I ought to have said to her then: "Why, grandmother, you can see me as often as you like, I have only you in the world, I shall never leave you any more." What tears my silence must have made her shed through all those months in which I have never been to the place where she is lying! What can she have been saying to herself? And it is in a voice choked with tears that I too say to my father: "Quick, quick, her address, take me to her." But he says: "Well . . . I don't know whether you will be able to see her. Besides, you know, she's very frail now, very frail, she's not at all herself, I'm afraid you would find it rather painful. And I can't remember the exact number of the avenue." "But tell me, you who know, it's not true that the dead have ceased to exist. It can't possibly be true, in spite of what they say, because grandmother still exists." My father smiles sadly: "Oh, hardly at all, you know, hardly at all. I think it would be better if you didn't go. She has everything that she wants. They come and keep the place tidy for her." "But is she often alone?" "Yes, but that's better for her. It's better for her not to think, it could only make her unhappy. Thinking often makes people unhappy. Besides, you know, she's quite faded now. I shall leave a note of the exact address, so that you can go there; but I don't see what good you can do, and I don't suppose the nurse will allow you to see her." "But you know quite well I shall always live close to her, stags, stags, Francis Jammes, fork." But already I had retraced the dark meanderings of the stream, had ascended to the surface where the world of the living opens, so that if I still repeated: "Francis Jammes, stags, stags," the se-

quence of these words no longer offered me the limpid meaning and logic which they had expressed so naturally for me only a moment before, and which I could not now recall. I could not even understand why the word "Aias" which my father had said to me just now had immediately signified: "Take care you don't catch cold," without any possibility of doubt.

I had forgotten to close the shutters, and so probably the daylight had awakened me. But I could not bear to have before my eyes those sea vistas on which my grandmother used to gaze for hours on end; the fresh image of their heedless beauty was at once supplemented by the thought that she could not see them; I should have liked to stop my ears against their sound, for now the luminous plenitude of the beach carved out an emptiness in my heart; everything seemed to be saying to me, like those paths and lawns of a public garden in which I had once lost her, long ago, when I was still a little child: "We haven't seen her," and beneath the roundness of the pale vault of heaven I felt crushed as though beneath a huge bluish bell enclosing an horizon from which my grandmother was excluded. So as not to see anything any more, I turned towards the wall, but alas, what was now facing me was that partition which used to serve us as a morning messenger, that partition which, as responsive as a violin in rendering every nuance of a feeling, reported so exactly to my grandmother my fear at once of waking her and, if she were already awake, of not being heard by her and so of her not coming, then immediately, like a second instrument taking up the melody, informing me of her coming and bidding me be calm. I dared not put out my hand to that wall, any more than to a piano on which my grand-



mother had been playing and which still vibrated from her touch. I knew that I might knock now, even louder, that nothing would wake her any more, that I should hear no response, that my grandmother would never come again. And I asked nothing more of God, if a paradise exists, than to be able, there, to knock on that wall with the three little raps which my grandmother would recognise among a thousand, and to which she would give those answering knocks which meant: "Don't fuss, little mouse, I know you're impatient, but I'm just coming," and that he would let me stay with her throughout eternity, which would not be too long for the two of us.

The manager came in to ask whether I should like to come down. He had most carefully supervised, just in case, my "placement" in the dining-room. As he had seen no sign of me, he had been afraid that I might have had a recurrence of my spasms. He hoped that it might be only a little "sore throats" and assured me that he had heard it said that they could be soothed with what he called "calyptus."

He brought me a message from Albertine. She had not been due to come to Balbec that year but, having changed her plans, had been for the last three days not in Balbec itself but ten minutes away by train at a neighbouring watering-place. Fearing that I might be tired after the journey, she had stayed away the first evening, but sent word now to ask when I could see her. I inquired whether she had called in person, not because I wished to see her, but so that I might arrange not to see her. "Yes," replied the manager. "But she would like it to be as soon as possible, unless you have not some quite necessitous reasons. You see," he concluded, "that everybody here de-

sires you in the end." But for my part, I wished to see nobody.

And yet the day before, on my arrival, I had been seized once again by the indolent charm of seaside existence. The same taciturn lift-boy, silent this time from respect and not from disdain, and glowing with pleasure, had set the lift in motion. As I rose upon the ascending column, I had travelled once again through what had formerly been for me the mystery of a strange hotel, in which when you arrive, a tourist without protection or prestige, each resident returning to his room, each young girl going down to dinner, each servant passing along the eerie perspective of a corridor, not to mention the young lady from America with her chaperon, gives you a look in which you can read nothing that you would have liked to. This time, on the contrary, I had felt the almost too soothing pleasure of passing up through a hotel that I knew, where I felt at home, where I had performed once again that operation which we must always start afresh, longer, more difficult than the turning inside out of an eyelid, and which consists in the imposition of our own familiar soul on the terrifying soul of our surroundings. Must I now, I had asked myself, little suspecting the sudden change of mood that was in store for me, go always to new hotels where I shall be dining for the first time, where Habit will not yet have killed upon each landing, outside each door, the terrible dragon that seemed to be watching over an enchanted existence, where I shall have to approach those unknown women whom grand hotels, casinos, watering-places seem to bring together to live a communal existence as though in vast polyparies?

I had found pleasure even in the thought that the te-

for a spell of contemplative relaxation, they would all interweave their useless, respectful, decorative, daily movements. For, except on their "day off," "reared in seclusion from the world" and never crossing the threshold, they led the same ecclesiastical existence as the Levites in *Athalie*, and as I gazed at that "young and faithful troop" playing at the foot of the steps draped with sumptuous carpets, I felt inclined to ask myself whether I was entering the Grand Hotel at Balbec or the Temple of Solomon.

I went straight up to my room. My thoughts kept constantly turning to the last days of my grandmother's illness, to her sufferings which I relived, intensifying them with that element, still harder to bear than even the sufferings of others, which is added to them by our cruel pity; when we believe we are merely re-creating the grief and pain of a beloved person, our pity exaggerates them; but perhaps it is our pity that speaks true, more than the sufferers' own consciousness of their pain, they being blind to that tragedy of their existence which pity sees and deplors. But my pity would have transcended my grandmother's sufferings in a new surge had I known then what I did not know until long afterwards, that on the eve of her death, in a moment of consciousness and after making sure that I was not in the room, she had taken Mamma's hand, and, after pressing her fevered lips to it, had said: "Good-bye, my child, good-bye for ever." And this may also perhaps have been the memory upon which my mother never ceased to gaze so fixedly. Then sweeter memories returned to me. She was my grandmother and I was her grandson. Her facial expressions seemed written in a language intended for me alone; she was everything in my life, other people existed merely in relation to her,

to the opinion she would express to me about them. But no, our relations were too fleeting to have been anything but accidental. She no longer knew me, I should never see her again. We had not been created solely for one another; she was a stranger to me. This stranger was before my eyes at the moment in the photograph taken of her by Saint-Loup. Mamma, who had met Albertine, had insisted upon my seeing her because of the nice things she had said about my grandmother and myself. I had accordingly made an appointment with her. I told the manager that she was coming, and asked him to put her in the drawing-room to wait for me. He told me that he had known her for years, herself and her friends, long before they had attained "the age of purity," but that he was annoyed with them because of certain things they had said about the hotel. "They can't be very 'illegitimate' if they talk like that. Unless people have been slandering them." I had no difficulty in guessing that "purity" here meant "puberty." "Illegitimate" puzzled me more. Was it perhaps a confusion with "illiterate," which in that case was a further confusion with "literate"? As I waited until it was time to go down and meet Albertine, I kept my eyes fixed, as on a drawing which one ceases to see by dint of staring at it, upon the photograph that Saint-Loup had taken, and all of a sudden I thought once again: "It's grandmother, I am her grandson," as a man who has lost his memory remembers his name, as a sick man changes his personality. Françoise came in to tell me that Albertine was there, and, catching sight of the photograph: "Poor Madame, it's the very image of her, down to the beauty spot on her cheek; that day the Marquis took her picture, she was very poorly, she had been taken bad

twice. 'Whatever happens, Françoise,' she says to me, 'you mustn't let my grandson know.' And she hid it well, she was always cheerful in company. When she was by herself, though, I used to find that she seemed to be in rather monotonous spirits now and then. But she soon got over it. And then she says to me, she says: 'If anything happened to me, he ought to have a picture of me to keep. And I've never had a single one made.' So then she sent me along with a message to the Marquis, and he was never to let you know that it was she had asked him, but could he take her photograph. But when I came back and told her yes, she didn't want it any longer, because she was looking so poorly. 'It would be even worse,' she says to me, 'than no photograph at all.' But she was a clever one, she was, and in the end she got herself up so well in that big pulled-down hat that it didn't show at all when she was out of the sun. She was so pleased with her photograph, because at that time she didn't think she would ever leave Balbec alive. It was no use me saying to her: 'Madame, it's wrong to talk like that, I don't like to hear Madame talk like that,' she'd got it into her head. And, lord, there were plenty of days when she couldn't eat a thing. That was why she used to make Monsieur go and dine far out in the country with M. le Marquis. Then instead of going to table she'd pretend to be reading a book, and as soon as the Marquis's carriage had started, up she'd go to bed. Some days she wanted to send word to Madame to come down so's she could see her once more. And then she was afraid of alarming her, as she hadn't said anything to her about it. 'It will be better for her to stay with her husband, don't you see, Françoise.' " Looking me in the face, Françoise asked me all of a sud-

den if I was "feeling queer." I said that I was not; and she went on: "Here you are keeping me tied up chatting with you, and perhaps your visitor's already here. I must go down. She's not the sort of person to have here. Why, a fast one like that, she may be gone again by now. She doesn't like to be kept waiting. Oh, nowadays, Mademoiselle Albertine, she's somebody!" "You are quite wrong, she's a very respectable person, too good for this place. But go and tell her that I shan't be able to see her today."

What compassionate declamations I should have provoked from Françoise if she had seen me cry. I carefully hid myself from her. Otherwise I should have had her sympathy. But I gave her mine. We do not put ourselves sufficiently in the place of these poor maidservants who cannot bear to see us cry, as though crying hurt us; or hurt them, perhaps, for Françoise used to say to me when I was a child: "Don't cry like that, I don't like to see you crying like that." We dislike high-sounding phrases, asseverations, but we are wrong, for in that way we close our hearts to the pathos of country folk, to the legend which the poor serving woman, dismissed, unjustly perhaps, for theft, pale as death, grown suddenly more humble as if it were a crime merely to be accused, unfolds, invoking her father's honesty, her mother's principles, her grandmother's admonitions. It is true that those same servants who cannot bear our tears will have no hesitation in letting us catch pneumonia because the maid downstairs likes draughts and it would not be polite to her to shut the windows. For it is necessary that even those who are right, like Françoise, should be wrong also, so that Justice may be made an impossible thing. Even the humble pleasures of servants provoke either the refusal or the ridicule

of their masters. For it is always a mere nothing, but foolishly sentimental, unhygienic. And so they are in a position to say: "I only ask for this one thing in the whole year, and I'm not allowed it." And yet their masters would allow them far more, provided it was not stupid and dangerous for them—or for the masters themselves. To be sure, the humility of the wretched maid, trembling, ready to confess the crime that she has not committed, saying "I shall leave tonight if you wish," is a thing that nobody can resist. But we must learn also not to remain unmoved, despite the solemn and threatening banality of the things that she says, her maternal heritage and the dignity of the family "kaleyard," at the sight of an old cook draped in the honour of her life and of her ancestry, wielding her broom like a sceptre, putting on a tragic act, her voice broken with sobs, drawing herself up majestically. That afternoon, I remembered or imagined scenes of this sort which I associated with our old servant, and from then onwards, in spite of all the harm that she might do to Albertine, I loved Françoise with an affection, intermittent it is true, but of the strongest kind, the kind that is founded upon pity.

True, I suffered all day long as I sat gazing at my grandmother's photograph. It tortured me. Not so acutely, though, as the visit I received that evening from the manager. When I had spoken to him about my grandmother, and he had reiterated his condolences, I heard him say (for he enjoyed using the words that he pronounced wrongly): "Like the day when Madame your grandmother had that sincup, I wanted to tell you about it, because you see, on account of the other guests it might have given the place a bad name. She ought really to have left that

evening. But she begged me to say nothing about it and promised me that she wouldn't have another sincup, or the first time she had one, she would go. However, the floor waiter reported to me that she had had another. But, lord, you were old clients we wanted to please, and since nobody made any complaint . . ." And so my grandmother had had syncopes which she never mentioned to me. Perhaps at the very moment when I was being least kind to her, when she was obliged, in the midst of her pain, to make an effort to be good-humoured so as not to irritate me, and to appear well so as not to be turned out of the hotel. "Sincup" was a word which, so pronounced, I should never have imagined, which might perhaps, applied to other people, have struck me as ridiculous, but which in its strange tonal novelty, like that of an original discord, long retained the faculty of arousing in me the most painful sensations.

Next day I went, at Mamma's request, to lie down for a while on the beach, or rather among the dunes, where one is hidden by their folds, and where I knew that Albertine and her friends would not be able to find me. My drooping eyelids allowed but one kind of light to pass, entirely pink, the light of the inner walls of the eyes. Then they shut altogether. Whereupon my grandmother appeared to me, seated in an armchair. So feeble was she that she seemed to be less alive than other people. And yet I could hear her breathe; now and again she made a sign to show that she had understood what we were saying, my father and I. But in vain did I take her in my arms, I could not kindle a spark of affection in her eyes, a flush of colour in her cheeks. Absent from herself, she appeared not to love me, not to know me, perhaps not to see

me. I could not interpret the secret of her indifference, of her dejection, of her silent displeasure. I drew my father aside. "You can see, all the same," I said to him, "there's no doubt about it, she understands everything perfectly. It's a perfect imitation of life. If only we could fetch your cousin, who maintains that the dead don't live! Why, she's been dead for more than a year and yet she's still alive. But why won't she give me a kiss?" "Look, her poor head is drooping again." "But she wants to go to the Champs-Élysées this afternoon." "It's madness!" "You really think it can do her any harm, that she can die any further? It isn't possible that she no longer loves me. I keep on hugging her, won't she ever smile at me again?" "What can you expect, the dead are the dead."

A few days later I was able to look with pleasure at the photograph that Saint-Loup had taken of her; it did not revive the memory of what Françoise had told me, because that memory had never left me and I was growing used to it. But by contrast with what I imagined to have been her grave and pain-racked state that day, the photograph, still profiting by the ruses which my grandmother had adopted, which succeeded in taking me in even after they had been disclosed to me, showed her looking so elegant, so carefree, beneath the hat which partly hid her face, that I saw her as less unhappy and in better health than I had supposed. And yet, her cheeks having without her knowing it an expression of their own, leaden, haggard, like the expression of an animal that senses it has been chosen and marked down, my grandmother had an air of being under sentence of death, an air involuntarily sombre, unconsciously tragic, which escaped me but prevented Mamma from ever looking at that pho-

tograph, that photograph which seemed to her a photograph not so much of her mother as of her mother's disease; of an insult inflicted by that disease on my grandmother's brutally buffeted face.

Then one day I decided to send word to Albertine that I would see her presently. This was because, on a morning of intense and premature heat, the myriad cries of children at play, of bathers disporting themselves, of newsvendors, had traced for me in lines of fire, in wheeling, interlacing flashes, the scorching beach which the little waves came up one by one to sprinkle with their coolness; then the symphony concert had begun, mingled with the lapping of the surf, through which the violins hummed like a swarm of bees that had strayed out over the sea. At once I had longed to hear Albertine's laughter and to see her friends again, those girls silhouetted against the waves who had remained in my memory the inseparable charm, the characteristic flora of Balbec; and I had decided to send a line via Françoise to Albertine, making an appointment for the following week, while the sea, gently rising, with the unfurling of each wave completely buried in layers of crystal the melody whose phrases appeared to be separated from one another like those angel lutanists which on the roof of an Italian cathedral rise between the pinnacles of blue porphyry and foaming jasper. But on the day on which Albertine came, the weather had turned dull and cold again, and moreover I had no opportunity of hearing her laugh; she was in a very bad mood. "Balbec is deadly dull this year," she said to me. "I don't mean to stay any longer than I can help. You know I've been here since Easter, that's more than a month. There's not a soul here. You can imagine what fun it is."

Notwithstanding the recent rain and a sky that changed every moment, after escorting Albertine as far as Epreville, for she was, to borrow her expression, "shuttling" between that little watering-place, where Mme Bontemps had her villa, and Incarville, where she had been taken "en pension" by Rosemonde's family, I went off by myself in the direction of the high road that Mme de Villeparisis's carriage used to take when we went for drives with my grandmother; pools of water, which the sun, now bright again, had not yet dried, made a regular quagmire of the ground, and I thought of my grandmother who could never walk a yard without covering herself in mud. But on reaching the road I found a dazzling spectacle. Where I had seen with my grandmother in the month of August only the green leaves and, so to speak, the disposition of the apple-trees, as far as the eye could reach they were in full bloom, unbelievably luxuriant, their feet in the mire beneath their ball-dresses, heedless of spoiling the most marvellous pink satin that was ever seen, which glittered in the sunlight; the distant horizon of the sea gave the trees the background of a Japanese print; if I raised my head to gaze at the sky through the flowers, which made its serene blue appear almost violent, they seemed to draw apart to reveal the immensity of their paradise. Beneath that azure a faint but cold breeze set the blushing bouquets gently trembling. Blue-tits came and perched upon the branches and fluttered among the indulgent flowers, as though it had been an amateur of exotic art and colours who had artificially created this living beauty. But it moved one to tears because, to whatever lengths it went in its effects of refined artifice, one felt that it was natural, that these apple-trees were there in

the heart of the country, like peasants on one of the high roads of France. Then the rays of the sun gave place suddenly to those of the rain; they streaked the whole horizon, enclosing the line of apple-trees in their grey net. But these continued to hold aloft their pink and blossoming beauty, in the wind that had turned icy beneath the drenching rain: it was a day in spring.

there clung, whether visible or not, a numerous company of friends, the poetical cry of the evening was no longer that of the owl or the frog, but the "How goes it?" of M. de Criquetot or the "Khaire" of Brichot. Its atmosphere no longer aroused anguish, and, charged with purely human exhalations, was easily breathable, indeed almost too soothing. The benefit that I did at least derive from it was that of looking at things only from a practical point of view. The idea of marrying Albertine appeared to me to be madness.

#### Chapter Four

I was only waiting for an opportunity for a final rupture. And, one evening, as Mamma was setting out next day for Combray, where she was to attend the deathbed of one of her mother's sisters, leaving me behind so that I might continue to benefit, as my grandmother would have wished, from the sea air, I had announced to her that I had irrevocably decided not to marry Albertine and would very soon stop seeing her. I was glad to have been able, by these words, to gratify my mother's wishes on the eve of her departure. She had made no secret of the fact that she was indeed extremely gratified. I also had to have things out with Albertine. As I was on my way back with her from La Raspelière, the faithful having alighted, some at Saint-Mars-le-Vêtu, others at Saint-Pierre-des-Ifs, others again at Doncières, feeling particularly happy and detached from her, I had decided, now that there were only our two selves in the carriage, to broach the subject at last. Besides, the truth was that the member of the band of Balbec girls whom I loved, although she was absent at that moment, as were the rest of her friends, but was coming back there (I enjoyed being with them all, because each of them had for me, as on the day when I first saw them, something of the essence of all the rest, as though they belonged to a race apart), was Andrée. Since she was coming back again to Balbec in a few days' time, it was certain that she would at once pay me a visit, and then, in order to remain free, not to have to marry her if I did not



wish to do so, to be able to go to Venice, but at the same time to have her entirely to myself in the meantime, the plan that I would adopt would be that of not seeming at all eager to come to her, and as soon as she arrived, when we were talking together, I would say to her: "What a pity I didn't see you a few weeks earlier. I should have fallen in love with you; now my heart is bespoken. But that makes no difference, we shall see one another frequently, for I am unhappy about my other love, and you will help to console me." I smiled inwardly as I thought of this conversation, for in this way I should give Andrée the impression that I was not really in love with her; hence she would not grow tired of me and I should take a joyful and pleasant advantage of her affection. But all this only made it all the more necessary that I should at last speak seriously to Albertine, in order not to behave dishonourably, and, since I had decided to devote myself to her friend, she herself must be given clearly to understand that I was not in love with her. I must tell her so at once, as Andrée might arrive any day. But as we were approaching Parville, I felt that we might not have time that evening and that it was better to put off until next day what was now irrevocably settled. I confined myself, therefore, to discussing with her our dinner that evening at the Verdurins'. As she was putting on her coat, the train having just left Incarville, the last station before Parville, she said to me: "Tomorrow then, more Verdurin. You won't forget that you're coming to call for me." I could not help answering rather tersely: "Yes, that is if I don't 'defect,' because I'm beginning to find that sort of life really stupid. In any case, if we do go, in order that my time at La Raspelière may not be totally wasted, I

must remember to ask Mme Verdurin about something that could interest me a great deal, provide me with a subject for study, and give me pleasure as well, because I've really had very little this year at Balbec."

"That's not very polite to me, but I forgive you, because I can see that you're overwrought. What is this pleasure?"

"That Mme Verdurin should let me hear some things by a musician whose work she knows very well. I know one of his things myself, but it seems there are others and I should like to know if the rest of his work is published, if it's different from what I know."

"What musician?"

"My dear child, when I've told you that his name is Vinteuil, will you be any the wiser?"

We may have revolved every possible idea in our minds, and yet the truth has never occurred to us, and it is from without, when we are least expecting it, that it gives us its cruel stab and wounds us for ever.

"You can't think how you amuse me," replied Albertine, getting up, for the train was about to stop. "Not only does it mean a great deal more to me than you suppose, but even without Mme Verdurin I can get you all the information that you require. You remember my telling you about a friend, older than me, who had been a mother, a sister to me, with whom I spent the happiest years of my life, at Trieste, and whom in fact I'm expecting to join in a few weeks at Cherbourg, where we shall set out on a cruise together (it sounds a bit weird, but you know how I love the sea)? Well, this friend (oh! not at all the type of woman you might suppose!), isn't this extraordinary, is the best friend of your Vinteuil's daughter, and

I know Vinteuil's daughter almost as well as I know her. I always call them my two big sisters. I'm not sorry to show you that your little Albertine can be of use to you in this question of music, about which you say, and quite rightly, that I know nothing at all."

At the sound of these words, uttered as we were entering the station of Parville, so far from Combray and Montjouvain, so long after the death of Vinteuil, an image stirred in my heart, an image which I had kept in reserve for so many years that even if I had been able to guess, when I stored it up long ago, that it had a noxious power, I should have supposed that in the course of time it had entirely lost it; preserved alive in the depths of my being—like Orestes whose death the gods had prevented in order that, on the appointed day, he might return to his native land to avenge the murder of Agamemnon—as a punishment, as a retribution (who knows?) for my having allowed my grandmother to die; perhaps rising up suddenly from the dark depths in which it seemed for ever buried, and striking like an Avenger, in order to inaugurate for me a new and terrible and only too well-merited existence, perhaps also to make dazzlingly clear to my eyes the fatal consequences which evil actions eternally engender, not only for those who have committed them but for those who have done no more, or thought that they were doing no more, than look on at a curious and entertaining spectacle, as I, alas, had done on that afternoon long ago at Montjouvain, concealed behind a bush where (as when I had complacently listened to the account of Swann's love affairs) I had perilously allowed to open up within me the fatal and inevitably painful road of Knowledge. And at the same time, from my bitterest grief

I derived a feeling almost of pride, almost of joy, that of a man whom the shock he has just received has carried at a bound to a point to which no voluntary effort could have brought him. The notion of Albertine as the friend of Mlle Vinteuil and of Mlle Vinteuil's friend, a practising and professional Sapphist, was as momentous, compared to what I had imagined when I doubted her most, as are the telephones that soar over streets, cities, fields, seas, linking one country to another, compared to the little acousticon of the 1889 Exhibition which was barely expected to transmit sound from one end of a house to the other. It was a terrible *terra incognita* on which I had just landed, a new phase of undreamed-of sufferings that was opening before me. And yet this deluge of reality that engulfs us, however enormous it may be compared with our timid and microscopic suppositions, has always been foreshadowed by them. It was doubtless something akin to what I had just learned, something akin to Albertine's friendship with Mlle Vinteuil, something which my mind would never have been capable of inventing, that I had obscurely apprehended when I became so uneasy at the sight of Albertine and Andrée together. It is often simply from lack of creative imagination that we do not go far enough in suffering. And the most terrible reality brings us, at the same time as suffering, the joy of a great discovery, because it merely gives a new and clear form to what we have long been ruminating without suspecting it.

The train had stopped at Parville, and, as we were the only passengers in it, it was in a voice weakened by a sense of the futility of his task, by the force of habit which nevertheless made him perform it and inspired in him simultaneously exactitude and indolence, and even

more by a longing for sleep, that the porter shouted: "Parville!" Albertine, who stood facing me, seeing that she had arrived at her destination, stepped across the compartment and opened the door. But this movement which she thus made to get off the train tore my heart unendurably, just as if, contrary to the position independent of my body which Albertine's seemed to be occupying a yard away from it, this separation in space, which an accurate draughtsman would have been obliged to indicate between us, was only apparent, and anyone who wished to make a fresh drawing of things as they really were would now have had to place Albertine, not at a certain distance from me, but inside me. She gave me such pain by her withdrawal that, reaching after her, I caught her desperately by the arm.

"Would it be physically possible," I asked her, "for you to come and spend the night at Balbec?"

"Physically, yes. But I'm dropping with sleep."

"You'd be doing me an enormous favour . . ."

"Very well, then, though I don't in the least understand. Why didn't you tell me sooner? I'll stay, though."

My mother was asleep when, after engaging a room for Albertine on a different floor, I entered my own. I sat down by the window, suppressing my sobs so that my mother, who was separated from me only by a thin partition, might not hear me. I had not even remembered to close the shutters, for at one moment, raising my eyes, I saw facing me in the sky that same faint glow as of a dying fire which one saw in the restaurant at Rivebelle in a study that Elstir had made of a sunset effect. I remembered the exaltation I had felt when, on the day of my first arrival at Balbec, I had seen from the railway this

same image of an evening which preceded not the night but a new day. But no day now would be new to me any more, would arouse in me the desire for an unknown happiness; it would only prolong my sufferings, until the point when I should no longer have the strength to endure them. The truth of what Cottard had said to me in the casino at Incarville was now confirmed beyond a shadow of doubt. What I had long dreaded, had vaguely suspected of Albertine, what my instinct deduced from her whole personality and my reason controlled by my desire had gradually made me repudiate, was true! Behind Albertine I no longer saw the blue mountains of the sea, but the room at Montjouvain where she was falling into the arms of Mlle Vinteuil with that laugh in which she gave utterance as it were to the strange sound of her pleasure. For, with a girl as pretty as Albertine, was it possible that Mlle Vinteuil, having the desires she had, had not asked her to gratify them? And the proof that Albertine had not been shocked by the request, but had consented, was that they had not quarrelled, that indeed their intimacy had steadily increased. And that graceful movement with which Albertine had laid her chin upon Rosemonde's shoulder, gazed at her smilingly, and deposited a kiss upon her neck, that movement which had reminded me of Mlle Vinteuil but in interpreting which I had nevertheless hesitated to admit that an identical line traced by a gesture must of necessity be the result of an identical inclination, who knew whether Albertine might not quite simply have learned it from Mlle Vinteuil? Gradually, the lifeless sky took fire. I who until then had never awakened without a smile at the humblest things, the bowl of coffee, the sound of the rain, the roar of the wind, felt that the day

which in a moment was about to dawn, and all the days to come, would no longer bring me the hope of an unknown happiness, but only the prolongation of my agony. I still clung to life; but I knew that I had nothing now but bitterness to expect from it. I ran to the lift, heedless of the hour, to ring for the lift-boy who acted as night watchman, and asked him to go to Albertine's room and to tell her that I had something of importance to say to her, if she could see me there. "Mademoiselle says she would rather come to you," was the answer he brought me. "She will be here in a moment." And presently, sure enough, in came Albertine in her dressing-gown.

"Albertine," I said to her in a low voice, warning her not to raise hers so as not to wake my mother, from whom we were separated only by that partition whose thinness, today a nuisance, because it confined us to whispers, resembled in the past, when it so clearly echoed my grandmother's intentions, a sort of musical diaphanousness, "I'm ashamed to have disturbed you. Listen to me. To make you understand, I must tell you something which you do not know. When I came here, I left a woman whom I was to have married, who was ready to sacrifice everything for me. She was to start on a journey this morning, and every day for the last week I have been wondering whether I should have the courage not to telegraph to her that I was coming back. I did have the courage, but it made me so wretched that I thought I would kill myself. That is why I asked you last night if you would come and sleep at Balbec. If I had to die, I should have liked to bid you farewell."

And I let the tears which my fiction rendered natural flow freely.

"My poor boy, if I had only known, I should have spent the night beside you," cried Albertine, the idea that I might perhaps marry this woman, and that her own chance of making a "good marriage" was thus vanishing, never even crossing her mind, so sincerely was she moved by a grief the cause of which I was able to conceal from her, but not its reality and strength. "As a matter of fact," she said to me, "last night, throughout the entire journey from La Raspelière, I could see that you were nervous and unhappy, and I was afraid there must be something wrong." In reality my grief had begun only at Parville, and my nervous irritability, which was very different but which fortunately Albertine identified with it, arose from the tedium of having to spend a few more days in her company. She added: "I shan't leave you any more, I'm going to spend all my time here." She was offering me, in fact—and she alone could offer it—the sole remedy for the poison that was consuming me, a remedy homogeneous with it indeed, for although one was sweet and the other bitter, both were alike derived from Albertine. At that moment Albertine—my sickness—ceasing to cause me to suffer, left me—she, Albertine the remedy—as weak as a convalescent. But I reflected that she would presently be leaving Balbec for Cherbourg, and from there going to Trieste. Her old habits would be reviving. What I wished above everything else was to prevent Albertine from taking the boat, to make an attempt to carry her off to Paris. It was true that from Paris, more easily even than from Balbec, she might, if she wished, go to Trieste, but in Paris we should see; perhaps I might ask Mme de Guermantes to exert her influence indirectly upon Mlle Vinteuil's friend so that she should not remain at Trieste,

to make her accept a situation elsewhere, perhaps with the Prince de——, whom I had met at Mme de Villeparisis's and, indeed, at Mme de Guermantes's. And he, even if Albertine wished to go to his house to see her friend, might, warned by Mme de Guermantes, prevent them from meeting. Of course I might have reminded myself that in Paris, if Albertine had those tastes, she would find many other people with whom to gratify them. But every impulse of jealousy is unique and bears the imprint of the creature—in this instance Mlle Vinteuil's friend—who has aroused it. It was Mlle Vinteuil's friend who remained my chief preoccupation. The mysterious passion with which I had once thought of Austria because it was the country from which Albertine came (her uncle had been a counsellor at the Embassy there), because I could study its geographical peculiarities, the race that inhabited it, its historic buildings, its scenery, in Albertine's smile and in her ways, as in an atlas or an album of photographs—this mysterious passion I still felt but, by an inversion of symbols, in the domain of horror. Yes, it was from there that Albertine came. It was there that, in every house, she could be sure of finding, if not Mlle Vinteuil's friend, others of her kind. The habits of her childhood would revive, they would be meeting in three months' time for Christmas, then for the New Year, dates which were already painful to me in themselves, owing to an unconscious memory of the misery that I had felt on those days when, long ago, they separated me, for the whole of the Christmas holidays, from Gilberte. After the long dinner-parties, after the midnight revels, when everybody was gay and animated, Albertine would adopt the same poses with her friends there that I had seen her adopt with An-

drée—albeit her friendship for Andrée might for all I knew be innocent—the same, perhaps, that Mlle Vinteuil, pursued by her friend, had revealed before my eyes at Montjouvain. To Mlle Vinteuil, while her friend titillated her desires before flinging herself upon her, I now gave the inflamed face of Albertine, of an Albertine whom I heard utter as she fled, then as she surrendered herself, her strange, deep laugh. What, in comparison with the anguish that I was now feeling, was the jealousy I had felt on the day when Saint-Loup had met Albertine with me at Doncières and she had flirted with him, or that I had felt when I thought of the unknown initiator to whom I was indebted for the first kisses that she had given me in Paris, on the day when I was waiting for a letter from Mlle de Stermaria? That other kind of jealousy, provoked by Saint-Loup or by any young man, was nothing. I should have had at the most in that case to fear a rival over whom I should have tried to gain the upper hand. But here the rival was not of the same kind as myself, had different weapons; I could not compete on the same ground, give Albertine the same pleasures, nor indeed conceive of them exactly. In many moments of our life, we would barter the whole of our future for a power that in itself is insignificant. I would at one time have forsworn all the good things in life to get to know Mme Blatin, because she was a friend of Mme Swann. Today, in order that Albertine might not go to Trieste, I would have endured every possible torment, and if that proved insufficient, would have inflicted torments on her, would have isolated her, kept her under lock and key, would have taken from her the little money that she had so that it should be physically impossible for her to make the

journey. Just as, long ago, when I was anxious to go to Balbec, what had urged me to set off was the longing for a Persian church, for a stormy sea at daybreak, so what was now rending my heart as I thought that Albertine might perhaps be going to Trieste, was that she would be spending Christmas night there with Mlle Vinteuil's friend: for the imagination, when it changes its nature and turns into sensibility, does not thereby acquire control of a larger number of simultaneous images. Had anyone told me that she was not at that moment either at Cherbourg or at Trieste, that there was no possibility of her seeing Albertine, how I should have wept for joy! How my whole life and its future would have been changed! And yet I knew quite well that this localisation of my jealousy was arbitrary, that if Albertine had these tastes, she could gratify them with others. And perhaps even these same girls, if they could have seen her elsewhere, would not have tortured my heart so acutely. It was Trieste, it was that unknown world in which I could feel that Albertine took a delight, in which were her memories, her friendships, her childhood loves, that exhaled that hostile, inexplicable atmosphere, like the atmosphere that used to float up to my bedroom at Combray, from the dining-room in which I could hear, talking and laughing with strangers amid the clatter of knives and forks, Mamma who would not be coming upstairs to say good-night to me; like the atmosphere that, for Swann, had filled the houses to which Odette went at night in search of inconceivable joys. It was no longer as of a delightful place where the people were pensive, the sunsets golden, the church bells melancholy, that I thought now of Trieste, but as of an accursed city which I should have liked to see instantaneously

neously burned down and eliminated from the real world. That city was embedded in my heart as a fixed and permanent point. The thought of letting Albertine leave presently for Cherbourg and Trieste filled me with horror; as did even that of remaining at Balbec. For now that the revelation of her intimacy with Mlle Vinteuil had become almost a certainty, it seemed to me that at every moment when Albertine was not with me (and there were whole days on which, because of her aunt, I was unable to see her), she was giving herself to Bloch's sister and cousin, possibly to other girls as well. The thought that that very evening she might see the Bloch girls drove me mad. And so, when she told me that for the next few days she would stay with me all the time, I replied: "But the fact is, I want to go back to Paris. Won't you come with me? And wouldn't you like to come and live with us for a while in Paris?"

At all costs I must prevent her from being alone, for some days at any rate, must keep her with me so as to be certain that she could not meet Mlle Vinteuil's friend. In reality it would mean her living alone with me, for my mother, seizing the opportunity of a tour of inspection which my father had to make, had taken it upon herself as a duty, in obedience to my grandmother's wishes, to go down to Combray and spend a few days there with one of my grandmother's sisters. Mamma had no love for her aunt because she had not been to my grandmother, so loving to her, what a sister should be. Thus, when they grow up, do children remember with resentment the people who have been unkind to them. But having become my grandmother, Mamma was incapable of resentment; her mother's life was to her like a pure and innocent

seem to be increased still further by the unalterable permanence of the setting, reinforced by the unity of the scene.

Two or three times it occurred to me, for a moment, that the world in which this room and these bookshelves were situated, and in which Albertine counted for so little, was perhaps an intellectual world, which was the sole reality, and my grief something like what we feel when we read a novel, a thing of which only a madman would make a lasting and permanent grief that prolonged itself through his life; that a tiny flicker of my will would suffice, perhaps, to attain to this real world, to re-enter it by breaking through my grief as one breaks through a paper hoop, and to think no more about what Albertine had done than we think about the actions of the imaginary heroine of a novel after we have finished reading it. For that matter, the mistresses whom I have loved most passionately have never coincided with my love for them. That love was genuine, since I subordinated everything else to seeing them, keeping them for myself alone, and would weep aloud if, one evening, I had waited for them in vain. But it was more because they had the faculty of arousing that love, of raising it to a paroxysm, than because they were its image. When I saw them, when I heard their voices, I could find nothing in them which resembled my love and could account for it. And yet my sole joy lay in seeing them, my sole anxiety in waiting for them to come. It was as though a virtue that had no connexion with them had been artificially attached to them by nature, and that this virtue, this quasi-electric power, had the effect upon me of exciting my love, that is to say of controlling all my actions and causing all my suffer-

ings. But from this, the beauty, or the intelligence, or the kindness of these women was entirely distinct. As by an electric current that gives us a shock, I have been shaken by my loves, I have lived them, I have felt them: never have I succeeded in seeing or thinking them. Indeed I am inclined to believe that in these relationships (I leave out of account the physical pleasure which is their habitual accompaniment but is not enough in itself to constitute them), beneath the outward appearance of the woman, it is to those invisible forces with which she is incidentally accompanied that we address ourselves as to obscure deities. It is they whose good will is necessary to us, with whom we seek to establish contact without finding any positive pleasure in it. The woman herself, during our assignation with her, does little more than put us in touch with these goddesses. We have, by way of oblation, promised jewels and travels, uttered incantations which mean that we adore and, at the same time, contrary incantations which mean that we are indifferent. We have used all our power to obtain a fresh assignation, but one that is accorded to us without constraint. Would we in fact go to so much trouble for the woman herself, if she were not complemented by these occult forces, considering that, once she has left us, we are unable to say how she was dressed and realise that we never even looked at her?

What a deceptive sense sight is! A human body, even a beloved one, as Albertine's was, seems to us, from a few yards, from a few inches away, remote from us. And similarly with the soul that inhabits it. But if something brings about a violent change in the position of that soul in relation to us, shows us that it is in love with others and not with us, then by the beating of our shattered



heart we feel that it is not a few feet away from us but within us that the beloved creature was. Within us, in regions more or less superficial. But the words: "That friend is Mlle Vinteuil" had been the *Open sesame*, which I should have been incapable of discovering by myself, that had made Albertine penetrate to the depths of my lacerated heart. And I might search for a hundred years without discovering how to open the door that had closed behind her.

I had ceased for a moment to hear these words ringing in my ears while Albertine had been with me just now. While kissing her, as I used to kiss my mother at Combray, to calm my anguish, I believed almost in Albertine's innocence, or at least did not think continuously of the discovery that I had made of her vice. But now that I was alone the words rang out afresh like those noises inside the ear which one hears as soon as someone stops talking to one. Her vice now seemed to me to be beyond any doubt. The light of approaching sunrise, by modifying the appearance of the things around me, made me once again, as if for a moment I were shifting my position in relation to it, even more bitterly aware of my suffering. I had never seen the dawn of so beautiful or so sorrowful a morning. And thinking of all the indifferent landscapes which were about to be lit up and which, only yesterday, would have filled me simply with the desire to visit them, I could not repress a sob when, with a gesture of oblation mechanically performed and symbolising, in my eyes, the bloody sacrifice which I was about to have to make of all joy, every morning, until the end of my life, a solemn renewal, celebrated as each day dawned, of my daily grief and of the blood from my wound, the golden egg of the

sun, as though propelled by the rupture of equilibrium brought about at the moment of coagulation by a change of density, barbed with tongues of flame as in a painting, burst through the curtain behind which one had sensed it quivering for a moment, ready to appear on the scene and to spring forward, and whose mysterious congealed purple it annihilated in a flood of light. I heard myself weeping. But at that moment, to my astonishment, the door opened and, with a throbbing heart, I seemed to see my grandmother standing before me, as in one of those apparitions that had already visited me, but only in my sleep. Was it all only a dream, then? Alas, I was wide awake. "You see a likeness to your poor grandmother," said Mamma, for it was she, speaking gently as though to calm my fear, acknowledging however the resemblance, with a beautiful smile of modest pride which had always been innocent of coquetry. Her dishevelled hair, whose grey tresses were not hidden and strayed about her troubled eyes, her ageing cheeks, my grandmother's own dressing-gown which she was wearing, all these had for a moment prevented me from recognising her and had made me uncertain whether I was still asleep or my grandmother had come back to life. For a long time past my mother had resembled my grandmother far more than the young and smiling Mamma of my childhood. But I had ceased to think of this resemblance. So it is, when one has been sitting reading for a long time, one's mind absorbed, not noticing how the time was passing, that suddenly one sees round about one the sun that shone yesterday at the same hour call up the same harmonies, the same effects of colour that precede a sunset. It was with a smile that my mother drew my attention to my error, for it was pleasing to her

that she should bear so strong a resemblance to her mother.

"I came," she said, "because while I was asleep I thought I heard someone crying. It wakened me. But how is it that you aren't in bed? And your eyes are filled with tears. What's the matter?"

I took her head in my arms: "Mamma, listen, I'm afraid you'll think me very changeable. But first of all, yesterday I spoke to you not at all nicely about Albertine; what I said was unfair."

"But what difference can that make?" said my mother, and, catching sight of the rising sun, she smiled sadly as she thought of her own mother, and, so that I might not lose the benefit of a spectacle which my grandmother used to regret that I never watched, she pointed to the window. But beyond the beach of Balbec, the sea, the sunrise, which Mamma was pointing out to me, I saw, with a gesture of despair which did not escape her notice, the room at Montjouvain where Albertine, curled up like a great cat, with her mischievous pink nose, had taken the place of Mlle Vinteuil's friend and was saying amid peals of her voluptuous laughter: "Well, all the better if they do see us! What, I wouldn't dare to spit on that old monkey?" It was this scene that I saw, beyond the scene which was framed in the open window and which was no more than a dim veil drawn over the other, superimposed upon it like a reflexion. It seemed, indeed, itself almost unreal, like a painted view. Facing us, where the cliff of Parville jutted out, the little wood in which we had played "ferret" dipped the picture of its foliage down into the sea, beneath the still-golden varnish of the water, as at the hour when often, at the close of day, after I had gone

there to rest in the shade with Albertine, we had risen as we saw the sun sink in the sky. In the confusion of the night mists which still hung in pink and blue tatters over the water littered with the pearly debris of the dawn, boats sailed by, smiling at the slanting light which gilded their sails and the points of their bowsprits as when they are homeward bound at evening: an imaginary scene, shivering and deserted, a pure evocation of the sunset which did not rest, as at evening, upon the sequence of the hours of the day which I was accustomed to see precede it, detached, interpolated, more insubstantial even than the horrible image of Montjouvain which it did not succeed in cancelling, covering, concealing—a poetical, vain image of memory and dreams.

"But come," my mother was saying, "you said nothing unpleasant about her, you told me that she bored you a little, that you were glad you had given up the idea of marrying her. That's no reason for you to cry like that. Remember that your Mamma is going away today and couldn't bear to leave her big pet in such a state. Especially, my poor child, as I haven't time to comfort you. Even if my things are packed, one never has any time on the morning of a journey."

"It's not that."

And then, calculating the future, weighing up my desires, realising that such an affection on Albertine's part for Mlle Vinteuil's friend, and one of such long standing, could not have been innocent, that Albertine had been initiated, and, as every one of her instinctive actions made plain to me, had moreover been born with a predisposition towards that vice which my anxiety had all too often sensed in her, in which she must never have ceased to in-

dulge (in which she was indulging perhaps at that moment, taking advantage of an instant in which I was not present), I said to my mother, knowing the pain that I was causing her, which she did not reveal and which betrayed itself only by that air of serious preoccupation which she wore when she was comparing the gravity of making me unhappy or making me ill, that air which she had worn at Combray for the first time when she had resigned herself to spending the night in my room, that air which at this moment was extraordinarily like my grandmother's when she had allowed me to drink brandy, I said to my mother: "I know how unhappy I'm going to make you. First of all, instead of remaining here as you wished, I want to leave at the same time as you. But that too is nothing. I don't feel well here, I'd rather go home. But listen to me, don't be too distressed. This is it. I was deceiving myself, I deceived you in good faith yesterday, I've been thinking it over all night. I absolutely must—and let's settle the matter at once, because I'm quite clear about it now, because I won't change my mind again, because I couldn't live without it—I absolutely must marry Albertine."

## NOTES · ADDENDA · SYNOPSIS